



**Lesbian Elders Oral Herstory
of
Jinny Henenberg**

An Interview
Conducted by
Ivy Olesen
09/09/2022

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LEOHP Interview

Interviewee: Jinny Henenberg

Interviewer: Ivy Olesen

Date: 09/09/22

Ivy Olesen 00:03

Okay, great. All right. Did you accept the recording? Whatever. Okay. Cool. So we're going to start. It's so good to see you again, Jinny.

Jinny Henenberg 00:18

Nice to see you too, Ivy.

Ivy Olesen 00:21

Okay, so my name is Ivy Olesen. Today, I will be interviewing Jinny Hinenberg. Did I get that? Yeah. Okay, for the Lesbian Herstory Archives, also known as the LHA. Jinny was born on December 21st 1948, in the Bronx, New York, and she is the youngest of two. In this interview, we will talk about coming out, Judaism, working on Wall Street, feminism, high school, night school, and graduate school, New York in the fifties, sixties, seventies, eighties, nineties, and 2000s, and Jinny's connection to the LHA. Jinny has found love, lost love, and found love again, and our conversation will also include Jinny's more recent experiences of dating. Today is September 9, 2022. And we are talking from her apartment in Manhattan where you have a clear view of the Empire State Building, and my apartment in Los Angeles where I do not. This is being recorded over Zoom, so if there are any lags or we talk over each other, please pardon that, future listeners. Anything you want to add, Jinny, does that sound about right?

Jinny Henenberg 01:37

I think that was a wonderful introduction.

Ivy Olesen 01:40

Okay. So maybe let's just start at the beginning. Could you tell me a little bit about growing up in the Bronx and maybe a little—yeah, we'll just start there.

Jinny Henenberg 01:55

So I grew up in the Bronx in the fifties. It was very—my parents owned a candy store, neighborhood business. It was a hub of the community. I learned a lot about community. I learned a lot about business, actually, in that little candy store. We played in the streets, we cooled off in the fire hydrants. I was a little bit of a tomboy. I went to public school. The great thing about living in the Bronx, and it was a beautiful borough. And it was really a sense of a neighborhood. Everybody knew everybody, you couldn't really get away with anything because your neighbors would tell your mother [laughter.]

But it was—it gave me a sense of values, of really—and of roots, and of what, what it is like to participate in, take from, and give to a community, because my parents were always very clear about how gracious we should be to our customers, whether we liked them or not [laughter]. Because they were helping our family by being our customers. So it was, it was great. It was great growing up in the Bronx then.

Ivy Olesen 03:21

The candy shop didn't come up in our pre-interview. So I have to ask, what was your favorite candy?

Jinny Henenberg 03:27

I was a chocolate, egg cream, and pretzel rod person, I have to admit. Which was a big treat. And there were a bunch of other things that I don't even think are available now. Baby Ruth chunky bars. There were a bunch of things, but my favorite was pretzels and egg creams.

Ivy Olesen 03:50

So we did talk a little bit in our last—in our pre-interview—sorry, I feel like I'm referencing to the future listeners our private conversation—but about sort of your coming out and realizing that you were a lesbian. Do you want to tell us a little bit about those experiences?

Jinny Henenberg 04:11

Yes. I knew from the very beginning that I was different. I don't know that I knew the word "lesbian" or what it meant. But I always wanted to play—you know, when we played house, I wanted to play the daddy. I always wanted to be around the girls. I used to follow my teachers home, my female teachers home, when I was in elementary school, in junior high school. And I remember the principal used to call my mother to school and say, "What is the matter with her, she's, she's traveling all over the Bronx following her teachers." And they would call me in and I didn't understand what they were so upset about. To me, I wanted to know where these women lived, I wanted to know more about them [laughter]. And I would follow them home [laughter].

And I remember also, you know, being at a public swimming pool in the Bronx, and one of my neighbors was there, a little girl about my age, and we were swimming underwater, and I went to kiss her. And I remember looking up and seeing my brother at the edge of the pool wildly waving his arms, like, what are you doing? What are you doing? So I had an inclination and a natural draw towards women. But I learned very quickly that that was really not the way you should behave. Even though I didn't really understand why, I just knew that it was not really something that people approved of.

Ivy Olesen 05:51

And just in case we have any future Bronx listeners, do you happen to remember the name of this particular pool or the elementary school?

Jinny Henenberg 06:02

I believe the pool was called—and I'm not really sure, I think it was called the Jerome Avenue Pool Club. I think. Not really sure about that. I definitely remember my elementary school, I went to Public School 26. I went to Macombs Junior High School. And I went to Roosevelt High School in the Bronx.

Ivy Olesen 06:27

And then you graduated early from high school. Could you tell us a little bit about why you did that, and what high school was like?

Jinny Henenberg 06:36

I used to love going to summer school. And I would go to summer school every summer, and I would advance courses, I would actually not go to repeat courses, which was usually why people went to summer school, I went to advanced courses. And I didn't realize it, but I was getting way ahead of myself in terms of high school credits. And when it came six months before I was supposed to graduate, my parents were called to school and they were told, "She's got all the credit she needs. She's graduating six months early." And so I had an academic diploma. In those days, that was one of the classifications. And normally people with an academic diploma went on to college. But my family couldn't afford to send me to college. And I didn't really have an orientation towards scholarships or anything like that. So I went to work, but it really was quite an accident that I graduated early. I wasn't aware that that would happen. But there I was at 17. A high school graduate having to enter the working world. And so I did.

Ivy Olesen 08:06

And what was your first job out of high school?

Jinny Henenberg 08:09

Well, my first job out of high school that I actually landed—because I had gone on a couple of interviews that I, where I did not get the job. I had one interview where I was told I had tested very well because that was what they did in those days. I passed the tests and the company had hired their quota of Jews that month. And if I came back the next month, then they could hire me. The second company I went to told me that I had tested very well. But I was 10 pounds overweight. And if I lost the weight, they would be happy to give me the job. The third interview I went on was for Merrill Lynch, Pierce, Fenner & Smith on Wall Street. 70 Pine Street, actually they were then. And they didn't really care about my religion or my weight or anything.

I remember I went into what was then called not HR but Personnel. And I said I wanted to—they used to advertise jobs in the New York Times in those days—I said, “I want the clerk typist job.” And they said, “Well, it's two different jobs. Do you want the clerk job or the typist job?” And I thought very quickly, and I thought, well, I'm not good at typing [laughter]. So I said, “I want the clerk job.” And they interviewed me, and I thought I was being very—very, you know, smart about negotiating for salary. I remember my mother had said to me, “Well, if you get an offer, ask for \$62 a week because maybe they'll give you \$58.” And I remember after I was interviewed, and you know, I spoke to the supervisor and he said, “Well, you know, we like you very much. You've tested very well. We'd like to hire you here at Merrill Lynch.”

And it was actually an interesting position because it was a bonded position, I had to be bonded. I handle millions and millions of dollars of securities that were all really trades that I was dealing with, the exchanges and name changes of companies, it was a fascinating job for a 17-year-old. And in the interview, I said to him, “Alright, well”—I remember I said, “Well, I would like \$62 a week.” And he said, “Oh, well, that's not a problem. The job pays \$68 a week.” So I was in the clear, and I was so excited. I ran to the nearest public phone. And I called my mother and I said, “I got a job! I got a job! I got a job!” She said, “Where, where?” I said, “I don't remember, it's a company with all these names.” [laughter] So that was my first job.

And I traveled every day from the Bronx on the train, down to Wall Street, and started my work life at Merrill Lynch learning all about securities. And I worked with a wonderful group of women. And I was the baby of the group, I was only 17, they were all married women with children of their own. And they kind of took me under their wing. And they taught me a lot about Wall Street and securities and about life. They would have me join them for dinners and theater, and I felt so important. And that's how it all started.

Ivy Olesen 11:32

I have a couple of follow-up questions. My first one is, and this is my own ignorance with Wall Street and all its working, but you said that you were bonded? Is that right? What does it mean to be bonded?

Jinny Henenberg 11:46

Bonded means that we were behind—they did a background check on you, a criminal background check. I was handling live securities, meaning they were tradeable. They were worth money. And we were behind a locked gate. When you went in in the morning, everyone went into what was called the cage. And they locked it behind us. And we had to wear ID badges, we had to be fingerprinted. It was a position that you were handling negotiable securities. At that point, you had to be sort of bonded, which it really ensured that you were not a criminal. And it was a process. I was—it was very overwhelming, because I knew so little, out of the Bronx, I

knew so little. And yet, this was all seemed to be required. So I did whatever they asked me to do.

Ivy Olesen 12:50

It's a lot of responsibility coming just out of high school.

Jinny Henenberg 12:53

It is and it was—I was a little unsteady on my feet. Because my friends, my peers, were going to college, they were still in high school, and they were going to graduate and go to college. So I was kind of no longer really able to relate to them fully. Women I was working with were quite a bit older than I am. And although they were very kind and took me under the wing, I couldn't really relate to them either. So I was a little caught between two worlds. I think that helped me a lot with my identity, by the way, of being caught between two worlds, not knowing, having to negotiate not really being here and not really being there.

But I just thought, well, that all may be true, and these people you're working are nice, so just do the work. Just put your head down, just do the work, work hard, learn the best you can. And that was really what I did.

Ivy Olesen 14:00

And you just said that, the being caught between the two worlds helped you figure out your own identity. Could you tell us a little bit more about that?

Jinny Henenberg 14:11

Yes. Well, later on in my career when I began to really be established as a professional, I was working—at that point, I had moved from Wall Street to marketing. And it was really—the corporate world where I was existing was a man's world. For a woman—and I was very ambitious, I wanted to succeed. And for a woman to be ambitious and want to succeed in a man's world, you kind of had to learn to straddle both worlds. And I knew, again, I knew there was something different about me and I'm not even sure at that point I knew exactly what it was, although I had more of an inclination. But again—I'm not even sure what the name—I knew what the label was. But that experience of straddling two worlds when I was working, as a young person sort of helped me succeed in the corporation, because I learned how to straddle the world between being a woman and what was expected of me in a man's world where I really wanted to succeed. So that balancing act has really been part of my life, my entire life.

Ivy Olesen 15:34

Yeah. And did though these sort of like married older women, did they help you in that process? Like, was there anything any advice they gave you that—?

Jinny Henenberg 15:45

Um, no, they didn't give me advice. But they gave me support and caring, which I have always found from a woman or groups of women, wherever I have been, that have propelled me forward. That I have been fortunate enough to—whether we're talking about sexual identity or not—to work, every time I have come in contact with a group of women, supportive women, caring women, it's propelled me forward. So they, in that way, by taking me under their wing and sort of teaching me the ways of the business world, they didn't even realize it, but they were propelling me forward.

Ivy Olesen 16:36

And then, you know, we've been talking a little bit about sort of like your growing understanding of your identity. Was there sort of a moment when you did start to have —more of an understanding of your sexuality? Maybe there's like an early encounter you want to tell us about or—?

Jinny Henenberg 16:56

Yes, there was. It's when I was working. And there was another young woman. And we were very attracted to each other. And we would get together and do things. And then, one time we were at her house, I think we both still lived with our parents at that point. And we were at her house. And she and I were in the other room, and we started to sort of kiss and then, you know, she said, “Oh, what are we doing? We're not supposed to be doing this.” But I was thinking, I was feeling like, oh, this is what has been, I've been wondering about all these years. And so there was that initial—but it didn't really become solidified in my mind as to what was going on with me until a couple of years later. But it was always there. Always present. I always knew where I was comfortable and where I wasn't, who I was attracted to and who I wasn't. But that one little encounter sort of opened the door to [pause] this is, this seems to be who you want to hang out with. That was I think, as far as I could take it at that point.

Ivy Olesen 18:21

And when she's, you know, pulled away and said, “What are we doing?” was that sort of like the end of the, of that encounter with her?

Jinny Henenberg 18:30

That was at least the end of that encounter. But then I began to pursue other encounters with people, with women, who were more certain that they also wanted this. And now this was all very tricky. This was really a balancing act, because it was all emerging as my career was developing. And I knew it was a threat to my career, I was beginning to understand that it was a threat to my career. And as I said, I was very ambitious. So I was beginning to learn what it was to be closeted very early, because I was living a dual life as I was meeting women who were also interested in women. Which I had to meet in sort of non-traditional ways because I was working

full-time. I wasn't clubbing, I wasn't—I was beginning to live the duality of an appearance of a straight person at work, and a gay woman in my personal life.

Ivy Olesen 19:46

And where would you meet these women?

Jinny Henenberg 19:49

I would meet them at wherever women were. I would meet them at Weight Watchers groups. I would meet them at lectures. I would meet them at the library. I would meet them in classes. Because at that point, I then, after working for a while, I began to go to college at night. I would meet professors. And there was always that look, like somebody would look at somebody else. So I would meet them wherever there were groups of women for, you know, around something. A mystery weekend, that, you know, was away someplace that I went to, and then I'd find like another woman who was there also. So I would meet these women, anywhere there were clusters of women. It was always somebody that sort of recognized—we recognized who the other person was.

Ivy Olesen 20:50

And you kind of like sussed each other out and you realized that these women were a little bit more evolved and comfortable with their sexuality than your co-worker had been.

Jinny Henenberg 21:01

Yes. Excuse me. Yes, they were clear, they were clear. They were clear. And I was clear. I mean, they were clear and I was clear. There wasn't ambivalence there. What my ambivalence was that I didn't want to do anything to jeopardize my reputation and my professional reputation. But in terms of our desire, to be with women, that was getting really clear, and the women I was now meeting and associating with, it was clear to them too.

Ivy Olesen 21:43

And were they also, you know, out to within, within a queer or within a lesbian community, but not out with their professions?

Jinny Henenberg 21:55

Some of them were. Many were teachers or in education, and there were a lot of gay women. They could not be out because the parents of the children they were teaching would have issues. So they were also closeted. Some were not—I didn't meet many in corporate America. A couple but not many. But yes, I would say mostly they—some were married. I would say, mostly, I mean, when I was—this was, I was 17, so this was 1965.

Women were, gay women were still getting married at that point, I mean—so, some were married. So I think that everybody was still closeted at that point. I mean, some women were not, some women were really, you know, on the edge, were progressive, were, you know, talking about their identity, but I wasn't among those women. Because I was trying to walk a very traditional career path. And I couldn't afford to be a radical. Nor did it really interest me. I really wanted to be successful in business. And so being in the closet worked for me in those years.

Ivy Olesen 23:27

Yeah. And you mentioned earlier that you started going to college at night. Could you tell us where you were studying, and a little bit more about your college experience?

Jinny Henenberg 23:40

Yes. Working in the corporate world, which was a wonderful experience for me, despite the fact that, you know, I had to be closeted. But in those years, I think everybody was closeted, as I said. But they said to me, at one point, you know, “You're doing very well here, we like you very much. We'd like to put you on a management track. But you need a degree to do that. And if you go to school at night, we will pay for it, you have to just maintain a certain grade”. And that was like music to my ears because I thought, wow, somebody's going to pay for my education?

Now, it's interesting because I said I went to high school at Roosevelt High School, right across the street from Roosevelt High School was Fordham University. And I remember coming out of high school, many a day, looking across at that university and thinking, someday I'm going to go there. It was really a beautiful campus. Now, I was Jewish. It was Jesuit, Jesuit-run, but none of that seemed to matter to me. I thought, one day, I'm gonna go there. So when they—and I was still living in the Bronx at home at this point—when they offered to pay for my education I went to Fordham University. And I couldn't believe I made it. There I was.

And I studied, I had a—I went at night and I worked during the day, it was not easy. It was really not easy. I don't think I could do it, I know I couldn't do it today, what I did then. But I studied marketing, I had a double major. Marketing, which was out of the business school, and organizational studies, which was out of the social psychology school. So I had a double major. But there I met some wonderful professors that actually helped me free myself in other ways. They took an interest in me—all along teachers had helped me, taking an interest in me, encouraging me. But then I met a group of psychology professors. And they then helped encourage me to move out of my home, out of my parents home and move into my own home, and move to the Upper West Side.

So once again, a group of women I met, going to university, working, helped me propel my life forward by encouraging me to take the next step and become an independent adult. And I did that, and I still, I finished up my degree. And I was still working. And then once I did all of that I

was put on a management track. I was put on a management track, the corporation kept their word to me. And it was—it's a great story of how, in those days, they did on-the-job training, on-the-job opportunity, and exposed me once again to a different kind of person, a different kind of world, that encouraged me to take a different kind of step.

Ivy Olesen 26:52

And what I remember about the way that you told it to me the last time too, was like, and correct me if I'm wrong here, but you had gone to your psychology professor's house for dinner, where this conversation happened. And I love that because it was sort of like you finally, you did follow your teacher home, and you knew that was what you needed, and it worked.

Jinny Henenberg 27:15

That is absolutely correct. I had dinner at her home, yes.

Ivy Olesen 27:20

And so, and you were 25 when you moved out of your parents' house.

Jinny Henenberg 27:25

Correct.

Ivy Olesen 27:26

And at that time, were you still in school, and then commuting from the Upper West Side to Fordham? Or did that kind of coincide with your finishing school?

Jinny Henenberg 27:35

Yes. Well, I was doing a triangle because I was working in Manhattan, and then I went to the Bronx to go to school, and I also, at that point, while I was going to school at night, I met a woman who—we began to see each other. We were both at night school, we were both doing, we were doing the same thing. We both had our nose to the grindstone, we both were career-oriented. And we both knew that that was important to us. But we met each other. And we came together in a very sort of [pause], we knitted a life together in a way that was really challenging because I was going to school and working, she was going to school and working. I wanted to move ahead in the corporation. She wanted to go to law school. So—but we did, we managed to build somehow with all of that chaos. And all of that moving around and all of that, “Where are you?”, you know, “Where are you? Where are you?” There weren't any cell phones. I mean, it was like we managed to build a life together.

Ivy Olesen 28:55

Could you tell us more about her?

Jinny Henenberg 28:57

Yeah, she was a lovely, lovely woman. I often have thought that. Unfortunately, she died. She was in college, she graduated college, I finished school. She finished school. I, as I said, was put on the management track. She went on to law school in Boston. She was working. And unfortunately one night in a bad storm on the ice on one of those awful roads, she had a terrible car accident and she died. We had been together 15 years at this point. This was not—we had somehow managed to stay together through all of this. For 15 years.

She was just finishing up a law degree. And we had gotten more—our lives had gotten more and more intertwined, because as we both got freer from school, we became more intertwined. So [pause] she died. And she was wonderful. I have often thought that if she was still alive, we might even still be together today. Probably not true. But fantasy. Smart, determined, like I was. We both knew what we had to do. We were doing it. But we were building a life together. We weren't clubbers. We weren't partiers, we were like, mainstream, oddly, America. I mean, both ambitious. It was, it was a great love story.

It was wonderful to have a partner to go through all of that with. And unfortunately, this is so typical of those days, when she did get into the car accident and they called from Boston, because I was her emergency contact, but she also had a brother. The authorities would not give me any information. They said, “You're not a family member, you can't have any information.” And they would only talk to her brother. I didn't even know she had died at that point. They wouldn't tell me anything. And so then they contacted her brother and her brother contacted me. And that was heartbreaking.

Because sitting there wanting to know, knowing something awful had happened, but not knowing where she was, how was she, what happened? Having to wait to hear from her brother, who was very good about keeping me informed, but was juggling a lot of emergency information at that moment. Fortunately for us, he was not—he knew about us, and he wasn't opposed to it, I think I could have been in a much worse, even worse set of circumstances if his attitude was horrific. But it was not. And that was hard. That was really hard, that even when somebody said, “If anything happens to me, call this person,” and the authorities did that, they would not give me any information.

Ivy Olesen 32:27

Phew. I'm so sorry.

Jinny Henenberg 32:32

Thank you very much. Thank you very much.

Ivy Olesen 32:35

Yeah.

Jinny Henenberg 32:37

It's an honor to be able to talk about that. So thank you.

Ivy Olesen 32:42

Yeah. She sounds amazing. And [pause] yeah, I'm just so sorry that happened. After she passed, how—what did you do next? How'd you put yourself back together after that?

Jinny Henenberg 33:02

Well, fortunately, I had a very demanding career. And I remembered that, you know, she and I were, both shared our determination. And neither one of us were ever willing to let that slide. So I was able to put my head down and work even harder, which actually propelled me forward even quicker in my career, sort of bury the pain and all of that, and also to remember that that's what she would have wanted. She would have wanted that. She would have wanted me to keep going. Of course, I ultimately had to deal with the pain of all of that, and the loss and the shock of all of it, but in the—in the moment it just made me work harder.

Ivy Olesen 34:07

And did you have people that, you know, knew about the nature of your relationship and her significance in your life that you could talk to?

Jinny Henenberg 34:16

I had a few, but people didn't [pause] really talk about these things. You know, you—the advice you got was, “Well, you know, be brave. She would want you to be brave, you know, you'll meet somebody else, you're young.” You know, it was really a double whammy, because not only did I have a very significant loss, I was gay. So it was very limited in terms of who I could talk to. And there were a couple of people, and then it ultimately didn't really—wasn't able to really deal with it ultimately, until I was able to deal with it in therapy, because that was a safe environment and not judgmental.

But in terms of, in general, people were sad for me. But I was also running with a bunch of very ambitious people too. And, you know, I don't think anybody wanted—was going to let themselves get distracted. I mean, it was sympathetic. Yes. Understanding, yes. Maybe hopeful that this was going to slow me down a little bit, maybe, secretly [laughter]. But I wouldn't say, there wasn't like, you know, and I wasn't about to go to a support group, because I wasn't going to do that. That didn't feel right. I didn't even know if I would know how to find one.

So it wasn't until I really dealt with it in therapy and my own personal therapy, that I would say—it wasn't that people were cold or callous, or uncaring. It was just a different time. And I

think people also didn't know how to talk about the loss of a lesbian partner. People did not, not everybody I knew who knew about the loss was a lesbian. So some people—people didn't know how to talk about that.

Ivy Olesen 36:32

And at this point, did you have a therapist that you liked, and connected with?

Jinny Henenberg 36:37

I did. At that point I began to—I've worked with a number of great therapists. But that point, I began to work—at first I didn't. The first, the first therapist I had was a male psychiatrist, it was horrendous. I thought to myself, I gotta get out of here [laughter]. And then I began to work with therapists that were recommended to me—someone at work recommended somebody, I began to work with therapists who were social workers. I didn't even know that that was a thing, that you worked for [unclear] and they were wonderful.

I had a series of wonderful therapists, women, I once again groups of women pulling me through. If I put all my therapists together, they're probably a big group of women. And once again, they really helped me. They really helped me and it's been many, many years that I have been in therapy, but it is—that was really when the mourning and the grieving and then the healing and all of that began to be able to take place.

Ivy Olesen 37:50

And could you tell us a little bit about, your, the next relationship you got yourself into, where you found [unclear]?

Jinny Henenberg 38:01

Yes, I got myself into a relationship with someone who was a public servant. I'll leave it at that [laughter]. A little bit on the wild side. Probably a very good distraction, exactly what I needed. Someone who was about fun and dancing and eating out and all of the good things that a corporate person could provide. And it was a very, very bad relationship, in terms of the definition of a relationship and loving and respecting and—it was not that. It was about, just, I think, a combination of two things.

One, sort of a reaction to the loss I had. Something very different. And also a release from all those years that I had kept myself so much on the straight and narrow to get myself where I wanted to go. Then all of a sudden, oh my god, I was finally free to sort of do something kind of ridiculous for me, but fun, and distracting, and sexy, and lots of important things like that. So it wasn't every—no, I had some other relationships in between. But this one had more legs. No pun intended. I mean, this one had more legs than, you know, those others. This one lasted a little bit longer.

So we—there was no such thing as monogamy in this relationship, it was just like one of those. But it lasted a while. Lasted a while [crosstalk], it was, it was, it was very good for me because it was, it was good for me and it was bad for me. It was good to me in a way that it was like, something very different. But it was not good for me in that emotionally, it was not a really good relationship.

Ivy Olesen 40:35

And, you know, during these, maybe that time where it sounds like you were bopping around New York a lot, but also, maybe since you moved to the Upper West Side, and just are—were there like any favorite places in New York? Or could you tell me a little bit about your time in New York, then?

Jinny Henenberg 40:54

Yes, well, what happened was I was living on the west side, but then I moved to the Upper East Side, and I discovered the Upper East Side. And I loved the Upper East Side. I loved Park Avenue, reminded me of the boulevards in Paris, not that I knew what the boulevards in Paris were at that point [laughter]. But it sort of—I didn't discover the boulevards in Paris 'til later, but it was like I loved Fifth Avenue, I loved the wide streets. I loved the people walking around, I loved, you know, what I had discovered with that first group of women, all the way back then, the theater. I loved those kinds of cultural things, which I knew nothing about growing up. And once again, groups of women introduced me to.

So I loved—I fell in love with the romance of New York, the restaurants, the theater, the wide streets, it was just a wonderful place. I was working, I was beginning to really get recognition in my work. And that had certain benefits to it, you know, boxes at the US Open, and I just, I just really loved, you know—then I went, I started to swim regularly, early in the morning, and I met again, a group of women, we got together every morning at six o'clock and swam the 92nd Street Y. We swam together for years, some of them are still my friends today.

So, and I began to learn about, you know, being creative in New York, taking classes, expanding beyond the corporate world. It just, you know, New York opened its doors to me from the time I was very young. And they remained open, and they kept opening more and more, and they—and it still is. New York is a city that is still forever opening itself to me.

Ivy Olesen 43:12

Beautifully put. And then, at some point, you, you also went to graduate school.

Jinny Henenberg 43:22

I did. After my career was very well established, and I was no longer threatened, and I actually had come out at work because I was a high level manager at that point. And I had people

working for me, and I had one young woman work for me, and she came out to me. And I realized that I had to come out because I was at a place now where if I had people coming out to me, I didn't want to teach them to be in the closet. So I remember going to—and then I was seen, I was seen having dinner with another woman and somebody told the personnel department about it. And I went to the personnel department, and I just told them, I said, “Listen, I'm you know, I'm a lesbian, I'm gay. I want it to be known.”

And that was the time where consciousness raising was beginning and corporations were beginning to understand the role of women. I'm not saying lesbians, but understand the role of women and—and I said, “You know, I want anybody who works for this company, who wants to come out, to know that I'm out.” And it was—I remember that, you know, it was always funny before then because every—you know, in everybody's office, there were always pictures of their wives and their children, you know, and I always had pictures of my pets [laughter]. It's like, very telling, you know. So it was very freeing for me.

So I did, I came out. So at that point, I was really almost untouchable in my career. I mean, not that you're ever totally untouchable, but I was so far, so well known and so far, so well respected at that point, so well established, that I felt I could leave the corporate world. And I could form my own consulting business, which I did. And because it gave me flexibility, I put myself through graduate school. And I went to NYU and I studied social work. So yeah. And then when I finished, it's just such an ironic story. Because I was—and social work was very akin to what my work was.

I know it sounds a little odd, but I was doing marketing research, and that is the study of human beings and their behavior. Now, it might be in relationship to products, what toothpaste they choose, or what spaghetti sauce they choose, but there's always a story behind their choices. And social work was very akin to it. It was—I finished graduate school and the next day, literally, I get a call from a headhunter saying that—and that's how it worked in those days—a major corporation was looking for a very senior level researcher. And they—very senior positions, vice president position—they wanted to know if I would be interested.

And here I had just finished graduate school, I had been consulting on my own. And I had been hoping, I had been planning to go back to work with the corporation, because when you're working on your own, you know, there's just not a lot of security. I was doing it because I wanted to go to graduate school. And they interviewed me and they hired me on the spot. So here I was, just like, just finished school, and get this call the next day, and within three days, I have a job. It's pretty amazing. So that plan, all of the work and the planning that I had done, about really investing in my career and sacrificing other things—because you can't do it all—and going to school at night, really came together in that moment. Like I made a bunch of good decisions. And they really came together.

Ivy Olesen 47:43

And what was your experience like at NYU?

Jinny Henenberg 47:47

It was great. Once again, groups of women. You know, it was great. Now I was going part-time because, well, I couldn't do my field placement part-time, but when I was doing the studies, the classes, I could do them part-time, because I would work a little while, get some money, and then take classes. So it took me a little while to get through. But it was, it was great. They were very supportive. And I loved the environment of the Village and university. I remember that social work school at that point was I think on a little, in a little brownstone, if I remember correctly, on the square, on Washington Square. It was charming. And, you know, once again, I wasn't doing it the easy way, I was working and going to school, working and going to school, but it was—I loved it. I loved school life. I loved campus life. I loved being in school, I really loved it.

Ivy Olesen 48:53

And was the social work partially inspired by your positive experiences with social work therapists?

Jinny Henenberg 49:01

Very possibly, very possibly. And also I knew, you know, remember I, as an undergraduate, I studied social psychology. So I was exposed to a lot of psychology professors, social psychology professors. And so I had an inkling, you know, I had to take certain courses in order to get that degree. I had to take abnormal psych and I had to take a bunch of those courses. And I remember they interested me. I didn't pursue them, you know, until I went to graduate school.

So I had an inkling that I didn't need an MBA at that point because honestly, my career was so far advanced at that point. And I already had a degree that had a, you know, a mixed major. I didn't need—an MBA would have been, wouldn't have done much for me. This, I had this fantasy of that, someday when I retire, if I had a social work degree, I would be able to go to work at some little college campus and hang out a shingle, you know, be the social worker. So I thought this was a very good backup plan. This was a good retirement plan to be a social worker, believe it or not, that is how I came to study.

Ivy Olesen 50:24

But now you are retired, correct?

Jinny Henenberg 50:27

I am retired, I retired from the corporation in, when I was in my late fifties, after forty plus years. And I knew at that point that I was too young to retire. So I went into real estate. I went into

high-end real estate, selling real estate in New York City and East Hampton. And I did that for a good 10 years. And I built a business. I understood about marketing and I understood about people. I owned a house in East Hampton, I had a second home at that point in East Hampton. And I basically built a real estate brand, Jinny Hinenberg, I built a reputation. I started as a sales agent, what you have to do in real estate. And of course, that was not enough for me, I had to go on and be a broker, went back to school, studied more, moved, pushed myself forward, became a broker. So now I have a broker's license, which I keep current. And so I'm kind of, I am retired, but not 100% retired. I have an active real estate license, and I get involved in—I watch the real estate market very carefully. I know the specific trades in East Hampton. I will never be retired, I don't think ever.

Ivy Olesen 51:46

I'm getting that feeling [laughter]. And you, I remember you mentioned to me earlier, when we spoke last, that the Hamptons also at various points and like maybe the seventies and eighties, there were like quite a few—there was like a lot of lesbian community there and that women would—?

Jinny Henenberg 52:03

Yes there was a big gay community there. And I actually met my third partner there, the one I was with for 15 years also. Yes, there was a big community of women out there, a lot of teachers and you know, a lot of us owned houses, real estate was affordable out there then, believe it or not. There was a particular beach that we all used to go to, Two Mile Hollow, which was known as the gay beach. And every Memorial Day, everybody would go down to the beach, we would all stand at the water edge, and everybody was there, like a bunch of little birds on a wire.

But you know, it was great. And who was out for the season who was there. And we also had—There was also a club there called The Swamp, which now is all getting revitalized. It's very interesting what's going on out there. But a place called The Swamp where we used to go and dance and drink and have fun. So yes, that was really a very, there was a big community out there. And I was part of that. And I actually met my third partner at a Memorial Day party out there.

Ivy Olesen 53:16

Right, would you tell us that story? Of how you met her?

Jinny Henenberg 53:19

Okay. Yes, it was a Memorial Day—I think it was one of the organizations had a Memorial Day party, one of the gay organizations that I went to. And I remember, you know, I was talking to people, and I remember talking to this woman. And, you know, she was, you know, a very nice woman. She had a partner, though. And she said to me—but she had a guest out that weekend, a

friend of hers—and the next few minutes, this other woman came up to me and said, “Oh, you were just talking to my friend. She said you're a very nice woman. And she says we go to the same synagogue—which is the largest gay and lesbian synagogue in the world, actually. And we chatted and you know, we saw each other, and then we came together as a couple for 15 years, which is actually now five years ago that we broke up five, six years ago that we haven't been together.

But that was yeah, how we met and then we turned out we had a lot in common. And we both lived in the city. And we both knew a lot of people in common. And I was really considered at that point, you know, a lesbian. I was on—I did a lot. I was on the board of the Gay and Lesbian Center. I did a lot of—I was very visible in the community. I was, you know, known as an active member of my synagogue. And we became a couple. We shared our life in East Hampton and in the city. And that ended about six years ago, five, six years ago, may—I think more than 5, 6, I would say now. But the wonderful news since I spoke to you last was [crosstalk] I met somebody!

Ivy Olesen 55:26

Yeah, tell me.

Jinny Henenberg 55:28

I met somebody on Match. And we are an item. And we are very happy and we are building together something that is scary but lovely. And I'm feeling that joy in my life again, of having met someone. So I have to say that I could not wait to share that news with you. Because it was not the case. Last time we spoke.

Ivy Olesen 56:03

So is this, this is not the communist that we were talking about last time you had met? Or this is the same person but it's progressed?

Jinny Henenberg 56:12

Yes.

Ivy Olesen 56:14

It's the same.

Jinny Henenberg 56:16

The same one. Yeah.

Ivy Olesen 56:17

Ok, amazing. Because I loved that kind of, where you're like, "I'm a capitalist, she's a communist, I don't know. I think I like her!"

Jinny Henenberg 56:23

That's right, exactly right. And it was horrible. I have to say that, like, the initial meeting was horrendous.

Ivy Olesen 56:30

Opening a water, just so you know, a sparkling water can. Continue.

Jinny Henenberg 56:34

Our initial meeting was horrendous. And we thought, where is this going to go? You know, like nowhere, but it has gone somewhere.

Ivy Olesen 56:45

Okay, tell me more!

Jinny Henenberg 56:49

What can I say? I mean, you know, the labels have been falling aside, who's what. We are now people. I'm excited. I haven't felt this way about somebody in a very long time. She is excited. We are both nervous. But, you know, we're invested in building what we can together. So it's, it's kind of nerve-wracking, because for a long time, I was thinking of me, you know, like, what do I want from the supermarket today? You know, what do I, what day do I want to go get a massage, or get my hair cut, you know, it's sort of like, the world revolved around me. I didn't think I would meet anybody, honestly. And now all of a sudden, we're both having to juggle a "me" and a "we," and, you know, build all of that. So there's a lot of like, craziness going on right now. But we managed to get through it. We managed to get through it.

Ivy Olesen 57:59

That's really exciting.

Jinny Henenberg 58:00

And love is, love is a very nice thing.

Ivy Olesen 58:04

Wow. Would you tell us a little bit more about her because she's a little different than people you've dated before, right?

Jinny Henenberg 58:11

She's different. She is not, certainly not, has not had a traditional career. Was traditional in the way that during, like I was saying before, in those early years, she was married many years ago. But then also began to discover who she was. She is kind and gentle and evolved. So we're very similar in those ways. But externally we are not. I mean, we are, but it's interesting to be so different. She's not like anyone I have ever dated before. The closest person she comes to is Ellen, who was the first woman I was involved with, in terms of—but Ellen was young like I was and wasn't evolved yet. You know, she was evolving you know.

This woman who I'm seeing now is evolved. We're both of a certain age that we, you know, our lives have been full and we—they continue to be full, we continue to grow, and not someone—I will tell you an interesting story about this Ivy because this to me is, even today, is a very interesting story. I saw this woman's profile on Match. And she saw mine obviously, and I thought to myself, you know she's a very attractive woman and—there were certain activities she said she could do that I don't really do. And I thought, not in your league Jinny, out of your league, not nearly—despite everything, despite all of my success, all of my building, all of my, you know, gigantic steps forward when it comes to love, tiny little steps. And I said, “not in your league Jinny”.

And ironically, she reached out to me. And I thought, well, if she reached out to you, maybe it is okay. And I'm really glad. Although our first meeting in person was an unmitigated disaster [laughter] but we had a very well established writing, we had, we were writing the great American love novel until we met in person because I got COVID. We were supposed to get together, and I got COVID. And so we had to delay it. So we kept in touch, writing these incredible discoveries about each other.

And then when we met in person, it was an unmitigated disaster, our expectations of each other was so ahead of where we really were. Because of this writing that had gone on, we had learned so much, but then there we were, in person, staring at each other across the table. But we managed to pull it together. We worked on it, we discovered, we discussed, you know, there was—no one was writing anybody off, it was like—she tried to write me off, but I didn't let her. But you know, I, we worked on it. We discussed what happened that night. We're what—where we were, we had this lovely rapport. And then something went awry, what was it? And we did the work that you have to do to build the bond. And it's continued to build.

Ivy Olesen 1:01:59

Wow.

Jinny Henenberg 1:01:59

We're very happy.

Ivy Olesen 1:02:02

And you were writing over email? Or—?

Jinny Henenberg 1:02:06

Now?

Ivy Olesen 1:02:07

Or no, before you met for the first time you were emailing back and forth?

Jinny Henenberg 1:02:10

Oh, yes, we were emailing and texting and I think we had a couple of phone calls too. All very romantic, all very, you know, when you're not—when you don't know someone physically in person yet, you know, and you're sort of—I was, you know, you like to write or whatever it is, you know, I have, I have more bravado at on the written word than I do when I'm actually in person. It sort of changes for me. And the first—so the first night I kind of really got scared. And she got annoyed, like, where was this person she had been communicating with all the time, who was like acting like this weirdo like this, got quiet and all these things. So I think each in our own way retreated, we retreated.

And, you know, when you, when that happens, there was of course, there was no chemistry, there was nothing. And I think—but I decided the next day to reach out and say, you know, “Why don't we get together again?” Because I know that sometimes when you meet somebody for the first time, it's so tense. I know this about myself. So tense. Sometimes if you can meet somebody for a second time in a more relaxed environment, it's different. And again, she was an incredible—she's an incredibly attractive woman. I'm incredibly attracted to her.

So, and she sent me this email blasting me out of the water saying like, “What? I'm not sure I want to, or how,” or you know, “It was such a disappointment, here you were this”—and I got indignant when I got this email, and I called and I said, “What do you mean, you know, you're gonna close the book on us because we had one bad night?” And then we got together and we really, we didn't just bury it under the rug. We're sort of too evolved for that. We talked about it. “What happened to you?” “What happened to you?” How it made me feel, how it made me feel. And ironically, even though it had that kind of beginning, it was a good beginning because it wasn't just unicorns and rainbows. It was something tangible and difficult that took some work. It showed that we each had that ability and that commitment to do that. So now it is built, and it's lovely.

Ivy Olesen 1:04:45

Wow, you know I got none of this our last call a couple weeks ago. You said “Oh, I think I maybe met someone online.” I got none of the drama. So, but I'm so glad it worked out. She sounds absolutely formidable and excellent.

Jinny Henenberg 1:04:59

Yes, and I'm—I think I'm very lucky.

Ivy Olesen 1:05:03

I think you are too. Well, the present sounds extremely exciting. I'm gonna backtrack just a little bit to the past, or also probably also the present. Are you still involved with the synagogue? I just, I can't, I want to just, to hear a little bit more about that, about the role Judaism has played in your life. And if you could tell us the synagogue name and stuff just for—

Jinny Henenberg 1:05:27

Yes, the name of the synagogue is Congregation Beit Simchat Torah—CBST. Very well known in the community. We have a great senior Rabbi, Rabbi Sharon Kleinbaum, known on the world stage. She is married to Randi Weingarten, who is the president of the UFT. Or the AFT. Sorry, Randi, I never remember which one it is. But anyway. And she has been with the synagogue for over 30 years. She has brought us forward. It's a very progressive synagogue. And we're on the forefront of social justice. And it is, when anybody wants—I mean, before COVID we used to have the High Holidays at the Javits Center with thousands of people. Open door, nobody had to pay for anything. It's a wonderful place.

It's—I've been with it since it was a small synagogue, I have also been with it for 30 years, we've grown, we now have our own building, our own synagogue, and our own shul. And it's a very, it's—and I've had an interesting journey with Judaism. I mean, I, culturally always identified as Jewish. I was raised in a Jewish family. But I'm not particularly religious. And when my mother died at — in 1980, I became disillusioned with Judaism. And I left Judaism and I actually joined Riverside Church and I actually became baptized. And met wonderful people at Riverside Church, had a wonderful community there. Again, another group of wonderful women. Loved the senior Rabbi there, Bill Coffin, he was great, very inspiring.

I was referred to Riverside Church when I was in mourning of my mother's death. I was referred to Riverside Church by a therapist I was seeing at that time. She said, “Why don't you try this, it's a very open place.” And so I went to Riverside Church for quite a while, but then something was missing. Something like my own culture, the music from my childhood, something was missing. And I thought, well, you know, this is New York City, there's got to be a gay synagogue in New York City. And I think I Googled it or something. And I found this—whatever there was 30 years ago, I don't know if there was a Google but anyway—I found CBST. And so Judaism, for many people, CBST is really their religious, their spiritual home.

It has never been that for me, it has always been the community. It has always been where my community is, where gay men and lesbians and now trans people can be—can be themselves, we can all be ourselves. We're all welcome there, straight people are welcome, we have a large congregation. So for me, it's not so much that it was a religious thing. Although I enjoy the holidays. I do say prayers of gratitude, I've learned that, particularly in these times, it's important to be grateful. So I would say it's not been so much a religious as it has been a cultural link to my past, and a cultural link to my community. And if anybody hears this and they're looking for a wonderful place, that is inspiring, go to CBST, Jewish or not, doesn't matter, gay or not.

Ivy Olesen 1:09:30

And you've mentioned in our, in our pre-interview a little bit about also becoming involved with different activist groups and like the HIV-AIDS epidemic, and being involved with now at various points sort of in a feminist consciousness raising—I was wondering if you wanted to say anything about that work?

Jinny Henenberg 1:09:55

Yeah, I mean, I do remember—now this is before, this is, so we're talking about the eighties, the AIDS epidemic—Astraea used to put out a call to women, to lesbians, that our brothers, gay men, were dying alone in hospitals because nobody wanted to see them. Nobody would go to visit. And we would sign up, and we would go visit men that could be dying momentarily. We didn't know them. They just—and sometimes they were not even still in the now, they were out of it. And I remember like nurses would say “You're gonna go in that room?,” I couldn't believe this, medical professionals would say “You're gonna go in that—” I'd say yes.

And they made us wear sterile gear and—I wrote a story about this one particular man once, who really touched me. But everybody knew men who were dying from AIDS at that point. And I did that. I did that. I thought it was, I thought it was important that, you know, somebody be there with these men, these young men, these beautiful young men. And so I answered that call.

I was involved with NOW, because I believed, particularly from a corporate standpoint, I really believed in opportunities for women needed in the corporation, because I'd come up through the corporation. And I had seen what I had experienced and what I had to go through to succeed. And then as I said, I was on the board of the Gay and Lesbian Center. I was also on the Women's Committee of SAGE. I basically, you know, donated time and money, wherever I could, to try to do good for my community.

Ivy Olesen 1:12:06

And I realized I didn't get a time for this, when, about what year did you come out at work?

Jinny Henenberg 1:12:16

That's a very good question. I have to, I'd have to really think about that. Let me think. I was, I was, it was 1965 when I first started working, and then sometime in the seventies, I want to say, but I don't know that I can pinpoint exactly when it was. It had to be—how old was I, 32?—I would say late seventies. If I had to put a range in it. It's hard, because I have, I'm trying to calculate back like, where I was, what company I was, what level I was, it might have even been '80 because I had to be further in my career that I felt secure enough. And I just started to work in '65. So probably was the eighties that I really came out. Because then the—before that it would have been too soon.

Ivy Olesen 1:13:16

And then do you feel like that kind of—I'm just thinking about all these different parts of your life and how they sort of coincided over time—and do you think that kind of like allowed you to then become, get more involved in activism, in these different organizations, in a more public way?

Jinny Henenberg 1:13:38

Yes, I think that I felt I had to give back, I was successful [pause], I had a community that I had suffered with firsthand and that I saw what happened not only to women, but to lesbians. I remember my childhood experiences, being discouraged from going with my natural instincts. And I was in a position where I had name recognition and I had economic ability. So I felt—but I didn't see it as activism.

It's interesting that you use that word. I actually have—I actually don't—people do, and I don't think of myself as an activist, I think myself as part of a community and I'm willing to serve, you know, where help is needed. I don't—I think of—the activists are going to kill me but I think of activists as being more military than, you know, the more on the edge than I am you know, more on, more progressive than I am. I'm really in my heart a traditionalist, I mean, I'm really—I haven't changed from that basic set of values of, you know, you work hard, you get ahead, you have a little steak at dinner, you know, you go to the movies, you get a promotion, you know.

I'm still that, I have that middle class value, I still see myself as a very, despite all of the name recognition and all the success that came my way and will the volunteer work I did. I mean, I just felt it was important to give back to the community. But none of that is the way I think of myself. I still think of myself as like, a middle class, you know, average, somebody who did well, and is part of a community, you know. I don't see it any different than belonging to your local church in some little town somewhere where you bake for the bake sale, because that's what you do. I just, that's how I see myself and my life.

Ivy Olesen 1:16:10

Sorry. Got a spam call through to my computer. Yeah, you're still kind of at the candy shop in the Bronx there being [unclear].

Jinny Henenberg 1:16:18

I am very, it's, that's a very astute — I am very rooted in the working class values of that. And even though everything else that's happened to me and all the things we've discussed, that is still who I am, and, you know, if somebody wanted to spend time with me and get to know me, that is who they're going to find. They're not going to find—you know, the story is the story, my successes are my successes, I certainly am proud of what I've been able to accomplish. But they don't define me. Don't define my values. They don't define me.

Ivy Olesen 1:17:05

And I think maybe one last question that Jinny, I could talk to you forever. And there's, I still have these other stories you told me the first one, I'm like, ah, should I ask that? But it's been a little while. So, and I want to be respectful of your time. So I was just gonna say the one thing we haven't touched on is your connection to the Lesbian Herstory Archives and how you came to find the LHA and how we came to be having this conversation.

Jinny Henenberg 1:17:33

Yes! I guess I was remembering Astraea. And I was doing research on what happened to Astraea. What happened, where's Astraea, where's—, and then I came across the Herstory Archives, and I saw the great work that was being done. And I thought to myself, just like I have about many other things, this is something I would really like to be a part of. Because I think my story is unique. There aren't a lot of women, lesbians, who came up through the corporation. There are some. And I thought, I would like to have this story recorded. Because some woman, some young lesbian somewhere, who might be struggling with some aspect of their story.

I mean, how to break through, how to speak up to a boss, what is she entitled to, you know, I want to just encourage her to go for it. To go for it. If you really want, you know what you want, you're entitled to it. You have the right credentials for it. You have to go for it. And so I hope this is a story—I want my story to be a story of encouragement, that young women hear something that says, well, that was brave, that was courageous, or that would scare me, or, well, that's what I'm doing, too. And, and just goes for it.

I remember, I had a situation a few years ago where I was in a rehab center in the hospital. And at the end of the day, my room would be filled with these young women, young professional women, speech therapists, occupational therapists, I mean physical therapists, incredibly young, beautiful, educated women. And they had all these questions for me. “How do you invest your money? How do you tell your grandmother to get out of your life?” I mean, how do you, you

know, like, all these questions you think these people are young adults, and they've already been taught what they need to know. But they didn't.

They needed a mother, they needed a professional mother, someone to answer the young adult questions. And they didn't have that anymore because they were supposed to be on their own. So that's what I would like to do. I would like to answer their questions. I would like to encourage them to go for it, whether it be a young woman, whether she be gay, straight, lesbian, however she identifies, trans, whatever, to go for it. And that's, that's what I'm hoping. And that was why I thought my story was so exciting, that it was such an opportunity.

Ivy Olesen 1:20:52

Thank you so much, Jinny.

Jinny Henenberg 1:20:54

Thank you Ivy, you've been wonderful throughout this process. I want to thank Herstory, I want to thank you, I want to thank everybody. This experience has been great.

Ivy Olesen 1:21:03

Yeah, I also want to thank the LHA for listening to us. I feel like, I feel very inspired by our conversations. And I feel like I've gotten a lot out of it. And we, you know, part of the reason that I wanted to do this is that I do feel like I need elders. And it's hard to find elders in the queer community. And so it's just been so incredible to meet you. And I might email you to see if you still have that story you wrote because I'm curious about that. So I'll follow up. But—

Jinny Henenberg 1:21:39

Okay, it's been—you have enriched my life. Thank you very much Ivy.

Ivy Olesen 1:21:42

Thank you. Bye. Have a great day.

Jinny Henenberg 1:21:45

You too.