

Transcription for Yetta Chaiken

Dalia Handelman: [00:00:03] Okay, it's recording, see if that actually happens then I'm gonna I'm just gonna move close.

Yetta Chaiken : I can do anything. don't forget. I used to do that.

Dalia Handelman: Yeah, [00:00:33] that makes me feel a lot better. Right? You're my you're the my first interview actually.

Yetta Chaiken: Well I remember doing the Orthodox Rabbi in Wilmington and after a very long interview, I noticed I had not plugged it in and so I had to do it all over again

Dalia Handelman: Oh no. I'm just gonna set my phone up. [00:01:06] up make sure i get the recording

Yetta Chaiken: You know, I've been interviewed already by the Historical Society. Did you know that?

Dalia Handelman: Yeah, they told me that you had had been interviewed already. So I guess they [00:01:37] I'm not really sure so I'm trying to set it up on my phone sorry it's taking a minute [00:03:37] Great, let's get started. Sorry that took a while. I'm just going to keep this on just make sure it's actually. recording a great Okay. So, um So just to explain the purpose of this interview, [00:04:08] it's basically so it's a it's a project through the University of Delaware and the Jewish historical society and just collecting, I'm sure you know this already but just collecting oral histories of community members in Wilmington and also feel free to stop the interview whenever you would like and I'm just going to start by stating. This is Dalia Handelman interviewing Yetta Chaiken [00:04:38] on Wednesday, June 19th, 2019 at 9 a.m. So, can you please state your name, date of birth and location of birth?

Yetta Chaiken : my name is Yetta Chaikin. I was born May 13th 1922

Dalia Handelman: : And the location

Yetta Chaiken :and the location was [00:05:08] the Delaware Hospital, Wilmington, Delaware.

Dalia Handelman: So where have you lived in Delaware? And for how long

Yetta Chaiken : I have lived in Wilmington or the suburbs. Except during World War II when I lived in Newark, Delaware, but I've lived in Delaware my entire life

Dalia Handelman: [00:05:38] and why did you live in Newark?

Yetta Chaiken : My husband I married in 1942 and my husband was stationed at a plant that made 40 mili anti aircraft shells in Elkton and so Newark was close to Elton and so even [00:06:08] though I attended the University of Delaware for four years and commuted after I graduated I moved to Newark.

Dalia Handelman: So what do you remember about the place you were born / grow up like your childhood?

Yetta Chaiken: I my parents were immigrants and [00:06:38] their social life centered around their brothers and sisters, family. And so they love to play cards. They went to synagogue, but we were not really a highly religious family we but we were Jews and [00:07:09] the community let us know we were jews. Jews had a different category in those days. In 1940s many Jews could not get jobs that they wanted. They couldn't get into universities that they wish to attend. There was definite anti-jewish [00:07:41] fervor circulating every place that I knew but it didn't bother me at all cuz I was enjoying my life

Dalia Handelman: so did you grow up with siblings?

Yetta Chaiken: Did I had a sibling? Yeah, I had a brother who was a year and a half younger. We were so [00:08:11] close. They raised us as twins and I had a sister eight and a half years older who acted more as a role model, but my parents were very unusual Because in those days women didn't go to college and even though they were immigrants and didn't know the [00:08:41] culture. They bought a used car so I could drive to the university and I attended college and I consider myself very fortunate.

Dalia Handelman: So What do you remember about holidays that- you mentioned how you weren't raised very religious.

Yetta Chaiken: Yeah, but we celebrated holidays. That [00:09:11] was that's what I remember so it even though I knew that my father didn't really believe it all we followed whatever our aunts and uncles did and I would say the whole family was not high on the religious order, but [00:09:41] knowing your Jews you do those things and we did and we had a place in society. My father was a tailor and many of his most most of its clients were not Jewish and he frequently

quizzed them to find out how their culture and our culture were the same [00:10:11] were different and I've witnessed some of that but its interesting.

Dalia Handelman: And where did your parents come from? You mentioned they were immigrants?

Yetta Chaiken: Yeah, my father came from Odessa in Russia and they were so poor my aunt told me that even though they had many [00:10:41] children. They only had one bed and people put um flax into sheeting. And so they slept on the floor and my mother came from Kiev, which was also in the Ukraine and at that time Jews were [00:11:11] killed and there was a terrible *program* in Kiev, which I'm sure has something to do with them leaving they were fortunate to to escape being killed my mother never spoke of it. So I but [00:11:41] I went after my father died. She made sure that she was not buried in the ground obviously that has had a terrible effect upon her and she built a mausoleum for him so she didn't have to be buried in the ground.

Dalia Handelman: Can you explain why so why does the did the being buried in the ground-

Yetta Chaiken : [00:12:12] I don't know. She never she never told us what it was but it must have been a horrible memory of a little girl who saw death around her and she had escaped it so

Dalia Handelman: So, um, why do you know why your parents chose Delaware?

Yetta Chaiken : Well, first of all, they came separately and [00:12:42] so it wasn't a matter of choosing Delaware. I'm sure they came because they had other family members. My mother went to Philadelphia and grew up there where her family had migrated and my father came to Wilmington because he had a sister [00:13:12] who had come here. So everybody went to the area where they would have some family members.

Dalia Handelman: So in terms of your childhood growing up, What was did you have any kind of Jewish Education?

Yetta Chaiken: Yes, I was when our family moved to 21st and Washington the synagogue [00:13:43] that we had gone to at 3rd & Shipley, which was Orthodox yiddish-speaking now we change to Beth Shalom which was conservative Jewish and my parents didn't care because their religious background [00:14:13] was just being Jewish and so we both my brother and I went to Hebrew school and we were confirmed to my brother was bar mitzvahed Beth Shalom and that was the conservative synagogue in Wilmington, Delaware And then later when [00:14:43] I married and had children, we moved to 30 bought a house on 38th Street, and that was close to

the reform synagogue, So we went to the reform synagogue, it didn't seem to matter to us too much. And my children were educated in that synagogue.

Dalia Handelman: So do you identify [00:15:13] with a specific sect of Judaism?

Yetta Chaiken : I identify with being Jewish and I'm pleased to be Jewish. It gives me an identity and I like it.

Dalia Handelman: You mentioned the synagogue you were the Hebrew school you got the Jewish Education at spoke Yiddish.

Yetta Chaiken :Yeah

Dalia Handelman: do you speak Yiddish?

Yetta Chaiken :I [00:15:43] understand Yiddish. my parents and all their family everyone spoke Yiddish. So without thinking about it I knew a second language, but um it wasn't something that we did consciously [00:16:14] my brother and sister both we all knew Yiddish and because everyone who spoke to us used Yiddish as the language.

Dalia Handelman: Not not referring to you know, whether it was reform conservative or Orthodox. Did you feel specifically connected or more connected to one of the congregation's that you [00:16:44] were part of?

Yetta Chaiken : Well anytime I attended one I felt at home and comfortable there. So I with that being very religious I too I was pleased to be a part of that world. I gave me an identity

Dalia Handelman: and when you say gave you an identity. Can you elaborate?

Yetta Chaiken :Yes when we [00:17:14] were in high school for instance in the 1930s, All the Jews ate lunch together. And when we went to dances the Jews danced with each other so I mean only once in my life did a boy who was not Jewish asked me out [00:17:44] on a date and my father wouldn't let me go with him because he wasn't Jewish I said but pop his father is taliorI thought that would help but it did but he ultimately married a Jewish lady.

Dalia Handelman: So you mentioned a bit about how [00:18:15] during was so was part of the reason why in high school all the Jews ate lunch together and hung out together because of anti-Semitism

Yetta Chaiken : well, we never thought terms of anti semitism but we ate together because others didn't want to eat with us or it was not an intermingling Jews were one area. They did went to dances together. [00:18:46] That was the way the world was at that time in America .

Dalia Handelman: Did you growing up experience any aside from the subtle like I guess anti-Semitism that you were mentioning about the segregation did you experience any other forms of anti-semitism?

Yetta Chaiken : Well, first of all, it was not just that, women women had very low place in society when [00:19:16] I went to high school. The only one I went to college the only offering for women. Was the only question they asked me do you want to teach secondary or Elementary? I could be nothing else except the teacher. Nothing was offered the women faculty [00:19:46] had we're hired by the University women's college. It wasn't the college was not all together it was separated. So that's the way our country was at that time women and men were separated.

Dalia Handelman: So just to clarify. Did you feel more in your life the women [00:20:16] inequalities was was that more pressing than the almost like the Jewett the anti-Semitism type.

Yetta Chaiken : Well, I will tell you that I became came early member of the League of Women Voters and work for women's equality all my life because women really did suffer inequality not only in jobs and education [00:20:47] but in the world around us, I mean we were surrounded by in in I remember when a woman could not open a charge account. She had to have her husband name on her charge

Dalia Handelman: growing up. Did you you know, did you have any like dream job [00:21:17] or

Yetta Chaiken :only thing a woman could do was be teacher or a stenographer and I when you went to high school most women even wealthy people people who could afford education most women became stenographers and they work for in some company Dupont [00:21:47] hired women stenographers, and it was not equality as you have lived it today. It was just not present

Dalia Handelman: so do you think today like how do you feel about [00:22:17] this is kind of a little different from the childhood growing up but how equality laws and equal rights for men and women.

Yetta Chaiken :Oh, I think it's wonderful and I feel as thought we've made great Headway. And as I said, I immediately went to work for League of Women Voters became a Really active

member and [00:22:47] because women had to work to vote. I pushed to get a local woman who used to go to Washington in 1917 and go to the White House and and surround the White House marching in an effort to get [00:23:17] women to have the right to vote in 1918 women finally got the right to vote. I was born now, I think 1920 they passed the amendment and I was born in 1922. So it was a very auspicious moment to come into the world

Dalia Handelman: wow. [00:23:47] That's amazing. So going back, I guess a little bit to um growing up. What was it like in America and look both in America in general that you were seeing on the news and in your personal life during World War Two?

Yetta Chaiken :what was it like

Dalia Handelman: Yeah, what did do you remember anything?

Yetta Chaiken :Well, I wait my husband and I was stationed at the war plant [00:24:17] and I worked in that war plant as a recreation director and what they did in that plant was they made these 40 millimeter anti aircraft shell and they had them in small buildings because occasionally there was an explosion and instead of having it one large building if an explosion occurred [00:24:47] at least a small number of people were killed instead of a large number and my job was to find us some kind of recreational activities for these young girls who were cut they brought by the busload to [00:25:17] live in Newark, they many of them came from West Virginia or western Pennsylvania and had no family about and so I offered them sports sporting activities and musical evening said that was my role and [00:25:47] I was offered a teaching job in Newcastle School District, but I chose not to go there because we had one car and it was easier for us to go to the plant and work rather than having to buy new car and and the principal [00:26:17] was furious that I did not accept that position. I remember him the he said you will never work in Delaware again.

Dalia Handelman:: Why was he so angry with you?

Yetta Chaiken :Because I had refused a job offer and I guess he was not used to people refusing an offer

Dalia Handelman: [00:26:49] So what was your connection to if any to Israel growing up?

Yetta Chaiken :Well, Israel was when Israel was about 17 years old my husband and I joined a synagogue group. [00:27:19] That was a synagogue from Philadelphia that was visiting Israel. And we join them and we spent several weeks and Israel was a teenager and everything was crude and new but we went to a concert and I was sitting next [00:27:49] to the Department of

Education head and when he heard what I did he offered me the job. Wow, so at that time we had three small children. We lived on 38th Street here in Wilmington. and we had we'd left our children at home with my [00:28:19] sister. And so I said to my husband, let's rent our house and go to Israel for a year and It'll be some experience for all of us. He looked around and it was rude and crude and he shudders and he said you must be kidding. [00:28:49] So we did not go but I remember that job offer because I felt it would have been just an unbelievable experience to witness Israel before it was 20 years old.

Dalia Handelman: Do you remember? were when in 1948 when it was established, [00:29:19] it was recognized by America was that was that day special

Yetta Chaiken: Oh it was such a great day it was exciting it was Unbelievable. Yes, it was but that's what I said. We we visited those days It was going Israel was much more difficult than it is now and so we [00:29:49] had the opportunity to live there, but I could understand my husband's chagrin at the thought

Dalia Handelman: do you have you been back

Yetta Chaiken: many many times there was an Israeli Shaliacha, a messenger who came to Wilmington and lived here for three years with his family [00:30:19] and they were I think they still send Shaliacha's. and but he was the first It was about 19 late 70s 80s and we became his family or their family. They came with two children. They had one child here. And ultimately I'm still [00:30:49] a part of their family they call me they visit and so we're still very close.

Dalia Handelman: that's amazing, yeah, so When you think of would you how would you describe if you could describe in words, you're like your connection to Israel?

Yetta Chaiken: well, it was more than the connection. It was a relationship that [00:31:20] we were bound together and never before had anything like this ever happen where Jews felt bound to this country and the it's only recently since they're involved with this politics that I don't approve of that that we [00:31:51] are looking at them with great dismay, but um are we went to Israel regularly every time we travel to Europe we would go to Israel first and then Europe and so I traveled a great deal and Israel always managed to get on our map and that Israeli [00:32:21] family still when they used to travel they did the same thing.

Dalia Handelman: Um, you mentioned so the the politics that you you don't approve of can you elaborate in terms of-

Yetta Chaikin: well, I don't I'm not the prime minister is going directions that I'm yeah. Yeah. that I don't

Dalia Handelman: Got it. So [00:32:51] I guess this is backtracking a little bit, but just to finish up the section on your childhood and growing up. Can you elaborate a little bit on I guess your relationship with your family with your parents and siblings?

Yetta Chaikin: my brother and I loved each other until the moment. He died. I I was such an integral part of his life and he of my life that [00:33:21] We we just up and even the day he died. I was he had moved from New Jersey to outside of Washington and I was with him on that day and uh I was close to [00:33:51] their children, their family and my sister's family I considered my family my own immediate family and I still she has one son who lives in Boston and when he travels he often will call me. I'm at the grave site of somebody and he'll be calling from [00:34:21] Europe or something. And so I'm still very close to both my brother and my sister's family and they were it was like a gift to me

Dalia Handelman: And your relationship with your parents?

Yetta Chaikin: Oh, very warm and close said my father my father [00:34:52] died first and but he Remember he had dinner at my house and later a heart attack and he said to me it's your dinner that's going to kill me, but it wasn't of course, I knew that but I mean and my [00:35:22] mother and he couldn't believe the way I dress that I would come into his shop and women were bedecked and I I never cared how I dressed and he would say look at you. How can you come in here and I'd look and think I look fine [00:35:53] and my mother was a meticulous dresser, so something didn't rub off on me because I never got that gene but I had wonderful parents said and led an unbelievable life. So even though I'm now at the end of my life, I can look back not at hardships, [00:36:24] but at pleasantness and happiness. My father, who I told you never went to school, bought a piano, a baby grand piano in our home so that I could learn to play the piano. I meant, you know that those are parents doing what they think will [00:36:54] benefit their children

Dalia Handelman:wow. Do you think your parents choosing to come to America when they did like set your life up to be-

Yetta Chaikin: oh my father had he not gone Jews were put men were put in the Army for 25 years. And so everyone escaped. [00:37:24] Yeah, and the women my mother and Kiev had she not escaped. She would have been killed because they were Jews, jews were all killed

Dalia Handelman: You mentioned your brother. Other right outside of DC did the rest of your family stay in Delaware?

Yetta Chaiken: My sister's family. [00:37:54] Stayed in Delaware, my brother married and the woman he married came from close to Newark, New Jersey. So he moved up there. But before he died, he told me he should have never moved. That was a big mistake, but he did. Things he became a doctor and he would travel to countries [00:38:26] that needed equipment and he would teach them bring the equipped and and teach them how to use it and was a wonderful example of humanity.

Dalia Handelman: You mentioned you. You told me the story about how your father wouldn't let you go out with the non-jewish boy. did your siblings all marry Jews?

Yetta Chaiken: Yes, [00:38:56] everyone everyone Mary Jews because remember in those days Jews were not accepted by non-jews. It was you couldn't Actually, I knew a couple who married and they changed their name and then moved to the Midwest and he got a job as [00:39:26] an engineer, but he could not have gotten a job here

Dalia Handelman: because because he was Jewish?

Yetta Chaiken: because he was Jewish and he had a Jewish name.

Dalia Handelman: So that's why they changed it

Yetta Chaiken: right right, right and they changed it to sands And, and his wife called me to this day. She and i are the same age.

Dalia Handelman: Um, so because your parents [00:39:56] were immigrants, do you remember growing up any I mean that and because you were Jewish any like main cultural differences between you and either other Jews that you were friends with or just other people in the community?

Yetta Chaiken: well, we did what most jews did. my parents belonged to a synagogue when they first came that was [00:40:26] yiddish-speaking so the sermons were in Yiddish, if you weren't the Immigrant you couldn't you couldn't understand what their women sat upstairs men downstairs. Definitely a culture that was a little different but then when we join the conservative synagogue [00:40:56] was more Americanized and our parents little by little got used to this new world.

Dalia Handelman: So, can you describe to me your first work experience you talked about it a little bit

Yetta Chaiken: Yes. Well my if first well, I don't know if you want during World [00:41:26] War II or my teaching

Dalia Handelman: both.

Yetta Chaiken: Well during during World War II I was a Recreation director at triumph explosives. and it was my job to see that these young girls had the activities they needed and so I I wasn't the only one [00:41:56] there was a group of us who arranged activities, sports events, musical events, things to keep them busy because they had no family around them and they've never been separated before and they needed them to work in the factory. So that was during the [00:42:26] war and then I started substitute teaching and then I was started. at PS Dupont and I taught economics and you know it was. I'm sure I could not have been a very good teacher [00:42:56] but then I somebody one of my daughters friends came to my class and I realized that I did not want to teach my children or my friends children of Affairs of friends and so I one [00:43:26] wish to stay in the same school district, so we would have the same vacation. So I moved from PS2 pain to Warner junior high school and I taught there and I taught American history and I used the facilities of the museum at Fifth and Market Street. There is [00:43:56] a museum of our community and I I added that to my activities and one of the things they did was give me artifacts from the museum every week so I could use it. You know, the Revolutionary War [00:44:26] Etc these this was a gun use this what and that became a part of my teaching life and then I can even remember taking a class to a classroom that was between Market Street and forget the name of [00:44:56] but three streets merged as a matter of fact, they just I noticed I heard that church that was on the corner there is now going to be used in a community as a community activity, but because it's no longer used as a church, [00:45:27] but I brought my whole class to this classroom. That was an 18th century classroom and I did all sorts of things and I got some notoriety, a little jealousy from the staff, but it was a wonderful experience. And then finally I was offered [00:45:57] a job in the Mt. Pleasant school district and their first year. I taught the ancient world. So I dragged my husband to all the ancient sites and then the next year they decided to teach anthropology. I rushed to the University, took a course on anthropology and then we wrote a curriculum for it and [00:46:27] it was just a wonderful experience teaching physical and cultural anthropology.

Dalia Handelman: So out of like all the professions that and job said he's just mentioned. Did you have a favorite?

Yetta Chaiken: Well, I just taught because again women had no choice in those days. [00:46:57] but I loved it because I kept changing what I was teaching and it opened up new worlds and new life for me and I felt I think the period between World War Two and the year 2000 were the most optimistic period in American history [00:47:27] because everybody felt we could do anything and the world was changing both for women and for minorities which minorities have been kept down and suddenly we began to think they had equal rights.

Dalia Handelman: [00:47:57] So what do you think happens in like what changed between 2000 and-

Yetta Chaiken: well, I think the darker side and certainly Trump is exacerbating it because as far as I'm concerned he is not going to get a good write-up in American history all the I don't need [00:48:27] anything. He knows his American history because if he did he'd know he's doing things that our founding fathers would have no stomach for

Dalia Handelman: Do you this is kind of an Israel question um do you feel because you grew up in America and you know helps during the war and stuff like that, but you also have been incredibly strong Jewish [00:48:57] identity. do you feel more connected to America or Israel?

Yetta Chaiken: Well, I at the moment certainly feel more connected to America than Israel. I I happen to be interested in the planets and what's happening about our understanding of our solar [00:49:27] system and all of this is going to become I believe in consequential it will not serve us well, if we do not understand that not only our galaxy but other galaxies have a profound effect and I feel that I have lived in this crucible [00:49:57] of History. Yeah where I was a part of the old and have stepped forward into a whole new world

Dalia Handelman: wow. That's amazing. There's some I was just asking there's actually a common question that people in like the Jewish community that people ask and they're they're like, do you identify as a American Jew or a jewish-american because they're [00:50:27] very different all depending on-

Yetta Chaiken: : I know well. I I think being Jewish is who I am who I was brought up to be but only because our country put me in that place, but now that I'm into the solar system all of that [00:50:57] is sort of inconsequential it will not matter for much.

Dalia Handelman: no definitely. Um So in terms of your interest with the solar system and what do you think is gonna happen? Like what do you think is gonna happen when you say it's inconsequential

Yetta Chaiken: Yeah Planet Earth is just one of the planets. We don't know about life existing on other planets. [00:51:28] Although we know life could not exist now in Jupiter and various various planets because of of lack of oxygen or Etc but I mean there is so much out there for us to distill. I just feel as so I've been fortunate to be. [00:51:59] bring together the old and the new and that has given me a view that few have had the opportunity to experience

Dalia Handelman: in in what ways can you elaborate on that ?

Speaker 2: Well, if you're thinking of the solar system, you can't be worried about some of the mundane [00:52:30] activities on the other hand because planet Earth is going through a very bad time. We don't even know if we will exist where there will be able to be life on this Earth. I mean we seeked changes that are unbelievable whether changes all kinds of [00:53:00] changes I can't believe that I'm that living to experience it when my Husband died. We didn't even think of those things and now suddenly so I'm not sure being Jewish is going to be crucial to it because because it it's happening to everybody won't matter for a Muslim [00:53:31] or a Jew or Christian or nothing many many young people are non believers Yeah, and that's happening as more people are in contact with planet Earth.

Dalia Handelman: Okay. So you think you think like younger people being atheists or not having connections to religion comes from the planet earth?

Yetta Chaiken: Yes. Absolutely. Absolutely because [00:54:02] it's if you have a religion you go back several thousand years but planet Earth goes because back 4.7 billion years and it took 2.7 billion before it emerged

Dalia Handelman: Ya definitely

Yetta Chaiken: so I'm turning your head too

Dalia Handelman: Ya it's an [00:54:32] interesting way of looking at things

Yetta Chaiken: Well, it's happening. Yeah, it's not the way of looking at things.

Dalia Handelman: So what do you think should be done about like, what would-

Yetta Chaiken: I would try to do everything to delay planet Earths demise, I think planet Earth is in for a rough ride

Dalia Handelman: [00:55:05] kind of Switching gears. Um going back to speaking about your work experience did did your work experience? I know you say you worked in schools. And as

the recreational director did any of that connect you more to Judaism or there was no connection?

Yetta Chaiken: Well, you know it really depended on what was happening. We were Jews we went to services. [00:55:35] But if you ask me if I'm really a bully have a belief system. I can't tell you I'm not I'm certainly not an orthodox believer

Dalia Handelman: So you're not an orthodox believer. So do you do and we talked about like the Earth and [00:56:05] solar system stuff. Do you believe in like what are your Jewish beliefs is definitely-

Yetta Chaiken: I was born to Jewish parents. I grew up in a Jewish culture. I have the values of Jews. And I've worked. I've worked all my life with Jewish organizations. And so, [00:56:35] you know, I feel I'm Jewish, Jewish from head to toe but I'm just telling you that it's very difficult. to have a belief system that's founded on something that's in direct contrast to what the planets are telling us

Speaker 1: , [00:57:05] right. Okay. I gotcha you. so In terms of as an adult. Can you describe your affiliation with the Jewish community in the area?

Speaker 2: Yeah well for many years being Jewish meant women did certain things and negated certain things [00:57:36] and I was always involved with women's whatever women did but I feel that it was a gift to have the opportunity. I love belonging and so that was another [00:58:07] part because belonging is the source of happiness. And so it was a source of happiness for me. And so now that I'm sort of out of it the ancient in our culture are for the most part thrown under the bus, we're not people say the [00:58:37] right things, but they don't include the elderly and except for your family most people life goes on and it escapes the worlds of the elderly the Chinese do embrace their elderly in a manner [00:59:07] that we do not

Speaker 1: Yeah, definitely So were you you mentioned like you were involved in like with the women and stuff were you part of a specific women's group?

Yetta Chaiken: yes. Oh, well, actually I was a part of the League of Women Voters that was not a Jewish organization and I never was active [00:59:37] in a sisterhood because I think objected to the fact that men ruled the vicinity of the synagogue and women did those other things and so I never but certainly at the University of Delaware. I was they had no [01:00:07] nothing for women when I went although my brother belonged to a Jewish fraternity, but and he just went a

year after I did so men already had a place to belong and women didn't it for some years till Hillel

Dalia Handelman: mmm. Yeah, [01:00:37] and now there are Jewish sororities

Yetta Chaiken: Right

Dalia Handelman: So how actually going back to college. How would you describe your experience at University of Delaware?

Yetta Chaiken: you know. When I drove, I commuted my father bought me a used car. I took five people I charged them each I think 25 cents each [01:01:09] and there was one blinking light between Wilmington and Newark now, of course, it's nothing but shops and busy roads but it was it was a whole different world. and I feel [01:01:40] that living in Newark. I met a family call. They were, they had escaped they were the last family Jewish family to leave Germany. I met the Dannemann family and that family came to Newark and opened up a fabric store. and became [01:02:10] a very important part of the family an important part of life there and I was because I was involved I embraced them and they embrace me and we to this day they're both their parents died they died and now their children and their grandchildren are still [01:02:40] there so I'm still a part of their life

Dalia Handelman: wow. Um was it you mentioned there was one blinking light from from Wilmington to Newark. was it common that you had a driver's license?

Yetta Chaiken: Well, I got a driver's license this once we got a car. We didn't have a car before we use the trolley and the bus and then [01:03:10] when I think I might have gotten the car first then my Mother learned to drive my father never learned to drive

Dalia Handelman: Okay, so did but was it kind of like unusual or special that especially being a girl that you had a license or was it like it was just really whoever had a car?

Yetta Chaiken: if you have a car so it really did and my mother ultimately drove so [01:03:40] soon people were driving but my father never did

Dalia Handelman: Was the the Jewish community in your area close?

Yetta Chaiken: Well, there was a divide between the Orthodox and the reform and the conservative definite the vibe [01:04:10] and I would say the Orthodox felt they had the secret of life. And the others didn't know what was happening and that's the way it was until now, religion

itself is taken taking a backseat but up till now each [01:04:41] dimension of Judaism felt strongly about themselves and the Orthodox young Orthodox groups are still badly it out.

Dalia Handelman: So you said like religion you think religion is taking a back seat today. Do you think there's that we can you elaborate on that?

Yetta Chaiken: Well, because I think as [01:05:11] More people get involved in the science of the planets and and not only planet Earth but Jupiter and Mars and Saturn and and then outside of our own Galaxy. It's it's I mean, the Jews aren't the re- religious Jews aren't even recognized. Is that [01:05:42] they don't accept that as a part of their life, but it's there. and I've taken several courses on it. And I am intrigued by what is going to happen.

Dalia Handelman: Right. Were there any important are there or were there any important Jewish Businesses in the area [01:06:12] that in Wilmington-

Yetta Chaiken: Yes, they are the Market Street had places like Bronstein's which was a woman's dress shop and Arthur said and canards was run by a Jewish Family and Wilmington Dry Goods, very Has low cost [01:06:43] a shop that I mean, so Bronstein's I bought my wedding dress there and Wilmington Dry Goods had many jews who were head of department. So Market Street was the my husband father opened the men's shop at fourth and Walnut and [01:07:15] For him that put my husband through the University of Pennsylvania, and then he the shop had to close and he moved to Market Street and ultimately had to give it up but Market Street was the commercial area of our town.

Dalia Handelman: So when did [01:07:45] this is kind of random, but when did you get married?

Yetta Chaiken: I got marriage in 1942. I was 20. I was married in Odess kodesh synagogue and the rabbi I remember said you should sail on the ship of happiness, and I remember first thing out. Out laughing because [01:08:15] we did not have air conditioning wait and there was perspiration dripping from its nose and his chin and I thought it was pretty funny.

Dalia Handelman: That is funny. So how long were you were you with your like um husband is like dating wise before you guys got married.

Yetta Chaiken: We dated in high school. [01:08:45] and many people were going away to the service and my husband was in the service but he was stationed right there. So.

Dalia Handelman: Got it. Okay. So, um, you mentioned that growing up you were you went to Hebrew school? [01:09:16] And you said you you've taken a few classes, but on the solar system have you taken any classes as an adult on with Jewish Education?

Yetta Chaiken: Oh, yes. Yes I've been taking as a matter of fact, I go to the we have an Academy of lifelong learning its classes for retired people.

Dalia Handelman: Okay, so that's where you-

Yetta Chaiken:and no [01:09:46] I but there's also classes at The JCC. So I've been taking classes there.

Dalia Handelman: : Okay. Have you participated in any form of fundraising for the Jewish Community or within-

Yetta Chaiken:not for the last 10 years or so we used to we were very my husband and I were both very active [01:10:16] but Jewish Federation he was even president of the, So we were very active.

Dalia Handelman: we kind of talked about this how you would describe your your connection to Israel today but you you kind of

Yetta Chaiken:yes yeah

Dalia Handelman: because I guess so growing do you think growing up it it changed at all did you ever feel a shift [01:10:46] in your connection to Israel

Yetta Chaiken: oh no I mean you know that's who we are that's who we were and my israeli family I call them my Israeli family because they keep very close. They're not related. But I told you I went there when Israel was a teenager [01:11:16] and I'm and then till probably the last time I visited Israel was the wedding of their daughter and so I remember we went to the wedding. No. No, I went afterwards, but my friend's the Donovan's got all dressed up [01:11:46] for this wedding. We had gone to a class that was outside of Tel Aviv and then when we came into the wedding I don't think it was Tel Aviv I think was Haifa and our friends were all dressed up in the [01:12:16] people standing next to them had shorts I mean, it was such a dichotomy and so strange. It was a world that I hadn't seen before

Dalia Handelman: that's so funny. Um, so how do you feel about the current political climate and its potential effects on jews and in America and the world?

Yetta Chaiken:[01:12:46] Well, I think it's not a good thing that's happening and people are our Israelei friends are not happy with what's happening. Yeah. My Israeli friends are Very upset but what's happening worldwide in terms [01:13:16] of the climate, What's happening to planet Earth, It's it's much larger than the state of Israel. Yeah. So as you ask these questions, you're still home in on where we were but now it's it's dangerous. I mean our planet itself [01:13:46] could dissolve and so you better maybe look in another direction. I'm I mean for me it doesn't matter I've gone from here to there and one lifetime and it's been a great ride. I've loved it. I I feel as though I had the best [01:14:16] of all worlds. Yeah, because from the beginning of mankind to what's happening. This could be the end. Yeah with this climate change. It's very serious. Yeah, so I hope you take note of that

Dalia Handelman: definitely ha ha um what are you okay so aside from climate change on the bigger scale what would you say the biggest threat to [01:14:46] jews is today to our-

Yetta Chaiken: well I think there's a group that still buried into their jewishness but I don't think Jews are going to have to worry as Jews except for this group. That's into this sand [01:15:17] only because of what's happening at the planet. It's serious. It's dangerous. Yeah, I mean everybody could stop breathing.

Dalia Handelman: Oh, no, definitely

Yetta Chaiken:so won't matter who you are what you are. Yeah, and if you don't take that into a consideration, and I think Jews have an obligation to alert our people on on Planet I mean [01:15:47] the president we have now is absolutely incompetent as he wants to start another War I mean he's irrational

Dalia Handelman: when you um spoke about you know that one group of Jews that are like Buried buried in their Judaism yeah what do you mean by that?

Yetta Chaiken: well I mean about the very the Orthodox [01:16:17] groups that just studied Torah and that's their world and that's their life I think our planet is moving beyond that and we better look pick up our heads yeah and take note otherwise there won't be a planet

Dalia Handelman:um so [01:16:47] this is a very general question but based off of you talked about how you have had a great life and loved it and loved the ride yeah do you have a piece of advice that you you would I don't know just based off of all of your incredible life experiences like one main piece of advice that you would give to Jews and non-jews?

Yetta Chaiken:well I think being Jewish [01:17:17] was a gift and I hope that all the people hard Jewish see it as something that they've had bestowed upon them used to be a curse but now I really do see it as a gift and I saw my own parents my own family [01:17:48] have this this sense of belonging belonging is the source of happiness. I hope that you have that Soros and that you have the same life that I've had in terms of belonging. I hope you had that source and that you have the same life I've had and sense of belonging. Well, I think you do.

Dalia Handelman:Thank you. I do do you think other do you think it's unique [01:18:18] to Jews, the the sense of belonging?

Yetta Chaiken: Yeah, I I have it's interesting. I've Chinese neighbors across the street who voted for Trump and I do think they have a sense of belonging with other Chinese in America not in China or not [01:18:49] and other places but here in America, I do think they they have hold a special place and I I have very neighbors who come from different places and we each everybody brings their culture with them and you sort of meld with whats here and that's [01:19:19] what makes us who we are. and that's maybe why I'm able to enjoy my life so much

Dalia Handelman: do you so there's actually a lot of debate on whether or not people consider Judaism like a religion, a culture, an ethnicity do you-

Yetta Chaiken: I think it's way of life I think [01:19:49] in my day was certainly a way of life but because of what is happening at the I think it's fast fading among young people older people still see it as their way of belonging but young people. Don't have [01:20:19] the same Viewpoint.

Speaker 1: And you said you why do you think that is because of what's happening and right with environment or

Yetta Chaiken:no because everything but not only is the planet change our planet Earth is changing but what could happen dire things could happen and if you stick to [01:20:50] What you're saying suddenly you might find yourself without drinking water or food or what have you I mean for climate changes and I'd only has to change a little bit to make great changes in our food production,

Dalia Handelman: and and just to clarify you you think that is that like the direct reason for why [01:21:20] younger people have a different outlook on religion?

Yetta Chaiken: No. No because once you start looking at the planets Once you start seeing that it isn't just I mean, do you know Galileo was the pope apologize to the family of Galileo. not this Pope a couple popes [01:21:50] before because they in the Seventeen hundreds for the first time. Galileo looked in into telescope and he saw we were not the only planet he saw and he oh my God and [01:22:21] and he started to talk about it and the pope at that time they were all under arrest has not only he but his whole family yeah and gave them a long period of misery and now couple of hundred years later. Oh, we made a mistake. You're right. We're not the only thing look [01:22:51] how long it took them before they apologized So you asking me these questions. We need human race needs a long time. so I'm telling you that in response to what your saying

Dalia Handelman: say going back to the current political climate and stuff. Did you [01:23:21] In terms of like our last election you obviously don't do not like our current president do you like did you support Hillary?

Yetta Chaiken: of course I support Hillary.

Dalia Handelman:I was just asking because there was a lot of people in the past election were like didn't support either. You know, I know, i was wodnering your opinion on that

Yetta Chaiken:yeah, that was What a shame. Yeah. [01:23:51] Well, this idea of America was a great idea and maybe we're if they continued with that concept might be the end. But who knows?

Dalia Handelman: Yeah, do you do you see any hope for the future for do you think it comes with the next election?

Yetta Chaiken:we would hope I mean the first [01:24:23] president came out with the new idea but the European countries have been living with this concept now, so it's not we're not the only ones. I mean, it is not just America now. Yeah who sees it and people are now educated that they have a much broader view. [01:24:53] yeah I mean to me if you are able to see where how we started and where we're going it's frightening because what's happening yeah and if you don't think we need to do something about it then you're going to suffer the consequences

Dalia Handelman: [01:25:23] yeah no definitely is there any last comments you I don't know anything you are else you want to say

Yetta Chaiken:it's been a pleasure talking to you

Dalia Handelman:thank you so much you're it's been a pleasure interviewing yeah pause all of my recordings

Yetta Chaiken: 97 years old and still going strong not so strong