

**CELEBRATING OUR STORIES**  
**Jewish Life in Ann Arbor**

**Ron, Lonnie, and Mira Sussman**  
**Recorded April 21, 2013**

**11:29-13:33**

*Mira:* I feel a lot more comfortable in Jewish Ann Arbor than Jewish L.A. The reason is L.A. is so big that you have to carve out a community, and that's basically your community. It's too big to have multiple communities. The vast majority—cuz I went to undergrad and grad school in L.A. I felt like the vast majority of people I knew in L.A. were Jewish, cuz I went to the University of Judaism for undergrad, and I went to Hebrew Union College and USC for grad school. I felt like the vast majority of people I knew in L.A. were all Jewish.

My world was pretty Jewy in L.A. There was some diversity within that, but not enough for me. When I moved back to Ann Arbor—even though Ann Arbor is a total *shtetl* in the classic sense of *shtetl*, that there is a massive Jewish community. We're really visible and present, and we know each other. You can live—you can live your whole life in Ann Arbor completely in the Jewish community, but most people don't, because we're so interactive with the whole community: public schools, the university, soccer teams, whatever.

*Lonnie:* Michigan Theater.

*Mira:* Michigan Theater, UMS, the University Musical Society. You can live your life very Jewishly in Ann Arbor, but you don't—you can't live it—I couldn't live it exclusively Jewishly, whereas in L.A. I kind of did. I really like that my best friends in Ann Arbor aren't Jewish, and that there is just so much more diversity in Ann Arbor that I am living with than in the really diversity of L.A. I just feel much more like I can identify Jewishly, because that's only one part of my life.

**13:35-16:01**

*Ron:* I have to say that I lived for 37 years with one foot in Ann Arbor and another foot 30 miles away in beautiful downtown Taylor, Michigan. I used to joke that, yeah, I have one foot on one side of I-275 and another foot on the other side of I-275, where my persona—you have this basic persona, but I actually even viewed myself differently when I was completely surrounded and

entrenched in this non-Jewish community in Taylor, Michigan. Of course, interestingly enough, they saw—they always saw me as the Jew.

*Lonnie:* There was one other thing. When you were in Ann Arbor, among the Jewish community, you always thought of yourself as tall. *[Laughter]* When you went across I-275, you suddenly weren't so tall anymore. *[Chuckle]* Yeah, it was funny.

*Mira:* I feel like—

*Ron:* It was with you in Ypsilanti, also.

*Lonnie:* What? Oh, I worked in Ypsi schools, and boy, there is not a very Jewish community. I think there's probably a few more now, but there certainly weren't very many in the school system. I remember feeling, especially after the Hagim, after the holidays, when we were completely involved with synagogue and family and food. Then I'd go back the next day to work in Ypsi, and I was like, "Wait a minute." I remember feeling dizzy, actually, like, "What world am I in?"

I loved working in Ypsi. I loved the school system. I loved the people I worked with. I loved the students and the families. I loved my job as a social worker. But I remember this feeling of, "Where am I," and feeling absolutely dizzy, like "Aahhh!" Just it was hard to readjust to where you were.

*Ron:* You know where it struck for me was? There were jokes that I could tell, and I did tell, in Taylor, Michigan, that I would never tell in Ann Arbor, Michigan. Conversely, there are jokes that I would tell in Ann Arbor, Michigan, that no one would understand on the other side of I-275.

## **27:56-30:28**

*Mira:* First of all, I think that the whole key nature of Ann Arbor, because of the university and the health system, is that everybody here is from somewhere else. An awful lot of the people that are here are going to go somewhere else. Anybody I went to high school with, for example, nearly all of them went somewhere else for college and stayed somewhere else to grow up. It's very, very, very rare to be born and raised and still here in Ann Arbor. That's just the nature of this community is the transitivity.

The fact that I feel like people have a lot of dual loyalties. You're gonna wear your Michigan, and rah, rah, the Wolverines, and all

that. But almost everybody has another sports team that they support, or another community that they still follow what's going on, the politics there or whatever. That's just the nature of Ann Arbor ... feet in multiple worlds. Everybody comes to Ann Arbor from all over the place. It's just a very—even though it feels like a small town and *shtetl*-y and all that, everybody is from somewhere else, and you just have windows into so many different worlds that you can't—a lot of Midwestern small towns can feel very closed-minded. Ann Arbor doesn't. Ann Arbor feels like a very global place. JFK first talked about the Peace Corps in Ann Arbor. It's a global community in a small town.

*Lonnie:* I was thinking about in middle school and high school, you and your brothers never seemed to feel very uncomfortable with being Jewish, in fact being quite proud of it and quite open about it. It was not an issue. I'm wondering—I never asked you this before, actually. Did Abba and I contribute to that, and if so, how?

*Mira:* You contributed to it by sending us to Camp Tavor. We grew up in Habonim Dror, which is a Jewish socialist youth movement. Aba ran the camp. He was the business manager. Ima spent the whole summer there.

*Lonnie:* Oh, yes, I remember it well.

**38:05-39:13 1:08**

*Mira:* I hope for my kids—my kids are Matan and Ishai. They have these really Jewish Israeli Hebrew names. I keep thinking—I hope that when they go to high school, and they're not at the Hebrew Day School anymore, and they have I hope—I hope—friends from all different backgrounds and ethnicities and religions—that's the whole point of being in a town like Ann Arbor. I hope that Matan doesn't change his name to Matt, and that Ishai doesn't change his name to Jesse. I hope that they keep their names, and that they're proud of them.

I think that that's probably gonna happen, because they're going to be going to school with kids who have all kinds of ethnic backgrounds and names, and speak other languages at home. I think that because they live in a diverse community that it's not weird for them to speak Hebrew in the house, or go to synagogue, or be involved in Jewish youth groups. That's not weird, because everybody around them is doing the same thing, just with a different community. I hope that they take that as a pride thing.