

Interviewed: Ismé Bennie

Oral History Clip Title: A Very Loose Jewish Background

Theme: Jewish Identity

Interviewer: Naomi Raichyk

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(Ismé)

My family were Jewish but not very religious. My father went to synagogue on the high holidays and my mother made a beautiful dinner for the first night of whatever, but that was really it. I went to *Cheder*, to Jewish school. We had to go. All the kids were made to go. You know, we all tried to get out of it. “Why do we want to go in the afternoon to study Hebrew?” sort of thing, but I went with my friends. We went to our colleagues’ Bar mitzvahs. My parents weren’t particularly...I’m not saying we weren’t kosher, but you know we certainly did have butter on the table and we had ice cream after meat. You know, it wasn’t terribly enforced in any way. So, it was a very sort of loose Jewish background for me. I think I learned the most about being Jewish when I went to live with somebody who wasn’t Jewish, and he kept asking questions. “Why do you do this?” “I don’t know.” He said but you should know, well I don’t know. He knew more Jewish words than I did – all these Yiddish words. Well, you live in New York, so you know these words. So you know, we didn’t... we had Jewish friends, but we didn’t mix into a totally Jewish community in any way, shape or form. I’ve never belonged to a synagogue. I’m not religious. I’ve never belonged to a synagogue. There are Jewish things I like that are sort of in my DNA in a funny way. You know, every now and again I think, “Oh, I feel like a piece of gefilte fish.” I have no idea why I think about that, but it comes out in my Jewish background. You know, I like going to a Jewish deli but none of that has to do with religion. It’s just to do with... I suppose it’s cultural.