Lenora "Leni" LaMarche Transcript

Roz Bornstein: Hi, this is Roz Bornstein, and it is May 4, 2001. I'm on Mercer Island, Washington, at the home of Leni LaMarche, and I'm here today with Leni to gather her oral history. Leni, do I have your permission to tape you today?

Lenora LaMarche: Ninety-nine and nine-tenths percent. I mean 100 percent yes.

RB: Thank you very much. Well, why don't we start from the beginning and why don't you tell me about your grandparents?

LL: Okay. Well, my grandparents were born in the Island of Rhodes. Like most people, we don't ask questions until the person is deceased, and then you wonder, what are you going to do? Who's going to know the answer? But in this case, I got it from my mother and a little bit from my uncle, and a little bit just observing myself. But I do want to tell you how much I admire my grandmother. And let me describe her. Her name was Luna – Luna in Spanish meaning moon. My grandfather's name was Eliezer Benveniste, was the name. That's B-E-N-V-E-N-I-S-T-E. Anyway, they had nine children. Everybody was poor there, and everybody had that many children. It was nothing so rare. Well, with all the work my grandma had to do, and if anybody was in the Island of Rhodes and would see what the old city looked like and where the people lived, well there were a few better qualities, some fairly nice homes, but my grandmother lived like the rest of them. It wasn't a hovel. I mean just a hole in the wall, but it was one living quarter after another quarter, but separated with walls of stone, whatever. The entrance had the architect of the Arabics. Instead of a square door it was round. When I was there, and I looked where my grandma used to live, and I peeked in there, a lot of these places are now stores and what not, small little (stanjas?), what we called (stanjas?) which means a small store. To think that at one time, that's where my parents lived, in those little hovels.

And the Sephardics were – because of living in Spain, ancestors were from Spain – they were extremely clean. They were always scrubbing and cleaning and polishing. So the place, I'm sure, was spotless. And the floors – I don't think they'd be wood floors. I don't know what there was there. I don't think it was dirt. But that's how poor they were. No running water, so they had to go out to a (poso?). The (poso?) means a well, and that's where they would get in line with your (chanaka?), and that's a Turkish word meaning a container. My grandmother never had the girls go out and get it because it was demeaning for a woman to go out there and do that, so the boys would go out and get in line and get the water. Still, to show you the kind of a woman she was – as poor as they all were, they still had social steps, social differences. Some people that were highly regarded came from high people from Spain, and so therefore, they had the social graces and a little bit of a good mind that they were kind of in charge of the situation – the synagogue, the community, whatever. I imagine that at that time there must have been about three thousand people living there. But my mother had the foresight – my grandmother – that education was very important. So the centuries went by, people became a little bit lax, but because they had this background, they were honest, they were hard workers, they were very giving, and charity was very important. If they had three cents, they'd give you one. So, everybody was well taken care of in the community. They lived in the old city, but they lived in what they called the ghettoes. And the Sephardics lived in one area, the Greeks lived in the other area, the Turks lived in another area, and so on. Now, I'll go back to my grandmother. My mother said that when the Italians took over in 1912 without a war, I don't know exactly the history, they took over, the Italians were very modern for that year, which was 1912. She says that the Italians would stand in the corner and call out – well, most of the people spoke Turkish, Italian, Ladino, which is a form of Spanish, and very little – no English at all to speak of. The Italian would stand in – if you want to call it a corner, there was no such thing as an intersection at all. It was just – you can imagine. You've seen pictures [of] what they looked like in the old country. And would announce to the community and go

from one area to another, explaining the importance of cleanliness, of health. My mother would say that they said, “Don't throw [away] any old fish, any old food because that's germs,” and what not. Well, the Sephardics, because they had kosher food, they knew what cleanliness was. But my mother admired the fact that the Italians were that far advanced because the Turks had the island for three hundred-plus years, and they ran it down to nothing. The old city was built by the Knights of Saint Johns, and by 1492, it was already built. So, it was just finished before the Jews were forced to leave Spain. So when they lived there, the place wasn't as old and as dumpy as it looked at the time. But I wanted to give you a background of it was. Now, it had various social status. Those that were cruder married into the crudeness – Sephardics. They were kind of crude. They spoke loud. They swore. At holidays, they would get all dressed. Maybe they wore stockings, but they were crude. Then, the better – the middle class knew their place, and they knew education was important, etc.. Then, of course, those that were extremely wealthy, one which was the Alhadeffs – and not the Alhadeffs that lived here. There was another branch of Alhadeffs. When I was there last October, and this is 2000, a woman that was in the concentration camp – how fortunate for us – knew every little piddly thing that went on and who lived there and whatnot. Prior to that, back in 1970, my sister and I went there. Financially we weren't able to do it, but it's another long story I don't want to get into. But she and I went. We stayed there a month. In that months’ time, we really got to know the people; we really got to know the area. So when I went back there, maybe ten years ago, I knew where everything was. [Recording paused.]

RB: So you were telling me that your grandmother, that education was very important to her.

LL: Absolutely. Okay. Now, to go back to my grandmother, so with all that she had to do, she trained her oldest, (Behora?) – let me explain this. The Ladinos and the Sephardics, the first male and by the first male is not if she had a miscarriage but the first

pregnancy that she gave birth, that child is automatically called (Behor?), and the female is called (Behora?) because that's female. So my grandmother had her first daughter, and they called her Behora. All the time, I thought my grandmother, my Aunt (Behora?) was her name. There were a few (Behoras?) here and there in Seattle, but I didn't give it much thought. There are many Marys and (Kadouns?), and they've been anglicized. (Kadoun?) now is Louise. (Caden?) is Catherine. And who makes this up? It's the first person that comes here and thinks of something, that's the law; that's what your name is. How fortunate.

RB: So (Behora?) was the first –?

LL: First born.

RB: First born. And what was her name?

LL: Then, when my Aunt (Behora?) had grown children, one of them got married and had a baby. I said, "How come they didn't call the baby (Behora?)?" "Oh no, her real name is Frances, (Fasana?)." (Fasana?)? I didn't know that. So it just shows – my mother didn't explain that to me. She lived that, and she didn't give it much thought. I could understand that. Okay. Then the second son was (Rahamin?), anglicized to Robert. The other child was (Uriel?), anglicized – he gave his own name, Lou. The next one was (Caden?). (Caden?), when she came to America, became Americanized and she changed her name to Catherine. And if ever anybody would call her (Caden?), because since she already got an American name, she says, "Goddamn yourself. My name is Catherine." She was the joker in the family. After her, there was a miscarriage, which is why there is four years difference because it's two years, two years, two years, you'd have children. Next was my mother, so therefore, she was four years younger than my Aunt Catherine. My mother's name was Rachel – Rachel. There wasn't much change there. And then after that was Irving, but his name was (Izhak?). The next one after that was (Moshe?); his name was anglicized to Morris. Next one after that was

(Allegra?). She gave herself the name of Betty when she started going to school. The baby was (Yaakov?), Jack. That's their children. Now, my grandmother had (Behora?), the oldest daughter, and the second daughter, take over the cooking, the this, the shopping, and whatnot, while she went out and worked because she had to earn money to buy their children clothes for school. I'm sure those that are listening to me or reading the story would wonder, “Who pays for the school?” It so happened back in the very early 20th century a very big man from England or Israel – I don't know – went to Rhodes and wondered how come the kids were outside playing instead of going to school. They said, “Well, we don't have money to send them to school.” Only those that happened to have a store that made a little bit of money, which was very rare, went to school. So, this person took it on himself to start the American (Alliance Israeli?). And therefore, the kids have a chance to go to school. When you go to school, you have to buy your own pencils, your own books, your clothes that you have to wear, certain uniforms, if you want to call them uniforms, and shoes and whatnot. So grandma had to go out. Then the oldest one, Robert, who became, incidentally – twenty years old when he came to America. Had gone to school. His French was superb, and he was a wonderful student, and they just kept – I didn't ask because I'm sure it was expensive where he went to special schools because he was so bright. When he came here at age twenty, that's when he started English, and then he went to school, and then he went to the university, and he became a physician. Now, [with regard to my grandma, she worked [and] made money for the kids to have clothes to go to school.

RB: Excuse me, Leni. Where did she work outside of the home?

LL: Being that the country was very much like Florida – not quite that hot, but very comfortable – there were figs and dates, and what she would do was work in a factory and work on the box of gifts and whatever process they went through. That's what she did. I was surprised. I mean, since when does a Sephardic woman work? Then, it was, “God forbid, you don’t want them to,” but my grandma didn't give a darn. She knew how

important education was. Well, then my Aunt (Behora?) got married [inaudible] so they sent her a picture of my Uncle Israel Levy, and (Behora?) sent him her picture, and they got engaged. He sent her money to come to the United States in 1912, ’11. She came to Seattle. Well, when she was going to have a baby, my grandmother was extremely worried. “None of my children are going to have a baby without my being there.” Because the word was there were a lot of Sephardic young ladies – and there were very few and far between that were in Seattle – that were having problems with pregnancy, having problems with birth, and whatnot. So she says, “I have to be there with my daughter.” Well, you know she's not going from Bremerton to Seattle; she's going from Rhodes to Seattle. She's a smart cookie. She saved enough money for a fare for herself, for her two older sons, (Uriel?) and (Rahamin?). (Rahamin?) was twenty; (Uriel?) was eighteen.

RB: Excuse me, her two oldest sons?

LL: Two oldest sons. Eighteen and twenty.

RB: Why did she choose those two of the group of kids?

LL: She wanted a better life for them, I'm thinking.

RB: Were there concerns about the army?

LL: No. It isn’t like in Turkey. They all were running away because of the war. They say once you're in there, you're stuck. No, because she knew that she wanted them to get a good education there. And especially when Robert was brilliant, and it's a shame to have this guy going around selling pots and pans.

RB: Excuse me. How was it for your grandfather and the rest of the family when your grandmother chose to leave?

LL: Well my grandfather owned a (stanja?), (stanja?) or (stanjica?), a small store, selling bolts of goods, not clothing. What would you call that?

RB: Pots and pans, utensils?

LL: No.

RB: Fabric.

LL: Fabric. Well, he trusted the Arabs, trusted them so much that he went bankrupt. So therefore, he had nothing to do but sell pots and pans in the street, going up and down the streets. Anyway, he was to stay back in Rhodes to support those other five children while his wife went to Seattle to tend to her daughter that's going to have a baby. So the two older boys she left in New York and she continued on Seattle with her two younger children, one being Jack, and my mother was saying because she had to nurse him. I don't think that was it. That would have been too much for her daughter to take care of a little one. So, she took with her Jack and Irving, who also became a physician. He was twelve years old when he came here. She thought he would be the babysitter, which accounts [for] the fact that I wondered why my uncle Irving, who was a nice guy, didn't like Jack. Because Jack must have given him one hell of a time when he was a kid. Anyway, so she came to Seattle with her two kids. She came here and her daughter had the baby and everything was fine. Meanwhile, she started working as a – I was going to say a den mother, but there was no such thing as a den mother then, but a mother to the Sephardic girls that were going to have babies. Took care of the babies, was a midwife, and was like a mother. And then this one would have the baby, and then the other one. Then she went over there, and she saved quite a bit of money, and she had her own place where she put it. Anyway, two years went by that way, and suddenly, she decided it's time for her to go back home. She took all her money and her two children. Now this time, Isaac was fourteen years old. I don't know. Maybe my grandma hid him or something because I know that the law was, thank God, here in the United

States, if you're under sixteen, you go to school. I've admired that. Instead of saying well, you know we – but that was a strict rule. So I'm thinking, geez, now how can – my uncle is dead. Everybody is dead in my mother's family. She was the last one. Incidentally, she was a hundred years old when she died at the Kline Galland Home. She went there when she was ninety. So anyway, I am sure that my uncle had to go to school. So, who took care of the little one? Maybe she did a lot of work in the evening. His little bratty brother was in his way, and he couldn't get his homework done. Who knows? Anyway, so she came back to New York and saw her two older children. She hadn't seen them for two years. I'm sure Isaac [and] Irving knew how to write Solitreo script.

RB: Could you describe what Solitreo script is?

LL: Well, I had an envelope with many letters in there. Somehow or other, I lost it at the Kline Galland Home one day. So, I can't show you. I don't have it with me. I inquired. Nobody knows where it is, and it breaks my heart. Well, somebody heard that I knew – well, my articles – I put there a Solitreo letter so they know now that I can write Solitreo, so a lot of people say, "My God, I have a letter from grandma. I have a letter from my mother," and they wanted me to know. So some of those letters were in there, and I lost them. So what it is – it's archaic Hebrew letters that were used by the Spanish Jews and then once they went to wherever they were, the word is – from Spain, they were –

RB: The Inquisition.

LL: During the Inquisition, they did the best they knew how. And they continued Solitreo. So, they were there about five hundred years before they start coming to America.

RB: So your Uncle Irving would write in this script.

LL: I'm sure he did because he was a pretty bright boy. Maybe he would write it – because my grandma didn't go to school. There wasn't school when she was young.

There was for her children. She blessed that. Anyway so my mother's, “Yo que no me fue a la escuela.” Oh, what a shame that I didn't get a chance to go to school. I thought she came here at fifteen, and I wondered and never asked her. She was eighteen. And when I thought, “Well there I go, thinking God, she lied.” But it wasn't her doing. It was because somebody told me there – I know who it is. I'll tell you her name because it's very complimentary. Her name is Piha. She lives at the Kline Galland Home. She did not change her name and her name is very, very Sephardic. I cannot remember.

RB: Is it Missode?

LL: Missode. Thank you. She says, “Todos Sephardim para avansar la moneda.” That says, “Well, honey very many of the Sephardics did that because that was one way of saving money, and they only go by half fare.” I thought to myself, “Oh, mom, I'm sorry.” Right away I think negative, right?

RB: How did the rest of your family come over then?

LL: Okay, I'll tell you. Where did I stop so I can bridge my next thought?

RB: Your grandmother had gone back to New York to see her oldest sons.

LL: She was going to go back to Rhodes with her money, and her sons said, “Mana.” They say, “Mana,” not “Mama.” “(Mana, mira cuanto el dinero en la mano?),” “Look how much money you have in hand. You can take this money, buy them the fare to come to the United States.” Now whether that was my mother's exaggeration – whether it was my mother's imagination or if it was true or false, I'm telling you what I know. But I still question it. Well, maybe she said that, maybe it's true.

RB: So she decided then to –?

LL: So, she sent them the fare in this big envelope, and my Aunt Betty, who went to high school in Los Angeles – graduated – said because that envelope arrived in Rhodes before Shabbat ended. They got it on a Shabbat, which is the Sabbath. My grandpa would not tear it open because it was against the Jewish law to tear anything. That was considered taboo. You didn't light a fire, you didn't work, you didn't tear anything, and whatnot. They had to wait until the three stars were up in the heaven which meant Shabbat is over. And my grandpa opened it up and there was all this [fare] for them to come to the United States. And my Aunt Betty, in the article that she wrote when she was in high school, and they put it in the Garfield High School Graduation book – the family went wild. "We are going to America. America!" Got excited. Anyway, they came to America with that money, the fares. Meanwhile, my grandma got a flat in (Rivington?). My mother used to call it (Rivington?). It was four flights up. Four flights. She carried all that herself – food and this or whatever. I don't know if she [inaudible]. There must have been a lot to that, but that lady was so used to working hard that it was nothing to her. And then when the family came, and it was on a Friday night – was it? – my grandmother had a big meal for nine, ten, eleven of them. They had fish and then they had chicken. Then my mother says, "What's this?" My Uncle Irving answered, "Oh, that's just nada, aqui todos son ricos." "This is nothing. Here in the United States, everybody is rich. Sure, we eat like this all the time. On the Shabbat, we have fish and chicken." "Oh my god, isn't it wonderful?" My mother also says, and I do have her letter, but I don't know where to find it now, a letter – oh, wait a minute. Was it in Spanish? I can't think of what it is, but a letter that says. I forgot what I was saying.

RB: You were talking about a letter that your mom received that you have.

LL: And it said her teacher was Madame (Gratziani?), and Madame (Gratziani?) told my mother, "Rachel, now that you're going to America and you're going to be wealthy, will you send the school some money?" And my mother answered, "Oui, Madame (Gratziani?)," because they only spoke in French, and let me just throw this in because,

knowing me, I'll forget. At the age of ninety-eight, I had somebody that spoke French at the Kline Galland Home speak to my mother, and my mother didn't rattle off, but she [imitates speaking in French.] And the woman said, “My God, she speaks beautifully.” She didn't speak it since her school days. So, I mean to say – that was really something. So, my mother always felt that she didn't go to school here. Well, she came here; you had to work. Hey, we have a big family to support. So, she went to work in New York. Then the word was that she wants to go to Seattle because that's where her daughter lives. Well, it isn't that it takes five hours to get here. Took five days, six days, seven days. But they came here. They uprooted themselves after maybe a couple of years, which made my mother twenty, twenty-one years old. According to my mother, she was eighteen when she was married and I believed her. Okay. But I feel better now because it wasn't her fault. Anyway, so she came here. My Aunt Catherine got married. Well I'll tell you, she had kind of like a hooked nose because most of the [inaudible] were very pretty. But my auntie was a little bit overweight and her nose was kind of thick, and she was always a mother to everybody so that's how she felt. And she was the one – my Aunt Catherine is the one who did so much work, and I could see where my mother was spoiled because my aunt wanted to do everything herself, and my mother was playing with the kids, having a great time there, going to school and all. And my grandmother wrote to the family in Rhodes, “Here is some money. I want Rachel to take mandolino lessons.” And my Aunt Catherine says, “Mandolino lessons?” Mandolino is a mandolin. “We have just enough to eat. I'm not going to put that money in mandolino. No, she’s not going to mandolino lessons.” She never got them. My mother said that and then smiled. I thought she'd get angry, but she smiled. My aunt was right. But my grandmother now is kind of Americanized. So, they came to Seattle. What's my grandfather going to do? When you're fifty-five years old, you're old. And he was old. He had a beard. I have a picture in there if you want to see it.

RB: That would be great. We'll see it after this.

LL: Okay. He wore a derby hat, and he looks like a man of means. But what could he do? So, he taught Hebrew school.

RB: In Seattle.

LL: In Seattle.

RB: For what community? For the Sephardic community?

LL: Oh, yes. Because they had nothing to do with the Ashkenazics. Ashkenazics had nothing to do with the Sephardics, and the Sephardics kind of shied away. Because they were used to living that way in the old country. They also shied away from the Turks at that time. My mother said that if anybody was in line, they pushed the person to one side that was Sephardic and stood before them. So, they were treated – they were like a lower echelon group.

RB: What year was this when your father and the rest of the family came over?

LL: My grandfather?

RB: Yes.

LL: My grandmother came here in 1914. I beg your pardon. My grandmother came here in 1914, and my mother came here in 1916. She must have been about eighteen, nineteen years old then.

RB: So when you say your grandfather taught Hebrew School, was this for the Ezra Bessaroth?

LL: Because the Ezra Bessaroth was one synagogue, the Bikur Holim was another one, and all through their 20th century, they were going to get together. “Why have two synagogues? They're too expensive.” And when one synagogue accepted, the other

one says, “Well, no, because things are going pretty good for us.” A few, ten, fifteen years later, the other synagogue was having problems. “How about if we get together?” “No, now we're doing okay financially.” They never did get together.

RB: Could you describe the background of each synagogue? Ezra Bessaroth is from –?

LL: Ezra Bessaroth was from Rhodes, and Ezra Bessaroth means help the needy. The Bikur Holim members were from Turkey, Izmir, and estas partes – that part. I lived in the Sephardic community. I was too young to become aware that there were only people from Turkey living in this area of Seattle, and this area would have been from 12th, 13th, 14th, 15th, 16th, 17th, 19th [Streets] and Yesler and Fir and Spruce. The synagogue, I think, was about 1917. I don't remember. I should know. 1915, whatever it was.

RB: Ezra Bessaroth was 1917.

LL: I was right then. It was 1917. What was I saying to you, please?

RB: Your grandfather taught Hebrew for the community at that time.

LL: Well, my mother didn't work here. She did in New York. In fact, I don't know where it is – I had a picture of my mother, and she was working with batteries with my Aunt Catherine. My mother was a full face. She looks something like me. Looked very much like that. My Aunt Catherine was severe. In those days, how they used to – so when they came here, my Aunt Catherine got married to a handsome guy – Jack (Hasson?). She never could have children. She wanted children. Then – “have children, have children.” So finally, when my mother had grandchildren – we had children – my Auntie Catherine adopted a boy through Dr. Irving. He got a boy for her. Very obviously – you see him now, he looks very Mexican. Good looking guy. Now he must be a little younger than my daughter, must be about fifty-three, fifty-four. My Aunt Catherine was from the old school and their relationship was traumatic with the boy, and he'd go away and she’d call the [police]. I mean when I heard that she called the police on her own son – but

see, she was kind of that way. [inaudible] people will talk. But anyway, when she got older, he treated her like a God, and her anger dissipated. When she got angry with my Auntie Betty, and they were close, because my Aunt Betty would say, “No Catherine, that's not the way you diaper the baby, honey. No, Catherine, don't put stockings on the baby. No, Catherine, don't do this. Don't [inaudible] the baby like a yaprake.” In Greek, it's called dolmade. My Aunt Catherine, finally said, “Well, okay, lady,” and she had nothing to do with my Aunt Betty. They were like two peas in the pod. Quite a difference in their ages, but they were very close, and my Aunt Catherine was very motherly. Something happened. By the time she got really old, she must have had a small stroke, and everything my Aunt Betty did that she hated was forgotten. And she said [inaudible] “Ande esta Betty?” [Where is Betty?] She forgot that she was angry with her. That was a beautiful part of it.

RB: When did your mother meet and marry your father?

LL: So, my Aunt Catherine got married to this handsome fellow, and I know she fell madly [in love]. I mean, anyone would, and she wasn't the prettiest gal. Anyway, of course, my grandmother was here, and she was the doer, so she was responsible for this. Well, it so happened that my mother was at her sister’s wedding, my Auntie Catherine's wedding and my father saw her, and he liked her. So he asked if he could go out with her. And they'd go out and have an ice cream. And of course, then, they didn't do what they did in Spain, where in Spain you'd have a –

RB: Chaperone?

LL: – chaperone. What did you call that in Spanish? But it was a chaperone. But my mother only got ice cream. Big deal. They had an ice cream. And then, [inaudible] they went to a show. And, of course, there was a lot of love between the two of them. My dad was a very mild, sweet guy. My mother had wonderful, gracious social habits, so everybody thought she was just great.

RB: Excuse me, what was your father's name?

LL: Mateo. Matatia.

RB: And his last name?

LL: Peha. P-E-H-A. But Mateo, Mattathias, my mother would call him Mateo. It would be “(Mateo, no Mateo, ah Mateo, Mattathias?).” His nickname was Mateo. He was born in Hanukkah. That's why they gave him the name of Mattathias, for Hanukkah. I guess my paternal grandmother had so many boys that she could give him Mateo instead of a name – of one of her parents. You know what I mean? How we Sephardic name after the living.

RB: Why don't you describe that custom?

LL: Well, I asked the rabbi about that when I became a full-grown adult. I asked him about that, and he says, “Well, no, it's nothing in the Bible. This is something that's cultural. There's nothing wrong with naming after the living.” And I thought, “Well, how do you like that?” So that's how I found out. Well, my name was Luna, after Grandma Luna, but it was anglicized to Lenora, when I started school. So I asked the rabbi, “Can you give me a Hebrew name?” Because how can you get a Hebrew name with a Spanish name, Luna. So, I think maybe (Lunar?). Anyway, they did give me the name of Lenora. No, my name was Lenora. The rabbi gave me Levana, which is “light.” So my name is Bavajadas De Benadam because I write an article for the synagogue, and Levana, Leni, Luna – my husband only called me Bunny. I had a lot of names.

RB: Very special names. You mentioned the first one was Bavajadas. Can you tell us what that means in English?

LL: Bavajadas is a slang Ladino expression meaning a bunch of foolishness.

RB: And you write an article entitled –?

LL: And I write an article, and I started doing this about twenty-seven years ago in The Clarion, from the Ezra Bessaroth synagogue.

RB: What is The Clarion?

LL: The Clarion is a monthly – supposedly monthly – issue that comes in a book form that looks like – you've seen them. I didn't know what to call it. Because somebody was saying – I said, “Gee, (Trujil).” (Trujil?) means you get a crock, fill it with water and salt, and you cut up cabbage in there. I haven't had that in a long time, come to think of it. Cabbage, small pickles, green tomatoes, green pepper, and the water is called salamura. And you asked me something.

RB: Oh, about Bavajadas, what it means?

LL: So, I was telling somebody, “Geez, somebody ought to write an article about the…” We were talking about the – what do you call that?

RB: The crock with cabbage?

LL: Not the crock. We called it – I don't know if there was a name. I don't know how they would call it, but they used to put it in that crock. And then they call that –

RB: (Trujil?)? You just mentioned it a few minutes ago.

LL: Trujil. Oh.

RB: That's it, yes.

LL: Bless your heart. We understand each other. Thank you. Anyway, and then when I had my menstrual period, my mother first asked me, “Te vino la cosa?” “Did you get your

thing?" Which means did you get your period? And I'd go, "Yes, I got it." "Okay. Regina," she'd call my sister, "Do you have your period?" "No." "Go and put your hand in there and get the Trujil because when you have your period, you're not supposed to do that."

RB: Not supposed to –?

LL: Put your hand in the –

RB: In the pot?

LL: In the pot. Anyway.

RB: What a story. So Bavajadas came out of –

LL: Bavajadas. Now, what shall I call it? Somebody says, "Leni, you're good at that. Why don't you do that?" I went, "Oh, god." "Come on." "Gee, maybe I will. But what am I going to call it?" I didn't say it to them. I'm going to call it – just like that.

RB: It came to you.

LL: I said, "I'll do my Bavajadas de Benadam."

RB: What is Benadam for people who don't know?

LL: Bavajadas. Oh, that's what I was telling you. Bavajadas is a bunch of foolishness; only we would say it's a bunch of – and so, bavajadas, a bunch of foolishness, de, of, benadam. Ben is "son of" in Hebrew. Adam is "Adam and Eve," which means "human being." So, [inaudible], "Mira tal benadam" means "look at that human being." So, it's Bavajadas de Benadam. So, in other words, I didn't go to college. Everything I know is here. That's how I got that name.

RB: That's how the name of the article started.

LL: And I'm still writing it, and I think now it's very poor timing because most of the people my age and the older people – my mother – all would have bought it anywhere in the United States, and even in Israel, they would buy that. But because of this brain tumor, that's about the time when I compiled all my articles. Something happened to me. I didn't know what it was. I didn’t want to get into that. I had no headache. My eyes were fine and everything. But I was doing some not too bright things. And I think maybe my patience was nil – a lot of things.

RB: But you wrote the article for many years.

LL: Twenty-six years. Twenty-seven years.

RB: And you're still writing it.

LL: I'm still writing it.

RB: That's wonderful. For the Ezra Bessaroth. Can we go back in time again, back to when your parents got married?

LL: They got married, and for one week – that's the ritual of a Sephardic if you had money, and my father must have been. How the old gals never grabbed my father because he was a very mild, meek guy, and he would have yes to anything. Didn't get married until my mother was there because, if my mother was twenty-two, my dad was twenty-six. Only four years. That's okay because my husband was four years younger than I was.

RB: So, your parents got married in what year?

LL: My parents got married in 1919, but you asked me about their marriage. I was going to get into that.

RB: Do you remember any customs? Do you remember hearing about any customs that took place?

LL: Oh, yes, and that's also in the book that I'm supposed to write. That's what I was writing about my book, so I did not do it, and there it sits. And until they found out it was my tumor and removed it, I tried to get back into it and get it going, but my enthusiasm was a one from a one to ten, and there it sits. I don't know what to do about it.

RB: But it's there, and it's incredible for those that have it.

LL: But I would like for you to read two or three stories. Two or three stories, so you'll get the gist of it. Now my mother – okay. She got married. My father had money. He had a shoeshine stand at the big hotel on Third and Yesler, and I vowed that I'd always remember it, and I forgot the name of it. Big hotel on Third and Yesler.

RB: The Bush Hotel?

LL: No, no. Everybody says Bush. No. So therefore, he made good money, and if things were busy, he had somebody help him and whatnot. So he had a few dollars. For one week, you hire somebody, they do the cooking, they do the shopping, and all the money just – I guess. I don't know. This is my imagination. In those days, they didn't buy houses, nothing like that. Everybody rented. And the few that had a little bit of this would buy it. And would buy it because they put five hundred dollars down. and they could buy the house. And for a thousand dollars, you get a nice house then, in 1919. That's when they got married. I don't know if I mentioned that. 1919. And then, let's see. Then when my mother got engaged, there would be a big ritual. We called it the mandatha. So the mandatha for engagement. You'd call all your friends over, and you'd have a big fiesta, you know. We called that vishita and people always had vishitas to go to then. Not now. Either you go downtown, either you get together with your friends, or either you work or whatever. It’s a different way of life. Anyway, and then what

happened is that they'd make marzipan, shape it into a hand, and then on one of the supposed fingers, they'd put the engagement ring. Then everybody – they had songs about that, about the [sings in Spanish] – no, no that's when they get married. I don't want to get it mixed up. Then the bride, my mother, with her mother sent to the groom's house, I guess his parents – my grandparents were not here then, my dad's parents. My Aunt (Sarota?) was. DeLeon was her name. So they had this affair. I don't know how my aunt did it; she had kids and whatnot. But then they sent a tray of marzipan and those almond candies and chocolate kisses and a robe for the groom and something for him to wear. And then everybody had the party there.

RB: At the groom's house? And did the groom send a tray back to the bride with gifts on it?

LL: No, it's just one took a tray there, and the other one took their tray here.

RB: I see. So, they exchanged trays.

LL: That's it. And then that's the engagement. And then, for the marriage, they had bano de novia; they go to the mikvah. That's when they go to the bath, and that's when the bride goes there with whoever she goes with. Then, when the woman would come in with her hair all wet and her fingers all clipped and all that, get her all cleaned up, then they would start. So the hair was wet, and they were cleansed. The cheeks were rosy. They'd come in. She walks in with this grin, very embarrassed knowing that some of the ladies saw her in the nude in the bano.

RB: Is this your mother that you were remembering? OK. That you've heard?

LL: No.

RB: Oh, just in general.

LL: My sister Becky had it. To be honest with you, I never did have it. Married twice. Never did have it. And it bothered me. Anyway, then in the house, the mother took one room and almost emptied it and put all the clothes and the trousseau and the embroiders and the this and the that and everything and the gifts she got, which they each give little, small gifts. That's the (ashuar?). Then, she would come in, and everybody would be applauding because they would sing this song, [singing] “(Kon bien mi lavi, kon bien mi shavoni, la, la, la?).” [I wash myself and soap myself well]. That was so stupid. Then, they would say biscocho. I don't know what this biscocho has to – you know what biscocho is.

RB: But for those that don't know?

LL: Oh, biscocho is a cookie that the Ashkenazics absolutely love. And I must tell you, that's how I started volunteering my time twenty-five years ago to the Kline Galland home because of that. So just remind me to say that story.

RB: I sure will.

LL: Anyway, they would sing this and then everybody – “La viene la novia!” [Here comes the bride]. [laughter] I was so embarrassed. Not embarrassed for me because I never had it, but embarrassed when they'd come in, they'd go, “Oh.” So embarrassed. But it was kind of fun to see that. And of course, I used to wonder about these old women when they talk about dirty old men, these are dirty old ladies because they think, “Oh, boy, you're going to have some fun tonight now, honey, or tomorrow,” whenever they get married. It was on a Friday night, this stuff. You have your bano only on a Friday day.

RB: Friday, right.

LL: So, all the women had to do their Shabbat work on Thursday and Thursday night and do the cooking because you're going to go to the party. I mean, all these little things. It doesn't mean much, but I know that.

RB: So, right, for the women, it was a lot of work to prepare for.

LL: Absolutely. I mean for themselves, for Friday night at home.

RB: Of course. And so the vishita – it was a group of women. Was it strictly women for the Rhodes community? Or were men included in this ritual?

LL: No. The men were out earning the money. Then they get married, and they used to hire two long black cars. What would you call them now? Long?

RB: Limos.

LL: Limos. One limousine. The bride and the groom and the family. I remember my sitting there because I marched in somebody's wedding. It wasn't my mother. I wasn't born.

RB: Of course.

LL: I wasn't born then. Anyway, so I sat there, and then we go down the boulevard to go to (Leschi?) on Yesler Way down the boulevard, and that's what I call [singing] “The boulevard of broken dreams, a gigolo and gigolette, la la la, without regret, the boulevard of broken dreams. I walk around the street of sorrow. The boulevard of broken dreams.” Anyway. I call that “The Boulevard of Broken Dreams.”

RB: And this is where people would drive after synagogue?

LL: If one does it, you do it too. If you didn't have money, you didn't rent – just little cars would go down. That was a ritual. Can you imagine that now?

RB: So, were you the oldest of your brothers?

LL: There were four. My sister Regina, who was named after my paternal [grandmother]. Her name was Reina. Reina means Regina.

RB: And what year was she born? Do you remember?

LL: Hand me that roll.

RB: Okay. Oh, I meant your sister, actually. I was referring to your sister Regina.

LL: That’s what I mean. She was named after my maternal grandmother, whose name was Reina. They call her Regina. Then when I was born, I was named after my grandmother.

RB: It's beautiful.

LL: I can read it to you. Her maiden name was (Baroh?), and she married – now, I'm with my mother's – this is my mother's. Scratch that. I'll continue. My sister Regina. Then when my brother was born, he was named after my paternal grandfather, and his name was (Yosef?). Then when I was born, I'm going to have my mother's mother, and her name was Luna. Luna was born in 1870. My (papa Eliezer’s?) mother's name was (Fasana?) and I'm looking here, I did not know that (Fasana?), which was my great grandmother. Her maiden name was Peha, and the only way I know is because I can read that. He was born in 1864. Now my father's parents were older than my grandmother. My mother's parents were younger than my father's parents. So, I imagine if my grandfather, my maternal grandfather, was born in 1864, then my father's father must have been, it's safe to say, ten years older. So he was born in 1854. I mean, this is all guess. My grandmother was born 1870 , my paternal grandmother, which means Reina, my father's mother, must have been born in 1860. I have here the ages if you want to put it down there – when they were born, (Behora?) and all that. You want to know their birthdates?

RB: Well, it would be great right now to go over actually your birthdate and your siblings’ birthdates. That would be terrific. We can come back to this.

LL: Now (Regina?), (Reina?), was born in 1920 in June. I was named after my maternal grandmother Luna. They anglicized it to Lenora. I was born in 1921. So we were about fourteen months apart, fifteen months apart. Then my brother Joe was born five years my junior. I'm seventy-nine; he's seventy-four. Then my sister Becky. Well, being that the two grandmothers [were] already named, my mother gave her the name of an aunt she had that never had any children. Her name was Rebecca, Becky.

RB: What do you remember about your early childhood in Seattle?

LL: Well, I have a very vivid memory. I remember once I was in a highchair, and my mother lived upstairs from Mrs. (Galante?). I remember calling her by her first name when I was a little girl, and I wondered how I got away with it. (Allegra?). Her name was (Allegra Galante?). We lived upstairs. Now she owned it. So my mother used to pay her. I guess that must have been some good money that they could use because they had a big family. I saw her at the Kline Galland Home. I've always loved her because I remember, as a very young child, she was so good to me. She always hugged me. Considering that she was poor, considering that she had so many children herself, she never once ever scolded me. I remember that. But I remember when I was in the highchair; I must have been about three years old. my Uncle Jack, I saw him getting my father's coat. I saw this, and he put it over his head, and he went under – we had a wood and coal stove. Then, everybody had wood and coal stoves to heat and to cook. And he pulled out a little box and got kindling and then saw me. He must have been about thirteen years old. That's my mother's youngest brother. I remember him going around my highchair going “Woo, woo, woo, woo, woo, woo.” And I started screaming; he scared me. I knew it was my uncle. I knew he put that hat on. I saw him putting that coat on. I saw him getting the wood, and it scared me. Years and years later, all of a sudden, I said, “Hey, I can ask my mother.” It was maybe within ten years ago. I said, “Mama, I remember an incident.” [inaudible] “I remember” that her little brother did that, and she scolded him when she ran in to see why I was screaming. So, my memory was

very good when I was young.

RB: I believe it. You know what I might do is stop this tape now and then we'll start up another one in just a second. I think this tape is almost finished.

LL: Sure.

[Recording paused.]

RB: This is Roz Bornstein, and we're back. I'm with Leni LaMarche, and it's still May 4, 2001. Leni, do I have your permission to continue taping?

LL: You may. You may.

RB: Thank you. Well, we're talking about early childhood memories and what it was like growing up in a Sephardic home in Seattle in the Sephardic neighborhood.

LL: Well, a couple of things went through my head. When I go to Hebrew school – and I quit going to Hebrew school before I was ten years of age, but because I learned the alphabet, Alef-bet gimel Dalet, I pursued to put these letters together and make words so I'll know it and I know it well now. I'm very thankful of that.

RB: That’s wonderful.

LL: But as a child, I asked my grandfather – now, my grandfather was a very holy, godly man. I asked him – when I’d step on an ant, I remember him telling me when I was a little girl – [Recording paused.] When I’d step on an ant, my father would say, “No hija, no mates las ermigas por ke tienen alma.” And that meant, “Do not step on those ants because those ants have a soul.” So, I’d see one and push it over here, and I wouldn't step on it. Then, when I'd go to Hebrew school, I was always starved after my public school, and I'd be eating whatever my mother gave me. Then, when I didn't want to eat anymore, I didn't want to throw the bread away because “La pan is very holy.” The bread

is very holy. And that's why we say, “Hamotzi lechem min ha’aretz.” But you don't throw it away. “Well, what am I going to do with this bread now?” I'm a little kid, and I'm walking, and I go, “Oh, I know.” I'd see a fence, and I'd put it on the – I can see the fence, and I put it on there, and I'd go, “Dear God, this bread is for the birds.” And I’m off the hook. Another thing is I would say, “Mama, why is it that I bite my finger?” If you ask anybody my age, they would know because my mother was very, in her own ways, holy. I said, “Why is it that when I point up to the sky I have to bite my finger and step on it until it hurts me.” She says, “Esto es que no tienes repecto del patron del mundo.” That means you don't have respect for the Almighty. I believed her. It wasn't until I was older, reading, that in Spain, during the time when the Marranos – Marranos being the Jews that lived in Spain – and their decision was to stay there because they had a beautiful life there and they were all professional people, so what they said is they pretended they were Christians, but they stayed there, and enough stayed there. But they were called “Marranos,” which meant pigs. It's a beautiful name for such an icky animal. So, when a Jewish mother that was living there – and all the Jews that wanted to be Jews didn’t live there anymore – would send the quiet kids – they all had this secret. “You don't tell them [non-Jews] that we practice Judaism underground.” So, they tell the kids, “Go out and look to see how many stars are out there.” So, if there's three stars, it's Shabbat.” And the kids would go out there and point up to the sky, and then they'd get reported, and they would be burnt at the stake. And I couldn't believe it. I still don't. But I know it happened. Because when I said about Hitler's ovens, “Oh, they’re not going to do that to a baby.” But they did it. Anyway, so that's one thing. Another thing I remember telling mama – oh, God there were a few things that I would tell her, and she'd give me answers, and it didn't make sense. This one about why do I bite my fingers – oh, because I'm pointing to the sky.

RB: The three examples you just gave really show that the community seemed quite spiritual.

LL: Oh, yes, very spiritual. So that's why the Arabs and the Jews didn't get along. Because with us, oh, geez, if you had one ant, and you killed that ant, what would happen? Oh, God would punish you. I remember as a child I went to Collins Playfield, and I know anybody that's going to read this is going to say, “God, I haven't heard that word in ages.” It was located on 15th and Washington, 16th and Washington, around there. It's a playfield, and it was in three tiers. The first one was the gym. Whatever we played when we were kids, or whatever it was. If you wanted to play volleyball, they had a place for that. Then, on the next tier, were trees and a couple of tables, so you could have a picnic. The third tier was a little wading pool, and I used to go in there, and I'd get my dress and put it in my bloomers and go in there, and I'd swish around, come home all dirty and whatnot. My mother used to get angry at me.

RB: So, is that where the Sephardic kids would play, at Collins Playfield?

LL: Yes, Collins Playfield. Besides the settlement house where we had a JCC. But let me finish with this. What did I say? It was in three tiers.

RB: It was in three tiers, and the lowest level had a wading pool and you would go there.

LL: Miss Powell, who was the lady in charge there – you could see she was very masculine. That was before the word “gay” and about the time when they called them fairies, but I loved her. I thought she was fantastic. She was very polite, and I loved her. And when I was president of the PTA [at] Hawthorne Elementary School here in Seattle, Miss Powell came to talk to us. Well, at my invitation because I found out Miss Powell talked to elementary PTAs about school and about such as that. So, I remember the same beautiful teeth. Goodness, that was forty-three years ago because I was pregnant with my baby then. Anyway, but I remember that. That's the gym. But there were some more. Oh, and then we used to play baseball there and whatnot.

RB: But did you play with just girls, or did girls and boys play together? Were there Ashkenazi there or what?

LL: Well, we used to play baseball with only girls, and that was [inaudible] in the morning before school started. I was very athletic. And then I didn't play basketball. And I was thirteen years old when we moved to Los Angeles, but that's another story. Then when it came to the time when I was just getting to be a teenager, when I was thirteen, fourteen, I left to go to Los Angeles, and that's when they start going to the Settlement House because there – I'll explain what they had there. Although to me, Collins Playfield – we used to call that City Park. But when I was a teenager, I was not here. That's when they started going dancing at the Settlement House because you settled there, those from America, and then they changed it to Educational Center years later. That's where they used to have a dentist that would work on your mouth for ten cents, and then they had bathtubs there. I'd take a bath there, loved it because I had all the hot water I wanted, and that was kind of rare because we didn't have that kind of hot water. When we wanted to take a bath, we had to get hot water from the big water tank that was cold to get water to take a bath. So geez, all this hot water. Well, I got lice. That's for the head. We used to call that "piojos." And my mother would be looking for the little things and trying to get rid of them. And then your tonsils – you get your tonsils out there. Well, everybody and his brother had tonsils out there. And I remember I was friends with the doctor's daughter. She was a she. The woman was a she, and the daughter was a little girl. I remember we'd clean up after a tonsillectomy. I was brave. I would pick up all the blood. I didn't get paid for it. I did that for fun. Then they had Girl Scouts. I couldn't get any of my friends to go there. I used to do things on my own because I couldn't get anybody to do the things that I wanted to do.

RB: Why is that?

LL: I guess I was more interested in not education because I thought I did lousy in school here because they were all Japanese. They were brilliant. So that made it difficult for us. It's not their fault. But we felt like a duh next to them. But when I went to Los Angeles at age fourteen, I was an “A” student because everybody was stupid there. I had such good training here in Seattle; by the time I went there when I was fourteen in junior high school – they didn't have a junior high school then – I was getting As, As, As. Everything in language arts and math was so simple. Well, it wasn't n “A.” It was an R, recommended. S, satisfactory; U, which is the bad.

RB: Unsatisfactory.

LL: Unsatisfactory. Thank you.

RB: So, you were a very good student, it sounds like.

LL: In high school, I was. Yes. And I made scholarship there.

RB: And this was in Los Angeles.

LL: Los Angeles. So maybe that's why. Even now, because my mother always downed playing cards because anybody that played cards weren't the best housekeepers, they didn't take care of their children, their kids were not taken care of, and all that. So Becky and I, and my sister Regina, we never cared for cards. So, everybody plays mahjong and cards and all that. Well, I did learn to play mahjong, but it was very hard because I had a lot of back problems then. God, it was torture. So, I just couldn't concentrate on it. And so, therefore, my way of entertainment and enjoyment was of the better-quality things. Instead of “Where did you go?” “I don't go there.” “Which restaurant?” “Well, no, when I was there in Palm Springs, I went there.” “Oh, you know there’s a good place.” It's not me. And then my husband was that way – very astute, very educated. I was like that, but that kind of rubbed off on me, too.

RB: I wonder if it was passed down from your grandmother and your mother [inaudible] –

LL: Oh, sure. Because my grandmother, fortunately – my grandfather was too busy trying to make a living. Where my grandmother was able to – she came from Mars, and my grandfather came from the moon. Oh, no, she came from the moon. Her name was Luna.

RB: Can you describe what a typical Sephardic household might look like way back when?

LL: Well, isn't that funny because that was the next thing I was going to say. I'm glad you said it because I wouldn't have thought of it. In the kitchen, we had a (canopy?).

RB: Can you describe that?

LL: My dad used to make them. Everybody had somebody make it for them, but my dad was a Jack-of-all-Trades. He used to make (canopy?). He really must have put a lot of nails in it because it never squeaked. It was fine. It was enough for two people to sit in there. And then they put a (mender?) on it.

RB: What is that?

LL: (Mender?) is a – what do you put on the bed?

RB: A mattress?

LL: Mattress. People didn't have money – would get a bunch of old clothes and put them in there to sit down so it wouldn't be wood. But we had a (mender?). Then we had pillows in the back and on each side. My mother would make [them]. And then, in the bottom, she would make the same material and ruffle it in the bottom. So, it was kind of cute. And that's the (canopy?).

RB: And where was this located?

LL: In the kitchen.

RB: So many households had this? No, just your household.

LL: It so happened. Coincidentally, we had a place [that] jutted out a little bit, and that's where my dad fit the (canopy?).

RB: I see. And it happened to be near the kitchen.

LL: And it was in the kitchen. Then we had a pantry. And in there, we had a gas stove. Three gas stoves. Then they had the big wooden coal stove that my mother kept polished. Beautiful stove. The steel was white, and everything was shining. But she used to work hard. She really should have been a wealthy woman because she had no patience with children. Then, in there would be the table, and I remember the table. The table had a drawer, but you opened it up, and that's where you put flour. Can you imagine? I mean, it's not sealed. Oh, I bet it got a lot of bugs and stuff in there. I think of that now. That's where we used to eat. Every Friday night, my mother would be in her glory. The meals were all cooked and all that, and she would tell us stories about Juha, and Juha is a story of a Sephardic that's a nerd. Stupid Juha. I also write stories about Juha. Now, there's a lady in Israel. Her name is Matilda [Koen-Sarano], who writes these beautiful stories of Juha. I'm sure everybody knows the story, and all she has to do is hear it, and then she'd embellish it and write it.

RB: Was this for entertainment for the family, or was it to teach them a moral?

LL: What are you talking about?

RB: A story of Juha.

LL: To laugh.

RB: To laugh, to entertain.

LL: You had to have somebody to echar lashon and to tell stories.

RB: For Shabbat dinner.

LL: But see I come from a generation where they don't need that unless – with me, but I get up and do a skit and everybody roars laughing before you even – that's true. I never thought of that. Before I even end up, they started this laughing. Like when I started, I said, “Hombres and Mujeres.” What was I going to say? “[inaudible] La estoria [the story.]” And then we would laugh and laugh. “Adio, de que estas riendo, cualo vu a no es coas de reir, ay por dolor, mira, awerra no respecto del todo.” [Why are you laughing? There is no reason to laugh. No respect here]. So this is what it is. And you can laugh because you get an idea of what your grandma was talking about.

RB: Do you remember any really short or quick stories that you can tell us here about one that your mother would tell you that you really enjoy?

LL: I'm going to look at it … [Recording paused.] Very briefly, here is a sample of my bavajadas Turkish/Ladino dictionary. “Acheliado.” Now, that's Spanish. Achuncate. Everybody laughed when they heard that. They haven't heard this since they were children. “Achuncate.” “Sit your ass down.” “Aringa.” And then I would say, “Aringa.” Everybody would laugh, and I'd go, “Aringa, ringa rosy.” Then, bakal is a grocery store. Barbunia are red beans. (Beebeela?) – ham. (Beerket?) – luck. (Beerket veeseen?) – luck and thankful. (Bebeeniar?) ¬– accept. (Buya?) – paint. (Cayida?) – literally falling star, bad luck person. “(Cayida que te vega?).” The people from Turkey used to say this a lot.

RB: And say that again. What does that mean?

LL: Literally, fallen star. Bad luck. But it was said in jest. But if you were really angry and then you would say, “(Cayida que te vega?),” and then boy, there would be a big fight. (Chanta?) is purse. (Cheekeenyar?) is bashful. (Deedal?) – thimble. (Dezmungada?) means discarded one. (Embatikar?) – dirty. (Falagar?) – to stroke, make feeling good. (Falaka?), to beat up. And so all these words that I'll let you have. Now, what were you saying? We'll do this fast?

RB: Because we're almost out of time here, I just wondered if you had a story for us that you remember.

LL: “(Habia decir un hombre (inaudible) Juha?)” and everybody laughs because they know the stories of Juha. Now [inaudible] Juha. What do you call that? [Speaks Spanish.]

RB: Novio?

LL: El novio. [Speaks Spanish] (Avia de ser un mansevo ke se yamava Juha. Agora Juha, con avlicas, se esposo con Bolisa, la ija de Bohora de Musanee Belebeezes. Buena famia, honesti Ga! Bohora, como nikuchera de su casa, le cumbidio al mansevo Juha para senar nochi de Rosh Hashanah.
Aparejaron una mesa, de lo muncho y de lo bueno. El mansevo juha se ‘enjoyo’ la nuchada. Cuando vino la hora de irse a su casa, la suegra le avrio la puerta. En este punto, empeso una luvia con truenos, y no demandes. Bohora, mirando afuera, cualo va ver, choros de agua! “Adio, juha, ijo bueno,” le disho la suegra Bohora, “te vas a moshar por entero. Echate aki esta noche, kerido.” Le vino una alegria a la novia Bolisa de senteer esto. Y con esto, la suegra con su ija, fueron ariva a la camareta de echar para atakanar la cama del novio. Aparejaron una cama, maravia de ver. El yeeru de cama era echa con una fina delicada tantela. El cavesal entero yeno de ‘embroideri’ con kohaki al deredor, de mil marafetis. La colcha capliada a la franca. Paresia halees como una cama de boda. “Ya abasto, Bohor, ke no sienten la jente! Ya escaparon, y

abasharon abasho para yamar lo a Juha. “Juha, Juha.” Se desparesio! Ande se fue? La prove de la esposada Bolisa empeso unos yoros. “Ya se fue mi kerido juha, y no va veneer atras!” “Ke acontisyo, Bolisa,” demando la madre, “Y vas a ver ija kerida, todos mis eswenios negros ke se afirmen por los enemigos de los judios ke por aki te vas a topar a Juha. Tu sienteme!” Adio! Ande se fue este Juha suyo Juha? Se desparesio. Y na, ke esta batiendo en la puerta. Ken sera? Avieron la puerta – ke vieron? Era Juha, mojado por entero…“Adio, Juha, ande te fuetes en esta fuertaleza de luvia?” demandaron. Juha suyo Juha respondio, “me fue a casa para tomar el shumees.”?) [Once upon a time, there was a young man named Juha. Juha was talked into becoming engaged to Bolisa, the daughter of Bohora, wife of Musanee Belebeezes. A wonderful family, honest! Bohora invited Juha to their home for dinner on Rosh Hashanah. Dinner was plentiful and delicious. Juha enjoyed the evening. Leaving to go home, he was greeted by thunderous and torrential showers. The future mother-in-law suggested he stay overnight. The two women went upstairs to prepare his bed. The preparation of his eloquent bed and accommodations was described. Coming back downstairs, Juha was not to be found. Bolisa was very upset. A knock at the door proved to be Juha, soaking wet. When asked where he had gone in that terrible rainstorm, he indicated that he had gone home for his pajamas.] So they're all like that.

RB: And this was how your mother would teach these stories to you.

LL: Oh, she would tell us, Friday nights. And you know I remembered everything. Only now that I have the book of Miss Matilda Koen, is her name now, and I've got it all written down, but when I used to write that, I made them up as I went along. And I would tell her about (cohake?). You know what that is?

RB: Describe it.

LL: It's material, you put that as a design around the pillow. In other words, instead of just having a pillow, you put that lace on there. But this is not a lace you crochet; it's lace

that you do with a big needle, and you do it by hand. And it turns out into this gorgeous crochet – (Cohake?).

RB: Leni, thank you so much. I really appreciate it. Hopefully, we can meet again and continue.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

RB: Hi, this is Roz Bornstein, and I'm with Leni LaMarche at Leni's home on Mercer Island, Washington. The date is June 25, 2001, and we are meeting today to continue gathering Leni's oral history for the Weaving Women's Words project of the Jewish Women's Archive. Leni, do I have your permission to interview and tape you?

LL: De que, no? Yes.

RB: Thank you very much. Let's see, we wanted to start today with the time in your life that you and your family went to Los Angeles.

LL: Los Angeles.

RB: What year did your family –?

LL: 1936.

RB: Do you remember why your family decided to move to L.A.?

LL: Well, I was so used to my mother embellishing that when she said, “The reason we're going to Los Angeles is because my son Joe has asthma.” I thought to myself, “Asthma? Joe doesn't have asthma.” Now that's what she said. The reason why is because – and I don't believe in the evil eye. I have this only because it's like a toy. And they go, “Oh, what is that?” “Oh, this is the evil eye.” This is also the evil eye. I wear it because it's attractive.

RB: Now, these are necklaces that you're wearing right now.

LL: Right now, I'm wearing the one that looks like an eye there. And what this is because – well, I shouldn't say the Sephardics only, but they picked a lot up from the Arabs, and that's the ojo, the eye, the bad eye, and they believed it to the core of their heart. It caused my mother a lot of grief because her illness was because of that, and who am I to tell her, “Ma, don't believe in that,” when she really believed it from the old country? So, there was nothing I can do about it. Anyway, so, therefore, my mother said that we were going to Los Angeles. Well, I said, “Oh, we're going to Los Angeles. Gee, with all the movie stars,” as if they'd come and walk right in front of our house. I was excited. But anyway, I left about two weeks before graduating eighth grade. In Seattle, there were no junior highs. You went up to the eighth grade, then onto high school, and you're there four years. But in Los Angeles, they had elementary school until the sixth grade, then you go to junior high until the ninth grade, and then the tenth, eleventh, twelfth, you go to high school. And then may I add to that that our teachers were not allowed to be married. Everybody was single. I don't think that's a good idea, but that's what they have. But as a substitute, they would take you.

RB: Is that in Seattle or Los Angeles?

LL: I'm talking about my school time here. It was in Seattle. So, now we're going to go to Los Angeles. We had a ‘29 Chevy. I know when we came back about five, six years later, everybody wondered what happened to our ‘29 Chevy because my dad was exceptionally careful with his ‘29 Chevy. He polished it, and it just shone like green gold. They said, “Oh, I remember your dad had a little vase there and put flowers in there” He used to put little flowers in there. Fourth of July, he used to put the red and white and blue around the tires. They were able to do that because it was the old kind of tires. Anyway, we got in there with four kids in the back. We squeezed in. I don't know how we did it. We sat back there. I remember my dad, chug, chug, chugging along. I looked

– thirty miles an hour. “We’ll never get there at this stage,” I'm thinking to myself. But I don't dare say that to my mother because she gets a little bit upset. Anyway, I just kept quiet. But every once in a while I'd get to sit in the middle, I'd put my foot over slowly, slowly on top of his foot and push it down a little bit, and he'd say [inaudible], and then my mother says, “Cualo es Mateo?” [What is it Mateo?] “Nada, nada, nothing, nothing.” Oh God. Thank God. It took us one week to get to Los Angeles. Now it takes two and a half hours. [laughter] There we were with [inaudible]. My mother brings comidas to cook in the wood and coal stove and the cabins and all that. I think about it now and I thought, “My God, if I had the patience, I would sit and write the story of our trip to Los Angeles in our ‘29 Chevy.” Anyway, so we went there. What was I going to say?

RB: Oh, you were going to tell us a little bit about your experience in middle school in Los Angeles.

LL: I'm in Los Angeles now. I’ll go back to it. Oh, gosh, what did I do there? I mean, the Sephardic community was very, very closely knit, and it's funny – rather interesting – how we were like that in Seattle. Now people going to universities, they're more open about things and so on. But then, you stick with your own. I think the reason for that is because of the antisemitism and the fact that I'm Sephardic and the king and queen wanted us out of there because the –what's his name? – some high priest says that if you don't get rid of these Jews – and the Jews have been there for a thousand years. But he said if you don't get rid of those Jews, when you die, you're going to go to Hell automatically. So we had to leave. So now, why am I telling you that? I don't know.

RB: You were talking about antisemitism in Los Angeles.

LL: So, we were conditioned to just keep to our own selves. It wasn't that we're better than you or you're better than I; it was just this is the way we were. That's what my mother was because well, they come here to Seattle, and they didn't know how to speak any English, and here the husbands were really working hard to make a dollar, and they

didn't know how to speak English, so it was not easy, believe me.

RB: So, you hooked up with the Sephardic community in Los Angeles.

LL: Right. And so we went to – once a week or was it twice a week we went to – at the synagogue – the teenagers. But we'd have our Hebrew class first because the Rabbi was pretty sharp. Rabbi Mizrachi was a wonderful man, and so he would have a little class, and then he was trying to teach us Solitreo script, which is an archaic Rashi script, but it's archaic, and I already knew it, so I was fascinated by that. Then we'd go downstairs, and we'd have the records played, and we'd dance. There may be anywhere from fifteen, twelve, something like that, kids dancing there. Anyway, like I said, it was very, very enjoyable. We lived between Broadway and Figueroa in Los Angeles, and anybody who has been there can tell you that the streets in our neighborhood were Broadway, Figueroa, Hoover, and then Vermont, and that's only three blocks. But in all honesty, they were the equivalent of nine blocks because one block was three blocks long, just continuously three blocks long.

RB: Was this a Sephardic neighborhood?

LL: Yes, not only this street. They lived on 54th [Street]. Very few lived way out [inaudible] Park. When we were ready to come to Seattle in ’42, that's when people were moving out of our area. You know how that is when the Blacks come in and so on and so forth? Anyway, I remember my brother and my little sister Becky – her name is Romano now, and her husband is from a family that went to Turkey after the Spanish Inquisition. My ancestors went to the Island of Rhodes, but the language is the same because we were speaking the old archaic Spanish. Right about that time is when they started changing it. Well, here we're on the island of Rhodes, no communication much from out other than the Jews maybe would come in. They did have, I understand – I don't know too much about it. They did have a yeshiva, and it was at one time a very successful situation where many rabbis went to the Island of Rhodes and became rabbis.

What was I going to say?

RB: When we were talking about Los Angeles, actually, and you were telling us about the rabbi, and you were learning Hebrew and Solitreo script.

LL: So, we enjoyed it. But I got to really know the guys. And this is why, Roz, when you said that you saw my video when I performed at the Sephardic Convention in Los Angeles about five, six, seven years ago. I don't know. Maybe more, maybe less, and why all I had to do was get on the front where the stage is supposed to be. I just walked out. Everybody roared laughing. So, they knew me, and I didn't have to say much to make them laugh. But our Sephardic young people don't speak it much. They understand it, but they don't speak it, and they got a big bang out of the way I was imitating these old ladies, complaining about their daughter-in-law, complaining about their kids, complaining about their synagogue, and I was using terminology that only was used by our mothers. Well, I could hear people saying, “Oh, my mother was like that. Oh, my grandmother was like you. You sound just like my aunt.” That’s the way I was. Anyway, so that was that about that, about the convention. But now you have to remind me – clue me in – what I wanted to say.

RB: So you started middle school or junior high in Los Angeles. Is that right?

LL: Yes, right. And then I started – I was there one year, John Muir Junior High School. Then I went to Manual Arts High School. Very nice school, and boy, the first time that I went – not there – the first time I started school in the 9th grade, and I saw the way the teachers were – most of them were married. And the girls were wearing hosiery. They were wearing lipstick. Their hair was bobbed, and I looked at that, and I says, “Oh my God in heaven, this is heaven.” And then, during lunch hour, we could go see a movie. We saw Will Rogers movies, those old-time movies, but they weren't old-time then because this was 1937.

RB: Did you go to Washington School in Los Angeles?

LL: No, Manual Arts high school.

RB: So, the principal of Washington – there's a great story that you were going to tell about a principal at Washington or in Los Angeles?

LL: In Washington. Okay. I'll tell you that.

RB: So this is the principal of the school that you went to before you went to Los Angeles, is that right?

LL: In Washington, yes. Because I left here in 1936. I was born and raised here. In 1936, we all moved to Los Angeles.

RB: Yes, I'm sorry. So to take a step back then, to catch this great story, before you moved, you had a principal –

LL: Oh, that was when I was in the 7th grade, and I had a principal here in Seattle. We were used to him, but nobody would tolerate the stuff that he pulled. I don't mean anything on the computer because there was no such thing. But what happened is one time – and the reason I'm telling you this is I was telling this to our Sephardic group at the Kline Galland Home. Now, the Kline Galland Home, when I started there twenty-seven years ago, the main reason I went there is because when I went to visit and I looked around, I saw where the Sephardics continuing their character of being by themselves because their English wasn't good. But amongst each other, they can talk. And it annoyed me when one Ashkenazic lady – Ashkenazic is a lady that's from Germany, Poland, such places as that, and they speak Yiddish. Anyway, I saw one mimicking one of the ladies that spoke Ladino, and I didn't know what to do. I says, “I'm not going to talk. I'm not going to scold her.” So there was a gal there about two months before I went to visit somebody there at the Kline Galland Home – again, about twenty-six years

ago – and she was doing a Sephardic group, and the thing is her Sephardic was as good as my Vietnamese. which wasn't any good. But, of course, I didn't say too much to her. And so I says, “Gee, don't you need help?” She says, “Oh, I sure could use help.” I said, “I'm going to come here, and I'm going to help you.” Well, the thing is I could read Ladino, and I told them stories of Juha and all this that is very Sephardic. So, I continued. I came in, and every Monday, I'd go there, and they would have this program. Just the Sephardics would come there. Well, it used to be that the ladies then were, “Oh, I don't feel good,” in Spanish. If I say it, you wouldn't understand. [inaudible] “Come on, come on.” I don't want to mention names. “Come here, and I'll get your shoes.” “Oh, no, hija.” “Oh, please, come on.” [inaudible] going to do that. I went, “All right.” I go around, find the shoes, put them on, get her wheelchair, get them in, get them in. Anyway, they’d all have either coffee or tea and whatever. They used to have little kosher cookies. Anyway, and then, little by little, I got to know the ladies there, the residents, and I don’t mean the Sephardics – the others there. And I got to tell them about, “What is Sephardic? What is it?” I explained to them the story, and they said, “Well, I didn't know that.” Those Ashkenazic did not know there was such a thing as a Sephardic Jew. Even in New York they didn't know. Somebody from Chicago never heard of it. And in Seattle only – and Seattle because if anybody went to school they knew there were Sephardic kids. Anyway, I explained that story. I feel bad saying anything negative about this lady because she apologized. “Well, I didn't know they went through all that. Somebody should have told us.” So, what I'm saying – “That was good, Leni. I used my head. I didn't say anything negative.” And so after that, they were a little kinder to our ladies. Anyway, then it got to a point where I [began] working there. See, this I did by volunteering and I wasn’t working. And after about three years, they wanted somebody to work in the day center. So I went there to work, and then they needed somebody to drive the van. So, I got a special license to drive the van. I'd go around to different places and pick people up, take them to the Kline Galland home. And then, when I was through with that, then helped them [with] this and that. “This person is

blind, so you got to keep an eye on her." This one this and that. And it was tiring. It really was tiring. I'm jumping around. I'm talking about the Kline Galland Home now. But you were talking about the –

RB: Well, I was going to have you tell us the story of the principal. The reason why you started talking about the Kline Galland Home is because today you were there for Sephardic Group.

LL: That's what I was going to say, and I appreciate you bringing me back on track because I seem to digress a little bit. So today, somebody – I forget what happened. Becky, my sister, who works on a day shift, started laughing. I forget what it was that happened, and I said, "That's nothing." Today I said, "That's nothing." Any time it comes to entertaining, I do it, but not too often because I don't want to be a pain in the neck. I think I'm so funny. Then you get corny. So, I says, "Let me tell you about our principal." I said, "The way it used to be in Seattle…" I was telling that today. "The way it was in Seattle, if I say I'm from Seattle – 'Seattle? Hey, you ever hear of Seattle?'" It was back about 1935, 1934. That used to annoy me. "Oh, you mean that place that rains a lot?" "Yes." "Oh, you mean where you have all these Indians behind trees?" Swear to God they'd say that. I wanted to hit one in the mouth, but I'm only nine, ten years old, and I can't do it.

RB: So, you're telling them about the experience about the principal at Washington.

LL: So I said, "When I went to Los Angeles – no wonder I went crazy. I'd go there and see them with the lipstick and hosiery and jitterbugging and movies during lunch hour, and I thought, 'This is heaven, this is wonderful.' Well, it wasn't like that in Seattle. In Seattle, God forbid you should wear lipstick before you get out of the eighth grade or God forbid you should wear a dress that's above your knee. Don't do this and don't do that. We minded our Ps and Qs." Let me just sidetrack. The gal in the seventh grade – I remember asking Mr. McNew – the first time they had men teaching, and she says, "Do

you ever drink wine with your meals?" I went, "Oh, dio, you don't go saying that to a teacher?" In those days, you didn't do that. So, I says, "What happened is that every Monday morning," and I didn't elaborate, but I'll tell you this, most of us didn't have breakfast. Either we didn't have time or didn't want to, or the mother wasn't up in time to give you breakfast or whatever, and you felt kind of squeamish. More than once, believe me, somebody would pass out. What it is, when you stand right up against our class – we stand against our class, and Mr. (Sears?) would get on the chair, and I used to wonder, "Gee, how come he's getting on a chair? Why doesn't he buy something to stand on so we could all see him." But we're all standing up, see? That's if nobody fainted. All they do is pull them out. Anyway, he was this way, he would go – and I'm not exaggerating. "I want to tell you something." He would always tell me what happened during the week – "And this happened, and something happened. Horrible things happened." And we always went, "What happened?" Ordinarily, everything's so nicey, nicey. He says, "There was a fight Friday night." And I went, "Oh my God, that's the one I saw outside." I mean, two girls were fighting, a Japanese – I know their names. (Narvis Manning?) – (Booker?), and the (Booker?) is very well-known in Garfield High School because he was big in football. (Sonny Booker?), they called him. The sister – very pretty girl she was. She and (Mary Nakamura?) – I remember her name, (Mary Nakamura?). Anyway, so they had a fight out there, and I only lived a block away. I lived on 20th, between Washington and Jackson, only one block away. So, I'm going to miss out on this exciting time? So, I watched. Anyway, now he's talking, and I'm going, "Oh my God. I was watching." "And I want them to know that I don't want them to insult the flag of America. And therefore, you that watched the fight…" He didn't talk about the girls. I guess maybe he had them and took them to jail or something. "You people that watch, I want you – go to your room and don't you salute the flag of the United States and insult it." Ay, dio. So, I'm standing up like this. I'm standing up like this, and I'm walking – not me but everybody. One was in that room, one was in that area, one was in this area, and so me and whoever else was with me, we started walking. "Put your head

down." So, I put my head down, and I'm walking. I thought I was going to die. "They're going to kill me." That was the history of the school then. Anyway, we went in there, and here comes a teacher, Miss – I don't use names, but I guess she's dead and gone a long time ago, (Miss Calder?). I remember her name – the seventh-grade teacher. And she had one of those real old scarves they had in the [movies], real old, crocheted scarf on. "I've never been…". Like ZaSu Pitts. "I've never been so insulted in all my life. I was so embarrassed by my class." I could have sworn. Anyway, now what's the principal doing? He didn't finish there. In the intercom [inaudible] if you want to call on the intercom, he goes [inaudible], and I could not understand it. Don't forget this is 1935. And somebody announces, "Mr. Sears wants to see Mary [inaudible] and Rosalind [inaudible] and Rachel [inaudible]." And they'd go, "They're going to call me next." Okay. So, they'd come up. "Now the principal wants to talk to…" And they'd mention a couple more names, and they'd go down. One of the girls was Mary Porter, Black girl, good-looking, very elegant then in 1935. Anyway, she came up; her eyes were red from crying, and I went, "Ay, dio. This tough girl, that your eyes are red from crying? How am I going to do down there? I'm going to die. I'm going to pass out. I know I'm going to faint. [inaudible]." Anyway, I went down there, and he started in. All of a sudden, I went, "Eeee," crying. Anyway, I went back upstairs, but it's left quite a scar on me.

RB: How so?

LL: Well, geez. We couldn't salute the flag. We don't want you to – what is the word? Not insult but desecrate, or what is the word – that you're going to the flag? You're not respecting or some word like that.

RB: And this was because you had witnessed a fight?

LL: There must have been about twenty, thirty kids watching. Those that were watching, even the residents, went, "Oh, my God." I said, "That's the way it was." It was tough when I went to school with this stupid (Sears?). And I was told that he was antisemitic.

Well, I was really naive then. I wasn't aware that he was. I was aware that he loved the Japanese kids. Now, I had it, and I don't know where it is now – maybe while you're changing tapes, I can look for it. You can see how many Japanese kids [there were] in that class, in the graduating class. We had [inaudible]. This is the following year when I went into the eighth grade, and he would take the Japanese, put his arm around them, and say, “Oh, my dear boy.” And this guy with the crew cut, Japanese, bowlegged, and he'd then go [inaudible] – not ZaSu Pitts. What’s those twins? The comedians? Laurel and Hardy? Remember, he’d go, “Oh.” That’s what it reminded me of. Anyway, I graduated from there.

RB: Wow, what a time, though.

LL: Well, that's the way they were

.

RB: Were the teachers the same, or was it mostly the principal?

LL: The teachers were kind of funny. I mean, they were strict, like you see in the movies with the rulers. Of course you never got hit, I don’t think. I don’t remember. Thank God I didn’t get hit.

RB: So, thankfully you were able to leave that school, and you moved to Los Angeles. What was school like in L.A.?

LL: In L.A., our grades were not A, B, C, D, and E. Our grades were “R” for Recommended, “S” for Standard, and “D” for – not failure, but “D”, the worst you can get. I was getting all “Rs” because the school – they had some funny ways about them, but boy, they taught you. When I went to L.A., and I think I was in the tenth grade, the teacher said, “I'm going to teach you students something.” This is in Manual Arts High School in Los Angeles. He says, “Now I want your undivided attention because it's going to be a little complicated.” And I'm looking. I says, “Ay, dio, that's [diagram].” What do

you call that? The noun, the verb – diagramming. Diagramming. You know what that is?

RB: Describe it on tape.

LL: Oh, what it is, you write, “Tony plays ball.” Just an example. Tony is the noun. Play is the verb. And ball is the subject or whatever. And then, it was Fat Tony – you put fat – adjective down there, and can become complicated, but the way he explained it – I says, “My God, if I didn't know it, I wouldn't know what he was doing.” Well, I got an “R” there. The best grade I can get. So, I was getting scholarships all the time. Over here in Seattle, if I got a “C” I was lucky. Because [inaudible] “That's no good. You don't do good. You don't write good.” I'm for praising children because nobody praised me. Nobody praised me. Although I used to do certain skits as a teenager in Los Angeles. I would watch somebody, and then I would go – this woman, a little bit fat lady, was there to see my grandmother who was also there to see my mother who was in bed. She had surgery. Now, the second day, they'd get you up. My mother was in that bed [for] one month. She didn't move. I did the cooking for Pesach. I did all the cleaning. I had the responsibilities. I had an older sister. She was the one that got the dance lessons and the toe dance lessons and the acrobat and the tap dancing lessons, and she got all the costumes and the tutus. I did ask my mother – “Mama, could I have piano lessons, please?” “No, if I'm going to give to you, Regina has it, and I have to give it to you and maybe to Joe. I can’t. That’s too much. Can’t do it.” That was it. Anyway, what was I going to say?

RB: You were talking about how it was much easier in Los Angeles in your opinion. You became a very good student.

LL: So, what I did there reminds me of what I was going to say, which reminds me that I was going to say I would watch somebody talking, and then I would imitate them. That's how I got started doing this. So, I told you – oh, I know, my mother was in bed. That's

what I was saying. I did her nails. I'd give her enemas in bed. I'd give her a sponge bath. Oh, I worked so hard. And then I'd be inside, and when I'd hear a bell ring, I'd run in my high school class. The kids that took the morning attendance – I told them, "Please, my mother had surgery." Okay. They always put me present in class because they knew that I wasn't one of these kids playing around.

RB: So, you were taking care of your mom as well as going to school.

LL: Oh yes. I was going to school. And I was seventeen at the time. Anyway, you'll have to remind me again, I'm sorry.

RB: That's okay. So, you later enrolled in Manual Arts high school in Los Angeles. Did you have any teachers that were influential to you that you remember or classes that were –?

LL: I got to tell you about my imitating. That's what I was going to say. Imitating. That's all right. But you see, that brought me to my subject. And so my grandmother was eighty pounds, four-foot-eight, very little, little lady. Very thin. She was the one that – I don't know what I told you on the other tapes. Because of her, we all came to America.

RB: You mentioned that.

LL: I mentioned that. So I'm just saying she's such a wimpy-looking lady, but strong. And this huge lady that was sitting there was an in-law – we call it (consuegra?) of our Benviniste family. And then she says – "Como estas hija," says grandma. [How are you daughter?] "Ay, dio (Hermana Lunar?)." Her name is (Hermana Lunar?). She spoke like, "(Hermana Lunar?)." "No demandes." [Don't ask.] "Cualo es hija?" [What is it, daughter?] [inaudible] "I'm sorry. I don't want to talk." But I have to tell you this, and if I don't tell you – "Como vas a saber?" If I told you – Como vas a saber? How would you know? So, I'm telling you. I embellished on it. [Speaks Spanish.] I'm putting out two fingers and saying, "This small." [Speaks Spanish.] "It's a shame. It's going to be thrown

out." [Speaks Spanish.] "I might as well eat it." [Speaks Spanish.] "You're going to be fine, hija." "Oh, thank you." "Muchas gracias (Hermana Lunar?)." Anyway, so that's how I got into making people laugh. "Yo no soy gorda [fat], es tengo pechos [breasts] in the stomach and the rear end, but I'm not fat." Say it in Spanish, and people will just crack up.

RB: Excuse me. So, you started being a comedian started when you were in –

LL: Oh yes, very small.

RB: In middle school or younger? Middle school?

LL: Well, my mother always had me dress like a rabbi, and then I used to read Hebrew, "Baruch atah adonai, eloheinu melech ha-olam, asher kid'shanu b'mitzvotav, v'tzivanu al n'tilat yadayim. Amen. Baruch atah Adonai eloheinu melech ha olam" and so on and so forth. Anyway, I was going to say something before you asked me.

RB: You were talking about your grandmother and your mom. Oh, I'm sorry.

LL: Well, what was I saying?

RB: You were describing how you would imitate people.

LL: There was one man – I won't mention his name. One man, when I was a kid here, I used to watch him. I was about eight, nine years old. He'd be, what the Ashkenazic call, davening, to daven. We don't do that that much. They go back and forth, back and forth. And so my mother would say, "Come on, get up there and show us how Mr. So-and-so. I'd go – [imitates prayer and snoring]. [laughter] And they thought that was so funny. And I figure, "Well, if they think it's funny, I would do it." And then there was (Julia Tarica?), who was always a card, but she was attractive. She was slender. She knew how to flirt. I didn't know how. I was just good friends with all these young fellows. But

that’s why I got married twice, so don't feel bad. Anyway, I told you how we used to imitate – oh, there's so much I could say. Let's see. All right. And my mother, when I was a kid –

RB: So, did you mostly entertain family? When did you start to entertain –?

LL: Oh no, I didn't have enough confidence in myself because if I want to get up – any other girl – “Oh, isn't that sweet.” But if I got up – “Sit down. That's enough. That's enough noise. Sit down.” So, I never did that. But when I got into my teens, and I was doing that, they thought it was a ball. Another skit was “Second Floor, Please?” Well, I didn't know what they were laughing at.

RB: Where did you perform this skit?

LL: Right in the living room. That's how movie stars came to be. I don’t know what happened to me.

RB: So, describe “Second Floor.”

LL: So Second Floor, and so I would say – of course, I can't say this – I didn't think it was funny, but I would say, [Speaks Spanish]. “Madame, please. I don’t speak English. I want to go pish, pish.” Oh, the elevator. “Okay, okay. Ay dio. [Speaks Spanish].” Of course, if you don't understand, it's not funny. So I'd get in there, and then I'd say, “Second floor, please!” And every time they see me, “Leni, second floor, please.” I’d go, “No, not third floor. I want second floor. Got to pish, pish. [Speaks Spanish.] I’d get real hysterical, and people would laugh and laugh. Anyway, I have an aunt, my mother's youngest sister, who is a darling lady, [who] came here when she was five, went to school, went to high school, graduated, and she was the eighth child of the family. Anyway, I remember once I went on a trip to Los Angeles as an adult, and it wasn't too many – about twenty years ago, fifty years ago. She did “Second Floor, Please,” and I thought I would die. “Second floor, please. Oh, second floor.” Nobody was laughing.

“Ay dio. Was I that way too?” I'll never forget that. She saw how much I entertained, and she was trying to do that, but poor her, she didn't know how to – she was a joker. What I love what she did was when she'd talk in French – I don't know French, but [imitates speaking in French]. That was funny. She was funny then. [laughter] Anyway, then to backtrack a little bit – back, back, back. My mother was saying that when she was engaged, she was engaged with a man that she really didn't like. But he sent her the money. When was in New York, she bought the ring. She was real excited, and then when she saw him, she didn't like him, she said he had too much of a “bira.” Bira in Ladino is temper. Bad temper. And boy, did she know what she was talking about when she broke up the engagement. She says, “I told my mother – I said, ‘Mama, I don't want that man. I don't like him.’” “Oh hija, it's not that you're changing a dress; it's a man you're going to live all your life with, so if you don't think you're going to like him…” And I was surprised because ordinarily [Speaks Spanish.] What are people going to say?” She didn’t say this. My mother gave him the ring. [inaudible] buy candy and buy this and buy that – to her. She says, “I don't want it.” And when she saw my dad, you knew he was very [inaudible], very intellectual, quiet, and she liked that. Anyway, she says that first my sister was born, then fourteen months later she had me. I guess [inaudible] with Regina, but I think with me – I have a feeling that I was a crier as a baby. I don't know. I never asked. Didn't want to know. She did tell me – this surprised me. She was in a good frame of mine. I kept smelling him – her ex-fiancée that came to visit her. Meanwhile, she has a child and me – two children – [inaudible] says, “Oh, you smell so good.” I didn’t even ask her was it in Spanish or in English. So, he took me on his lap, and he says, “Oh, what a cute little baby,” and all that. But he came to visit my mother. So, that wasn't a very pleasant situation. Then I remember my dad working in the Rhodes Department Store. He had a little (stanja?). (Stanja?) in Ladino is a little shop, and there he shined shoes. [If] somebody wanted shoelaces or maybe polish, he would sell it to them. That's it. I mean, he wasn't the best businessman, but he made a pretty good living there, even during the Depression. So when he worked at the Rhodes

Department Store, it was like a Frederick & Nelson for senior ladies. Frederick & Nelson was here, but this was for senior ladies. And the store was exquisite. Everything was expensive. That's where my father was. He had his (stanjica?) right by the entrance of the ladies' restroom with the three tiers up there. They go up two or three stairs, and they sit down. For a dime, he would polish their shoes.

RB: Did he do this in Los Angeles as well?

LL: Well, that's the problem he had. In Los Angeles, it’s different; they're more (chapachulu?). In other words, their shoes weren't shined as much here. He didn't know how to go about it. But he learned how to clean hats.

RB: In Los Angeles.

LL: In Los Angeles.

RB: How did that come about?

LL: Because my uncle was a hat cleaner. My uncle was a hat cleaner, and he taught my dad. What happened was my dad had a fan – I guess you have to blow the –

RB: Excuse me, Leni, just a moment. I'm sorry. I'm going to check the tape.

LL: Sure, please, go ahead.

[END OF CD 2 OF 3]

RB: I am back with Leni LaMarche at Leni's home. This is tape three, and Leni and I are meeting to continue gathering her oral history for the Weaving Women's Words project for the Jewish Women's Archive. Again, this is tape three, and Leni, do I have your permission to interview and tape you?

LL: (Bashutunee?), which in Turkish means yes.

RB: Thank you very much. How would I say thank you in Turkish? Do you know?

LL: I don't know.

RB: Okay, that's all right. So you were telling me about Los Angeles and your father started in the hat cleaning business. Is that right?

LL: Yes. Wait a minute. But I wasn't going to go into that. See, I had something else in mind, and I said I'll remember, and I didn't.

RB: You were describing how he got into that business.

LL: Yes, what he did. He was downstairs, and he had a fan that was going round and round, and the sparks went on his hands, and he got all burnt up, and then he was out of business for quite a while, so I don't know how we managed. It was a very, very poor situation financially.

RB: Did your mom work outside of the home, or was she primarily –?

LL: She tried once. She could have made good money. This is sewing for furs. But her back couldn't take it. Because I'm sure you know from tension and nervousness, her back – and is her problem. She was always in pain. She was always sick. She was always hurting. And there was really nothing radically wrong with her. She had surgeries, but I really feel that the doctor – it was hurting, it was hurting – they open her up to see. Then they said, “Well, it was this, or it was that.” But I always said, “I don't think so,” because she lived to be a hundred years old. And the thing is, she believed in the evil eye, and she didn't want anybody to know how old she was. But in the community, you know how old each person is.

RB: So, during high school, can you tell us a little bit about those years for you and what they were like?

LL: Well, I'll tell you, it's easier for me to speak about Seattle because I've been here many longer years than. In L.A., I was a teenager.

RB: What did you do after high school?

LL: I worked in a factory with bed springs because I had no confidence in myself. And I didn't know that to get where you want to go you have to – because my daughter – this is her job – have confidence, be sure of yourself, don't underestimate yourself. Well, I was everything reverse. And the only time I got any accolades, any laughter, was when I used to entertain. So, I thought that was flattering anyway.

RB: You have a wonderful family.

LL: Now, for my children – I've got to tell you about my children. My oldest one is a dentist. (Carol?) is an employment counselor. People are sent to her from their employers of very high caliber jobs. She helps those who are laid off and works with them to increase the self-confidence they need to better themselves. And this is what she does, including lectures.

RB: Carolyn was the first child from your first marriage.

LL: She was the first child from my first marriage. But I left him. He was Sephardic. I left him when (Carol?) was a year old, came back to Seattle to live. Although I was in Los Angeles with him when I decided I had to leave him, there was no other choice.

RB: What year did you return with Carolyn when she was a year old?

LL: 1944.

RB: Can you tell us a little bit about that time? There's some great stories about how you lived with another woman.

LL: Okay. One minute. Let me start. So I came here to work, and I had my daughter boarded out, which was difficult for me. I had no car, so I had to take one bus, get another bus, get another bus – they lived in Alki. They didn't have freeways. He was up there. It was a long way. And then, being that I worked in an area where there weren't too many buses, I would go see her about two times a week, three times a week. And I guess I overdid it. And because of that, they didn't want her. And not only that, I remember that she would get very melancholy with me. She was only two years old. All she would say, "Mommy, mommy." [Speaks Spanish.] "Mommy, mommy." "What honey?" "Mommy, mommy." That's all she kept saying is "Mommy, mommy, mommy," and my heart would break. Anyway, when I went to a certain organization that helped me find a place, and I found another place for her, and (Carol?) remembers that – two years old, two and a half. Anyway, I remember her name too. She had two girls, and so Carol didn't say anything negative. Anyway, what was it you asked me?

RB: Oh, you had met – I believe her name was Sadie. You met a woman.

LL: Then I couldn't have her there anymore because it was too far from me, so I took her – so, I went to board my daughter out at – Mrs. (Fink's?) is her name – near Madrona Park. She used to tell me some unsavory things about Sadie, and then she would tell Sadie some unsavory things about me. So, the one time when she wasn't home, I was sitting in this little living room. I sat in one chair, and Sadie sat in the other. I mean little. Half of this size was the living room. And she looked at me, and we got to talking, found out, "Gee, she's great." She talked to me. She thought I was great. Anyway, to make a long story short, we decided we're going to get a place to rent in 1945. Even knowing that things were tough to get a place. We finally found one and the thing is we had to have two hundred between us to buy what little furniture was there. They were renting it, but they wanted to move out and leave the furniture, whatever you want to call it – it was furniture without springs. You couldn't get anything like that – bed springs without springs, that type of thing. No washing machine. You couldn't find that. There were no

cars or nothing like that. Well, you could, but you had to hold them on forever because – when I say forever, a couple of years, three years. Anyway, so we got together, and I got money. Wait a minute. Where did I get the money from? Oh, I had been working in a shipyard, and I saved some money. Not at Boeing. I mean, I saved some money, so I had a hundred dollars. And then that's when my husband and I decided to get married even though my mother was very much against it. I felt sad about that because I didn't want to hurt my mother. Because all this time I was catering to her.

RB: So, just to clarify, you and Sadie lived together for a while.

LL: What I did is I took care of the baby. She paid the rent, and I did the shopping and the cooking and washed the clothes, and it's all right for me. Now that I think of it – geez, I worked hard, but I didn't mind then. I'd take the kids for a walk, and Carol had somebody to play with. She'd come home, and dinner would be ready, and then she'd do the dishes. I thought, “Geez, if I can meet a man like this, I'd have it made.”

RB: How did you meet your second husband?

LL: I met him in the shipyards.

RB: And what was his name?

LL: Well, we called him Duke, but after having grandchildren, he decided that that wasn't a very good name for him. He had a name that I won't even mention because he hated it. I want him to rest in peace where he's buried. So, I'm not going to mention it. I didn't use it either because that wasn't his name, really. I mean, legally it was. But anyway, I met him there, and it so happened it was my last day on the ship. The next day I went there. They gave me papers that they were going to lay me off, and I think it's because they saw me sitting down. Even if you weren't busy, you had to look busy. Anyway, I figured, “Well, I'm going to go to Boeing anyway; they'll take me.” He was a burner. He said, “Are you going to be my (hepa?)?” What’s a (hepa?)? Helper. They’re all from the

South. So, one [inaudible] it over here, and they'd have the mark there, and I'd get in line. Duke was there. So when I knew it was my last day there I figured, "Hey, what the heck, I don't care. I'm just going to take it easy." So while standing in line someone asked if they could get ahead of me. Finally, the burner says, "Hey, wait a minute, what's going on here? This young lady has been standing in line, and everybody's getting in front of her. How come?" Oh, geez. He noticed. Anyway, then they had smoke – five minutes, smoke period. I had just started to smoke then, and I was twenty-four years old. I was twenty-three years old when I started. I had a heck of a time trying to quit, but I quit. Anyway, is it too hot in here for you?

RB: I'm okay. Are you warm?

LL: No, I'm all right. So some fellow came up – well, I was working there six months already. It was the first day he was working on the ship. And so I thought when somebody asked me – I thought, "Well, I don't want to give him my phone." Then, you didn't give phone numbers to any guy, especially the ones that work there, you know? And I wasn't going to. And meanwhile, I was divorced. But still, I was not interested. And the thought of the miserable experience I had in my first marriage, just the thought of getting married again was very frustrating for me. So the guy says, "Oh, gee, can I have your phone number?" So then my husband-to-be gave me the paper, and I said, "Oh, the number is," and I gave it to the man, and he thanked me. So I asked him, "What number did you give me?" He says that it was the police station. I thought, "How does he know the police station number?" So, I gave it to him. Meanwhile, the whistle blew, and that meant that it was my last day at work, so I had to collect my toolbox and go and get my farewell slip, and my tools and whatnot. So here he comes running after – ding, ding, which means everybody off the boat or whatever it is. He came running, and he says, "Please, can I have your phone number?" And I went, "Well, I'd like to," because he had blonde hair and nice teeth, and he was young. I didn't know how young he was, but he was young, and he wasn't Jewish. So, I hemmed and hawed, and he said, "Oh,

please." I could see he was real excited, and I gave him the number. Then I took off because I was too embarrassed to stay. Two weeks went by, he didn't call me. Meanwhile, ya me olvide [I forgot] what he looked like. I didn't know what he looked like. And then I had picked up Carolyn, and I brought her – I'd pick her up once in a great while – oh, no, wait a minute. That was the time when I had her, and then I used to walk with her all the way – from 18th and Alder all the way to – you know where Horace Mann school is near Garfield High School? Walla Walla Park, they used to call [it.] Anyway, I used to take her. What it used to be was the Jewish Community Center across the street from Horace Mann School. I'd take my daughter there, and then I'd go to sleep because I worked graveyard shift, and I had to get up. By the time I took her, came back, it was already twelve o'clock. Had to pick her up at four. I could only sleep three hours, get dressed in a hurry, run over there to pick her up, and bring her home. That was much too much. I had her there at [inaudible]. I tried that. Now can you put me back on track with what I was saying?

RB: So you met Duke, and he asked for your number, and you didn't hear from him for two weeks.

LL: Oh, yes. Then I had my daughter home with me, and she was in the hallway and the hallway, I swear, in those days, it was a big hall like that and "woo," and all the echoes. The phone rang, I picked it up, and I went, "Hello?" And he says, "Hello, is this Lenora?" I says, "Yes." He says, "This is Duke." "Who?" "Duke." "I don't know any Duke." I forgot. And he says, "Well, you know I met you." I went, "Oh, yes." So anyway, I went out with him. But I met him. I said, "Okay, I'll go out with you" and all that. But I met him in Jefferson. On 18th and Jefferson, there was a drugstore there.

RB: Why a drugstore?

LL: That was the only store around.

RB: Was there a soda fountain, or you just planned to meet?

LL: No, I had planned to meet him there. But he was sitting in his car. I felt I never went out like this before.

RB: So when you went out with Duke, you felt like – just a second. [Recording paused.]

LL: Okay. I was going to say that we went together for not quite a year. And finally, we decided to get married because – it's a big because – I told him that it's not going to be a 50/50 proposition in our marriage because I'm too Jewish, my kids are going to be Jewish, and that's the only way I'll take him. And he says, “You know, I have no religion at all. Never went to Sunday School.” And he was quite the reader, and I learned a lot about Sephardic history from him. So I mean, that was just music to my ears. He was an intellect and all that. Well, he went to Rabbi Levine, talked with him. In those days – it was fifty-seven years ago – “Marry a non-Jew? God forbid.” The funny thing is, I didn't have the stamina most people have. “Well, I'm going to marry, and that's it.” I couldn't do it. I just couldn't do it. I didn't want to hurt my mother's feelings. And I couldn't live with somebody that wasn't Jewish. So he went to Rabbi Levine. He went there. Rabbi Levine accepted him, and then when he came to tell my mother – I can still see her. She was in the bathroom putting on her hat. My dad was there too, and I says, “Mama, this fellow here is the one.” He gave me a box of apples to give my mother. And so when I told my mother, “He's the one that gave you the apples.” I says, “Well, he went to Rabbi Levine and he accepted him.” Of course, Rabbi Levine is Reform. And she says, “Ay dio. Cualo estas hablando?” [What are you talking about?] Oh, boy. I went home and, of course, cried that day, cried the next day, cried the day after that. Then she came by and told me, “I'm going to give you what you want. I'm going to get you a fur coat.” And I thought now – I didn't think of it then; I was too stupid. She was going to get me a fur coat. She was going to get me some nice clothes. “Why didn't you say that before when I really needed the help?” And I can understand that her daughter, in that year, should

marry a non-Jew – God forbid. So, we eloped. Well, I said, “I can't marry you. I just can't.” One day, all of a sudden, I thought of it. I lay there in bed and thought, “Wait a minute,” like I was born again. “Why can't I get married? Why can't I have a Jewish home? If he wants to be Jewish, and I know he's a very honorable man …”. Of course my mother would say don't listen to them because they say this, which is true. And then once they're married, they don't like it, the Jewishness and all of that is a bunch of malarkey.” And I suddenly thought, “I'm going to marry him.” So, I called him up, and I says, “We're going to get married.” Oh, allegria grande.” He was so happy. So, we got married. And then my mother had fallen or something – my Aunt Sarota said, my Aunt Sarota DeLeon. So, I went to see her.

RB: This is your aunt?

LL: No, my mother. When my Aunt Sarota – that was my mother's sister-in-law – told me that mama fell down the stairs and go see her. I went there and ? “Hi mama, how are you?” But she loved Duke, and I [inaudible], “Geez, how come she loves him so much?”

RB: So they developed a relationship?

LL: Oh, yes.

RB: You had three children together?

LL: Yes, three boys.

RB: And what are their names?

LL: Their names are – where did I put that that I wanted to show you? It had some pictures. See, I wanted to show you. [Recording paused.] Here's another one of my sons, Michael.

RB: So, you're showing me some pictures now of your children, and if you start at the beginning, you found the pictures, and you showed me a picture of your son.

LL: Yes, Michael.

RB: Michael, and he's your oldest son.

LL: The older son.

RB: Your first child with Duke. When was he born? What year?

LL: 1947. And that's a picture of my son and his wife (Lena?), who is Greek Orthodox.

RB: (Lena?), that's interesting her name is very similar to yours.

LL: I'm Leni, and she's (Lena?).

RB: Isn't that something? And their two beautiful children.

LL: And their two children. That girl was from her first marriage. He was married to a German girl. He met her when he was in the service. Then he came here and got married in Seattle. He wanted to be with his parents; he was so close to us. Sending us letters all the time. Anyway, he went with her. After, he couldn't find anybody that he really liked. I mean, they're all gorgeous gals, college-educated and pretty and Sephardic. But anyway, now there is Michael again. That's with his – what do you call that?

RB: His doctor's coat?

LL: Doctor's coat. He is a dentist. Oh, here, you're going to like this one. This is his stepdaughter.

RB: Just beautiful.

LL: Yes, she's (Katerina?). And this is named after my husband (Derek?). That's his son. And this is my cousin, (Marleigh Muscatel?). She's now a doctor. She's doing the – what do you call that in a hospital for two years?

RB: Residency.

LL: She's doing a residency as her husband is. Both of them. He's also a Jewish boy, and he looks Jewish. Yes, he looks Jewish. But she's very united with the family.

RB: That's great. So, you started having children in ‘47.

LL: In ’47. So, we moved into a place when I was pregnant with Michael, and we fixed the place up. I mean, really, because it was dirty. There were mice there, but rentals were so hard to get then. I'm going to get right in the middle of Yesler like I'm not running away. And my kids could have a good Jewish upbringing.

RB: Could you describe that? You wanted to move to Yesler because it was a Jewish neighborhood?

LL: It's a Jewish neighborhood. Right in the corner of 22nd and Yesler was the core of the Sephardic community, more or less, because people were scattered way up by the lake and close to downtown. But anyway, I went to 22nd and Yesler, and I was gung-ho for moving there because I wanted to be close. My husband was a very extremely – what do you call that? I should say talented. He knew how to hold a hammer. I mean, he was good at that. And beyond that, he used to fix toilets, but he was a jack-of-all-trades. So, I was pregnant at the time, and then I had Michael. And then, after that, I had Tony. And then I waited eight years, and then I had Ricky.

RB: What was it like at that time, raising your sons and living in the Yesler neighborhood?

LL: Well, we lived there until Tony was four years old. The second son. And then I got pregnant again when Tony was eight years old. Michael was ten years old. Carolyn was thirteen years old. When he was born, Carol was fourteen years old. My husband wasn't too happy about my getting pregnant. I've never seen him – usually, he was very understanding and caring, but for a while there, he just was so upset. I never thought he would be that way to be honest with you. So, he was born. And we had a crib downstairs, and then we had another larger crib upstairs, and my husband worked. Of course, I couldn't with four children. And I was always working and canning and cooking and [inaudible] and baking and the yard work and children and being president of the PTA. What else did I do? I was in the Mizrachi.

RB: So. while you were home full time with four kids, which is a lot of work in and of itself.

LL: Oh, yes. I did my own cleaning, my own washing, my own ironing, my own cleaning – I mean, wash clothes that should be put in the laundry because financially, we weren't doing too good. But my kids came out pretty good. Went to college and whatnot. And they did it on their own.

RB: Is that right? What values did you share with them about education?

LL: Well, the thing is they were just knee-high to a grasshopper, is what they say. My mother had two brothers that were doctors. One of her brothers came here when he was twenty, and then the other brother, the doctor, came when he was twelve years old.

LL: Anyway, my uncles were Dr. Robert and Irving Benveniste, [who] was another, he was a physician. And Dr. Robert had three children that were in the medical field: one was a dentist, one was an ENT, one was – just everybody around was – and then my Aunt Betty had a son that was a dentist. I'll say this, I remember when I was [inaudible]. I said, “Look at this, look at this.” The doctor Benveniste sons and I said, “Look at that.”

And I didn't say it in a way to make them feel bad, but I said, “Look at this, isn't that something? Look. This one is Dr. Ed Benveniste.” It was his oldest son. Richard Benveniste was his youngest son. And then the (Muscatel?). And then my Aunt Betty – the son was Dr. Joe (Elimelech? And Michael says, “Big deal.” And I went, “God, I shouldn't have said it like that.” And then he says, “That's what I'm going to be. I'm going to be a dentist.” And the way he said it, I knew he meant it.

RB: With conviction.

LL: I think he must have been about fifteen years, sixteen years old.

RB: Isn't that something?

LL: When my husband said, “Look at your grades and see what you have and see if you're going to be accepted at the University of Washington,” they did, and they just about went, “Oh my God, what am I doing? I better…” So they were late bloomers.

RB: As far as religion, how did you work that with your husband? You felt very Jewish. What was his background?

LL: Too bad. I'm sure that he would have converted but you know that they say, and I think it's a good idea – if he had a nephew, a relative encouraging him to convert because the rabbi won't come and say, “You want to convert?” Nobody did, and I just figured whenever [he’s] ready – “If you want to.” And then he says, “Well, I would, but I'd feel like a hypocrite because I can't do everything they tell me to.” That's how honorable he was.

RB: But he agreed to and wanted to raise the kids Jewish.

LL: Of course. And then comes Passover and all the holidays. They had the fruticas, the fruits – and I don't mean this kind.

RB: Can you describe fruticas for those who aren't –?

LL: Well, with the Sephardics, we used to have like an auction, and then we make the rosca and bread and dates and figs and persimmon – no, not persimmons. The ones with the little seeds. They're red.

RB: Pomegranates.

LL: Pomegranates. And that was the thing. And then I remember when I was the president of the Ladies Auxiliary, too, for three years. So being that I liked anything that has to do with entertainment, I had something like that going on. It was “Noche de fruticas with entertainment.” Wait a minute. Was I a Bavajada then? Yes, I was a Bavajada. That is, my article in Bavajadas de Benadam. Anyway, the place was so packed, they had to refuse members, and we have a big synagogue.

RB: Was this a seder for Tu Bishvat?

LL: No, no.

RB: Fruticas? When –?

LL: Fruticas. That comes at the time when the fruits are ready to eat. Not watermelon or cantaloupe.

RB: Okay. So, it's not for Tu Bishvat.

LL: Wait a minute, Tu Bishvat? Yes, that’s “Noche de fruticas.”

RB: Okay, that's what I thought.

LL: And then when I went to write my article, I says, “That's the night of the fruits,” and I went, “Oh.” I don't know if you know that. That was the terminology used years ago. Instead of gay, you used to call them – “Oh look at the fruit, look at the fairy.”

RB: Oh my gosh.

LL: So, I didn't want to call it the night of the fruits because it sounds a bit – but anyway, after we had this, another time we had the fruitcas. Oh, I told you about the roscas, the round bread and the buns and all that. We auctioned them off. Kid, we made a pile of money. Because for one bun, one bun, panesico, he would say – what was his name? Both he and his wife were from Greece. They came to our synagogue. [inaudible] Sephardic guy from Greece who was in a concentration camp. He was married. He was from Greece, and he only spoke Spanish, Hebrew, and Greek, see. So, he would say, “All right. [Speaks Spanish.] quien quiere esta frutica? Es una sabor dulce, que vamos a comer?” And he was going on and on. They would bid for them – thirty to thirty-five dollars. This was about twenty-five years ago. In 1982. Twenty years ago? Okay. And then for raisins. A little packet of raisins. Thirty dollars for that. And then it was different fruits [inaudible] watermelon or the pomegranates. My gosh. For the olive, you get a handful of olives – thirty-five, forty dollars for the olives. One would bid. the other one would bid, the other one would bid. We got a lot of money. Well, another time, I had a talent show. I just wonder if I've said that before about the talent show. And this one fellow – and I only had a talent show for – I didn't say it, but that's who I used to pick – the young people whose parents came to the synagogue would never see them, the children. I did that purposely. One of them was my brother Joe's daughter (Shelly?). Another one was – the fish market, Israel – that family, young fellow that did – you know when you got a dummy? What do you call that?

RB: Ventriloquist.

LL: A ventriloquist. He did pretty good. You couldn't see his mouth move. He was a husky kid about fourteen. Then another one that did the –

RB: Juggling?

LL: Juggling. See, I can't think of this. The juggling. Oh, God. I'm telling you. Then I had dancing and whatnot.

RB: So, these were activities that you organized as president of the sisterhood at Ezra Bessaroth.

LL: No, but the other synagogue. I was trying to get them together more or less.

RB: And Sephardic Bikur Holim. Your husband was very supportive of these endeavors?

LL: Of course.

RB: How so? How did he show this support?

LL: Well, he was always there in the synagogue. On Shabbat, he was there with a tallit. I went, “Oh my God, you shouldn't be wearing a tallit,” but he was not aware of it, and he wore it with pride. So, when he died – I don't know if I mentioned this to you before, but when he died, at the funeral – and the funeral happened to be where they have the funeral now. Do you know where that is? On Broadway.

RB: Describe it.

LL: On Broadway? All of my sons went there and says, “Nothing that's Christian in there.” So they put the candelabra, and then the eulogy was given by Ike Azose. Rabbi Greenberg really cared for Duke. Then Rabbi Maimon came. You know how strict he is. And Rabbi Moskowitz from the Hebrew Academy, and, of course, his wife.

RB: Now, how did you know Rabbi Moskowitz? What was your relationship to him?

LL: Well, he had courses that we used to go to. It was interesting. I learned a lot.

RB: Courses that you went to as an adult?

LL: No, as an adult. No, no. He's, I think, younger than I am. I know he is. And so that's where we got acquainted. And they had the (Meamloes?). But anyways, we'd meet at different homes, and we used to discuss this book that had to do with the bible.

RB: So Duke was very beloved, and many people showed up.

LL: Oh, yes.

RB: How long were you married for?

LL: Forty-two years. We would have been married now fifty-five, fifty-six years. For the other one, it was sixty years.

RB: And how did Duke die? Was he sick, or had he [inaudible]?

LL: Well, what happened is – let's see. Well, let me just tell you this and then remind me that I was going to say how was he sick. But when we were getting ready to go on the road to the cemetery – you know how they have that? – and I think we had three motorcycle cops. My boys finally came home to tell me, and I just got out of the hospital. I'd had surgery.

RB: You had just gotten out of the hospital. For what type of surgery?

LL: Bladder. Bladder repair. So my boys came home, and they were so excited, “Mom, we got a terrific place for dad,” because he couldn’t be buried in the synagogue's plot.

RB: Was it because he had not converted?

LL: That's right. So we’ll say this is the sidewalk, and there's a cemetery here and a cemetery there. Well, he was buried here, right in this corner. Right in this corner. Get your feet out of the way. [laughter] And he was on this corner, and the Jewish cemetery was – no, this corner here on that side, so close. Then they requested him wearing a

shroud. Let's see. Okay. What was I going to tell you? Please remember.

RB: Well, you were going to describe the circumstances of his death.

LL: Okay, you remembered. Let me explain. He was a borderline diabetic. I don't know why. He was slender, and you saw his picture there somewhere. It was over there. Anyway, but they kept saying, “Well, he's the baby of the family.” His brother was over twenty years old when he was born. So, the mother was about forty-five years old. I think he had problems, and one of his problems was – little problems I don't want to go into. Nothing really serious, but he had a certain amount of problems. One of them was that he was a borderline diabetic, and they wanted him to lose weight. I didn't want him to lose any more weight. I went to the hospital because I had this bladder repair. And then he told me [Thursday], “Well, I'm not going to come in tomorrow Friday because I'll pick you up Saturday.” I said, “Okay.” Well, Saturday came, and I'm waiting, and I'm waiting, and I'm waiting, and I called, and I got the message machine. I called again and [got] the message machine. “Ay dio, what happened to him?” So, I had my niece pick me up, which she did. She took me home. I went up the slight – four stairs, holding, because I had stitches and all. So, I went up the stairs. I walked into the kitchen. There he was, laid out. He was dead.

RB: Oh, Leni.

LL: Yes. Anyway, I wasn't feeling good the day that he left. I just was, “Okay, all right. You're going to come. All right.” Well, wait a minute. When he was there, the last time I saw him, he says, “Well, I have real bad pain here,” as he touched his chest. And I said, “Oh? How are you now?” “Well, it's not bothering me too much now.” And because I was feeling so poorly because they kept me there four days longer because I had an infection, and they had me on codeine and morphine, and I was a little bit screwy. I didn’t say, “Come in and go to the emergency [room].” The emergency is right there. The main floor of Group Health. I didn't think of that until three or four months later. Anyway, I

started screaming, and my niece Jeannie ran in to see what was wrong when she heard my screaming. She had already come in and then came out again. And when she was out there, I screamed, she ran in again, and she went, “Oh my God.” And she went over him and under him and touched him here. I couldn't touch him. Maybe it's the Sephardic in me. I don't know. And that's the end of the story of that. And the police came, and they had to hang around for a long time. They couldn't take him right away until whatever procedure they go through. Maybe to file who was with him, who wasn't with him, and all that stuff. So, that's what happened there.

RB: I just want to tell you that I was really struck with your story about Duke and coming home from the hospital. I really felt for you as you were describing that, and I am so sorry.

LL: Yes. Well, that's what happened. Let's see if there's anything. You are familiar with this?

RB: Yes, I am. It’s beautiful. It’s a beautiful book. You're showing me Let Me Hear Your Voice.

LL: Yes, Let Me Hear Your Voice: Portraits of Aging Immigrant Jews. And this is [inaudible].

RB: Yes, on the cover. Your mom is in this book.

LL: Oh, my mother has a story here, and it's interesting to read her story about the Island of Rhodes. Everything was wonderful there, and just everybody enjoyed Rhodes, and it was a wonderful place and nothing that negative about it. Everything was just very, very positive. But she was good at that. Anyway, here. Her name was Peha. Here's Maimon – Sam Bension Maimon.

RB: It's a wonderful book.

LL: And then this one here is (Policar?). My mother is before (Policar?). Peha.

RB: It's a wonderful picture of her. And she signed it for you.

LL: Yes, look at that. Her writing was not her usual.

RB: I remember you telling me how important your grandmother and your mother have been in your life, and I wonder what values you've passed on to your daughter and your granddaughters.

LL: Well, the good thing about this was my mother's social habits were terrific, were really good. Everybody liked her. They knew her shortcomings, and knowing their shortcomings, would help her. With the children, one had to be diapered – "Oh, my god. What am I going to do? I don't feel good, and I'm sick," and all that. But she was very close with people. Always wanted people to come over. But she'd stay in bed and her body hurt her real bad. Well, what else is new? When I get up in the morning, I can hardly walk. Which is, I guess, arthritis and back. But then once I'm up around, I'm all right and she's that way too. Well, the good thing about this is that I picked up the good things from her and the things I didn't like – like I was telling you about the ojo, the evil eye. I didn't believe in that. And she believed in it so much that she grasped it with every bit of strength that she could muster.

RB: She was a very spiritual woman.

LL: Oh, yes, she was. She wouldn't know. If you say spiritual – "Huh?" She wouldn't know. Although the ten years she was at the Kline Galland Home, living there, she learned her English. She was pretty good. But boy, did she ever improve because it was really not too many Sephardics to talk with, so she'd talk with others there. Did I tell you that we gave her a hundredth birthday there? At the Kline Galland? Did I tell you? No. Well, when she's a hundred years old, we threw kind of a big thing. And my sister-in-law, Joe's wife, was real good about doing things. I know what it is. I had brain surgery,

so I was not doing too good, and so she did a lot. She got pictures together and got the board, and of course, anything that we spent, we went four ways. Regina didn't come because she wasn't doing well. Now she has Alzheimer's. Anyway, so we had a party. We called Rabbi Maimon. Rabbi Greenberg came. Rabbi Benzaquen came. I don't even know what happened there because that was the first time that my mother, in the ten years that she was at the Kline Galland home, could not get up. They had to give her oxygen. She's never had to do that before. And she was just flinging her arms around and flinging them and flinging them. Like unconscious. And Becky brought her nice clothes that she's going to wear that she couldn't wear because she couldn't get up. Every once in a while, somebody would come in, and they'd be a little bit – and they'd see that no way are they going to be able to talk with her. The thing is the good part of it is that we had the hundredth birthday party at the Kline Galland in a room that was just a few steps from her room.

RB: Is that right?

LL: Yes, it wasn't downstairs, down the hall, up the hall. It was right there. And so I kept going and checking in on her and checking in on her. Meanwhile all these people were over, and then we had like some kind of small program about my mother. I had said something about my mother. And then I had brought papers of the letters she used to write me in the Solitreo script, in Spanish, that I was able to read. I brought a couple of her letters that she had written in English with little errors in there because she went to a French school, so she got a good outlook on how to write. She did fairly good. She learned her French in school. What more can I tell you? But anyway, so we tell my mother, “Mama we're going to give you a big party for a hundred years old.” “Me? No, no, no, no. I'm not a hundred.” She would refuse. She told us she was four years younger than she was.

RB: Now, Leni, was this common for the women at the time to do that?

LL: Well, I found out later. Somebody mentioned that, and that was the best thing that was told to me. I was telling someone – I says, “My mother comio.” Comio means she ate four years. “At this age I did this, and at that age, I had you, and that age …”. She had it down pat. Only to find out when I said something to my uncle, he says, “Cualo estas hablando? You're mother's four years older than I am. If you say your mother is” – I forget the age – “if you say your mother is ninety-three or whatever, how can she be when I'm ninety-two when I’m ninety-two?” So, she was four years older. Anyway, she got to believe that she was that age. Well, when I mentioned it to somebody, my mother passed away, and I said to this lady, “I feel bad that she took so many years away from her life.” And they says, “Well, you know a lot of people did that because they didn't want to pay full fare.”

RB: With immigration, you mean?

LL: So, with nine children, you had to be careful. Every dollar would count.

RB: Isn’t that something? Leni, I'm wondering if you could tell us how life has been like the last ten, twenty years. What have you been doing? You've done so much volunteer work and paid work. It would be wonderful to hear in your later years what you've been doing.

LL: Well, I've worked with Fredericks.

RB: Frederick and Nelsons?

LL: Frederick & Nelson.

RB: And what did you do there?

LL: Selling. I don't know what it was. (Jean Hall?) – I could never remember that. Is that familiar to you, the word Jean Hall? Downtown?

RB: (Jean Hall?). No.

LL: Then your mother would know. That was a ladies' wear clothing, and people that really wanted to buy nice clothes at a decent price – right across the street from Fredericks – would go there. I went there because my neighbor asked me if I can take her place because she had back surgery. So, I was there. I was like a bump on the log. There was nothing for me to do. Then I worked at Glamorella.

RB: What is Glamorella?

LL: Glamorella – we called it a salon, but it's a health salon. Nothing like they have now. It was a salon where a person would work out, and they had belts and machines, all these kinds of things. And the monster that would go up and down, brum, brum, brum. Well, I had so much trouble with my neck and my back that I used to use that a lot. Not because of my weight. Where's a picture of me when I was real slender? My daughter put it up. But anyway, I was very slender then.

RB: What years were you there?

LL: I was there in '66. I was there for five years prior to 1966. My job was to sell contracts, which was no easy task. And you had to make them believe what it would do for you. It wasn't that I was showing them a product – there it is, touch it, feel it, taste it. Nothing like that. So, I had to tell them. In those days, money wasn't easy to come by. And I will be honest enough to say that I refused a couple of gals when I found out they were on welfare. They say, "Well, you know my welfare." I says, "Wait a minute, are you on welfare?" "Yes." I says, "I'm sorry." It wasn't against the company. They do not come because it's expensive to eat better foods and whatnot. And I figured she has no business, the dum dum, to join this when I know they wouldn't follow through. They'd put on weight. Anyway, so I was there, and then he wanted to me to be a manager in one of their salons. I really didn't want to be before that because I still had Rick at home, and he

was rather young. When I say young, he was about twelve, thirteen, and that's when they need you the most. And see, the thing is you have to work split shift, from ten to three and then from six to nine. So I didn't want to go all the way there and then come back and then go there and then come back. Well, this time, he kind of like begged me. He said, “Gee, we'd really like to have you as our supervisor and all.” Well, there were six salons. And our salon, the manager was of all people, Sally – her last name was Curiel. Does that name –? Okay. Your mother would know that name. There was only one Curiel in this family, and it so happened that his son, Mr. Curiel's son, married into a non-Jewish family, and he died young, so there's no Curiels. It's a shame. There was only one name, one guy here. The father was a wonderful man. Sephardic. Anyway, she was my supervisor, and I had more fun with her. You can't lie, but you can just put out a little a front and say things. I wouldn't do that with somebody I didn't know too well, but I knew her very well. She lived about two doors from me, and my mother and her mother were good friends until she got that bad. I mean, she really got bad. And the poor girl, you know, her famadia, her fame in the community was not good because of the mother. She was a good person. What else? Oh, what else did I do? Then I worked in a fish market for about a month, and I only did it as a favor to my cousin, although she paid me. In Burien. And then I worked at Boeing four different times. I got laid off during the slow season, and then they'd pick me up again, which didn’t hurt my feelings. And then I was glad when they laid me off because things got slow. Then, I used to help my husband. He'd get place and then I would paint and this and clean the stove and get old curtains and put them up and fix the place up cute.

RB: What kind of business did your husband have?

LL: Well, he worked with Lindahl Cedar Homes the longest. And he would sell homes over the phone. But it had such a good reputation that you could sell and not feel uncomfortable. Because I'm sure you've heard of it. He was doing very well. By very well, I mean he was doing so well that he wasn't at all excited when he was selling, and I

don't like that. “Sell something. Be happy. The money is important, but gee, at least smile.” But I knew he was going through something. Oh, you had once asked me how come he died. He was diabetic, and then he got on insulin three weeks before he died. So if you read up on diabetics, it's [neither] here nor there. You don't know exactly what it is. Did that cause the heart? Did this cause that? But he was borderline for a couple of years, and then he had to take the shots, but I told him, “I'm not going to give them to you.” He says, “No, no, I'll do it,” and I says, “Okay,” because I don't like to see that. And so he died three weeks after he took the medication. And my sons feel real bad. They didn't know too much about their dad's health record. They were very angry because they felt that he could have been saved, see. Let's see. Where else did I work?

RB: You had talked earlier about the Kline Galland Home, and you volunteered there for many years. How many years approximately?

LL: Twenty-seven years. Well, I told you the reason I started there was because I saw how the Sephardics were a little bit mistreated. I don't think the Kline Galland Home was aware of that because they never would report it. Guess they are used to people saying, “Oh, look at that foreigner.” Although you used to see them dressed up so sweet and so darling in their little hats and their hair just so. Becky and I would always – and my mother was a very – as you see there. Look what a pretty lady she was. She used to fix up. Not too much because “el ojo de la cara.” “Ma, come on. Fix it.” “No, I don't want it too fancy.” [Speaks Spanish.] “They’re going to look at me.”

RB: Was that a Sephardic – so, other women felt the same way, to be very careful?

LL: Oh, yes. Very much so. But I figure this – what you don't know don't hurt. If somebody is complimenting me and just being nice, that's fine. They’re trying to be nice to me. They're not going to, behind my back, say, “Look, the money he’s making.” Look at all the people that have money. If the people that make money – and if all the people look at them in jealousy, they’d be dead fifty-thousand times over again. Where if you

don’t know about it, it’s not going to bother you. Try to tell them – no, I never. I didn't even attempt. Although she was very modern in other ways.

RB: But some of the Sephardic customs really stuck with her.

LL: Oh yes, absolutely.

RB: Well, I'm noticing that there's not a lot of time left on this tape, but I wanted to ask you a little bit about again later years that you did a lot of volunteer work for the synagogue for the Kline Galland.

LL: Washington State Historical Society.

RB: Historical Society. Did you do the bulk of this work after Duke died?

LL: Oh, no.

RB: Okay. So, a lot of it –

LL: When, he was – yes. And then usually, a maximum is two years to be president, and they begged me to make the third year.

RB: For the sisterhood?

LL: No, no. Yes, the sisterhood. The Ezra Bessaroth sisterhood. And I said, “I've got to ask my husband,” because he took the blunt end of it. So I asked him, and he says, “Well, Bunny.” He used to call me Bunny. “Well, Bunny, I guess it wouldn't hurt for you to take another year.” I heard that, and I go, “Oh, geez, I was hoping he says no.”

RB: So, he really was there for you.

LL: Oh, absolutely.

RB: About your volunteerism.

LL: Oh, here's what I was going to tell you. My daughter-in-law – we had, like I said, driving to the cemetery, Tony, my son Tony said, “You know.” What's her name – his wife (Rae?), who is Ashkenazic. “She did not know that Dad wasn't Jewish when we got married. And a lot of our friends forgot that he wasn't one of us because we tend to have that cliquish way about them, you know?”

RB: So, he was really immersed in it.

LL: Oh, yes. That's why I said it's a shame that he didn't – and like he says, “Once I'm gone, I'm gone.” But I used to say, “Yes, but if your boys want to visit you,” and I didn't say about me, but I want to be buried by, “then we’d be together.” Of course, I had no idea that he would be buried so close to us. And by close, I mean maybe three minutes' walking distance.

RB: How was that for you when he died and his time came for burial? What was that like?

LL: Well, I already worked it out with me that that's the way it's going to be, and that's the way it's going to be.

RB: So you felt resigned to it at that point.

LL: And I mean one time that was very traumatic for me. In our community, I taught three young people, Sephardic people, against marrying a non-Jew.

RB: Is that right? Recently?

LL: I don't say recently – yes, recently, and recently, is maybe twelve years ago. To me, that's recent.

RB: And can you tell us a little bit about that? Not necessarily using names but what was that about for you?

LL: Well, when I called one of my relatives and called her, and she wasn't living in Seattle at the time. She was telling me about this fellow. “I don’t know what I’m going to do, Auntie Leni.” I said, “Honey, I'm going to tell you something. As good as Duke was, I know that it had some bearing on my kids as they grew up. Although they were friendly with the other kids in the Hebrew School and in high school and all their Jewish kids, and they had the Passover table, but still, they had that (pinchon?).”

RB: What's that? I'm sorry.

LL: Well, a (pinchon?) is if I take a pin and prick you. That's a (pinchon?). They had that. Even the young kids – now, they're a little looser. God forbid that anybody should live with somebody before they get married. And now even the best of them do it. I didn't think it was going to be such a short time until they got used to it. Just they started doing it, and within a few years, everybody did it. So, I'm talking to you – the different generations. Anyway, I told her that my son – I'm sure – they never told me. But later on, they did say – when I'd say something, they'd say, “Well …”. They didn't say it together, but one told me one time [and] one told me another time that it was kind of a burden for them. So, then another one – the mother was very concerned about her daughter, and I had enough courage. I said I was whammy pammie, and I didn't let things bother me. Things like that really concerned me, and I'd go out of my way. I told this one particular gal – met her at some little coffee shop here in Seattle. Had a nice talk with her. I told her, “Look, he was a good man and all that, but you got to think of your kids. And then there's that (pinchon?).” She married a Sephardic. Left this guy. Now the third person – I'm trying to remember. I know there were three of them, but I know those two in particular. So what I'm saying is that I'm not belittling my marriage, but I know that if he had converted, it would make a big difference to me. He was willing to

convert. The thing is, we couldn't convert with an Orthodox rabbi then. The only way you can do that, he had to go to New York or whatever it is and then be with them for a year. Now you could, and you're accepted. Well, would you have married a non-Jew? Oh, you don't know if you would have.

RB: This is your interview. You're such a sweetheart. Well, listen. Why don't we move on a little bit since we're really close to the end. It would be great to hear some of your thoughts of the last few years. You've done a lot of work with Ladino, with the Clarion, writing, and you've taught classes recently. You also attend – you go weekly to meet on Tuesdays. Can you tell us about Tuesdays?

[END OF INTERVIEW]