

X2296 Milken Archive, Wolf Krakowski & Paula Parsky

[X2296] 12:18:32 [inaudible]

X2296

I: I'd like to start by thanking you for inviting us to your --

C: Standby. Roll counter.

I: Okay. So I want to start by thanking you for inviting us to your lovely home here in -- we're just outside of North Hampton, Massachusetts. It's a pleasure to be here again with you after our first meeting probably I think it was 2007, so 11 years ago.

[X2296] 12:33:31 **Wolf Krakowski:** Glad to have you back.

I: We'll cover a lot of the same territory in terms of your life and history that we covered back then, and we'll talk about what you've been up to since. Could you start by introducing yourself and spelling your name for the translators [sic]?

[X2296] 12:33:52 **Wolf Krakowski:** My name is Wolf Krakowski, K-r-a-k-o-w-s-k-i.

I: And could you describe when and where you were born?

[X2296] 12:34:08 **Wolf Krakowski:** When was 1947, August. Where is a refugee camp called Saalfelden Farmach. This would be in the environ of Salzburg and that area. People are familiar with this part of the world through the film "The Sound of Music," which is this part of the world, Austria. It is located -- I did find out later, it would be down the hill from Hitler's summer home Berchtesgaden. It would be down the mountain and then that's Saalfelden. That's what I know about that.

[X2296] 12:35:11 So the circumstances depending on how far we work our way back, the -- what would be the best way to do this? Little segments. But let's do this. When the war, Second World War came to an end, my mother and older brother, wherever they had been for the last couple years or so, they were in what they call a culhaz [ph], a work camp in Kazakhstan.

[X2296] 12:35:55 And my father at this point, towards the last months of the war, he had been an infantry officer in an all Jewish brigade of Polish nationals that fought under the collective named the Wanda Wasilewska Brigade. They fought under the command of the red army. My father was wounded tow- -- in the waning days of the

war while the -- the -- the Russians were routing the Germans out of Russia back west, I guess.

[X2296] 12:36:48 And he was in a military hospital. And then I don't know how the system worked, but he ended up living in the apartment of a former SS man in a town called Walbrzych, which the Germans, they were wont to do, they renamed during the war Waldenburg.

[X2296] 12:37:20 Anyways, the story is incredible in some ways, but my mom received a telegram that said that he wasn't in such and such a town, no address. My mom and my brother dragged their way across Russia by train for about two weeks. They came to this town, no address. My mom asked the first guy she saw if she happened to know of a Jewish soldier living nearby. And the guy looked at my brother and he said, you know what, there happens to be a Jewish soldier, looks like he could be this kid's father living right over there. Upon investigation it was my father.

[X2296] 12:38:27 So my father and mother had not seen each other -- God, I don't even know how long -- over a year, maybe, you know, more. I can't even -- I'm sure it had been awhile, anyways, a long time. And in this town while they were getting back to -- getting reacquainted, I was conceived.

[X2296] 12:38:54 In short order, they had what -- they had something called the -- they had a pogrom, in '46, a famous pogrom, and they started to kill Jews. And this, of course, freaked out my parents to no end. And now they're -- picture this. This is after surviving the war and learning about the fate of their families, which included 114 people who were murdered or perished in that era.

[X2296] 12:39:37 Anyways, they decided they were going to get the hell out of Poland. So in utero they were being smuggled to Palestine. They were arrested. There's some kind of -- There's a bit of a family discrepancy. We don't know if they were in a truck or in a train. But they were arrested by the Italians and deported to a refugee camp in Austria. That would have been a United Nations refugee camp where -- where I was born.

[X2296] 12:40:24 I will mention I had -- my mother -- years after I made my first record and recorded the song Friling, which always had a great hold on me, my mom informed me that while I was in utero during that refugee flight, some other refugee sang her that song. Pretty amazing, huh?

[X2296] 12:40:48 So I heard Friling in utero. And so we -- the family was now in -- in the refugee camp. I will go back just to paint a bigger picture of the family. But going back further than that, as refugees, they had been picked up by the NKVD and they were enslaved.

I: Can you tell us what the NKVD is?

[X2296] 12:41:28 Wolf Krakowski: NKVD is kind of the Russian equivalent FBI and, you know, police and, you know, general enforcers. They were not -- they were an arm, I guess, enforcement arm of I guess Stalin and the communist party. Anyways --

I: So they were --

[X2296] 12:41:53 Wolf Krakowski: Here's some -- here's some background.

I: Mm-hmm.

[X2296] 12:41:55 Wolf Krakowski: They ran away from German occupation as young people living in Lodz. They made it into Russian territory. They did not last long there. They -- they tried. They had a -- they had -- my mother had a relative. They were able to live with them in a small town Lida. But they got picked up. And the law was such then that Stalin, he feared Jewish people -- this was a paranoia -- that the Jewish people would be -- act as a fifth column. That means that they would support the side of Germany against Russia from the inside. That was his belief.

[X2296] 12:42:55 So through an edict, you know, all these Jewish refugees were fair game. They were enslaved inside the Arctic Circle and my parents among them. And up there, they were put to work cutting wood. It was a miserable frozen environment. And my mom got pregnant.

I: So can you put us on a timeline here a little? This was after the war?

[X2296] 12:43:27 Wolf Krakowski: No. This is in -- during the raging -- right in the war. They are -- they are running from German occupation and -- and roundup -- roundup of Jews in Poland.

I: So this would be early 1940s probably?

[X2296] 12:43:41 Wolf Krakowski: Yeah. It -- right. They -- Look. Germans invaded I think in September '39. They were four months under the occupation. So you're going into '40, '41. And a little -- just little images that paint the picture. You know, I can't help but jump back and forth. But what were these people dealing with? They're young people. They had heard Hitler's speeches on the radio. They knew that -- they knew what was in store for Jews.

[X2296] 12:44:13 And also Jewish people were starting to get rounded up, abused. People showed up from the countryside bloodied, terrorized. My mother's brother -- my mo -- my father's brother, he was pressed into a work gang and he came back several days later. His teeth were knocked out. His -- at his wife's insistence, she -- he ran away

with my mother and father, ran east to go to Russia. That was the thing. A lot of Jewish men were doing, Jewish people were doing. They were running to Russia, safety, perceived safety in Russia.

[X2296] 12:44:58 My auntie then -- I never knew her; she perished -- she baked a gold watch into a loaf of bread, which financed his survival. Overland, across Russia to Japan, he was one of what has become known historically as Sugihara's Jews. He somehow knew. He was smart enough. Somehow he knew to go to the Japanese consulate in Vilnius. This guy was a Judeo file. He made it his business to save Jews by giving them Japanese visas. And there's like -- I don't know -- a couple thousand of those. And he later -- he was -- he was fired by the Japanese for doing this. It was against the policy.

[X2296] 12:45:54 And it was not until many decades later he was rehabilitated and his wife and kids got his pension. I remember reading. So my uncle is one of Sugihara Jews. So patching all that in, they, you know, what -- you know, the older I got and realized, you know, how they had to -- you know, the -- the odds -- the odds against their survival, you know, that they -- you know, that they met and overcame and, you know, that whole part of the narrative, when they ran -- I will mention a couple of things because they're historically kind of relevant. You might see.

[X2296] 12:46:52 But they ran -- one night they decided -- they were from Lodz where there's young people -- decided they're going to get out of -- of town. So they ripped off the yellow stars. You know what I mean by that. So they ripped off the yellow stars and what they had in their knapsacks, they ran for it. So later it was to become the headquarters for the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. But my -- my mother had an uncle or a relative who lived at Mila 18. It's a famous address, Mila 18. They crashed there for a night. He gave them some very little bit of money and chartered them for going, you know, over to the Russians, to the communists because the communists were not in favor to whoever. You know, people didn't like -- so they ran.

[X2296] 12:47:47 They ran to a place. It was the end of the line. It was the border of Russia and Germ -- and Poland, Ribbentrop -- Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. Hitler made a deal with Stalin we'll hold the line here. Okay. So my parents show up there. The resources of this town are stretched totally to the limit. The synagogue is full of crying babies, you know, and diapers hanging on clothes -- you know, makeshift clotheslines. My mom says I'm not staying here.

[X2296] 12:48:20 They find themselves under guard in a pit, like a natural indenture in a pit under German guard at -- with like 200-300 other Jews. They're being held in a fucking pit -- in a pit. And my mom gets it into her head that she's going to go and talk to one of the young soldiers there. And she does and she basically -- she makes a plea for her life and says to the effect that I -- I do not want to die in this place. I'm letting you know. And then as -- when night was falling, he beckoned for her to run. And she did and a bunch of other people went with her. And they ran into the Russian woods.

[X2296] 12:49:18 And that -- you know, so they got out of, you know, you know, German-controlled area as Jews into Russia. But they were -- they were, you know, between a rock and a hard place. They were in the woods. They found a young peasant boy in the woods. They made a deal with him to like lead them to the next place. And like that.

[X2296] 12:49:43 I want to go back just in honor of my mom and show what it took. When they decided to leave Lodz to get on this train east, so they needed train tickets. Now, the setup at the time was such that, you know, a few Germans, you know, with, you know, with rifles, you know, terrorized the whole population, you know. And what they had -- when people at the train station -- German soldiers would have a native Poel to identify and extricate Jewish people from the line.

[X2296] 12:50:26 Why? Average German soldier, some 18, 19, 20 year old kid, you know, from wherever, you know, Holstein, Schleswig or wherever, they don't know a Jew from a Turk, from anyone. But a Pole, it could be said and rightly so, they could smell a Jew. They had just a total sense for it. The same way, it would work the other way around I would think often.

[X2296] 12:50:55 So they had a -- they had -- they'd have a German soldier and some -- some rat, Polish rat, a collaborator who would be pulling Jews out of the line. This guy pointed out my mother. My mother had prepared. She had a kerchief drawn tight on her face. Her hair was hidden though she was dark haired.

[X2296] 12:51:19 She spoke in unaccented Polish, which a lot of Jews did not. They had a sing-song Yiddish inflected Polish. My mom -- this guy pointed her out. And my mom pulled what I will say -- she pulled a De Niro before De Niro and she said, You talking to me? Are you talking to me? And this guy backed down. And I'm really proud of that. She got three train tickets out of town, you know.

[X2296] 12:52:00 So, you know, it goes to show you, you know, if you got it, work your best bullshit. You know, you know, and so that's how they as young people got out of Poland, you know, had their first child that perished in -- at there. It perished -- they had been liberated. And they were already in the -- they were in the -- calkoz [ph], the work camp. And just hardship and lack and deprivation that the little bambino died in my mother's arms.

I: That was her first child?

[X2296] 12:52:49 Wolf Krakowski: Yeah.

I: And this was --

[X2296] 12:52:50 Wolf Krakowski: A daughter.

I: Do you know what year?

[X2296] 12:52:51 Wolf Krakowski: Sicilia Sapora [ph], She is buried in the town of Kazan, which is in Kazakhstan. So that's how we ended up in the Austrian refugee camp. I have no memory of the Austrian refugee camp. My brother has one photo. My father's already looking pretty good. He's wearing good clothes and he's got -- he's got a little weight on him, not overweight but he's looking healthy. And the only thing is my brother recollects -- oh, circumstances of my birth.

[X2296] 12:53:32 So my mom had suffered. She had eight years of, you know, hell and like, you know, whatever a few more hell light. But anyways, she had a lot of demands made on her on every level, least of which was physical and emotional. I was what they call a blue baby. I was not a willing entrant, a willing participant. The nurse employed at this refugee camp, German, Austrian, she whacked my ass 40 times to get me to cry. And I come into the world and these are the circumstances. My brother says at my [briss?] they served chopped liver. I don't remember but I'm taking his word for it.

[X2296] 12:54:35 And the other thing is like a great line of bullshit. But the rabbi, the mohel, that's the guy who does the circumcision, you know, they, of course, have their own lines of bullshit to the parents. And they basically did the circumcision and said this guy, he will grow up to be a tzadik. A tzadik is like a pious, righteous, I mean, super righteous like almost like, you know, a Jewish saint. He misspoke. I would not grow up to be a tzadik. I would grow up to be on Tzadik Records. Got ya. [laughter] So -- yeah.

I: What was your mother's name and when and where was she born?

[X2296] 12:55:21 Wolf Krakowski: Ester -- So Esther Bluma Russak. So she born in a little town called Sulmierszyce, S-u-l-m-i-e-r-s-z-y-c-e. And on the map of Poland, there's at least four. She relates how her father was the richest Jew in Sulmierszyce. He had his own horse and a wagon. He traded -- he was a trader of sorts. And they moved on Fami [ph]. They moved to a bigger Jewish center called Czestochowa. Czestochowa is a large Jewish center, the sixth largest in Poland at the time. Population estimated to be between 18,000 and 25,000, one of the largest Jewish communities.

[X2296] 12:56:18 They moved there and Wolf Russak after whom I am named, he had a -- a little -- a block of stores. One was -- he sold textiles from one. He rented the others out. He had -- they had some flats. He lived in one with his family, rented out the others. And so he -- and he -- and they also played -- played -- they sold merchandise at fairs. You know, he'd take his stock and, you know, go to the fairs.

[X2296] 12:57:07 Czestochowa is very famous and today still is a tourist attraction. They have a shrine there. Czestochowa Matki Boskiej, it's Black Madonna of Czestochowa. It's

a big black marble of Virgin Mary. She used to have like jewels for the eyes. The Swedes robbed her eyes during one of the Swedish invasion of Poland. You didn't know the Swedes invaded Poland. They did. Swedes kicked -- kicked Polish butt historically.

[X2296] 12:57:39 Anyways, to this day, it's a shrine, you know, for Catholics. And so my mom [inaudible] was actually at the very foot of this pilgrimage. And yeah. And regularly pilgrims would, you know, they would walk. They would ascend a hill, you know, and the highest part of the hill was the shrine and the statue. And, you know, heavily, you know, Catholic atmosphere. But they lived this little Jewish life, you know.

[X2296] 12:58:12 There were -- my mom had two brothers and four sisters. And at least one child died also in childbirth. I just found out on the Internet. There's a Czestochowa site where you can access, you know, these records and stuff. And a guy kind of just threw that at me. Life -- they were -- you know, life was poor, you know, like horse and a wagon, you know, cold water, you know, boil water. People were happy to eat and to have a Jewish life and to celebrate the holidays.

[X2296] 12:58:56 I'll tell you how, you know, what -- how, you know, just how nefarious life was for Jewish people could be. But the local constabulary would come in. We'd wait until there's like a Jewish holiday like Passover. The whole family would be sitting around a table. They would come in. They had the power, you know, to check the -- check the books, the accounts. You know, that night, that time of all nights. Right?

[X2296] 12:59:29 And these were humiliations vested. And, you know, the family had to see this. They'd interrupt a Seder, you know. This is a pretty sacred little event. So they'd interrupt that. But not only that, sadistic humiliation where they -- my mother speaks -- they literally take my grandfather and hold him upside down to shake money out of his pockets in his own home. And Jews -- Jews were subject to this -- to this shit just by local cops. So this is the kind of thing, you know.

[X2296] 13:00:05 There were -- you know, violence -- violence went unpunished many times. A visit to a -- to a gravesite, you know, you'd get attacked by a gang of toughs, young toughs. But you seriously, you could be seriously hurt, you know, with, you know, rocks and stones and stuff like that. They had a -- they had a tough life. You know, they had to make a living in this environment. And so yeah.

[X2296] 13:00:50 So they were traditional Jews in that the same way people have fervently belonged to like say a political party or whatnot. They -- you know, the traditional Jews over there, they followed a rabbi, usually like a -- often these wonder rabbis or wisdom rabbis or miracle rabbis. But these rabbis -- this one rabbi, he was known as the Zurich [inaudible] Zurich [inaudible] Zurich would be a town where his dynasty originated. But he so happened to have his little family seat, what they call a [schieble?], place of worship and study in Czestochowa where my mother's family lived. So my father was one of his followers.

[X2296] 13:01:36 So his name I found out was Twerski. It was a very honorable Jewish name. And to this day through our rabbis and scholars named Twerski. This line is well-known. So that was -- yeah. So they were -- they were traditional. There was no reformed, conservative, you know, orthodox. There was traditional. And that would have been orthodox in so many ways.

[X2296] 13:02:17 They did, you know, Shabbat, Sabbath holidays, kashrus, you know, kosher, laws of kosher, and those -- those were all followed. That was the natural way of living. And Wolf Russak, that's my mom's father. So he -- he was very proud of the fact that he supported two of his brothers in Yeshiva. It's a big mitzvah, a big honor to pay for someone's scholarly, you know, and sacred education. So like that.

[X2296] 13:03:10 At 15 she was already self-supporting, had moved to Lodz, big city. She worked in a bakery. She was something of a maid in the -- in the home of an auntie. This would probably not be unusual, you know, room and board, you know, and, you know, do the dishes and clean up and whatever. And -- and -- and she was -- going to night school a little bit. And -- yeah. She was, you know, self-supporting at 15 in this environment that, you know, Hitler came, you know, when she was living this kind of life. And, you know, Hitler, you know, came, you know, came to power.

I: She moved to Lodz on her own?

[X2296] 13:04:06 Wolf Krakowski: Yes. Fifteen years old to get -- to live with her auntie, kind of au pair, kids or what, but more like a maid I think, you know, tidy -- you know, I think traditionally I think that was, you know, common. And do you want to hear about my father's side of things?

I: Yeah. What was your father's full name and when and where was he born?

[X2296] 13:04:34 Wolf Krakowski: Ah. I wrote that down for you. Didn't I?

I: Do you want me to check?

[X2296] 13:04:41 Wolf Krakowski: I did because I always confuse the 15 and the 15.

I: So --

[X2296] 13:04:46 Wolf Krakowski: He was -- was he born March 15, 1915?

I: That's what it says here.

[X2296] 13:04:51 Wolf Krakowski: Yeah. So that's when he was born, March -- and my mom would have been born March 10, 1918. Anyways, my father -- circumstances of my father's birth were --

I: Before you -- can you say, my -- just say his name.

[X2296] 13:05:05 Wolf Krakowski: Oh, yeah. Leon, Leon and in Yiddish it was Labish -- Lebusch, which is -- in his world it would've -- you know, he'd be known as both. But Leon would be secular. Lebusch is a Yiddish, you know, for Leon. Lebusch Krakowski and he -- so he was born in a town called Piotrkov but did not stay there long. For some reason, they ended up in Lodz.

[X2296] 13:05:43 His father is a -- has a good job as a bookkeeper through one of the main Jewish textile factories, which is also owned by family, known as [Zilvishstein's fabric?], Silverstein's Factory. This is one of the top, I believe, six very large textile factories, which Lodz was famous. I think they were all Jewish-owned. They had a lot of Jewish workers. And he -- so the father, his name was Mordecai, educated man, bookkeeper, he and his wife perished in an influenza epidemic 1918. Over two million people died in Europe.

[X2296] 13:06:43 He was raised by sisters, a cousin. He was a -- had rudimentary formal education. He was apprenticed to a tailor as a 10-year-old. And this could not have been a great time. But he did become a very able craftsman. And I think in '39 when the Germans invaded, I think he'd been on his own for a little bit. You know, he's a young guy on his own, had a little apartment. I did see where that was. My mom kind of told me where it was. And also he was in his compulsory military service. He was getting basic training.

[X2296] 13:07:42 During the chaos of the first few days of the German invasion and occupation, he could walk away. He basically ditched the uniform, walked away. And it was not long -- I think they lived in Lodz, you know, before they basically -- didn't know what was in store here. And they'd already seen, you know, the, you know, the violence and like that.

I: What do you know about how your mother and father met and became married?

[X2296] 13:08:31 Wolf Krakowski: Okay. My mother and father are related, and with Jews, that's all right. It's allowed. So they knew each other. And so, yeah, they're --

I: Cousins.

[X2296] 13:08:46 Wolf Krakowski: Yep. Jews allow that.

I: It's very common actually.

[X2296] 13:08:50 Wolf Krakowski: Yeah. Yeah. Jews are -- a quick sidebar. But Paula and I both -- we did 23andMe, the genealogy. Paula is 99.1 percent Ashkenazi. I am 99.4. So very little intermarriage with Ashkenazi, you know, very little. And so anyways.

I: So they were -- they knew each other from a young age?

[X2296] 13:09:28 Wolf Krakowski: Yeah. They knew each other. I don't know how -- if they -- if they first laid eyes on each other after my mom came to Lodz, which is quite a possibility because there would've been, you know, you know, you find family first thing you do. And however that went. And yeah. So he -- they -- they planned to get the hell out of Dodge. And --

I: Do you know what year they met?

[X2296] 13:10:04 Wolf Krakowski: That's a good question.

I: Or what year they married?

[X2296] 13:10:08 Wolf Krakowski: They married I would say '40. They married on the road in Russia at that -- my mom's cousins, they had a little -- cousins had a little place there. The name was Zolzenstein [ph] that translates into Salt Peter. A branch of that family still around in Paris. I had some contact a little bit. And so I think one of that -- how that goes is like somebody a Zolzenstein married one of my father's sisters and kind of spins off from there and people end up in -- in Paris. So I would say yeah. They married then. They had -- you know, okay.

[X2296] 13:11:01 So they're on the run. They're refugees. They're in Russia illegally. And they're renting a room in the Zolzenstein. My father is taking in alterations. They're living. They make them a nice little wedding -- have a little wedding, my mom said. They made them a little wedding. And -- but one day on their way home, my -- somebody, my father or my mother, they determined that the place is being watched. So they did not return home, not to get their hosts in trouble.

[X2296] 13:11:47 They kept going with what they had with them. I think that's really tragic. They end up in some train station, exhausted. What little they had was robbed. And with that went any traces of my mom's former life, like the last of the family photos and anything. They were robbed and arrested and enslaved where they were -- that's -- and I brought you up to that part of the story.

[X2296] 13:12:27 And you know, tragedies, miracles, succession of miracles, incredible perseverance and survival in terms of deprivation, danger, hunger, stress, sickness, and, you know, insecurity, hopelessness, all these things that do a lot to demand of a -- of a person.

[X2296] 13:13:09 You know, you don't -- you know, for me it's like the family story, but you know, you can appreciate how intense it was and how miraculous the survival was. There are other family stories. In Russia, there was typhoid fever, typhus I guess, a lot of it going around. My father contracted it. Usually that was a death sentence.

[X2296] 13:13:54 So my mom finagled a horse. She rode this horse with my father, rode it hard to the nearest hospital. Got to the hospital, the horse dropped dead. She brought my mom into the hospital and said you basically brought us a corpse. This guy's a goner. She nursed him back to health. And he survived, you know, long enough, you know, to -- to join the army and everything to go from there.

[X2296] 13:14:33 Another great -- another thing is when my brother also at a certain point, as a wee kid, he, too, gets something that necessitates my mom -- no resources, not a -- not the equivalent of a penny. She needs to boogie for the hospital again with my brother. I don't know what order this happened in. But she ran for the hospital and it's the same thing. She brought my brother into the hospital. I forget what he had, too, if he had typhus or whooping cough or some -- some wretched affliction. And they said the same thing. This kid -- this kid is a goner.

[X2296] 13:15:24 Okay. So you got to picture this. Talk about an existential moment. My mom is in a strange city. She doesn't know anybody. She doesn't have a penny. She's got this -- what she saw as a dying kid in her arms. She knocks on the first door, and the lady invites her in, expels her own child from his bed and gives it to my brother.

[X2296] 13:16:03 In the next -- in the ensuing days, this -- this like a working class Russian person, she basically said, the kid, said, stick the kid outside in the sunshine. And he, too, recovered. He recovered. So you know, the, you know, the stress of all that, it -- it writes -- it -- well, from what I've learned, you know, it -- it wires itself into -- into, you know, the childhood development, you know.

I: Especially after losing --

[X2296] 13:16:55 Wolf Krakowski: Yeah. So there's a lot of -- just a lot of emotion and stress on -- just some great uncertainty about what happens next, you know. And I will say in all this, too, we -- after Sweden, I don't remember much. In short order, my brother -- my mother was getting a letter -- letters from one of her brothers that survived. Both her brothers survived. Her four sisters all perished and her parents in Treblinka. The brother writes that Sweden is okay. That -- he had gone onto Sweden.

I: But where was your family at this point?

[X2296] 13:17:54 Wolf Krakowski: Mine? In the refugee camp.

I: So he wrote --

[X2296] 13:17:58 Wolf Krakowski: From Sweden.

I: From Sweden to the refugee camp?

[X2296] 13:18:01 Wolf Krakowski: Yes. Yes. They're in touch. And the basic gist of it was that not like, you know, can you live here, like you're allowed to live here, as in you're not an illegal person here under the law and subject to, you know, genocide or arrest or whatever. So you could get to Sweden from there. You could get to Sweden and there was some kind of interim little refugee thing, and then, yeah, they housed you. Boy, when they house you, both in Sweden and in Canada, they -- they give you the bottom of the bottom of the housing situation.

[X2296] 13:18:53 I know things got better in terms of people coming to Toronto. And always a great -- what's the word here -- a consternation to my mom [inaudible] by the nineties and eighties, well, the -- the agencies had gotten much, you know, more resource-rich. And anyways, back it up a bit.

[X2296] 13:19:25 In Sweden, they housed us in a ramshackle country house with a bonafide kind of, you know, marginal -- like a marginal -- two Swedish marginal people. They were probably were on wel -- Swedish welfare. One alcohol -- one of them was an alcoholic, one-eyed ex-sailor and my first babysitter, Ardid [ph]. And the other one was a woman. We didn't see much. But she was a lunatic and she raged and raved from a second floor of this place.

[X2296] 13:20:00 Anyways, and it was just a really desultory, deprived situation. You know, my mom -- you know, like my mom would buy like a chicken, pluck it, you know, make pillows out of the feathers, you know, like living very hand to mouth, whatever. I know that she told me -- I don't recall this, but they -- they -- she had to work at a certain point. And at work they made refugees work. She scrubbed stairs she told me someplace.

[X2296] 13:20:41 My father got -- got work in his trade, alterations in -- in a tailor -- tailor establishment. So we were in this place. Then we kind of upgraded. We kind of moved to town, modest little apartment in a little multiunit place. But it was a little more, you know, middle -- lower middle class. I mean, it was clean and, you know, it wasn't not as funky and ramshackle. And we didn't have to share it with anybody.

[X2296] 13:21:22 So we lived there. And then I don't remember much. I was really young. My -- I did not even start school in Sweden.

I: So what year -- what city --

[X2296] 13:21:32 Wolf Krakowski: Eskilstuna.

I: And what year did you arrive?

[X2296] 13:21:35 Wolf Krakowski: Okay. So this is Eskilstuna from 1947 on to '54. Like I became -- we went up there when I was just a number of months old out of the refugee camp. And we left there shy of my seventh birthday when we sailed for Toronto.

I: Do you have any other memories about Sweden that are --

[X2296] 13:22:07 Wolf Krakowski: Very little. I could remember the common yard that we had and the kids. We -- we would make a real full-size igloo. We could make a mountain of snow, you know, carved it out, you know, light candles in there and stuff. It was very magical, really nice. I also remember first very close-up film experience. Some kid had probably then it was an 8 millimeter or 16 millimeter and he showed these little cartoon -- little cartoon things on a sheet. I thought this was the cat's ass. This was great, you know. I think he charged admission. But I thought this was great.

[X2296] 13:22:51 There was also -- my brother and I would go to a real cinema, which I loved. I can still smell this place. And, you know, that was kind of located in kind of like a secret place behind a certain place and it was a full-on theater with big -- you know, with -- you know, the velour seats and big velvet red curtains, you know, that parted. And we went there. You know, my brother, of course, you know, literally, you know, in charge of me. I was, you know, way little. But we saw *The Robe* there, CinemaScope, just dripping color.

[X2296] 13:23:41 And I, because of that wiring, I think it's in my birth, I -- I could not be restrained in some instances. My mom had her hands full. I once -- a couple of times -- I once was found in a park setting where there would be a pond. I was once found in like a Narcissus situation where I was having a conversation with a boy in the pond. And that freaked them out a little bit because I could have been, you know, wanted to get in that pond, you know. They got me.

[X2296] 13:24:24 Another time I, on my own, I bolted from somewhere. I got completely away from them, parents. I walked into a barbershop and I sat myself down in a chair, proceeded to get a haircut. It -- when it was all over, the barber realized I was unaccompanied. At that precise minute, my mother's brother saunters by, sees me. Of course, he knows me. I'm his nephew, a little shrimp. But there's no mother or father. Right? So he clears it up with the barber. But, you know, brings me home, and that was like, you know, panic. My mom, you know, was already in a panic.

[X2296] 13:25:19 So what happens there? They bought me a leash. They had this little decorative little leash. My mom walked me like a dog. Not happy about that. Not happy.

I can remember it. Little outings, I was on a leash. They made these things for kids. They made them for kids. So I was on the leash.

I: Now you see them everywhere.

[X2296] 13:25:43 Wolf Krakowski: Yeah. In Eskilstuna there was no Jewish life to speak of. On occasion, I [inaudible] even once. We went to Eskilstu -- to Stockholm I think. We went to Stockholm for some Jewish event. I can remember that. One of my mother's reasons for wanting to get out of Sweden was lack of Jewish community, which she felt that America or Canada would offer her. And so when our names came up for permission to go to Canada, that was a no-brainer at that point. And we proceeded to go there. I will say and make a musical connection to my mother, her life, music.

[X2296] 13:27:02 After my mom survived all that stuff she survived in -- she was in Sweden, she got in line once overnight to get Sinatra tickets. Is that something about something? He caught cold I think in Copenhagen or in Gothenburg or somewhere. Show cancelled. But my mom wanted to very much have that experience, you know. She's a music lover.

[X2296] 13:27:44 Through her singers -- she talked about guys, you know, people in the family, people who married her sisters and stuff like that. People -- there were singers. People like to sing here and there. You know, people like to sing. I will say somewhere early -- okay. There's a transition.

[X2296] 13:28:08 Okay. So in Sweden in Eskilstuna, we have a big wooden radio, you know, with the cloth speakers and a dial and a beautiful thing. It was a piece of furniture. My mom sold it when she left. She said she regretted it. It was a beautiful thing. But that's when I first heard the -- the pop songs of the early fifties, way early. And that morphed and that melded -- one of the first things we got I would say that we - - and I'll tell you more about this in more detail. But we had a radio right away. That was our -- that was our -- that was our entertainment, you know, in '54 straight through to '57.

[X2296] 13:28:57 We got TV in '57. I can -- I remember. I remember the set, the size of it and the whole bit and how all that came down. You know, how all that media impacted to me as, you know, this immigrant kid from a Holocaust family. I was a refugee with the -- you know, the language -- the language stuff, the Jew thing. All that stuff is getting a very good -- you know, I'm juggling it all. I'm juggling it all. And it's like creating an identity, you know, creating my identity in so many ways. Should I tell you about arriving in Canada?

I: I do want to get to that. Can we do maybe a couple more -- I want to do a couple more questions on Europe and your family. And then maybe we can take five and then we can talk about Canada.

[X2296] 13:30:02 Wolf Krakowski: Yeah. Good idea.

I: Mainly to -- I want to talk about your parents' parents and learn a little bit about them. And then the very -- you mentioned a famous address in -- was it the Warsaw --

[X2296] 13:30:18 Wolf Krakowski: Warsaw Gh- -- it became the headquarters of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. And it's the title of a very famous book by Leon Uris called *Mila 18*, which is a story, a fictional story of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, which is a huge success, and one of those -- one of these block -- blockbuster books that came out probably in the '60s, early '60s, late '50s, 60s, post-war, post-Holocaust, post- you know, Israel. There was a bunch of them. There was a few of them. *Exodus* was a big book I think by the same guy. *Exodus*, *Mila 18* -- there were others. Yeah. What do you want?

[X2296] 13:31:07 So my mother had a relative who was a tenant in this building I guess. I don't -- I can't say he owned it. He might have but tenant. She described -- he was a crotchety old Jew who chartered them on going over to the communists. And she -- she could remember dialogue. You know, we -- we're good at that in my family. We remember dialogue. And she would -- she'd like, you know, replicate -- I see the communist and, you know, like I went to the communists, you know. And she also said he gave her like a small amount of money. He thought he was going to do okay with the Germans. They killed his ass and his family.

[X2296] 13:32:06 And she described this apartment where they crashed, basement apartment. She said water -- water dripped down the walls. And the tenants there were -- they had one child or two children, but that was deformed, you know, just like deformed, you know, some poor, poor -- literally, you know -- You know, if you were poor, you know, there's no treatment. Your family like hid you away. There's not a lot of social programs. You know, and Wednesday is your bowling group and, you know, Thursday is your ceramics group.

[X2296] 13:32:57 Life was so much different. People were -- people were happy to eat. People were happy to eat and have something special on a holiday, you know. So that's what I know about that, *Mila* -- *Mila* freaking 18. You know, my mom crashed. My mom -- my mother and father crashed there.

I: This became an important address in the Ghetto Uprising?

[X2296] 13:33:21 Wolf Krakowski: Yes. It became the headquarters. I don't know how or why exactly that was. But that is a very famous address, and it would have been the last -- if you know the story of the -- of the uprising, well, the Germans at the end, they say they were known as sappers. Those are the guys that just blow your shit up. They just drop the building. And one by one, they decimated the Warsaw Ghetto. That would

have been the last place to go where the last Jewish fighters would have been hold up and made their escape, the ones that could, into the sewers.

[X2296] 13:34:03 And that was the end of that. And one day, you know, like I think Hitler got the telegram the Warsaw Ghetto is no more. And that's -- that's it. You know, they erased the place. They dropped, you know. You know, whole countries fell to the Germans in a matter of days. Right? A bunch of ragtag Jews with a bunch of army surplus guns, they held off the Germans for over two weeks. So something to be said about that, you know.

I: What do you know about your grandparents? Can you tell us their names, where they were from?

[X2296] 13:34:49 Wolf Krakowski: So my mother's father was Wolf, Wolf Russak. And -- and her mother was Shandla Ruda Horjevski [ph], which is a very Polish name. The Russak part, as you could surmise, the R-u-s-s part means Russian. So my father was a -- grandfather was a textile merchant, a rel -- a follower of the religious dynasty the Zuricha [ph] [rabbi?] and my grandmother there would have been just a traditional Jewish wife and mother. So she had like seven kids to deal with. I know one -- there was an eighth. Another one died. And yeah. They -- you know, they ran the household. You know, running a traditional Jewish household is a lot of work.

[X2296] 13:36:00 And so I didn't know -- you know -- she did have -- they had traditional healing skills. Like they were herbalists, you know. And -- and people had these skills, which puts me in mind these incredible stories. There would be a guy in the community -- this is not his paid work, but he's a [inaudible]. He's an herbalist. He has -- he has the [lure?]. He's a witch. He knows healing -- he knows -- he knows the [law of?] herbs, medicinal herbs. So well, you know, stuff happens. And there are a lot of folk cures. People -- you know, before the, you know, the family doctor and the pharmacy, you know, medicinal herbs. Right? So I'll tell you one great story and we'll close on it.

[X2296] 13:37:04 Okay. So one of my mother's sisters -- it was common -- she had a tapeworm. Tapeworm eats all your food, starves you. Now who would have thunk of this? Take that little girl. You lay her on her stomach. You spread some jam between her ass cheeks and be damned if that tapeworm doesn't stick its head out to get at the jam. You grab that tapeworm. You save that girl's life. Amazing?

I: Wow.

[X2296] 13:37:51 Wolf Krakowski: Isn't it amazing? And like that. And they also used very regularly what they -- we call cupping. You can call bunks. You basically heat these little cups and you create a vapor and the heat draws out -- you put them on your chest and on your back and stuff. And they still use today cupping. And it's an age-old cure for,

you know, cold-type illnesses because it draws out, you know, the phlegm and whatnot and it steams, just steam cleans from the outside, so. That's my story on the tapeworm.

I: How about your father's parents?

[X2296] 13:38:43 Wolf Krakowski: Father -- not much is known. The father -- the grandfather Mordecai, educated. He was a -- he had a good job, which would have been, you know, in a managerial class, a bookkeeper and like that. So he, I guess, died in an influenza -- influenza epidemic. So what happens? The factory passes onto I guess it would have been Mordecai's sister and her son.

[X2296] 13:39:29 And they run it under German occupation until -- well, actually not -- they run it up until German occupation, until the Germans -- they steal all the machinery, which is what they did a lot of. They'd steal the machinery, ship it back to Germany. This is a nice factory. I saw it. It was big like a high school. And they had different machinery in it now. It'd become a state factory, rug company, which closed after the fall of communism because it was a state company.

[X2296] 13:40:09 But yeah. What were we talking about? Oh, yeah. My father's family. So they -- yeah. They -- here's the thing. They -- they -- they ran it. The Germans eventually made quick work, you know, of them. And here's an interesting aside. But the -- the -- over the years, the German -- the Poles had been wanting Jews to reclaim this property. So my family and I, we've made attempts a number of times. We are the legal heirs to what is an incredible, substantial piece of property. However, they don't cooperate. What they really want you is to come back and start paying the back taxes and do this, that and other. Anyways, they're not -- it's -- they're disingenuous. And I -- you know, I've shown and proven like that.

[X2296] 13:41:27 Anyways, so the factory is one thing. But, however, the guy who owned this factory -- that would have been my father's uncle -- no wait. It would have been his uncle or the cousin, the Zilvishstein [ph] fellow. So he had a house as befits a magnet of the times, too. Right? So here's what happened after the war. The Poles in looting Jewish property -- okay. A factory is kind of hard to hide. But a residence, you muddy the waters. How do you muddy the waters? Through the deeds and the documentation. To hide this house, some high level bureaucrat -- it could've been like a big chief of police or, you know, one of these guys way up there. You muddy the waters. You change the name of the street. The house now is like lost, you know, to history.

[X2296] 13:42:35 And my mom, God bless her, you know, she kept up with all this stuff. She had that name of that street for me. And I was able to give, you know, to pass this information on and stuff. But they're not sincere. They're not going to give you these properties. And my mother said she had an auntie that was French-speaking, which would've meant education and some social status.

[X2296] 13:43:17 First of all, for a Jew to get a university education, you had to send them out of the country to start with because it was what they call a [non-classis?] thing. I think a Jew could go to university in Poland. So they ended up going to France. If you were rich and you were -- I mean, a very small -- a real elite, a real tiny elite, you know, you'd get educated out of the country.

[X2296] 13:43:48 What can I say? In Sweden, my mother -- my mother had -- she needed an operation after some of the stuff she'd went through. She had this operation, and then coming out, she was not -- she -- her recuperation was not going -- it was in the abdominal area. Her -- her recuperation was not going well. She was experiencing a lot of pain. And she was just freaking out about it. She got the doctors to go back in there. They opened her up and some doctor had left a bandage in there, which would have killed her eventually.

[X2296] 13:44:38 While she was in there for the second time, I remember this vaguely. I do not know the timeframe. I think my father kept working and took care of my brother, and my sister and I ended up under some kind of state system, like kind of a quasi-orphanage situation. I don't know how long that was for. But it did happen. I remember being there with my sister. Let's take a break.

I: Okay. Do you want to un-mic, Wolf?

X2296

C: All right. Ready to roll. RU is rolling. And one, camera two is rolling, camera one is rolling. We're ready.

[X2296] 14:08:47 Wolf Krakowski: Just to recall a couple of these Russian vignettes. The first concerns -- my father had a job on the culhaz [ph], the work -- the work camp -- collective work camp as a shepherd. He had no experience as a shepherd. There were problems with the sheep. I guess some sheep died. And it -- it was a very serious charge under, you know, those conditions and at that time.

[X2296] 14:09:41 I don't know quite how that worked out, but similar to that where they had to deal with the justice system, local justice system, my father on his way home from work, he pi -- he stopped to pick up grain by grain that had -- of wheat that had fallen off a wagon and put -- and he put these grains one by one in a sock that he would take home and I guess to be cooked on some level.

[X2296] 14:10:26 Well, this -- on the collective farm, this was -- this was theft. This was theft. And believe it or not, it merited a death penalty. And this is, you know, what they had to contend with and deal with. So it came time -- it came time for the -- the court and trial and all that. And my mom just pleaded for his life. And he was released. The

thing of it is later, the judge came around hoping for, maybe expecting, but more hoping for sexual favors.

[X2296] 14:11:23 And my mom said -- she gave him a vigorous handshake. She gave him a very, very, very vigorous handshake because they're not -- they're not going to take it any further than that. Rape is a very serious crime in Russia. And so that -- but this is stuff they had to deal with and, you know, the stress of it, you know, those hours, that day, you know. Oh, man.

[X2296] 14:11:58 Then I'll say another thing, too, illustrate how busted down and impoverished they are during all this. They're definitely starving. There's definitely not enough food. On top of it, my mom is reduced -- she's reduced to making a dress for herself out of rolls of bandages. If you think about it, pretty creative. But that's what you had. That's what you had. That's what you had to work with. Okay. So --

I: Your mom saved a lot of lives.

[X2296] 14:12:47 Wolf Krakowski: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah.

I: Including her own by --

[X2296] 14:12:56 Wolf Krakowski: Fierce; a tigress when it came down to it, a tigress. When she needed to spring into action, I think -- you know, there's this [adodistic?], you know, ferocity kicks in. And, you know, I'm glad she had it.

I: Yeah.

[X2296] 14:13:22 Wolf Krakowski: Definitely did.

I: So do you want to walk us through how you wind up in Toronto?

[X2296] 14:13:30 Wolf Krakowski: So one day we kind of -- we know we're coming to Canada. I can remember my father sewing -- sewing dollars -- dollar bills into a lining of a coat. [I can see that?]. And we -- we cross on a -- on an ocean liner. I learned to swim on this ocean liner. They have a pool. I learned to swim with a similar leash. The -- they tossed me in the water with that leash, but what ultimately convinced me to even get in, the captain or one of the -- the higher officers on the boat, he put a coin in my hand, a Kroner, which to a kid, like a silver dollar, that thing was big. And he got me -- he got -- he taught me how to swim in the water. So that was on the boat over.

[X2296] 14:14:30 We land in Halifax. I don't know what happened in Halifax, but I don't think we spent the night there. I think we got on a, you know, we got on a -- we were processed. We got on a train. We came to Toronto, Union Station. From Union Station,

again, I don't know. I think we were on our own the whole time. We ended up in what is essentially almost a skid row hotel. How we knew how to go there, I don't know.

[X2296] 14:14:55 Later this place was demolished. It was like an old kind of first generation Toronto hotel. There was an actual tavern downstairs, some rooms upstairs. How we ended up there, I'm not really sure.

I: Do you remember the year?

[X2296] 14:15:10 Wolf Krakowski: 1954, May. I definitely know how -- it was the first place we stayed in Canada. Now, then it gets interesting. So then you're in the hands of the -- the Jewish charities. And okay. So the general attitude was that these Holocaust survivors refugees are a big pain in the ass and nobody wanted to have much to do with them or do things for them, especially anything that would have cost. And in this way, our family fell through the cracks and were in certain ways neglected and abused. I'll tell you why.

[X2296] 14:16:03 It would've been normal for the Jewish agencies involved, they would've taken that immigrant family and plunk them down in an apartment in a Jewish community of which there was still one going strong, an original downtown based Jewish community in Toronto with what would've been Jewish families, Jewish businesses, Jewish entertainment, everything. They didn't do this.

[X2296] 14:16:31 They plunked us down a long streetcar ride away where the Jewish community was already defunct. It already had petered out before World War II. And now we're like 1957 or '54, '55 up to '57. And what's going on here is this. And this is difficult and it's an indictment on -- on the system and on people. But somewhere in there, a guy who owned the flat that we moved into and the business underneath it, which was called West Toronto Wall -- Paint and Wallpaper. So he made some kind of deal and arrangement, I'll say bribe, with the Jewish agency to get that refugee family in his flat to locate them there. It made no sense to do that.

[X2296] 14:17:25 Why did he do that? What was his self-interest? He had an aging and decrepit mother, and the guy was too cheap to put her in a home. She was, you know, basically -- you know, she was senile, bedridden. He got this poor refugee family that didn't know their ass from their elbow in the new world, and he got them into that apartment.

[X2296] 14:17:54 Okay. In this apartment on top of the paint store, one big room facing the street with the Benjamin Moore sign flashing all day and all night and the streetcars running in front of it, three children each in a corner of that room. Then there was a place that they used as an office for the business. Then there was a room that the same old Jewish guy, he gave as a home to a bag lady -- who's essentially a bag lady. This kind of funky woman did not look or smell too great. She lived there. Then there was Joe's --

Joe Fon's [ph] mother. Then there was a room where my mother and father slept. And then there was a kitchen.

[X2296] 14:18:40 And they -- this was the best they could do for this already battered family. And it -- it really -- it was not kosher. It should not -- it should not have happened. There were plenty of flats in the proper -- you know, so vibrant core that they could've stuck us in where we would've had peers. As it was, it's like you're talking about a whole public school maybe like three or four Jewish kids.

[X2296] 14:19:13 This is -- this impacts on your own view of yourself, your own narrative, your own self-esteem and all that stuff. However, so this place is -- this place is the west end of Toronto known as The Junction. Why? Because the train yards are there. And the train yards feed the slaughter houses. And it's a really funky old part of town. And on the main street are the stores and the immigrants live above the stores and poor -- poor Anglos, you know, poor -- and on the side streets are very nice tree-lined streets, single-family homes, you know, lawns, two or three stories. And that's where the established homeowners for the most part, you know, the early arrivals, the Anglo-Scots-Irish, you know, and that, like that.

[X2296] 14:20:12 And immigrants peppered the whole place. Everybody I knew pretty much had one name at school and one at home, which would be like their real name and their, you know, their immigrant name. They would change your name for you at school. That was the style. That was the style, you know, like you can't call him that. Kids will laugh at him. And that was the freaking style. You know, this cultural imperialism just imposed. And something as sensitive as a name, they would just lay it -- they would give it to you and change it for you.

[X2296] 14:20:42 So -- so that was the environment, rough, working class, cacophonous, violent.

I: What languages did you speak?

[X2296] 14:20:59 Wolf Krakowski: So my Yiddish never left. That was the language I communicated with my mother and father. Swedish, however, was displaced in short order by English playing with the other kids in the back lane. Toronto has lanes, laneways that at the time when you're a kid, they're like, you know, the whole world. But when I went back there as an adult, of course, the scale was so amazingly small.

[X2296] 14:21:27 It's unbelievable, you know, the places we lived in and the size of our yards and the width of the laneway and stuff like that. But I learned English in the back - - in the laneway with the other kids, you know, yelling and clamoring and doing kid stuff. And the first English I learned were shut up and shit. And I learned English pretty quick. We came in May. By the time I went to school in September, I was speaking English.

[X2296] 14:21:55 And so it all happened pretty quick. You know, my environments, you know, changing environments, you know, language, nomenclature, culture, all happening pretty -- pretty quick.

I: How long did you live in the west end?

[X2296] 14:22:14 **Wolf Krakowski:** Yeah. So we stayed in the west end a good five years until my mom got us out of there. My brother already started to get in trouble. He's like a, you know, a fifties black and white, you know, B movie. He's like a juvenile delinquent and he had to go to court. He got involved with some bad kids. They almost burnt down a major park like a Central Park of Toronto.

[X2296] 14:22:42 They almost burnt the thing down. My brother was among them. Oh, yeah. My mother had to go to court. He had to do restitution. And he got -- and he was locked up for a couple of days. He saw what that looked like with the really bad kids, disturbed people. So he, you know, he learned his lesson, let's say. But that envir -- not a great environment. And decidedly, you know, really working class, Gentile. And --

[X2296] 14:23:09 You know, but it had its -- it had its working class soul. And in the end, you know, a lot of interesting, you know, things because it's -- yeah. What I really like is that it established me in the new world as a downtown kid more or less. It was mostly depositing me in, you know, some [antiseptic?], you know, bourgeois suburb. You know, so that part suited me well.

[X2296] 14:23:42 And, as I was saying, I had this -- my day, if I went to school, I would come home. Then I would get on a streetcar and ride a very long ride, and I would be in charge of these two other Jewish kids whose parents owned a candy store, Harold and Albert, twins. I'd be in charge of them, and we would ride to our Cheder, our parochial Jewish school after school, which was really too far away to be sustainable. But we did it. And my mom said -- you know, later she said I can't believe -- this is my mom.

[X2296] 14:24:21 She survived, you know, Hitler and Stalin. She did not know until she came to Toronto and started reading the daily paper that there was such a thing as a child molester, you know, or a sex criminal. She didn't know such a thing existed. And she figured it out. She'd read about it, you know, in the Toronto Daily Star. And she said I sent you to ride that streetcar alone twice a day five days a week. Six days a week I think I did it.

[X2296] 14:24:45 Anyways, that was my -- my routine. It was not good. It was not good. Why? Because you're in school too much. You're on your ass too much. And you don't run around enough. You don't get -- you don't do sports enough. You don't give social skills enough. And yeah. Just understimulated and like that. So --

[X2296] 14:25:20 But that -- but what's interesting about it was that in order to get to my Cheder there, I went through a lot of Toronto, a lot of the west end into -- then you get the central and then you get like the serious downtown, you know, the commercial heart. This would be like where let's say when I was a teenager, like Ronnie Hawkins and the Hawks would play at the bar there.

[X2296] 14:25:51 And Toronto is -- you don't know it at the time, but it's a hub of entertainment. And Canada is like two big cities. It's a magnet, you know, for the traffic of good times, you know, the bars, restaurants and the entertainment. So I grew up with a sense of -- of that. I was too young for the most part to partake directly, but I would surreptitiously partake in some of this stuff.

[X2296] 14:26:32 And there were odd opportunities. As a very young child, I could see Louis Armstrong as close as I'm stand -- you know, sitting to you for free in the daytime with security for the whole concert was probably two rent-a-cops, you know, or two Toronto local police, you know, and playing through a gaggle of kids and a bunch of freebies, you know, the great Louis Armstrong.

I: This was in a theater or --

[X2296] 14:27:04 Wolf Krakowski: Yeah. A band shell, a band shell in a park. Stuff like that, you know, I could see in Toronto. So yeah. Because my mom always responded positively to music and movies. I kind of picked up on that. And I started to, of course, like it, too. But I saw that, you know, she found joy in it and I learned to find it, too. It was very, you know, pretty easy and, you know, movies and music, you know, became an attraction. It wasn't -- so I was too young for the bars even though I could get some of the --

I: You found your way in sometimes?

[X2296] 14:27:48 Wolf Krakowski: Huh?

I: You found your way in sometimes?

[X2296] 14:27:50 Wolf Krakowski: Well --

I: While we're paused, your jacket is --

[X2296] 14:27:53 Wolf Krakowski: I found out that, you know, you have to be -- you have to be mindful because the element of risk. But if your timing is good, you walk in backwards, the guys often they're busy enough they think you're coming out. By the time they catch on, they realize, it's like, kid, get the hell out of here. You know, you're not supposed to be -- you know, you're in an adult zone, you know.

[X2296] 14:28:19 And a lot of great blues and jazz guys used to come to Toronto, um, the Legends, first generation people. And I'll tell you, it'd be hard to resist. Like Jimmy Reed would play like your local bar, you know, people like that and, you know, jazz guys and later -- I come into -- like by the time I get to be a big enough kid and start to move around enough, I'm in the coffee house era, which is the leftie, liberal, commie, folkie, era, which flowers on a parser, contemporaneously with Greenwich Village and, you know, San Francisco --

[X2296] 14:29:11 Okay. So me and my friends, we're young teenagers in Toronto. We don't know much of what's going on anywhere else. We think this is our time in our life. Things are pretty interesting. You know, there were coffee houses, The Village Corner, The Purple Onion, The Minobird [ph], The Fifth Peg, Penny Farthling [ph], these -- So for the price of a sticky lemonade, The Riverboat, the price of a sticky lemonade, hey, man, you could see Neil Young or Joni Mitchell on the way out. You know, it's pretty cool.

[X2296] 14:29:57 To, you know, contemporaneous with this stuff that was happening. It was on a revolution in music, you know. It was happening all over. A lot of happening -- a lot of musical people and places to see them. Yeah. And so I --

I: Can I interrupt you for one minute? Your jacket on the right side is just kind of creeping up on your right, just sort of poking up into your head a little bit there. Thanks. So you were talking about seeing all these great acts.

[X2296] 14:30:33 **Wolf Krakowski:** Well, the scene -- I started to find commonality. There was something in the authenticity. You know, of course, this was a marketed authenticity. It was being marketed to millions of people. You could, you know, dissect it years later, you know, but somewhere a bunch of people decided, you know, that this folk music thing is going to be the thing. They're going to sell that to, you know, America's teenagers for the next, you know, 10 years. And that's true. But, you know, things also just happened, you know, you know, on their own.

[X2296] 14:31:03 But so in all that, so you got -- okay. So now you got to take into account my age. So in 1965 I'm 17. I'm going on 18. So in '65 that year -- so the Beatles have hit. Bob Dylan has hit. The culture is changing. Long hair becomes a very serious thing. Fashion becomes pretty serious. And, you know, political lines are being drawn in so many ways.

[X2296] 14:31:48 Who are you? Who do you want to be? What side of things do you line up with? What -- you know, what do you stand for? You know, what do you stand for? So all this masked around those early movements, Ban the Bomb. I think my first demonstration was 1963 Ban the Bomb. I think my second demonstration was 1965 Selma, March on Selma. We stayed overnight across from the American embassy on University Avenue.

[X2296] 14:32:27 Now, the thing is in the telling, you lose so much of the burgeoning community and radicalism, those -- that emerged in a very, very conforming era. Yeah? And if I felt myself, you know, on the radical side of these things.

I: The demonstration was in Toronto?

[X2296] 14:32:55 Wolf Krakowski: Yes.

I: In solidarity with what was happening.

[X2296] 14:33:00 Wolf Krakowski: Yes. Yes. I was still in high school. I remember. Yeah. But the thing is, you know, it brought out -- things like this, they brought out the community. You know, you saw who -- other radical, you know, people were later, you know, to be, you know, people a lot of times are freaks, you know, the people, just the nonconformists, you know, for good and bad, for good and bad. And so that was a hell of a year to be the age I was and a hell of a year to get totally caught up in it. You know, for me, my emotions to get royally hijacked by living in interesting times.

[X2296] 14:33:53 I made a fateful decision in 1965. I was not a happy camper in my life, in my home. Ah. Uh. I have to interject I would guess. I have to interject. I have to interject. To describe -- so we were still in my early days as an immigrant. We were talking about immigrant, the environment there.

I: Still on the west end?

[X2296] 14:34:26 Wolf Krakowski: Yeah. My mom -- my mom got us a residency as the first tenants in a brand new government housing project, which was for us a step up. Things were clean. It was our own apartment. Just like back in Sweden, I had my own place again. Everything was new, you know, urethaned, shiny. And things were built in like pentagons. They're like these long row of houses built in one, two, like a pentagon.

[X2296] 14:35:11 And there were clusters of them. And then the wisdom -- in Toronto, the wisdom of the town planners, they built these places between a kind of prosperous area and a kind of prosperous area where there was space. They carved this place out of fields and stuff. So they put in these row houses where, man, it was beautiful. We had two floors, clean. And --

I: It was a separate home?

[X2296] 14:35:42 Wolf Krakowski: Yes. Attached to a row, but our unit, two stories, was ours. Next to us is another one. There was about four or five of them in a -- in a row. And the thing of it was, it's what Gentile folks would call a bad element. You have a lot of your working class and lump in proletariat and welfare people and everything that

might go with that. And bad crowd. We did not -- we only stayed there most of -- it was one -- one school grade, seventh grade.

[X2296] 14:36:26 Then my mom scraped together a down payment and then we moved -- and Toronto the trajectory of the social movement, Jews, they moved north, downtown with prosperity and homeownership north to where now it's way north and gated communities with large, large homes defines a certain part of the Jewish community. Never mine.

[X2296] 14:36:53 But anyways, so a solid little five-room brick bungalow with a very large backyard. They kept the yards. These were built. They were marketed to returning soldiers after the war. So that was back in the day when they still -- they built a house, it still had some dignity and some soul. It was solid. It was brick. It was not bad. \$12,500 my parents paid for this in 1960. For another \$1500 we could've gotten the same house -- and they're all the same up and down many streets with a slight modification. For another \$1500 we could've got one with a finished basement. Fucking knotty pine, oh, was that ever beautiful. We didn't get that. That \$1500 made all the difference.

[X2296] 14:37:52 All right. So I'm going to junior high there and high school, and I'm deposited now in a -- the lower end of a really like bourgeois neighborhood where more successful people have built -- have built in their own communities nearby and the more regular people are still there from before the war, you know, and it's kind of a mix. And my family is in there, lower middle class, you know, guys like my father, tailors.

I: I was going to ask what your parents were doing for money.

[X2296] 14:38:28 Wolf Krakowski: My father was a tailor and a cutter. And he worked in factories. And he moonlighted as doing alterations for cleaning stores. Now, the big social -- how do we call it -- advancement, for a lot of Jewish families, tailors -- you know, a lot of Jews are tailors. A certain amount of Jews are tailors. So how did Jewish tailors advance themselves in the new world? They buy a little cleaning store, do the dry cleaning and make a buck on the alterations.

[X2296] 14:39:03 So after -- and that's what, you know, a lot of my families' peers and community did. People who survived the Holocaust, survived Russia, this sort of thing, this was one of the things they did. And so once they open up a cleaning store, boom, boom, boom. Okay. So by the time it kind of came, a couple of things started to factor in. A couple of things -- well, my father kind of would've been almost ready to do that. Oh, so iffy. It was so risky because, one, if you left the factory, they wouldn't give you your job back. And two was at that time, this thing called One Hour Martinizing was hitting town, which is drop off your dry cleaning, get it back in an hour. Well that was, you know, a technology. You can't beat that.

[X2296] 14:39:52 So my father never went that independent route. It was too risky both -- you know, our circumstances and his personality, you know. So he never -- so he worked as a tailor and a cutter for large people who made suits, nice suits but for like, you know, mass market. And so that's what he did. My mom in the first years, mom had no marketable skills. She cleaned houses and she babysat. At a certain point, a year, year, can't say, sixties, they put in Canada's first mega mall kind of near our house called Yorkdale. And it was like a city unto itself and there were job opportunities. My mom got a job. And she was never happier. She was like peeling off her own cash, you know, at the end of the week and, you know, this was a first for her, you know. So that was really good.

[X2296] 14:40:57 And we lived there. However, I'm not -- the culture, the neighborhood, you know, I'll say the infec -- the infection, you know, the American -- North American infection of being rich, becoming rich, that's what everybody was fucking concerned about. You know, it seeped into everything. And so one of the things a working class kid could do in Toronto in the summer to earn some money where he otherwise might not -- there's an annual fair comes to Toronto called the Canadian National Exhibition. It's like one of the biggest annual fairs in the world. There's work to be gotten there for teenagers. And I had a -- I had gotten myself little jobs there over the years, and this one year, I had gotten a job.

[X2296] 14:42:17 The guy's name will live on forever. I'd gotten a job selling balloons for Half Beat Harold. Half Beat Harold was a local businessman. He was like a Jewish gangster, thug, entrepreneur. And I remember him because he had a record store where he sold cutouts. So I knew him from the records and he also had this sideline [at the X?]. He sold balloons. So I was selling balloons. I believe like two bucks a pop or something in 1965. People aren't buying balloons.

[X2296] 14:42:47 I quit. I quit Half Beat Harold. I marched down to the midway. I kind of see there's an office behind the bumper cars. And I see a guy with a -- with a monkey suit, grease stains, sweating I think. Can I work here? And today, of course, there'd be no -- there'd be no way. They'd want documentation, you know, and child welfare and on and on. He shows me -- all he asked me was a social security number and shows me where to punch the clock. And he says you work on the bumper cars. Bumper cars were fantastic. I ran around all day hopping on bumper cars and straightening them out.

I: Want to get a drink? I can get it for you.

[X2296] 14:43:42 Wolf Krakowski: Thanks.

I: Yeah.

[X2296] 14:43:57 Wolf Krakowski: And, you know, digging all the loose change I can out of the -- out of the seats, and it's fabulous. And well, then I decided to do what most

people say was a real bonehead move. But for me it worked. At the end of the Canadian National Exhibition run, sort of coincides with Labor Day and going back to school, I decided I'm not going back to school. I'm going to stay with the carnival and travel with them.

I: What year was this?

[X2296] 14:44:25 Wolf Krakowski: '65. And I agree to meet the carnival in the next town over, London, Ontario. I arranged to do this with a couple other guys. I think it was a brother and a cousin -- a brother and a cousin -- a guy and his cousin. And they're also going to go down earn some money with the carnival in London, Ontario. They were trying to save money. They were working class guys. I was at their home with their mom and everything. And they were trying to save money to open up a diaper service. And we all went there. So --

I: So London, Ontario?

[X2296] 14:45:15 Wolf Krakowski: London, Ontario. And it was my fortune and fate, I end up essentially rooming, sharing close quarters in a skid row hotel with a person, a sideshow freak named Schlitzie who was billed as the missing link. Schlitzie is a sideshow show business legend. He worked for everybody from, you know, P.T. Barnum, you know, to Hollywood movies and he was on -- his story is -- is tragic and fascinating, but he's -- but this is the kind of life I opened myself up to, and it's fabulous.

I: So he was the circus freak essentially?

[X2296] 14:46:08 Wolf Krakowski: No. He was one of many. And he came -- he was a -- he was under the guardianship of a fellow named Frenchy at the time who we quite haven't figured out who he is. But basically Frenchy owned the rights to display Schlitzie. You're wondering how can such a thing go on, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. It's a wonder. I'm thinking that over the years, authorities were paid off and bribed.

[X2296] 14:46:39 But a ban on this sort of thing became outright not long after '66, '67. It wasn't long before the displaying of people with deformities was outlawed in Canada and in the United States. It might have taken a little time municipality by municipality. But it's a double-edged sword for these people because, yeah, thanks a lot. There goes my -- there goes my livelihood.

[X2296] 14:47:10 You know, but -- so it turns out later, years later -- okay. Well, I'll have a -- so Schlitzie -- okay. Schlitzie needed guidance. He was a -- he was a child, microcephalic, pinhead. And he, you know, he needed care. He was incontinent. He was hooked up to this little bladder device. And he virtually almost -- he could get a little food into his own mouth, but Frenchy would, you know, would feed him and keep it moving.

[X2296] 14:48:01 And so it turns out he's -- years later, I see a film when I'm a McGill student at this point, I see a film and Schlitzie is in the film. The film is Freaks, a very famous film by director Todd Browning that is a plot and uses a lot of real freaks, a lot of real freaks who all got together in Hollywood. And, you know, the making of the film is legendary. The film is legendary. And anyways, Schlitzie is this very loveable pinhead, Schlitzie. He has brothers and sisters. They are also displayed on, you know, as a group in --

[X2296] 14:48:55 So I found out later, so he -- you can Google all this stuff now. Second to only the Elephant Man, Schlitzie is the most famous freak in world history. And Elephant Man is pretty famous -- pretty famous. So Schlitzie really got around and he kept at it for a long time until, oh, the guy who owned the papers on him died and his ownership passed onto a daughter. The daughter didn't want to care for him. You know, you're dealing with a human being here. He's a human being totally dependent. And so she puts him back in an institution.

[X2296] 14:49:41 And somewhere down here, too, is -- I don't want to say -- it's not for me to say. I'm not sure of every detail, but I think people who were paid to take care of him basically betrayed him for money, you know. At the same time, did he benefit from any of this money? Well, you know, he ate. He had a place to sleep. He was not compos mentis. He couldn't, you know, make any decisions or anything.

I: What was your relationship like with him?

[X2296] 14:50:21 Wolf Krakowski: Okay. So this is -- this is where it's kind of interesting. So I -- me and Frenchy were -- and, you know, the other guys, we were like, you know, neurotypicals. Other people were like freaks, real freaks, and, you know, they kind of stuck -- hung by themselves behind their closed doors and for the most part. You know, I chatted with people. But so we hung. And one of the things, there's a lot of alcoholism. And one of the things Frenchy in the morning, because Ontario liquor is sold through government stores. So you got to get there before it closes.

[X2296] 14:51:04 So in the morning, we'd pick up a bottle of booze for Frenchy. I wasn't a drinker. But we'd pick up a bottle of booze. And before we went to the fairgrounds -- Frenchy had his own car. And I'd ride in the back with Schlitzie. And one day out of the blue, so Frenchy, he was, among other things on his resume, he was a lion tamer and he was a sword swallower. So he decide -- so we roll past a -- we roll by a pawn shop. He parks in front of it. There's knives and swords in the window. He goes and says I want to practice. Follow me in.

[X2296] 14:51:53 So I get Schlitzie together. We walk in. So this is a side -- you can only imagine. Frenchy is a few steps ahead of me. He's gone in. He's gotten himself a sword about that long. He's cleaning it. He's cleaned it with a cleaning solution. And the minute

I walk in with Schlitzie, he is swallowing that sword and I'm walking in with this little monkey person. And me -- me a child of my times, I have really nice, long hair. [laughter] So these women, two old women at the -- managing the business, they went white. They went white. And but Frenchy did his thing. You know, he swallowed that sword, you know, a couple times. And we went back to the car and went to work.

[X2296] 14:52:50 The memorable thing about my experience with Schlitzie is he was a child. You know, he was torn from his mother. Okay. The mother -- it's a Jewish family in the Bronx 1900-something, way back. Somebody comes along and the mother is not having a good time dealing with this microcephalic child who's all needy all the time. Somebody comes along, offers the family \$75 a month for Schlitzie. Schlitzie disappears from human history, emerges as a teenager on display at Coney Island. And therein begins Schlitzie's life as a carnival exhibit and a sideshow exhibit. So torn from his mother, he's living with these people who essentially own him like a show horse or a show animal. He's certainly not getting any remedial instruction. So he was emotionally -- he was in a zone all his own.

[X2296] 14:54:14 One night -- so we had this kind of common room, like a living room off this crappy hotel. Schlitzie kind of proceeds to crawl into my lap. This is a man in his fifties now. And, you know, microcephalic, a little coconut-shaped head, he's not everyone's cup of tea. He's in my lap. They got his head shaved to a point where just a ponytail is growing out in a point. That's, you know, for show business.

[X2296] 14:54:53 He crawls into my lap and he's looking for love. He is craving affection. He found an opening. He found an opening. He proceeds to take it. Well, he -- he starts - - he starts to moan with this combination of you name it, just emotion, you know, just emotion that he sorely -- you know, I was his mother. I was -- I just became his mom. So we're a couple of minutes like this. He's basically in my lap. And there is something happening on a spiritual level, which I would call -- would call the act of compassion, which is a feedback loop. Frenchy comes in and says I see what you're doing and, you know, you're a cool guy, but you have to stop it because he will never let you go. So I did as I was told. You know, it was not my place to, you know, countermand that in any way.

[X2296] 14:56:10 So this little scene is -- I told you about Bill Griffith and the cartoon -- he's doing a whole graphic book on this. And I told -- I kind of told him this and I elaborated and I gave him some ideas. And he said I'm going to use it. And so it's a real mindblower to see -- watch this, you know, kind of come together like this. It was transformational.

I: How so?

[X2296] 14:56:48 Wolf Krakowski: It was transformational. Huh?

I: How so?

[X2296] 14:56:50 Wolf Krakowski: Act of compassion. It transforms -- it transforms not to only the receiver but the giver. It's a feedback loop, you know, essentially. I'm not -- it's not like, you know, you got this great thing done to you or I did this great thing. No. It's like a feedback loop. And it's transformational spiritually. I think I always retained something of it, you know. Most people he would not be a very appetizing guy to have in your arms. I'll say that, you know. And yeah. So that was just like a day in the life.

I: How long were you with the carnival?

[X2296] 14:57:36 Wolf Krakowski: Yeah. So London -- London is like a 10-day run or something. And then they pack it up and then they go point south, and that would've been a little more kind of problematic in terms of work permits, visa and stuff like that. But the whole thing is, you know, [inaudible]. It's all shady, you know, kind of business anyways. I will say this. Different accounts and stuff that I've read -- Today if you could pull it off, eventually you'll get sent back. If anybody's looking for you and they'll come around. You know, they'll come around. It's not the haven, romantic haven it used to be. You know, so for me it was perfect. You got to picture me there. This is the first Beatle days. I'm turning 18. You know, I'm heavy romantic tradition. You know, I see myself, you know, the guy with the guitar, you know, with the folk songs and, you know, this sort of thing.

[X2296] 14:58:43 I had -- right. I had worked my way up at that point. By time I was in high school at that point, I had worked myself up to what to me a very nice new guitar. It was a \$40 Harmony. It was a beauty. It was a real great step up from the one I'd had before that. Guitars are very important to musical development because if you have a piece of crap, it impedes your development. You're not hearing right, hearing properly. So I will -- yeah. So I had this guitar, you know, this young guy, blah, blah, blah. You know, went to circus, made my way through circus. It's -- it's cool.

I: How long were you with -- was it just the 10 days?

[X2296] 14:59:31 Wolf Krakowski: In London. I worked in Toronto.

I: And then you went back to Toronto?

[X2296] 14:59:33 Wolf Krakowski: Yes.

I: But you had dropped out of school?

[X2296] 14:59:36 Wolf Krakowski: Yes. It gave me my break. It enabled me to make the break and to think about what I was going to do next. And yeah. It was -- it was stressful and whatever, but I had an idea of my own sense of authenticity and what would be right for me. Of course, you make every foolish, you know, mistake around all that. But

at the same time, we're entre into a world and exit out of one. The one out of made a lot of -- a lot of demands that would've in so many ways just made me very unhappy I would think.

I: With the carnival?

[X2296] 15:00:23 Wolf Krakowski: Huh?

I: The carnival?

[X2296] 15:00:25 Wolf Krakowski: No. If I would've stayed in my old life and not left. Right? If I would have just continued on the path of that kind of meatball ride of just, you know, go to school some more, go to school some more, go to school some more, you know, go to school some more. In my neighborhood, it was all -- it was three things, besides I told you everyone's obsession with this becoming rich. There was three -- there was three top tier professions if you're anybody with any -- seen as anyone with drive, ambition or worthy of respect, doctor, lawyer, accountant.

[X2296] 15:01:06 You see? You needed to go to second generation. Nobody ever told you such a thing as you could go to film school. You know what I'm saying? I mean, it was a very --It was bereft, very neglected, you know, parenting on that score. I mean, I was anybody's kid with anybody's brains at that point, get this kid into art school. You know, I mean, I had a couple of obvious strengths and interests. You know, I had no one in my life. I had no one in my life. To me it had to be the path of least resistance and the one that's going to appeal to my sensibilities, those heavily romantic sensibilities.

[X2296] 15:01:56 And I'm -- I'm going with that and I'm bas- -- but I'm cutting loose from this other stuff, which that's not going to be my group, you know, of people. You know, and those were the kind -- those were the years when you can do it a little easier. You still had maybe an out. You know, you could -- yeah. You could still, you know, get educated and stuff. I went back to school and stuff a number of -- a couple of times, you know, a number of times, you know. I believe in lifelong learning. I'll probably still go back to school, you know. But not -- not a career level. I didn't do a career.

[X2296] 15:02:35 So -- but, you see, I like to think, you know, I'm a quick study. You can get a lot out of a little, let's say. Some would ay especially more risky, dangerous things. I could've traveled with the fucking carnival for a year or something. I don't think I would've gotten a lot more out of it. Right? Except a livelihood, you know, maybe. And I'll tell you what I did. I looked at -- I'm the kind of guy who looks for signs and markers in life all the time. So with the carnival, it's probably the most money I saved in my life. Let's say maybe I'd come away with \$600 bucks or something. And okay.

[X2296] 15:03:27 So it's not there anymore, but there was a strip in Toronto across from the old city hall. It was a strip of pawnshops and strip joints. And I just got the tail end of

that when this pawn shop, it had a gorgeous Gibson guitar in that window. I bought it the day it came out of pawn. I was there waiting. I learnt when it was coming out of pawn. I was predatory on that guitar, \$175 bucks.

[X2296] 15:03:58 I have not that same instrument but I have the same model today because I did have to let go of it one time to sell it for money and all, but I have the same 1954 southern jumbo. Hank Williams is pictured with it a lot. It's a sweet guitar. It's a real sweet guitar. And I -- I replaced it again. When I replaced it about 1982-3, it was \$750. Now that guitar I think that it's valued for insurance purposes at about \$5000. I don't know why I need to mention the numbers. But guitars -- musicians love their guitars, you know. And I'm kind of true.

[X2296] 15:04:46 You know, I don't need a lot of guitars like, you know, to be happy, you know. But one good one is fantastic. [laughter] You know, one real good one where it doesn't leave you, you know, I wish I could get this model or that one. So --

I: So is that your primary instrument now?

[X2296] 15:05:07 Wolf Krakowski: Yeah. I had no one to teach me really. I had to learn -- pick up what I could by watching and by very basic instruction, manuals. And --

I: So let's back up a little bit. How did this fascination with music and the guitar --

[X2296] 15:05:30 Wolf Krakowski: In general, I just -- radio, songs -- I happened to -- okay. It's a bit of a history. So we arrive in the junction in '54, summer of '54. In '54 there's a cultural change happening right then or shortly after. Believe it or not, it's rock and roll is being marketed for the first time in history. And it's not being marketed full-on. No. You tune into a certain program, a certain day at a certain time, and you get to hear this certain kind of music. So that was a Saturday morning. And then that became a thing.

[X2296] 15:06:19 By '56 Elvis hit full force. And at '56 I'm already nine years old. I'm fully informed to appreciate this, you know, for all it's worth. And you know, '56, '57, and then this rock and roll phenomenon, you know, black music and a lot of black music done by white people. This becomes a full on cultural force. And you get like a whole radio station that plays it all the time. And then you're into a change in the world order really. And, well, I'm loving the music in that -- that area, those first days of -- of pop music.

[X2296] 15:07:10 And then, you know, you get into more kind of some more sophisticated intellectual plane where I get at about age 16 -- earlier, maybe 15, 16. I had a friend. All praises to Allen Strauk [ph]. They had a proper Console HiFi in a recreation room and LPs and it joined the Columbia Record Club. We could -- we could play some killer LPs, you know, and order them up and buy them. I'd get stuck with the

charges. Even back then the freaking mail -- the handling charges -- nobody -- nobody had money. We had no access to money to speak of at that age. You know, \$70. It was a buck. You know, so -- so we had Columbia Record Club. And then --

[X2296] 15:08:01 So Toronto had this music culture. They have two killer record stores downtown. It's at the hub of the downtown, Sam the Record Man and A&A Records. They're both Jewish family businesses. Sam Sniderman. I forget the family with A&A. So they're stocking stuff that, okay, has come into our awareness. Back then, you know, these things were like -- they were discoveries. They were major discoveries because everything in the cult -- the dominant culture was crap, you know, that you're kind of expected to latch onto and consume and support. So with Allen Strauk and his basement and Sam the Record Man and LPs, Leadbelly, Folkways Records, first of all they came. They were packaged thick with a respectable thickness.

[X2296] 15:09:02 They were divided. They had a whole fat book with lyrics and history and everything, everything was academically beautiful. So you had Leadbelly. What could be more authentic? This guy's a -- this guy's a convict. This guy's a convict, murderer, folk singer. Totally appealed to me. Just totally appealed to me. And his cronies back in the day, so if you know his story much, you know, he was sprung from prison by Alan Lomax. And Alan Lomax, settled -- you know, just settled him in New York. Not a lot of people know this. But Leadbelly and his wife while Lomax was getting him gigs at Harvard and here and there, Loma -- Leadbelly and Martha were employed as Lomax' driver and maid. And that was a setup. That was a setup.

[X2296] 15:10:02 And Leadbelly was -- he was old school. He was like this loyal subservient black guy, you know, you know, around all this because also Lomax was his savior and protector. Leadbelly couldn't get a gig, you know. Eventually, you know, published. Lomax stole all Leadbelly's publishing. What kind of con -- [illuminate?] ex-con was [inaudible] from the publishing business? You know, did Lomax write Midnight Special? I don't think so, you know. But, you know, a lot of money poured into Lomax' accounts over the years.

[X2296] 15:10:38 But anyways, Leadbelly. So also at Leadbelly Records you get Woody Guthrie, Dust Bowl Ballad [year?], you know, hard bitten, poor, you know, hillbilly. But Lefty, social conscience, you know, bridging the music, you know, this country, folksy stuff that's, you know, some loving, you know, that you hear in -- you know, you hear in all the early rock and roll stuff. You know, I'm getting into that. And we were, you know, we were acquiring this stuff and -- but yet we had places to go where we could kind of hear this stuff through traveling, touring musicians. Now, back in those days, the older blues guys were still alive. And under the agents of a couple of people, Dick Waterman is one, he's still living, and so he'd get these guys jobs in coffee houses.

[X2296] 15:11:40 And they're -- they're happy to get it. They're already now in their 60s and whatnot. But they're playing -- they're playing to white audiences and big

audiences. And they're getting -- and they're saving money. So these guys toured. Toronto was a big center for this. Toronto had a lot of cool coffee houses. I saw these first generation blues men close as I'm sitting to you. It's pretty cool. Mississippi John Hurt, Jesse Fuller, Reverend Gary Davis, Sonny Brownie -- Sonny Terry & Brownie McGee. These guys used to come to town, you know, with some frequency and you could get really close to them.

[X2296] 15:12:19 I did have one special relationship with a delta blues man named Big Joe Williams who -- I'll show you how tight these little worlds are. By 1965 I think -- and this can be verified on Google, but there was a -- the CBC television had a blues show. And on this blues show, this Dick Waterman booked it, and he traveled up to Toronto with a bunch of blues guys. And they did this show. And it can be seen. I think you can track it down on -- on YouTube and stuff. It had a bunch of blues guys.

[X2296] 15:13:04 And then Dick being a smart businessman that he was, he rolled by -- he rolled into Montreal. He came to where the action was in Montreal, which is a little coffee house called The Blue Lantern. Now, The Blue Lantern is the kind of place where the customers basically operated the place. It was owned by a middle class Jewish guy -- did not -- it was a business to him. He didn't have a clue. Customers said, you know, you should book this guy. You should book that guy.

[X2296] 15:13:32 So anyways, Dick Waterman rolled by looking to book some of these people, one of whom was Big Joe Williams. They said you got to book this guy. I mean, he's an original delta blues man. He wrote Baby Please Don't Go. He had a hit in 1927. And he's this hobo, illiterate Mississippi blues man. So he gets a gig in this Montreal coffee house. This is like my second home. I meet Big Joe. I become his guitar barer and his general guide about town. And I read his restaurant menus because he -- he's illiterate. And we have a very nice relationship, and I'm -- I basically don't leave his side for the whole time he's up there.

[X2296] 15:14:30 And 18-year-old kid, 1966, 19-year-old kid, whatever I am, fabulous experience. Fabulous experience. Cheek by jowl with a Mississippi blues man.

I: How did you establish yourself in that position and how long were you with him?

[X2296] 15:14:52 Wolf Krakowski: He -- he had a job up there that was 10 days. He had a furnished room above the coffee house. I had a furnished room somewhere else. And I would basically see, you know, we'd hang out. He would do his set. But we got him the job. He would do his set. We'd hang out afterwards. What's a Mississippi blues man like to do after -- after he essentially gets paid to party on stage? He wants to find a better party.

[X2296] 15:15:18 So where do black guys go? So he goes deep, deep, deep, deep into Montreal's dark underbelly, the Black Bottom. So that's where the late night real jazzbos

go. So we took Big Joe, so -- and I forget -- I'll never forget the MC -- for some reason he got to know -- he says, Ladies and gentlemen, we have tonight -- we have tonight in our audience, we have the great folk blues musician Mr. Big Joe Williams, give it up for him.

[X2296] 15:15:49 And he was introduced from the audience like he was on The Ed Sullivan Show. And it was so cool. It was so cool because he -- here's a guy. He had kept himself on the road illiterate for decades, decades. He's driving a car state to state, university to university, coffee house to coffee house. He can't read. He can't read. And he's -- he's taking care of himself on this level.

[X2296] 15:16:22 Anyways, we came -- when he came to come to Canada for this gig in Montreal, he -- he was smart enough to take a bus, not try to take a car over the border. But he got a -- you know, I mean -- and he wrote about on one of his albums about Montreal blues because they hassled him at the border. Freaking Mississippi blues man, you know, trying to come through -- come through Montreal. You know, I'm going to play in a coffee house.

[X2296] 15:16:50 First of all, French Canadians can't understand his Mississippi accent. I wrote -- I was heads and shoulders above everybody because these French Canadian hippies could not understand this guy. They barely understand English. [laughter] So I'm -- and with his Miss -- you know, he's like Clarksdale, full on working class, you know, under-class Clarksdale accent, you know. So I can understand him. I have a good ear. And I'd been listening to blues records, so anyways I understood him. [laughter]

[X2296] 15:17:21 So we'd go -- you know, we'd party and had a -- there was a closeness and intimacy, I mean, you know, money can't buy. But I mean, he'd -- he'd say come with me, come with me. And he's like, oh, he'd go into the men's room and he'd pull out a mickey. He would share his whiskey. He would share his whiskey with his buddy and stuff like that. So when it came time to send money home, we'd go to post office. He'd make his mark on a money order -- international money order, X. Man could not write his name. At the same time, you know, yeah. He made a lot of records, made some deals [inaudible] little money, sent a little money home, played the universities, colleges, coffee houses. He recorded with Dylan. Dylan gave him some money I know.

[X2296] 15:18:19 A lot of this stuff at that level, you know, it's all -- you know, it's all karma and, you know, goodwill, you know. He's not penciled in for any money. No money's ever going to reach him, you know. Dylan gave him some money. You know, and that's what it takes. And another story about Big Joe is that there's a famous blues writer Sam Charters. So he writes a story and he refers to the late Big Joe Williams. Well, you know, if people think you're late, you know, they're not going to send you any job offers. Big Joe came after Sam, who's like this, you know, University of Connecticut professor, came after Sam with a knife at, you know, one of the coffee houses like at the Fifth Peg or Kettle of Fish or something. And that, you know, we were a little fact-checking. But he [laughter] --

[X2296] 15:19:23 So X. Yeah. X. And yeah. He was like a big child. He's like a big child. And we'd sit in a restaurant, you know. He'd order, you know, good junk food, you know, burger, fries, you know, strawberry sundae, you know, that kind of thing. And I'd read the menu to him. How many guys could tell you that? [laughter] I was his guitar bearer and menu -- and official menu -- menu reader.

I: And what did you learn from him?

[X2296] 15:19:57 Wolf Krakowski: What did I learn from Big Joe? Oh, my God. This guy, you know, the ferocity he, you know, he had to adapt to survive, the places where he'd end up performing, you know, give him a dollar, a lot of these guys you got to remember down south, their experiences as street singers, street singers. That's a rough life. And after street singers, a step up turpentine camps. Right? Heavy clientele. He'd talk about sleeping in the hobo jungles with -- he had that [inaudible] same guitar since the twenties. He'd talk about sleeping in the jungle with the guitar tied to his leg. You know what I'm saying?

[X2296] 15:20:47 Perseverance but he still found -- look. He could still -- he could still -- he could still deliver his authentic -- authentic true self, you know, through music. You know, nobody played like him. Nobody played his style. He had a nine-string guitar of his own invention. And I'm talking -- you're not talking fine carpentry and woodworking here. You're talking about a nail, you know, banged out -- a piece of wire tied to another piece of wire and stuff.

[X2296] 15:21:20 There's a picture on one of his albums, you know. He had -- he had that guitar his whole life. And he could make that thing sound. Nine strings, nine strings, some were doubled, some were not. And ah, what a, you know, piece of junk, piece of crap. I hope -- I hope it's in the Smithsonian somewhere, but Dick Waterman, you know, got a hold of these things and whatnot.

[X2296] 15:21:47 He'd talk about seeing the auction block where his parents were sold from, if you can believe, in St. Louis -- and having that experience, you know, in your mind and what -- I don't know what kind of childhood he had. But if you're familiar with Robert Johnson and these guys, they're not going to pick that -- they're not picking cotton. They're not picking cotton. They're going to -- they're going to get on their guitar. They're going to get on their guitar. You know, that's -- that's the American -- that's the American way, you know.

[X2296] 15:22:27 And he was a big -- he was like a big kid. He was like a big kid. I will tell you another little story. He -- we came back one night after all night carousing, all night carousing. Dawn -- dawn is breaking. I walk him to like his furnished room that's above The Blue Lantern, a nice little furnished room. And yeah. I go over to my place. I crashed a little bit, maybe wake up 11:00, 11:300 or something. I go back to check on Joe. Joe's

got himself a woman that he got from the street, you know. And they know how to find each other. And there it was.

[X2296] 15:23:13 And one other thing about Big Joe that I can -- my claim to fame is Big Joe cooked me fried chicken on a -- on a -- on a frying pan that he packed in his own suitcase. That's your -- that's your [inaudible] and blues man, baby. Did he carry his own frying pan? Fake. What's he eating? He's not -- blues men ain't stuffing it at McDonald's. Blues men are living rough, you know. No. He could -- I'm sure he ate at restaurants, you know, but, you know, you read the stories of musicians touring in the south and stuff. You can't even get a place to eat.

I: Sure.

[X2296] 15:23:54 Wolf Krakowski: For years, you know. So that was Big Joe. Yeah. Big Joe was thrust -- You got to see some of these guys. They're thrust into this middle class world, you know, of coffee houses, you know, and Jewish guys, you know, getting them gigs and college kids and hippies, you know, and what, all that, how that impacts with them. And, you know, they're -- they're treading water every step of the way. Holy shit. There's like money in this for me. I got to do my part, you know. And --

[X2296] 15:24:24 I'll never forget one guy. Some guy -- local guy had a record store, and he swung by -- he swung by to ask Joe where he might get, you know, get his records, you know, where they're distributed and stuff. So Joe told him, you know, this record company, that record company. At the time Delmark was a nice little independent record out of I think Chicago where Big Joe lived. And it was actually good to its artists, Delmark.

[X2296] 15:24:52 You know, so they, you know, he wrote down what he needed to know. And when the guy said goodbye, he said, good luck in your career, Mr. Williams. [laughter] I [inaudible] and also when I knew Big Joe then, he had a freaking aneurism on his forehead the size of like, you know, a tomato. He had this growth, you know. And he's the real deal, you know. He didn't have no teeth. He didn't have teeth. He had this growth. He got that growth dealt with. He got it excised later because it's on an album cover he made later. They tried to dress him up a little bit. They cut out -- they had surgically removed that, that big thing there, whatever.

I: Did you ever encounter him again or keep in touch after that?

[X2296] 15:25:54 Wolf Krakowski: No. We were never in the same town again.

I: How did you wind up in Montreal?

[X2296] 15:26:02 Wolf Krakowski: I went to -- yeah. I just went down the road. I had -- I thought it was a good idea to get out of Toronto. For one reason or another, I knew this

coffee house and I knew that this blues guy was going to be there. And I thought maybe I'd hitchhike in. And those were the days when, look. A longhaired -- a longhaired guy was your brother. You could -- chances are, you know, you could get a place to crash, you know, and it would be safe and, you know, cool, you know. And I don't know what I did my first --

[X2296] 15:26:38 But also I can remember this. When I first started venturing forth, you could get a furnished room for like \$11 bucks a week, \$13 bucks a week. And that would be the cheapest thing on -- in the market. But it was a thing. You know, it was a thing, you know, and, you know, marginal people, marginal people do. You live on the -- on the margins, on the fringes, on, you know, on the outside. And yeah. It was --

I: So you just went to Montreal to check out this --

[X2296] 15:27:22 Wolf Krakowski: Yeah. And ended up meeting people, finding a little place for myself in this coffee house, did a little performing. And we brought also -- someone knew somebody who was in a position. We imported Richie Havens whose first gig outside of New York. Somebody knew somebody. And he came up. I got to know Richie Havens very well because he came up a few times, you know, before he broke big time stardom, before Woodstock. Before Woodstock there was a -- you know, he was becoming a star.

[X2296] 15:28:00 And it was very interesting to see that kind of evolution of a musician to basically go from, you know, coffee house artist, you know, very bottom, you know, of the whole industry and income stream if you will, and to see him emerge as a, you know, a superstar and like a rock god of sorts and receive that kind of attention and, you know, career and, you know, and how all that impacted on himself, people who knew him artistically and how all that went, you know, different worlds. You know, something like that, you know, the access -- your access to worlds you're otherwise, you know, not, you know, easily find yourself in.

[X2296] 15:28:58 You know, and, you know, if you're cool and you're friends with the cool guy, you know, you're cool, you know. And I've always -- yeah. A couple times, you know, like if, you know, you admire somebody, well, you know, get close, get close to them. See what might happen. You know, you don't want to be a groupie, you know, or overdo it and stuff. You often -- you meet around, you know, celebrities and especially musical people, they meet people like that, you know, psycho fans, you know, psycho fans and, you know, women who just want to throw themselves, you know, at guys, you know, male singers and, you know, they have a lot of activity if they -- if they want it.

[X2296] 15:29:51 Richie, sweet guy, sweet guy, regular -- you know, just a regular human being. And he had this thing thrust on him, a fantastic talent that the commercial interests are going to -- are going to jump on and, you know, expose and exploit. And he

definitely, you know, lived a bunch of that, you know, in so many ways. And I got to see a lot of, you know, show business workings, by knowing a guy like that.

[X2296] 15:30:32 And also -- so I'll say with Big Joe Williams and Richie, what do you come away with? Okay. So there's a million guys trying to play, you know, Baby Please Don't Go or Muddy Waters song or Boll Weevil song, songs about, you know, picking cotton and stuff. Well, look. They're okay in their time and place. You know, to me like a Harvard student in overalls just on this kind of folk music deal, you know, singing about boll weevils, well, to me that's kind of a joke. You know, and they call that cultural appropriation. That's fine. It's a learning -- it's part of their learning curve, you know. But for me it's all about authenticity, authenticity, telling your own story, your own way.

[X2296] 15:31:20 So with Big Joe Williams, it's basically like, well, nobody -- you never mistake him for anybody else. Right? He's not like a guy who ever approached a song or something like, that's a great song. I'm going to copy it. He did cover songs. Blues guys did. But he's totally invested -- his own person --

X2296

[X2296] 15:31:43 --ality style and -- what do we call it -- it's folk ethos, it's all he is. He can't think about being anything else, you know, than what he is. So that's -- that's all in the music. It's authentic. Can't touch it. You know, can't touch it. Whatever your criteria are for what makes music good music and what makes it bad music, I think it touches all the criteria.

[X2296] 15:32:15 I used to sit around with Havens, and so he had also -- because he had no one to teach him. He had to learn to make the guitar do what he needed it to do to cover his singing, to match his singing. So he learned to sing in a totally unique way. You couldn't copy it if you tried. You can because he can teach it to you online. But he works with a series of open tunings, many of them [open mining?] tunings, which come with their own fingerings. You know, nightmare, nightmare in terms of a guitarist, you know, kind of approaching that. It's not standard, you know. I'm a standard tuning person. A few forays into open tunings and what they were about and stuff.

[X2296] 15:33:06 But the point is for a musician, guitar, your instrument, it's got to serve you, you know. It's got to serve you. You shouldn't have to fight it like to get your vocals over or anyways, you know, replicate. I don't see the big deal in replication. You know, like a tape recorder can replicate better than me. I don't need to reproduce this song. This song was perfect in its time. You know, in 1927, you know, this blues guy laid it down under these circumstances, you know, the 78 pressing, can't touch it. Can't touch it. It's perfect in its time, you know. So that's how I look at that.

[X2296] 15:33:53 So sure. So I built a repertoire over the years and I played this kind of music and that kind of music because it was cool stuff. I would relate very strongly to words. And one of the things that, too, also helped get me into a lot of this, you know, black, you know, rhythm music essentially is that, you know, black experience boils a lot from Old Testament in terms of their gospel music and poetic references. So to me all this stuff hit home totally. I thought this belongs to me as much as it belongs to those guys. So you know, it was a road in, a bit of a road in. But -- and Havens, too, just very casually, be yourself, man.

I: That's what he would say?

[X2296] 15:34:49 Wolf Krakowski: That's what he'd say. Be yourself when everyone's trying to be Bob Dylan. A guy like Bob Dylan casts an enormous shadow because in his repertoire, first of all, he's lifted. He's lifted outright many, many things from obscure sources, but he's lifted himself. So into the stuff he's lifted and, of course, transfigured, you know, to make, you know, personalized, but into, you know, the original stuff that he's boring from, the world of music has poured into that stuff to create that stuff. You know, that's why a guy like Dylan, well, you claim ownership of these things that -- he didn't write that.

[X2296] 15:35:32 That riff existed -- that riff in a -- in a Robert Johnson song and Robert Johnson didn't write it, you know. And nobody knows. You know, it's [inaudible] some blues guys riff, you know, caught on, you know, and now they're going to place it, boom, boom, boom, boom. And before you know it, this is the guy who claims ownership. You know, they've done that. Folklorists have done it just for fun. There's a Child Ballad like Black Jack Davey, you know, Child Ballad, the great British collector of ballads, and they're all numbered and it's like the reference for a song and stuff.

[X2296] 15:36:14 So Child Ballads, you know, goes through a million incarnations, you know, from like, you know, it's [like?] running away with the gypsies. It goes through many incarnations throughout the centuries -- throughout the centuries. It ends up in Appalachia where it easily becomes as a country song over time. And they talk to a guy. He says I wrote that. It's hundreds of years old, and there's references all throughout history to Black Jack Davey, you know. So anyways, a lot of stuff like that. You know, and --

[X2296] 15:36:43 Okay. Do -- so we come to Yiddish, Yiddish, Yiddish, Yiddish. I'm still, you know, attracted to so much of it, and I would say in the early '80s, I get kind of a leap where I -- I have a friendship with a woman who from the culture of Poland, you know, the old country culture. Not only is she steeped in that culture, a total Jewish person in every way, she is a historical personage of incredible interests and importance.

[X2296] 15:37:37 So Sarah Nomborg-Przytyk, who's the mother of a really close friend of mine, that's how I met her, through him, but she was -- and this is her job -- this is her job in Auschwitz. She was Mengele's secretary, Mengele, the Angel of Death. She was his secretary. So I will say to you, she and I were good friends. She started speaking Yiddish again to talk with [inaudible]'s buddies. A couple of them were Yiddish speakers, and the best common language you might have had. She spoke Polish, French, Hebrew and some English. We spoke Yiddish.

[X2296] 15:38:23 She -- what's the word? It didn't embarrass me, but she basically told me that your Yiddish is arrested development. You speak Yiddish like a kid. I go, ow, it's true because I left off with Yiddish in my family and we did not have any cultural enrichment. We didn't have any poetry reading club or anything. I speak real kitchen sink Yiddish. I communicate. But so she -- with her, I tried to further my education in Yiddish.

[X2296] 15:39:02 And so after meeting Paula -- and Paula and I met -- at that point -- I don't know. I rekindled my interest a little bit. Paula and I met at a thing called Congress -- what was it -- International Congress for Yiddish or something like that. It's one of these organizations world -- what was it called -- Congress for Yiddish?

Female: [inaudible]

[X2296] 15:39:33 Wolf Krakowski: Well, yeah. What's it in English? World Congress on Yiddish. So we made up this thing. We were the youth contingent. We were like a dozen people, less, under the age of 40. Paula at that point -- I don't know -- I went to this thing. I went in a way just, you know, like things fall into place. They're [inaudible]. They're meant to be.

[X2296] 15:39:53 But I was in Toronto. I was working in a Jewish home for a group home for the, you know, Jewish special needs. And I saw this thing in a newspaper, and I said a good reason to get out of town. I went to this thing. And I had a place to stay. That was good this time. Friends, place to stay. I went to this veldrot [ph] hung out with Paula four days, and then her plan was to continue to New York that summer. I worked things a couple of months later blah, blah, blah. I -- I worked things so that I could be in New York.

I: Where was the congress?

[X2296] 15:40:34 Wolf Krakowski: The conference was in Montreal. Neither of us lived there. We both had traveled there to be there for four days. She went back to, you know, to her home, Summerville, Boston. I went back to Toronto and then arranged to get together with her and then we did -- we had a great time, like five, six weeks in Manhattan and recorded over Haagen-Dazs. They didn't have it in Canada yet. And we're in a heat wave in Manhattan. I wore a lot of white.

[X2296] 15:41:12 And we just fried on those sidewalks, had fun, did a lot of Jewish -- leftover Yiddish kind of related stuff that was still in the early eighties, accessible. You know, bought a lot of records, you know, Yiddish records that I needed to -- I needed to hear, you know, who all these cats, you know, were, you know, who leads to who, you know, what -- you know, you follow the chain, you know, by the timeline, you know, who begets who, who begets who in the chain. That reflects back the state -- you know, the culture.

[X2296] 15:41:47 And as you know, post-World War II, it's sad. It's super sad. It's not supported anymore. Everything -- all resources are going to Hebrew, and Yiddish is consigned to this luckian [ph] language of the losers and language of the victims, the language of, you know, these people who got hit so bad, you know, and there's no positive associations with it, you know. It's not like back then in the '50s and '60s and stuff, like you're going to go see any kind of Yiddish entertainment even, you know. It's like it hasn't even evolved back to where a little tiny bit of that could be sustained, a tiny bit because there's always a core, a rich -- couple of rich people who will support a very traditional view of culture and music.

[X2296] 15:42:41 And that's the kind of stuff that becomes a cliché and that you'll get, you know, laughed out of the discussion at a certain point. But it did in the end spawn because of the record collections of like Dr. Schwartz in Berkeley. Dr. Schwartz had the record collection. That was where the Klezmerim, we were able to get their repertoire from. And so in this way, you know, where Yiddish was really moribund for a few good decades, it started to pick up a bit.

[X2296] 15:43:23 And through fortunately guys had collections, and then, you know, people [borrowed?]. They learnt this repertoire and injected it back in there. And, you know, a lot of it then gets recycled with your Klezmerim revival and you're listening to records -- you're listening to stuff reproduced that could've been recorded, again, it depends on the cachet of it. Do you want to be twenties interwar? Do you want to be lower east side? You know, do you want to be, you know, like the real academic stuff, the Bergofsky expedition? You know, the -- that kind of stuff. You then get this stuff replicated.

[X2296] 15:44:10 So that's fine. I'm hearing all this. I'm looking at it. I see. That's okay. Yeah. I'm getting something out of this. It's mine. This is mine. This belongs to me as much as it belongs to any like Frank London and Lawrence Glandberg [ph] or any of those guys, maybe more so if you want to split hairs. But so I get into it and I start -- so in hanging with Paula, beginning to hang with Paula, more and more -- there's more of a Yiddish and Jewish context to life. Oh, yeah. She gets I think -- yeah. She gets in a Klezmer band, and she does that for a long time, eight years I think. And she's, yeah, doing good repertoire and it's all good.

I: What was the name of that?

[X2296] 15:45:05 Wolf Krakowski: Klezmir. She was in a band Klezmir out here, Jim Armenti, Joe Blumenthal who owns a music store, and Amy Rose, Neil Zagorin who used to be at the book center. He now teaches at Mordechai Shechter. But anyways, yeah. So they did that kind of traditional, you know, you play party music, party music sometimes from the stage, not often but sometimes from the stage, but like party music. So they did that kind of thing.

[X2296] 15:45:38 I -- I started to hear a lot of this stuff that I've kind of been steeping myself in. I mostly hear them as lyrics that somehow touch -- that touched me as being strong lyrics on a poetic level. And there's something about the integrity of the melody that I'm able to move ahead a couple of decades or so, let's say, musically.

I: Can you give a specific example of a song or two?

[X2296] 15:46:15 Wolf Krakowski: So [Sane?] Breeder, this thing, the more you get into it, the more you see the history. But anyway, it emerges. You start seeing it on -- on cassettes and, you know, just folk song and delivered in such and such a way. The Germans are going to do it in a certain way. Then I hear one that gets perilously close to kind of country bluegrass instrumentation. So in my mind, so now I'm recomposing it with a different groove. You know, and I make it work in the studio. I make it work.

I: Do you remember what recording that was?

[X2296] 15:47:13 Wolf Krakowski: Nameless. At Auschwitz believe it or not, they had a gift shop and I picked up some cassette. It's like this Nameless -- I think it's a German band. They flipped this stuff into the marketing, you know, [inaudible] ghetto songs, no artists, no credits, stuff like that. So -- and I'm sharing a lot of this stuff at this point, too, you know, we enter the CD era. I guess I'm playing stuff in the car and stuff, and I don't know I'm sharing stuff with Paula. I said, what about this song going like this? And it sounds kind of outrageous at first because it seeks to fool history because when these songs were made, the kind of styles that I might put them in didn't really exist. You see?

[X2296] 15:48:12 But music being what it is, it bridges. Music bridges infinitely. It just bridges infinitely. It's not a big -- big leap, you know, really. If I can find that cassette, you'd hear these guys and they sound almost like a country bluegrass band. You know, it's a guitar, standup bass, you know, chorus, repetitive chorus and -- so I basically found -- if a tune communicated to me and it had authenticity for lyrics and melody and just a roundabout integrity where I could feel I could sing this song like I'm telling a part of my own story, so that is my criteria for the most part, for the most part.

[X2296] 15:49:09 And yeah. So what kind of songs appeal to me? It was in my repertoire. Usually, you know, love, loss and heartache, you know. And that's -- so they

say -- so by the time -- oh, yeah. All right. I'm -- in 1994, okay. Yeah. We'd been -- we had been to Poland, Paula and I. We'd done the Death Camp tour. We'd absorbed a bunch of that stuff, came back. We got new records, this and that. In Germany, you heard a little music, heard a little Yiddish performed in Germany. In Poland, no. But in Germany, a little.

[X2296] 15:50:08 But anyways, came back. Right. I'd worked for Spielberg. I worked really hard. I saved money for the first time in my life. Then I ran into a management problem with Spielberg in Toronto. And I tried to finesse my way through it all, which is basically in L.A. they basically said, Wolf, your manager Janet, you know, we know who she is. We take your side in this. She came out of the schmatta business. She did not know about media documentation or any of that. But when push comes to shove as it is -- keep the system rolling and greased.

[X2296] 15:50:58 A cameraman in Hollywood, it was my experience, the cameraman was with -- power of the truck driver. In other words, I -- Janet -- I'm the one who had to make a move because I was not getting along with the management. But I swung in myself over. So I got out of Toronto and I said, okay. Let me work in another place. I'll be away from her. And I did. And I did 14 shoots in Manhattan and in New York area.

I: Can you just describe what Spielberg won't really mean anything to anyone, so just describe.

[X2296] 15:51:42 Wolf Krakowski: Holocaust documentation project, the survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation was founded roughly '95. It was to document, create the largest archive of its kind of videotape survivor histories. Their goal was 50,000. They exceeded that. They went to several countries. I was the first guy hired outside of L.A., the pilot city. And it was an interesting thing for me because I had done on my own, I'd been involved in two or three of these things on my own before Spielberg ever did it. And I walked in. It's a great position to be in life. You walk in; you claim a job. You don't apply for a job. You claim a job. And so I got the job.

[X2296] 15:52:30 And, you know, I made it. It was very hard. It was very difficult, two shoots a day. I'd have an assistant from the community. Most of the time they were useless. And then I'd have also a volunteer who got a few hours training in how to conduct the interview with an interview instrument with the questions. In my other projects, I had done both. But this one, I was the videographer. And they held me -- it was a broadcast -- broadcast quality standard. It was two shoots a day dragging that stuff around, tearing it down, setting it up. And, man, I worked. And I saved. I saved some money. Came home. The thing with Spielberg, the thing in New York, it came to an end.

[X2296] 15:53:25 What happened at that point was, because of that dancing around with Toronto and my problems there, when I went to New York, the guy who supplied

the camera gave me his end of the line camera, his worst camera. There were some problems with that camera in terms of the work it was able to do. So without work, I ended up in L.A. from my New York shoots. Some of it was questionable. And I was ready to leave. I was exhausted. I'd done 114 survivor testimonies in every kind of home. I set up two a day, you know, with the same kind of quality that you guys are going for.

[X2296] 15:54:16 And I would have an assistant. Usually they couldn't tear gaffer tape. They could not tighten, you know, a butterfly, you know, knot. And I had my problems. And yeah. So when it was all done, I came back here. And I was not in a great mood given what had happened there professionally. So --

I: You came to North Hampton?

[X2296] 15:54:50 Wolf Krakowski: I came back home here. You know, I had been living away from home in Toronto and -- and in New York. I had been living elsewhere when I was there. But anyway, I came home. I was really glad to be home. However, I was in a pretty foul mood. I was really bad company. And Paula kicked me out, which she should have done because I deserved it. And so what happened here was while I was out, man, I was really at loose ends. And I was crashing on the floor of an artist friend of mine. My best buddies would not let me leave town.

[X2296] 15:55:33 So okay. I was crashing with my buddies and living this very disembodied life after 11 years of marriage. And I started making Transmigrations out of -- out of the air. I just put it together. I called up Jim Armenti and I -- I don't know what we had to set together in the first place. We started to do it. I started going over there. And we started to organize the album. And after a while, it started coming together pretty good. You know, different tracks were going on. Paula and I started seeing each other, you know, outside the house. And she was pretty impressed with what I was doing musically. It wasn't -- it wasn't ready yet.

[X2296] 15:56:32 And before the album was finished, Paula and I had reconciled. And then she was on the album, you know, doing backup and stuff. So that's how that came to be. It was really made in a crucible. It was really made. And we had some tough times. Twice -- okay. So we started off basically with, you know, rhythm section. And, you know, we'd do those. We kind of nailed those. And then you move onto tracking, and we do all the individual tracks and vocals and backup vocals and all that.

[X2296] 15:57:06 And yeah. So I -- so twice the tape recorder, it ate tape. We had to run that thing into Boston twice. Once it saved it. Once it ate it. Back to the drawing board. You know, things like that, you know, that -- when I look back on it now, and true to the energy you put into a song, you know, and track by track, you know, it's like making a film, all the elements, you know. You know, a song doesn't just emerge full-blown. It's like every piece of it, you know, is, you know, accounted for.

[X2296] 15:57:46 So yeah. It was about making Transmigrations. We were going to plant it here, listen to it here and coming together. Paula gets, you know, really likes it, gets in on it. And before you know -- and you don't know until the final mix -- until the final mix, you don't know if it's a piece of shit or if you've got something good. And you never know. I never made one of these things seriously with, you know, under microscopic conditions, you know. Well, I'll be damned. The thing exceeded my expectations, you know, and you got accolades, you know, worldwide, which is -- I mean, could I ask for more?

[X2296] 15:58:25 You know, so -- and that's -- that's how it came to be. And yeah. So I worked it, you know, on my own for five years, you know, just relentlessly promote, promote. Get it up, you know, get it heard and try to get a gig, get it heard, get it played, on and on and on. Then --

I: I don't want to disrupt, but maybe we take a break and then dig into this a little more.

[X2296] 15:59:00 Wolf Krakowski: Yeah.

I: I feel like we brushed through Transmigrations.

[X2296] 15:59:02 Wolf Krakowski: All right.

C: We need to do a battery break, too.

I: Okay. I thought maybe you guys would need to take a break.

[X2296] 15:59:09 Wolf Krakowski: Good, good, good, good, good.

C: Yeah. Let's stop.

X2296

I: So, where we left off, you were -- talking about some of the music you had been listening to prior to Transmigrations and reigniting your relationship with Paula.

[X2296] 17:12:01 Wolf Krakowski: Right.

I: So, we can pick it up from there.

[X2296] 17:12:04 I -- I started listening to anything Yiddish really, I could find and going through any kind of record, you know, that might, you know, be accessible at all. That would include a lot of, you know, vinyl LPs, mostly American in origin, some Israeli, some French, some British, maybe a couple South American. Yeah, not that much more.

I: Anything in Yiddish?

[X2296] 17:12:37 Wolf Krakowski: Yeah, oh yeah, I'm talking about this, at this point, Yiddish. I'm making it -- I'm making a concerted effort to absorb as much of this stuff as I can, to see, you know, where the good stuff might be, you know, and just parse the schmaltz. What I got -- what needs to be said is in the 50s and 60s, whatever they were marketing in Yiddish was, you know, I'm not going to slag -- slag other artists, whatever, but we would mostly look at it as schmaltz, you know, sentimental, nostalgic, you know, not, you know, just not authentic, yeah, to my experience and anything I want to think is historically somehow uplifting or enhancing to my identity.

[X2296] 17:13:27 I'll give you a perfect example, so if I'm a teenager -- okay, I'll say this, in the -- let's say in the '50s and in the '60s in Toronto and Montreal -- yeah, still the late '60s in Montreal, creeping up on 1970. 1970 was Kent State a date that will all live in infamy, always a marker for Kent State in 1970. Okay. So I've been with the carnival, I've become a mill of McGill student, and I was mostly just enjoying, you know, hedonistic young person's lifestyle.

[X2296] 17:14:15 And, you know, I'm -- I'm adapting, internalizing -- adapting all these things I've been, you know, exposed to and that I like, and that have -- make an imprint, you know, make an imprint. So, if you ask me now whatever gave me the idea for this that now, there are the hard-pressed.

I: But what was it about Kent State?

[X2296] 17:14:58 Wolf Krakowski: Oh, just as a marker, 1970. 1970. Yeah, so after that, the world, my world, became even more let's say radicalized. And, I don't know, self -- I guess self-involved. I was just -- I was just going to, you know, have a good time, like, on my terms. And that just involves roaming -- roaming the countryside and, you know, playing a little guitar, whatever. And, you know, getting by. And, you know, politically very uncertain times; you know? Social -- politically and socially very uncertain times.

[X2296] 17:15:51 But -- but the music was always a source of nourishment, you know, behind all that, you know, you could get a lot, you know, from a band like The Rolling Stones, you know, depending, you know, which record you know. You know, Bob Dylan, you know, there's a, you know, everybody gets their own, you know, message and stuff. But, you know, great artists are you know putting stuff out there, you know.

[X2296] 17:16:19 So, okay. So, I don't know what the exact point of departure was but somewhere in my mind Yiddish stuff -- songs that kind of emerged as songs -- I'm telling myself these are good Yiddish songs. They -- they would sound good in a new set of musical clothing. And that's why this, I think is my, you know, my contribution is. These

songs for the most part, I don't want to say are consigned to oblivion, but there's no market, there's no demographic, there's no nothing, really.

[X2296] 17:17:04 So, the Phish salvaged a bunch of them, give them a new set of clothes, pump them up with, you know, authentic, you know, rocking music. So, I thought that was a good thing to do. You know, with your time and money at the time and --

I: You mentioned some years ago when we met first, that there was a particular moment --

[X2296] 17:17:38 Wolf Krakowski: Oh, yes.

I: -- that kind of --

[X2296] 17:17:39 Wolf Krakowski: Yes, Yes. I will say so. In Canada they have this newspaper, the Canadian Jewish News. And I would say -- I would say this would have been in the, maybe, 1980s, I'd say. So, there was a little article, a little piece in there on the Klezmer Conservatory Band. They were performing in Toronto, was going to be a little piece on them. And so, my mom kind of says, very casually, that you -- you know, that like you're a musical guy, you should see about getting involved with people like this.

[X2296] 17:18:19 Now, this is -- this cut, because my mom in -- in her limited naive understanding, it doesn't occur to her that all these people are the beneficiaries of private lessons plus upper, like you know, post-secondary university musical educations. You know -- you know, so that was a little something. I said, you know, I don't know -- you know, can I make something that would kick -- kick ass musically. And that was -- that was the point there were, you know, I kind of started formulating it -- just envisioning the thing at all and --

I: I remember you also speaking about seeing -- because your music, you bring the Yiddish into a style that's sort of comfortable to you. And I remember you mentioning something where there was something Jewish and black that were put together, but it was kind of done as a mockery --

[X2296] 17:19:34 Wolf Krakowski: Oh, yeah.

I: -- does this ring a bell at all?

[X2296] 17:19:36 Wolf Krakowski: The Klezmer Conservatory Band once did a -- a silly parody number. I mean, it was Frank London who performed it. And it was something to the effect of Jewish blues or Yiddish blues. Well it was a send-up and a mockery and a

parody and it really bothered me because Here I am -- I'm kind of, I'm trying to basically join these two but in an authentic dignified fashion and -- and up to this point to, you can look everywhere and you still can, and when Yiddish or Jewish music is invoked at all there's a joke -- there is your joke there, something trivial and -- well, I'm not the one you pull that on, you know, I understand how people respond sometimes and, you know, kind of where it's coming from, you know, culturally -- in a cultural path, but, you know I -- I seek to dignify the blending of these two genres or any -- any genre -- any multiple genre, but I don't see where one -- where one cultural expression as a joke compared to another.

[X2296] 17:21:04 To a joke -- to make a joke on to trivialize, trivializes to demean, demean to degrade, degrade to devalue, you know, it's a very slippery slope here; you know? And so, you know, and you end up with just cliché. You know, some cliché stuff, some of which, you know, you can't -- you can't escape just seeing in passing, but this -- but usually this stuff is the most widely promoted and wildly integrated. Like -- like Adam Sandler Hanukkah song, right. So, this is somewhat representative of American-Jewishness or you know Jewishness at all; you know? I mean, I would -- I would take a little [inaudible] that; you know? I think it's a trivialization that, you know, maybe the population has been conditioned for and that -- and that certainly is true.

[X2296] 17:22:16 And it does bring up an interesting point because you will see a -- you will see post-war representation of Yiddish. One of the last bastions was Borscht Belt comedians and their Yiddish. Now their Yiddish was always crude and of a low nature or trivial; crude or trivial. So, you wonder why is this? I passed in my reading some years ago that when your only exposure, you know -- and this was the stuff where you would -- America would have seen these people on Ed Sullivan Show, your mass-market variety show. You would have seen Jackie -- Jack Carter you would have seen, who's that guy, Myron Cohen, Shecky Greene, all these kind of Borscht Belt crappy comedians and they basically reign until Lenny Bruce, who starts telling a -- a deeper truth. But all those other guys, you know, Henny Youngman, Alan King, Jackie Mason and all these guys -- there's -- it's very Yiddish -- there's a joke, there's a triviality.

[X2296] 17:23:58 Oh yeah, so my point is that after the war, I think, there's a conscious -- conscious kind of meme in the culture that you minimize the Holocaust by somehow minimizing the people and their culture. See what I'm saying? Like, well, it wasn't so bad, those people, you know, they're kind of trivial, didn't really have a real culture or a language or country or any of that. And that's just on my own, you know, my own take about why that -- why that is. There were -- there was very little of it anyways that was marketable to tell your truth, now I can tell you in the '50s and '60s, if some kind of theatrical troupe or Yiddish performance came to town it was very feeble and be like in a synagogue basement, you know, or a school and -- and it would probably pretty lame.

[X2296] 17:25:03 Some where some actors loved it enough to get it going, you know, and you go to another city and like that but -- but pretty lame. And that stays that way,

you know, until the more like edgy -- well, you know, Lenny Bruce used Yiddish in his act, but he used it with very measured and with very -- very depthly, you know, to make, you know, underscore really a certain words or concept. But okay, so the rest of it. So, I'll give you another analogy or so. I'm a teenager and I'm, you know, I'm trying to make my way, you know, I'm eighteen. And so, on the one hand you got -- like here's this Jewish folksinger, Theodore Bikel, bit exemplar. And on the other hand, Muddy Waters.

[X2296] 17:26:08 Who would you rather be? Who do you think is having the most fun? Well, I went with Muddy, in a lot of ways you know, is more like a -- it's an attitude, you know, who'd you rather be; you know? And I just, you know, idealized. I saw myself more in, you know, more than others; you know? But, yeah. So yeah, Yiddish is very sad. Yiddish falls on hard times. Yiddish is gone. Yiddish is gone. There's a -- a thing in -- in New York. There's a folksbeine theater I go by. One -- one set of donors, one family. It's like a cynic cure. And, it's probably not staffed, just sepia tone nostalgia. But it does go on to this continuity, but there's nothing resembling anything like a market; you know? Or somebody -- you're going to make anything resembling a livelihood, you know, as a Yiddish singer. It can't be, there's no -- there's no market for that.

[X2296] 17:27:30 So, then you go -- you get up into the '70s probably, early '70s -- you get the Klezmer Revival, you get the Klezmer Revival. And then you're exposed to more and more of this stuff. But it's all, you know, like this kind of stuff -- it's all like, you know, dance based. So, dance party stuff. And of course, in their eagerness to sell this stuff -- anything Yiddish, anything Jewish, is all lumped in. It's categorized as Klezmer because they need to categorize it for -- for sales, you know, purposes. So, you come into that and then I don't know I make friends with some of these guys and I don't know, I go to some of their concerts, I get to know some of these guys.

[X2296] 17:28:32 And, but anyway, the thing with Transmigrations is there was -- definitely was a crisis, there was definitely a crisis and all I thought that I wanted to do was to make this statement. And it was tough, but in a lot of ways, you know, it led to the next thing and the next thing and I got, I got a lot -- I got a lot out of it, it exceeded my expectations in a lot of ways. It brought things into my life you never even thought about, you know, either so --

I: How did you go about that, making those first -- your first experiments bringing these, as you phrased it, these old songs as new clothing?

[X2296] 17:29:24 Wolf Krakowski: Well, I guess I just started keeping, you know, documenting stuff; you know? And writing stuff down and, you know, learning -- learning the songs and putting, you know, my spin on them. And, you know, sometimes, you know, I have a specific, you know, feel, and groove, and style and other times I thought stuff would get enhanced in the studio; you know? But in general, it's all the stuff I ever might have heard growing up musically, except Yiddish music -- except, really, Yiddish music itself. And but-- but then again, this merits a little more discussion.

Yiddish music at that time would have meant, let's say this, you know, Klezmer Revival stuff -- interwar Poland and East -- and America you know in the 20s and 30s, you know, and that's what people would say, well that sounds Jewish. You see, that sounds Jewish, that's what I mean by Jewish.

[X2296] 17:30:37 But see, in its day that stuff is a reflection of the larger, let's call it a host culture, you know the dominant culture, so all I really did was filling a vacancy. Guys, I mean, were not around in the '60s and '70s to reflect back country, blues, reggae, and like that; you know? You could always take out any song and, you know, turn it into a pop song, you know, kind of schmaltzafile it, you know, add lore in, the violin like that. But to do it, I think with authentic -- authenticity, you know, and soul and I think that, yeah -- that, that was special. And you can't -- no one's going to say oh I got this record here, the guys sounds just like Wolf Krakowski. I don't think it's going to happen. I don't think so; you know?

[X2296] 17:31:40 And, you know, going on, my accolades have been terrific and do a lot to your self-esteem and -- and basically, you know, reinforce the idea that, well, you know, you might have chosen some questionable and on unpopular paths and -- and you might have suffered for it; you know? But in the long run, if you live the authentic life in choosing your own self, I think it's going to work out, you know, better. I think it's going to work out, you know, somehow for the better. Yeah, I'm really happy I did the record and then, yeah, and then --

I: So, you made it first on your own?

[X2296] 17:32:24 Wolf Krakowski: Yes, I did.

I: So, let's pick it up from where you made the record and tried to do something different.

[X2296] 17:32:28 Wolf Krakowski: So, I'm working it, you know -- so this coincides with birth of the internet. 1996 I'm on the internet. And I had places to promote this and on and on. And also, okay so, if you're willing to, and I was, spend some money sending out free copies. Which was you know the style then before everything just went to electronic, you know, files. I sent out shit loads of stuff, but people respond. You get write-ups; you get airplay.

[X2296] 17:33:01 Okay, you take all that and that feeds you, that sustains you. You're reaching people. You're getting a feedback. And business, however, the business end of the of it is a recipe for misery. There's so many traps and so many things you think you somehow now have to do or, you know, you need to prove this and that, you know, it takes you into the whole realm of the business part of show business and promotions.

Now I wouldn't wish the world, like in general, like looks at senior dependence on Jewish show business.

[X2296] 17:33:53 Like, yeah, you had performances and sell records which is an impossibility. The idiot performances, you know, for livelihood. Well, it's going to -- it's going to inject you in a world that it will often, you know be very unpleasant, demeaning, and otherwise humiliating. You know, an artist has to beg often, you know, for a gig worried he's going to end up losing money. You know, not that, you know, you want to get yourself in that position often. But as I told you -- you know, you come up against a lot of cultural illiteracy and just your commercial, you know, crassness and stuff. And besides, who -- who said that was part of the deal; you know? I'm all, I mean at, at -- at the outside I'm about expression. I'm about expressing myself.

[X2296] 17:34:54 Do I have to inject myself into this stream of Jewish cultural and you know and show business life because I express myself and there is like records involved? Well, you know, there's some time when that is kind of a worthy pursuit, maybe, you know, but you know I was saying that there's no real market for anything sustainable -- anything sustainable. If I want to get back -- backers and feed that I can maybe build up my, you know, a little circuit or something; you know? And, you know, maybe invest in a show, maybe lose money. Maybe go back there in the next year, you maybe make a little money. That's a lot of work. It's a lot of work for diminishing returns.

I: How old were you when you made Transmigrations?

[X2296] 17:35:46 Wolf Krakowski: I was on the eve of my 50th birthday. So, you see I also -- it's about building up ahead of steam, like graduating, you know, a New England School of music in your twenties, let's say, and injecting yourself into that world; you know? Learning how to deal with all that, and meeting the people. You're cultivating relationships and like that. So, I'm -- I'm really an anomaly, you know, in the -- in that whole world to them.

[X2296] 17:36:19 I'm also not like a skill for either Israel or conservative Judaism or Orthodox Judaism. Most people, it's a singing in Yiddish. Not Everybody. Somebody just playing in show business and like Broadway types, like Bruce Adler and Joanne Board, those people. But for a lot of people comes with a big ideolog- -- ideological badge and that can be a pain in the ass to deal with, you know, like a, certainly a very identifiable people have their -- certain audiences and certain audiences will only attend shows by certain identifiable artist of a certain socio-religious strike, you know, it's all -- I don't align myself with any of those kind of categories, you know, none at all really.

[X2296] 17:37:27 If anything, I'm a -- I'm an atheist anarchist with a very, you know, a romantic, you know, history and, you know, you know, mystical predilections. Like, I mean, I like all that stuff, but at the end of the day -- end of the day, I believe in science;

you know? I mean, I, you know, I've listened to the stories and the myths and all that, everything. And you know --

I: Didn't get anything from them?

[X2296] 17:38:09 Wolf Krakowski: Oh yeah. Lots. And you growing up, you know, more; you know? But there comes a certain point, you know, you know like everybody's favorite, you know, invisible friend, you know, it's -- it's cool; you know? But, end of the day, um, it's not like a, you know, bad spirit entered that girl; that girl got contacted small box, you know what I mean? Like, yeah, that kind of thing, you know, so you know, you have to be careful with that stuff in general.

[X2296] 17:38:45 My mom would -- it's a folk tradition and you're -- you're nurtured in sayings and uh, things that, you know, are rooted in all that stuff; you know? So, it becomes a part of you and, you know, that, you know, and nevertheless; you know? God will punish you. How many times did I hear that growing up? In Yiddish, you know, so know stuff like that; you know? Lovely curses and injunctions and things like that -- that ultimately, you know, what I learned about, you know, child development, I mean, that stuff is, that's stuff is creating, you know, wiring your brain, young early on, right? Really, we -- you know, science proves this.

[X2296] 17:39:37 So, I was very -- I guess the unstoppable urge to be expressed. Like look, so I'm going through life, you know, marginal and yeah, I'm lucky like a I found love you know in my life, but socially, uh, I don't have a lot of status, don't have a lot of status, marginal; you know? Um, and this is elevated me to another world of -- you leave all the guys who say I could do this too, and you come into the, all the guys that I did this and that, right there is already something. You know, from scratch, you're, you make a record, you know, make a record. You know, and make it work, it was like world class criteria; you know?

[X2296] 17:40:43 And, fortunately, by that time in life, with a degree of maturity, maybe we're, you know -- I will say too that Leadbelly was also on the eve of his 50th when he made, when they recorded him in prison. But his -- his song got him out of prison. Yeah. But yeah --

I: Was there anything or what was it like to, to try to bring these old Yiddish songs into that? Was it difficult to do that?

[X2296] 17:41:20 Wolf Krakowski: Yes. It was difficult on one level in that the guy -- and this has been written about, like how you met him, might have been you, -- but, do we know about Ari Davidow. So, you know, and it's just pure snarkiness and bullshit. This guy decides to diss my record and he is, ironically, the largest voice in that world -- in the Jewish music world. And that -- what's that last voice mean though, then?

Internet. You have to also remember, he's not an ethnomusicologist, he's not a folklorist, a folk singer.

[X2296] 17:42:07 He's not a musician, not an instrumentalist. He's good on the Internet. He's good with the web. So that, that's his, you know -- you know, resume for being an expert. Well, he just -- I was getting good -- I was getting good press everywhere and this guy, he just started to diss it but in a total bullshit way. There was no criteria; was free floating criteria. It's like this stuff you know, you don't -- you don't like about me, you know, yeah, you like about this other group and this stuff you point out here and -- he didn't know me. It was that -- and critics will often do this to show something -- how clever they may be.

[X2296] 17:43:00 And he even attacked my looks, that because I don't fit the mold. It wasn't Klezmer, it wasn't Klezmer, it wasn't Israel centric. It was Yiddish, which are not -- which they don't understand. What to them is like [Boobie -- Boobie Zany ?] language, you know, and it occupies this very, almost like mystical, and semi-sacred realm for them. But you know, then again, an unreal one -- Unreal one. So, it never even occurred to him, in him dissing what I was doing there -- It never occurred to him that I can actually be authentic as to who I was presenting myself to be. The guy never run into anybody, my generation, you know who the roots in the old country and these, you know claims to this music; you know? So, a bunch of people jumped on him and said basically, Schmuck, this guy's the real deal.

[X2296] 17:44:06 He rewrote it, made it a little nicer, and I think he even rewrote it again, but it set off an internet firestorm because people -- people were rooting for me; some people were rooting for Ari. And I got very, very vociferous in defending myself because I already didn't know what he -- already didn't know, you know, he didn't know ass from elbow, you know, it was just a critic's whim. But to me it was bigger than that because this is the internet side for Jewish music and blah, blah, blah. Yeah. Yeah. 300 subscribers, you know, huge, huge. So, well I -- I, given who I am, you know, I took it to -- I took it as a more of a slight, yeah, then, you know, I should have. But I -- I also bristled at the unfairness of it; you know?

[X2296] 17:45:09 So, I come on and make this record, that really kicks butt, you know, people are telling me, you know, so all over, all over. You know, I get it reissued by Tzadik no less, you know, and he's kind of trivializing it. And he references my Marlboro man persona, that's out of bounds, that's bullshit. That's total bullshit; you know? You know, what's he trying to say, you know? You don't -- you don't look Jewish, you know what I mean? Like this and all kind of stuff, you know, indignities, you know, it's little indignities. But I have enough accolades.

I: He was an outlier in that.

[X2296] 17:45:57 Wolf Krakowski: He was the -- pretty much the only one. But ironically, you know, the lesson for me -- and they're like, what -- what do you do with the kind of most -- the most vocal critic, the one -- the one all the people who don't know shit about the music look to -- to explain the music, you see. So, it's ironic, that's the last guy I want. But I had enough defenders and accolades to last me a lifetime because you only need so many accolades. Then something is satisfied in terms of your ego and your idea of your, either the quality of your creation and so forth and all that. That's fine. That's satisfies you. I'm not going to dwell on it; you know? Like, I'm cool. I'm cool, I'm cool, I'm cool, Okay. Done. You know.

[X2296] 17:46:44 So -- but anyway, a lot -- I met a lot of people, many of them on the internet or something, some personally and still, you know, through the -- through it all. I've met people in other cities, you know, fans this kind of stuff, you know, money can't buy it. You had just gorgeous, wonderful things. Wonderful people. My fans are all very highly accomplished bunch, like yourself. And, you know, it's very enjoyable, very enjoyable.

[X2296] 17:47:17 Oh, you know, a little of my background: I'm, I'm hungry for this kind of stuff. I was, you know, recognition, credit, that stuff because if you don't get it when you're young, you're going to seek it when you're older, you know, through other -- through other means; you know? So, this stuff is all good. It's all good now. I'm definitely nourished, nourished, you know, by it.

I: So how did you get to Tzadik?

[X2296] 17:47:46 Wolf Krakowski: Yes. I heard about Zorn, another musician on scene. I heard Tzadik Records was a thing, Man, so all I really know, my world does not, you know -- Tzadik Records -- so through having a hope of something Yiddish, Jewish, yeah Jewish. Not even Yiddish because Yiddish is so down in the charts, it's not about Yiddish happening. Yiddish is happening on the Klezmerim and the Klezmer Conservatory Band. It's happening on vocals. They might sing a theater song or a folk song in their Klezmer repertoire.

[X2296] 17:48:27 Now, you know, Klezmer is Jewish instrumental music, so this stuff isn't Klezmer, but that's where it winds up. So. All right, so I have a tape. You know, and I'm super excited that I even did this record. I'm very excited. I have a tape, you know, and as soon as we make cassettes -- first thing was a cassette and I -- I'm thrilled to death; you know? This thing, you know, has Transmigrations on it, my name on it, you know, thrilled with it. And uh, like I said, went to Zorn. He goes, yeah, great, very nice, good luck. Then --

I: You just said the record point blank? Did you put a letter in it?

[X2296] 17:49:10 Wolf Krakowski: Oh yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. Oh yeah. I know how to promote.

I: Okay.

[X2296] 17:49:16 Wolf Krakowski: I said a little something. Then when the -- the first pressing was cd, in the purple cover, the purple Kamea Media, wine colored. I sent that. And that was a CD, that was looking more serious, has a booklet. Thanks. Good luck. At this point you have to think, you know, most men would give off -- it's two rejections. What are you -- are you have like a glutton for punishment, you know, do you like being rejected or --

[X2296] 17:49:52 So, Seth Rogovoy and I had become friendly. And so, he's one of these music maniacs and he knows everything about all the details. So, he says, take it to Zorn but let this kind of be your approach. And I don't even remember what was -- at that point -- really special about the approach. But I will say he had some insight that I was able to deliver.

[X2296] 17:50:29 And Zorn, his mom had died and to him that was a -- it was a new record and it was good, Transmigrations. And he -- he bought Transmigrations from me outright. And he gave me standard Zorn budget, 5,000, to make another one. and I get to make Goyrl on the other guy's dollar, which is a lot more fun, you know? Even though that was pressure. And I had chest pains, went to the hospital, Frank London, don't know why I got off. Could -- could've been -- could have been food; you know? But pressure working with producers. You need to have a producer. Then I think you have two-grand is to -- two to London. \$5,000 budget to all the musicians. The studio time, the mixing, and makes me give. That's the way -- it's written in stone.

[X2296] 17:51:28 You got to give the producer their two grand. That's how important he is. To me, he was not important. I'm organized, I know my stuff inside out. Transmigrations, I did all myself. I did give, you know, give Jim a co -- a co-production credit; you know? But I could have done a Goyrl 100 percent without frank. Not to take anything away from frank, but me and Jim could have done it; you know? But this is how corporate America works. Zorn needs his man in the studio. I'm the artist. I'm not trusted to spend the studio's money in their best interest. So, you got to have Frank in there who knows -- he knows how to make my best music. That's bullshit.

I: Whose choice was it to use Frank London --?

[X2296] 17:52:18 Wolf Krakowski: That was mine. Because again, this -- how's the rest of this works is interesting. Okay, it's a go. I'm on. In very short order. I get a call from this guy, Anthony Coleman. He said -- he says, I hear you're going to make a record for Zorn. I'd like to produce it. I said, I don't know you. Thanks, but I don't know you. I do know him. I did have his records and stuff. That's not what I'm going for. So right away

Zorn - Zorn is back on the phone. He goes, what happened with Anthony? Was there a vibe? I said, no vibe. I said, if I have to have a producer, I want Frank London. He goes, Frank, I love Frank. I'm going to call him right now. And that's how it happened. As -- as simple and crazy as that. But I don't know if Frank is in my ballpark, he's a groover.

I: But you didn't know each other prior?

[X2296] 17:53:15 Wolf Krakowski: I'd said hi, and I probably said hi to Frank a few times. Maybe. I might've said hi to Frank over the years.

I: He was aware of your work?

[X2296] 17:53:23 Wolf Krakowski: yes. Oh yeah. Oh yeah. Frank is our big champion. He's a huge champion. He's like a world class -- and hip-hop artist. And that makes me really proud. this guy who is like, he can play with anybody and has. You know from a Raga as, you know, to --

I: Yo-Yo Ma or --

[X2296] 17:53:49 Wolf Krakowski: -- you know, Collapsy -- Calypso. He was going to be in Levon Helm's band when Levon Helm died. What's his name, Mitchell -- recommended him -- Brian Mitchell recommended him to-- to Levon when Levon died. And that would have made me so happy for Frank. Yeah. So, Frank is my -- he's like my biggest champion and the Jewish music world because he's out, he's very hip. He understands, you know, that's basically it, he gets it. He gets it.

[X2296] 17:54:24 And Frank is a very special human being. He's enormously talented. He's educated. I think there's a little bit superhuman, like he's in a realm with angels. That's just my own personal feeling. He is just -- he just treads that lightly and he embodies a musical consciousness that's just -- I just, you know, I'm really happy that, you know, we're buddies; you know? We -- we relate, you know, sho- -- shoot the breeze and, you know, he, you know, he tries to get, you know, to present opportunities for me and I'm thrilled with that; you know? Frank London.

[X2296] 17:55:07 Yeah, he's been here. They stayed here. Oh, that was so great. When he came, the first time just to check me out and everything. He was coming back from Canada and with his wife and kids and so I wasn't really quite prepared for that. But, yeah, stayed here, you know, kids taking baths; you know? You know, cooking food and it was great. Next time he came, he had his mother in tow. This time, though, he got a motel for everybody and -- but I thought it was really nice, you know what I mean?

[X2296] 17:55:43 There's like a friendly, homey -- like yeah, we're making a record, yeah, we're putting it together, you know, here. And he's getting these ideas and, you know, I had a bass guitar then; you know? He's playing the bass and everything. I was

pretty organized. I'm pretty prepared. You mean it's very serious stuff. I'm spending money and -- but I'm having a -- I'm having a blast in so many ways because I'm being challenged. I'm being challenged.

I: When Frank was here?

[X2296] 17:56:16 Wolf Krakowski: To make the record -- to make the record at all. Again, you make -- when you make that thing, you don't know if this is a piece of shit or if it's, you know, transcendent. You don't know until the final mix. Because it's all disembodied. You did a track of this, it sounds like this, it's tucked over here, and they mix, you know, and every kind of thing. And, now, you know, it's so -- I wouldn't worry as much as then. But you just wonder how it's all going to shake out, you know, because I don't remember like a -- well the advance -- you know, my own advancement and, you know, the technology is advancing.

[X2296] 17:56:54 The other first recording situations that might have been in and, you know, had memories of different -- you know, I remember, you know, I remember all my guitars. I remember all my recording sessions, you know, and I'm glad to recall them all. You know, you see how you know, in insignificant little moments this is where our lives are lived; you know? One, you know, one after the other; you know?

[X2296] 17:57:20 I was staying in Toronto, when I think back; you know? I had that coffee house life and these -- I literally -- I literally played guitar. I had no confidence about getting on stage or anything at that point. Though, there was a little of that -- I'll feed into that a bit. But I would just, you know -- side left the guys might be playing a guitar on a porch, you know, somewhere. I just listen. You know, watch; you know? And that was the greatest education. Because the real character is in Toronto, there's real street people in Toronto. They're legends in Toronto; you know? They're social misfits and total, you know --

I: Outcasts.

[X2296] 17:58:02 Wolf Krakowski: Yeah. But they're -- but they're the antenna of the culture; you know? They're the first guys, you know, with -- advancing the culture; you know? And, so yeah, I used to, you know, hang with these guys and try to learn. Like I say, you know, some of them -- you approach somebody for a real lesson -- and it's five bucks and sharps and flats, sharps and flats and no --

I: Do you read music at all?

[X2296] 17:58:39 Wolf Krakowski: I got rudimentary musical education. I'll tell you, I got seventh grade and then a thing happened to me where I still wonder how it would have gone, but we -- I changed schools and then being the sort of passive kid, you know, having, you know, this immigrant kid -- when I moved on to the next place, they did not

-- they did not, did not put me in a music class. And I did not have -- I didn't even think it was my place to say, you know, I -- I would like to be over there and something; you know? So, in that way.

[X2296] 17:59:15 Okay. So how do -- do I rationalize all that? Yeah, you know, it could have gone on, I could have gotten like a real musical education, you know, invested in all that, gotten a degree in music. And like people I know who did that are playing classical -- in symphony orchestras and stuff. They're like punching a clock for them. You know, they might play this piece exactly the same way 100 times, you know, and it's like punching the clock. And I'm glad I didn't go that route.

[X2296] 17:59:45 One friend, he did it, and it did kind of work out a little bit for him. He as a bit of a -- a marginal guy and he studied violin here. The lessons, he took it further. So, he became like, a talk nightclub musician. Like we're in a big city is going to be like two -- like two venues. One, maybe, in like a hotel where the hoi polloi go dancing, you know, after, you know, the theater. So, you get a job at one of those places, you know -- you know, you're cooking. Society -- used to call them society, you know, musicians. So, friend of mine, Igor Romanic. And he won a Juno, which is like a Canadian Grammy because he's very good at his instrument. So, he ended up like that. But, hey, if I would have gotten a musical education; people I know got musical education; they end up doing jingles and studios, you know, stuff like that.

[X2296] 18:00:36 With me, what I can say, by the time I got to Transmigrations and to Goyrl, I didn't have the investment that you're -- that you know people are going to meet for the most part have. Nobody invested in those -- in those private lessons when I was a little boy. They would have run at the time. They would've run. I tell you what, they would've run. I came home with a leaflet from school, public school. You could get lessons, \$2. That \$2 was unaffordable to us as a family. And I raised quite a -- I raised quite a stink. I wanted -- I definitely wanted those lessons. The flier had a picture of a guitar on it and everything.

[X2296] 18:01:21 It was some time later that I don't know how I did it, I lived on the street, it was a commercial street, but mom and pop stores, there was a guitar in a window. This guitar was freshly made. It was more like a slash -- toy slash guitar. I can still smell the freshness of the wood, the planed wood. This guitar was 11 bucks. I -- it was a block or two from where we lived -- I remember running upstairs -- was on top of the paint store, ran upstairs. My mom was doing housework. She was wearing an apron. I said, there's a guitar. Please buy it? She came downstairs in that apron and her little purse - the one with that little snap -- the little purse, you know, classical coin purse. She bought me that guitar.

I: Just like that.

[X2296] 18:02:17 Wolf Krakowski: It was a big moment for me. I didn't know that this thing was a piece of shit. It was killing my fingers, you know, for years. And, it was a toy.

I: How old were you?

[X2296] 18:02:27 Wolf Krakowski: Probably 10 years old; 1957. Sounds about right. Something like that. Yeah, I think. So that started me off and I struggled with that thing and couldn't play it. It was torture because it was -- it was, it was -- it was an instrument of torture, but more than the musical instrument. But --

I: Are you self-taught then?

[X2296] 18:03:00 Wolf Krakowski: Yes. Totally.

I: Were you listening to the radio records --

[X2296] 18:03:04 Wolf Krakowski: All the time --

I: -- trying to pluck things out?

[X2296] 18:03:06 Wolf Krakowski: -- but I didn't, I could not match them up. I took a little proactive step and I got a book of chords. And it seems the most natural thing to me, but in, you know, giving the examples of the chords to be a little folk song that everybody knows: On top of Old Smoky, Michael Row the Boat Ashore, and you know, you could do that. I can do that in my mind. And starting with that, I could strum. I could begin to strum and see how these things, you know, came together.

[X2296] 18:03:42 And anything fancier and ordinate, I worked my way up. I worked my way towards by listening to more, you know, complicated things and things that I thought -- that's really cool at the time to learn how to play it. But I had a hell of a time because they -- you know, you need instruction; you know? But the stuff I could figure out for myself -- there was one book -- so that would have come into my life already later. I probably had a decent guitar by then. So, let's say by high school, by age -- by 17 I had a -- a playable guitar.

[X2296] 18:04:27 And I got that new for 40 bucks at a music store. I still remember the store. Munding Music on Younge Street. And I remember it especially well because in the store with me at the exact same time, looking at guitars as well, was a heavyweight contender, Ernie Terrell, who's a musician. And his sister recorded with Marvin Gaye, Tammy Terrell. He was -- he was looking for guitars too. And he was a largest, most sharply dressed black man I'd ever seen. I mean he was big, and he was sharp; looking at guitars. So, I always remember getting that \$40, \$40 Harmony. That -- that was a -- that was playable.

[X2296] 18:05:25 Right, a great book called the Folk Singers Guitar Guide. It came back into print a few years ago because the guy who wrote it toured. He came to Mount Holyoke. I went to see him and this guy, Jerry Silverman -- so he's like a product of the, you know, the Jewish left, you know, folk music. Red diap- -- they call it your red diaper baby, that kind of Jewish, New York. Which I had only read about, you know, though, informs much of, you know, the culture, you know, what I value. It's always.

[X2296] 18:06:07 So anyways, he -- the Folk Singers Guitar Guide, it's a really great way into the Folk Cannon -- the Folk Cannon, the stuff that I liked, that he liked. You know, it came to the same place. You know, he was basically annotating Guthrie and Leadbelly and you know, Sonny and Brownie and, you know, bringing these, -- bringing these songs and these techniques, you know, to try to play them. Bringing them into, you know, that whole new demographic which would have been a, you know, baby boomers, you know, people like myself who came of age in that era.

[X2296] 18:06:49 You know, people have bought a lot of guitars and you know records and, you know these programs that were on all, you know, fed -- fed, all this stuff. There was a circuit for folk singers, you know, where guys for years into the seventies, you know, you'd like to just waltz, you know, go from one college to another, you know, hey, you lived, you know what I mean? Like, yeah, I can make a living. But it was all the fringe benefits, you know, you were partying all the time; you know? And girls, girls, girls; you know? So, a lot of people did that, you know, you can't do that today. Today subsidizing -- today you're subsidizing those expenses; you know?

I: So, we went from Trans Migrations to getting Frank London involved. How did you go about putting Goyrl together?

[X2296] 18:07:45 Wolf Krakowski: Okay. So. Zorn gave me a contract to make a second album. At this point Zorn, you know, Zorn is liking me, you know, he's like -- so, the way the thing works, his whole thing kicks in because of money. You know, money seeks its own level and people got eyes on it and claims on it. And so, two grand of that money was going to go to London no matter what. So, I said, fine, you know I'm not just thinking, fine, I get, we don't get to make the record. And I put in -- I ended up putting in my own money to make this record the quality I wanted it to be better than. But then again, I said fine, it was money that Zorn gave me for Transmigrations. So yeah, I still figuring out my head in the game; you know?

[X2296] 18:08:36 I got a -- at one point, I will just mention, well I had some struggles with a Transmigration. So -- so first of all, you know, they -- it's arrogant. The guy says, we're going to change the title, we're going to change the cover.

I: What guy?

[X2296] 18:08:55 Wolf Krakowski: Zorn. So, he owns a record company. He's my guy. Everything hangs on him. He was going change the title, change the cover. I said I don't think so. He says then -- this is one for the books, Classic -- so he tried to tell me something about my appearance. Like all right, you also have to know that all Zorn's record covers are pieces of artwork that he purloins. Might be a corner of a of a famous -- a famous painting or photograph. No artists gets his name or his likeness on his own album because it's all about Zorn and his curation. So, I said no. I said no, ain't going to happen.

[X2296] 18:09:40 Picture and title stay. What I did let them do was in keeping with his stylistic format. There was no Yiddish on there. But -- and the name, like all his -- his style, his stylistic crap. The name of the artist is on the back and it's on the front of this thing called an [ob ?] with is a little piece of paper between the cellophane and the CD. So, I said no. He goes -- oh yeah, this is a great line, you got to remember this, tell your friends. So he started telling me about how I look and my appearance as an album cover and I'm -- and I'm, you know, and I'm sorely vexed because I'm figuring, you know, man, I wait my whole fucking life to make a record, a real record, and I can't get my name and picture on my own album, this is the way it's going to be; you know?

[X2296] 18:10:26 And I said no. And he says, I hate to tell you this, Wolf. And he says -- this is in reference to my -- my looks. And he says, I hate to tell you this Wolf, but you ain't no Burt Lancaster. Can you believe that? Can you believe that? He's telling me I'm not -- I'm not handsome enough for my own album cover. So anyways, how do you -- how do you get back at such a line? I happen to collect since I was a kid, trading cards, musicians and actors and stuff. I happen to have one of Burt Lancaster where he plays an Indian with a headband with long hair. And if I do say so, with the long hair, it could be close enough for me on my face on Transmigrations.

[X2296] 18:11:15 So, I sent that back to Zorn. Color xerox. I sent it to Zorn and said, well John, I actually think I am a sort of Burt Lancaster. And the two pictures side by side. He loved it. He phoned me up chortling and chuckling at my little repost there. So, that was fun. And --

I: This was before Goyrl.

[X2296] 18:11:46 Wolf Krakowski: Right, before Goyrl. role. Yeah. This was to get my -- this was to get Transmigrations out. And I'm -- and I'm arguing with them and stuff. And he goes - he already sent me money for both. He sent me money, bought Transmigrations then he paid me money to make Goyrl. And it -- and we're on the phone and he's -- and he says. One, one thing he says is, you know what it's like, you know what it's like to come home and have messages from like 10 artists, all want something. So, I'm basically tempted to say, John, it's your record company, you signed up for that; you know? But I say something else, anyways. And he goes -- anyways he's

had it with me because I -- they don't like it when you stand up to him, you know the money. He said send back the money.

I: Over the photo?

[X2296] 18:12:46 Wolf Krakowski: Oh. To me, over -- he said he has sent me money for Transmigrations and for the production of Goyrl: Destiny. He said send back the money. And then he lets go with a litany. Paula is standing with me nearby in the kitchen. He lets out the litany -- we counted them. There were eight successive and fuck you's that I held out -- help out into the air. Paula was way proud of me because I did not retaliate. Now, I am known in some circles, and I wasn't that already dabbled at that time. I'm a hothead.

[X2296] 18:13:25 Like he basically pushed -- triggered me; you know? It's, you know, I'm triggered, you know, he -- I did not -- I did not respond. I basically said-- I had them on the phone and say, chill, John; chill, John. I don't know what possessed me, you know, that I even talked to him like this, but he chilled and -- and I got my cover and my original title. And I got my face on my second one. I think besides David Krakauer, I think I was the only guy he -- he did that with. But it's about him. He wants it to be about him. Okay. That's fine. It's his -- it's his thing. I guess guys like that are important, they make things happen -- they make things happen.

[X2296] 18:14:11 And, you know, we got, right -- what he did -- with Transmigrations -- I had to excise 14 pages I think, or 12 pages or something of the booklet. The stuff that was flat out Yiddish. You know, he's going to save point five cents on the printing of the - of each booklet; you know? But that's what he's going to do. But, you know, at a certain point, you have to pick your battles; you know? I've got to make them feel that he's in charge, you know? Meanwhile, I'm getting pretty much most -- mostly what I want. But I was sore -- sorely vexed. Man, and I can't get my name and picture on my own -- my album. What the -- what kind of world is this, you know? You know, it's all about the -- it's all about the guy who puts up the money; you know? Not the artist; you know? So that was that adventure.

[X2296] 18:15:15 So Goyrl. Frank London comes to -- comes to town and we hit the studios. We hit the studios; we're doing pretty good. London has the suggestion that I balk at -- b-a-l-k. I said no. He did not like that. They're not used to being contradicted. They're like a little prince in the studio. And who am I? I'm a self-taught guy. He went to New England Conservatory of Music. He wants to put this thing on my record. I said, no, that's -- I don't see that. And he's kind of squirmy, kind of squirming a bit, he's uncomfortable. I love Frank. I love Frank here. After I did not let him do it, I told him why it would be a bad idea.

[X2296] 18:16:20 After it was done, we had done it my way. He apologized. He said, I'm glad you did not let me go there. So, you can ask them more than that. Guy's a mensch -

- the guy's a mensch, I can admit to it. But look, if I -- if I -- if you know -- if I made money like he made money, I'd get a little arrogant, you know; tell this kid what to do, you know? Okay. Yeah. It's an album, I've you know made 60 of them. Meanwhile me, you know, it's number two or three and it's important to me on a level that -- you know, not for him. You know, he's made 60; you know? It's got -- it's different, you know, to him.

[X2296] 18:17:00 Yeah, we had some fun, we had fun. You know, we'd hang out here afterwards and he came and went a couple times. New York. Drive to New York. Yeah. And it was me always -- with every stage, you know, I'd pay him a little more, he had coming. And every stage a little more and a little more until it was all gone. He had no more coming in. No, there's nothing else to do and then -- I devised all these personal ways of paying people. I make it, you know, like a bit of a game.

I: Wanted to ask you about some of the other people you worked with for these albums. There's a lot of other musicians on this.

[X2296] 18:17:43 Wolf Krakowski: Yes. Yes.

I: How did you get involved with them and what have they brought to your music?

[X2296] 18:17:51 Wolf Krakowski: So, I was very lucky. I've known Jim Armenti from playing -- playing in the Klezmer band with Paula in her Fraidy Katsz incarnation, which she sang with the Klezmir. So, I knew -- so I call up Jim and I basically start to contract for The Lonesome Brothers to be my backup band. You know, rhythm section and everything else. And we -- we make a deal; you know? I -- I have the money from Spielberg and I start to -- and I start to do it, you know, out have a notebook, and yeah, at the place I'm crashing at in North Hampton and we started having sessions and doing it.

[X2296] 18:18:44 Jim Armenti, Ray Mason, Tom Shay, as Lonesome Brothers, they've been together 30 years, which is a hell of a thing. They are flesh and blood musicians. They play bars for people's listening, you know, and dancing enjoyment. They're not concert artists. So, they do play -- they will play a concert. But the world -- their world is very immediate. Nobody pays them. They compete to get to play places to compete for tips. They're the band -- that night there might be something going on; food might be being served; there might be a barbecue or something -- they play for the opportunity to collect tips. At that -- and that's -- so that's immediate.

[X2296] 18:19:41 You're running in a world where the show -- doing shows and concerts and stuff. You're this -- you're involved with a lot of people, and middlemen, and arts agencies, you know, and, you know, cultural institutions and this and that. And, yeah, it's great, you know, when it all comes together. And all that. Their stuff is more immediate. They're like, I play tonight, I make \$17. I play tomorrow night. I make \$40; you know? But --

I: They are pretty highly regarded musicians, are they not, though?

[X2296] 18:20:19 Wolf Krakowski: Highly. Because they're the -- they're essence or the core, they're the bedrock. Without guys like that, music dies, you see. Because they're not all -- they're not about money, career, hits, prominence, you know, uh, the scene, you know, a lavish lifestyle or any of that. They are, you know, they're flesh and blood musicians and, you know, they -- and the thing of it is, is they have the ability, the talent, the motivation and the -- the skill, the fortitude and perseverance. They can play every night, you know, several times a week, you know, and it's -- and they -- and they can do it.

[X2296] 18:21:07 And incredibly so. It's not like, especially every band is that, but to be psychologically motivated then they are lifers; I call them, lifers; you know? They're playing so long, they will continue to play, and they do it for a zero -- sometimes zero money. Because they have to play. They're that kind of musicians. They're musicians because they play, I think, a lot for people's enjoyment on a regular basis. You can kind of party around them. So, guys like that -- well, it's an honor. It's a -- it's an honor to sort of, you know, to momentarily be in their league and thinking these real -- I mean they're the real deal. They're the band, you know, they're banditos; you know?

[X2296] 18:22:06 So, Jim has a musical education and a college degree and stuff. Ray came up the hard way like me. From the housing project and, you know, self-taught. And just a music loving guy who start -- you just inserted himself into musical situations. So, he learned to, you know, he learned to -- he plays very good base and he runs his own band, The Ray Mason Band. Like -- like 14, 15 CDs as the Ray Mason Band and about an equal number as The Lonesome Brothers, maybe a few less. But they're prolific. They're productive. They can bang this stuff out. Then, you know, they do it like, you know, like journeymen, like craftsmen. Like they're -- like they're carpenters, or bricklayers or drywall guys, you know, they don't make a big deal of it.

[X2296] 18:23:00 They do the job, you know, and -- but in terms of the -- Jim could have been a much more successful, richer, you know, highly regarded musician if one thing and that thing was that he did not want to travel when his kids were growing up. And you know, the life of the musician is the road. So, he didn't do that. However, he is highly regarded, nevertheless. Somebody made a list that I did stumble upon. It was 100 -- it said 100 guitarists better than Eric Clapton. And he kind of roamed the world, you know, the guy, you know, some music fanatic. So, Jim Armenti comes in at 81. World. And Mason, too -- a fantastic bass player.

[X2296] 18:23:52 I had two drummers, Bob Grant is on Transmigrations and Tom Shea is on Goyrl. And Tom Shay also, has been a music a long time. He was part of a band; a successful band called the Scud Mountain Boys. I don't know if you heard about them before, but that the Seattle -- SubPop, a label there that had a flowering. That is after

the Nirvana thing, post Nirvana -- Nirvana. So, Goyrl, yes, I went -- I basically approached Goyrl to Frank, did not want -- yeah, so everybody that wants to be a sound different than the last sound. I would add more backup singing because I loved those girls, love the sounds they make, and he got him on one cut. Okay, we got them on one cut. The cuts, I don't have them on software for their absence, not necessarily, not necessarily.

[X2296] 18:24:54 But, you know, that sound -- yeah, that sound is good -- sound is still -- is good. I have an ear for this one cut, because Frank -- Frank didn't want to the backup. So, so the record would sound, would sound different; you know? People, they'll -- they pull all these things. You're like pulling rank on the other things; you know? So just so they can be on the books for getting their way. But yeah, you got to -- you know, Frank is a, he's a very talented musician and he could -- he, you know, his -- his reach is very wide. And for me to be involved with guys on this level is -- is very good for my self-esteem. You know, I played with some very cool; you know?

I: Why did you choose Tzadik?

[X2296] 18:25:49 Wolf Krakowski: No, there's nowhere else to go. Anybody at all that would have an interest in what I was doing, except for some, I would say really square and a Schmaltzy kind of record companies, that you would not want to be associated with -- Craig Taubman, maybe, who we did some there -- in terms of a compilation like, you know, Craig 'N Company. But the whole image and the whole thing of Tzadik is right -- is definitely right for me. The only other kind of company would be, you know, flat out, you know -- you know, major that would just have like a Yiddish singing artists on their roster, which is a hard sell. It wasn't always. And you might've found one or two in the day.

[X2296] 18:26:35 We had Jan Peerce. You could sell records on Columbia -- Columbia, Capital or something probably; you know? But those guys, it's different -- it's a different ballgame in terms of promotional money, and what they expect to make. And you know, you -- you know, you fall under their wing. That's fine. That's great. That's cache, right. That's the case. But you cannot eat that cache; you know? Ooh, he's a Tzadik -- a Tzadik recording artist. That's pretty cool. Yeah. Well, it paid for this pizza.

I: Still got to hustle.

[X2296] 18:27:17 Wolf Krakowski: So, that's cool. That's all good. Yeah, so that's why Tzadik. There's nowhere really else who put out -- okay, I'll tell -- Klezmer Conservatory Band, who put them out?

I: Shanachie?

[X2296] 18:27:39 Wolf Krakowski: No. It was the one that the folkways -- Elektra. And - and [inaudible] told me. So, the record company people, they got brains too. They say

what will sell? At that point it's that university kids will buy this Klezmer shit. University kids are, for the most part, a lot of them, Jewish. Yeah, right there. So, they had -- the record company came through to Frank and said, you -- you're a band, we'd like, you know, would you record for Elektra. I think they put out the first one -- was an indie on KlezTone. Was the -- an indie -- where they are still in school and stuff. So. Right. So, after Tzadik there's really nowhere for you to go. In France, there's a little something, disc Bleu, I think, they put out Krakauer, maybe. And then in Germany there's Orienta.

[X2296] 18:28:43 And not much else. And then their terms -- I did start to enter into negotiations, their terms are incredibly humiliating. They got worse over time. Used to be you could approach your record company and say, yeah, fine, you know, here's -- here's some money. So now I was working through an intermediary, a woman over in a Holmberg, lovely lady, Stella Jorgensen. So, she got things going. So, the head of the company, the record company, there's already like a folk, you know, like a German folklorist and ethnographer and everything. So, I said, so right now, so they not only don't -- do they not pay you for your album, they want you to bring you -- bring them your album complete. For the privilege of them slapping their label on it, they will distribute you.

[X2296] 18:29:38 Oh yeah, they demand a year exclusive -- and they will distribute you in the stores. Their chain stores that they have like, you know, a brand name chain store like Target. They will sell you record there and that's it. That's your deal. Right? So, I've got to finance it and then I got to give it to them and then they'll send me whatever they think, you know, they want to send me because I am -- can I see their books at that point? Yeah. That was a great, you know, record industry rip-off for a lot of, you know, American artists. It's a business that emerged out of nothing. It's being made up as it went along. And a lot of the artists, well they're illiterate or semi-illiterate and they had no clue, no one ever sat them down.

[X2296] 18:30:34 And then often, too, they did not -- they didn't know there was such a thing as publishing and that's where you make money as a recording artist and a writer; you know? So, yeah. So that's that kind of stuff.

I: Have you looked at doing another album since it was 2001? When was Destiny?

[X2296] 18:30:57 Wolf Krakowski: That was 2002 I think. I'll tell you, at this point, I'd be surprised if they even want an album. They might want or consider -- though I'm not even sure about this -- a download. Everything -- just -- just a -- a sound file that will be your album, you know, because there's no money in it. They've taken out all the money. They managed to take out all the money. I don't see where Zorn and Kazunori what -- do we want to give you -- I think the occasional side of the album still comes out.

I: They're still releasing.

[X2296] 18:31:42 Wolf Krakowski: Yeah, they're still releasing. Could I make one? Yeah. I'll tell you though, but for the -- I know what it takes and for the bullshit with Zorn and paying a producer two -- two grand out of -- at his budget -- budget is always five even no matter what it is; you know? Out of a \$5K budget and two to a producer, I wouldn't do it. I don't need it to -- I don't need it for my ego that much. Do I like to involve myself in the creative process and -- and doing it and looking forward to making a killer album, an album that I would think is killer and like that -- that'd be fun, I guess; you know?

[X2296] 18:32:22 But it diminishes. Because I know the work and again, you know, my playing outside my -- my age group here, you know, in terms of your late nights in the studio and this, that, and the other; you know? I don't know, under the right circumstances I think I would, I would like it -- the right circumstances. Because I'm about the work. The idea that I would leave another nice -- you know, another good album, respected album, well that's appealing. You know, the legacy; you know?

[X2296] 18:32:57 But, it's such a small world, you know, in the Yiddish art, such as it is -- it's ridiculously small. That -- yeah, we all know each other, and this is a different aspect and this little different aspect and like that. But, it was my hope at the height of the, kind of Klezmer revival and the stuff, that you would get like a really top and kick ass Yiddish groups and have like a rolling thunder review of Yiddish, of, you know, serious, you know, hard hitting stuff. A few single artists, you know, a few little groups, you know, some Klezmer, but, you know, kick ass stuff -- stuff you can really wail -- wail on.

[X2296] 18:33:48 And -- and I think you have the people -- you have the people that, yeah, you know, they supported Jewish culture; you know? And the way it is now, it's like, these little slots at the JCC and these little festivals. I'm -- I'm not slagging it and I'm not taking it away from anybody. But, a lot of people they just liked the field. They've done their bit for Yiddish culture, you know, they went and consumed this, that; you know? They've been told that this is the hot guy right now, and the guy, you know, like NPR says, you know -- you know, Matisyahu is like a, a great Jewish artist, you know and stuff like that. That's fine. Depends on what you're into and all, you know, your -- you know, your group, your demographic. And look though, it is what it is. And --

X2296

[X2296] 18:34:42 -- a Yiddish speaker dies off, there isn't one to replace it, not really; you know? The casita communities, yeah, well they have been having a lot of children, but they also -- they also decry secular culture and anything like, you know, like what I might do, you know, just, in the context of musically. You know, they say ja- -- can jazz it up and everything.

[X2296] 18:35:09 But what's very important to, you know, Orthodox people is that, you know, you eat kosher, you wear a yamaka, you wear tzitzits, you put on kittel, you do -- you do all these things. It's almost like, you know, they -- they won't have anything to do

with you, you know, you're not one of them. And it also -- it's an ever-tightening circle; you know? There's only fewer and fewer of the real -- people who consider themselves the real deal, you know, and of course you're not going to bite into any of that -- it's a bit of a joke, you know, because you end up with just these different elites and, you know, one doesn't support the other.

[X2296] 18:35:52 And sometimes there's actual enmity and even violence over stupid religious, uh, disagreements; you know? Petty stuff comes to -- to blows and violence. And, you know, criminal matters, you know, it's -- it's like that. But, you know, the point is it's a very small demographic and you have the, international, kind of, Yiddish Jewish music festivals. Which every, you know -- there's a correlation between the places they killed the Jews the most, they're the most popular places for Jewish festivals. And there -- there are some successful ones and they're ongoing.

[X2296] 18:36:35 There is money being made there. It's a -- it's a, you know, protected business. It's not like you're just going to get -- get in there; you know? The same names, for the most part, repeat. There's just not that many. These are people, somewhere powers that be say, okay, these are the kinds of people our audiences, mostly your poles or Germans or other generic Europeans, you know, and, you know, Jewish tourist, maybe. This is -- they're going to buy into this stuff. They don't want anything to-- So Zhenya and Nostalgia and -- and the -- the Sepia Tone.

[X2296] 18:37:18 And tunes that everybody knows, but something a little more challenging, like a living -- like a living Jewish artist. In other words, someone who lives in their time and is creating in their context. That is almost an impossible sell. Whereas a living artist who happens to be Jewish, that's -- that's different; you know? They'll, you know, they'll sell you a Paul Simon, they'll sell you Art Garfunkel; you know? They'll sell these people and, you know, try to make a buck off their Jewishness in certain contexts; you know?

[X2296] 18:37:59 But you know, people don't understand Yiddish. Young people don't understand Yiddish. And the older people, they're not a market. They're not like a marketable demographic. They don't even own CD players. A lot of these -- lot of these people, you know, that are - are my kind of demographics. You say the last of the old timers; it's has always been in my parents' generation, are these people. Yeah, their grandson, their kid might have a CD player, you know, but they're not involved on that level and technologically with the music.

[X2296] 18:38:33 And it's interesting to, the way all this stuff rolled over on them is that -- say my parents, my -- my parent's generation, who are gone, but the ones that might remain and the one's just a little bit younger, they hear more music -- there's more music thrown at them in a couple of months in America than they ever hear in a whole lifetime in Europe. It's the proliferate, just, you know, because their proliferation in music. You know, back then, you know, it's a new song, you know coming down the

pipe, like a new hit. Everyone's, you know, everyone is dancing to it. And, you know, now you know, it's like a title wave, it's a tsunami of -- of clips and, you know, performances.

[X2296] 18:39:18 And there's so much and -- you know, how do you stand out? How do you get anybody's attention? Another thing that's started to bother me too, is that -- so for me as a creative artist, my thing is the album as a standalone thing. Like albums are cool; Bringing It All Back Home, Highway 61 Revisited, Blonde on Blonde; you know? My thought process is that it's my records, I want them to be albums. They're like albums like that. They have a beginning, a middle, an end; they're a journey. They're a journey; you know? So today that that's been disembodied, atomized, all this about a track, a single track, they've even had to market that; you know?

[X2296] 18:40:06 So, you have to compose an album with kind of the structure in your mind, you know, it all kind of futile times because they're going to -- they're going to atomize it at the marketing level. Unless you're like totally, totally, totally self-contained, you know, you make CDs for your fans, you sell them downloads directly, any of that kind of stuff. So --

I: Since you mentioned albums, could you talk about why you titled those two the way you did?

[X2296] 18:40:39 Wolf Krakowski: Well, the Transmigrations would refer to the concepts of the -- metempsychosis is another word -- it's a transmigration of souls. So, Jewish people believe in reincarnation in their -- in their folk belief. That we -- there's a certain number of us, we keep on getting reincar -- reincarnated. And so, a Gilgul is a reincarnated soul. So, a transmigration is a reincarnated -- you know, it's transmigrated from another -- realm of soul to another human body.

[X2296] 18:41:28 So, these are transmigrations. So, the songs kind of existed on a certain plane and it -- and given, you know, the state of Yiddish culture, you know they are kind of disembodied -- almost like they're disembodied. Well, I -- I think I kind of reanimated them. You know, I'm like the doctor, like the Dr. Frankenstein to these -- these songs. I kind of just reanimated them, but given them, you know, a new set of musical clothing and seeing how -- and showing how music -- music adapts to its environment.

[X2296] 18:42:09 And I'm living proof of that. In order for me to express myself, what good would it do me to try to replicate these kind of East European grooves that have no real feeling for, you know, these, you know, these rhythms, and tempos. and melodies, and modes that hark into a -- hark into an east European culture. Quadrilles, you know, and waltzes and you know, these, more gentrified and village folk kind of things, which yeah has a bit of a crossover element there with, you know, Jewish stuff, yeah.

[X2296] 18:42:50 Because -- but Jewish dancing, Jewish celebratory party dancing is its own thing. They had their own, you know, they were replicated, they might look like the other stuff, you know, that's all join hands in the village square kind of stuff. But the Jewish dancing is Jewish dancing. I happen to know this because I know an expert on the -- on the subject and East European Jewish dance is specific to a Jewish life in a simplistic, in East European.

[X2296] 18:43:24 So Goyrl: Destiny. So, by the time we got to the second album, it was like five -- it's like a good five years in between and -- it's like that album was the destiny of Transmigrations. You know, the material on Transmigrations morphed and evolved further where I can express myself further in my time with these world grooves that are accessible to anybody. There are a lot of people out there who I would -- they would never listen, you know, purposefully to a song in a language they don't speak, okay.

[X2296] 18:44:10 Well, I think these people are just people who have very low vision and you know, well low horizons in general; you know? God, half the blues songs you listened to growing up, you can't understand the dialect, you know, Mississippi and Muddy Waters and those guys, that's some heavy -- that's a heavy dialect. The dialect unto itself. You know it was language or a dialect; it's a whole sub-language of English; you know? A Mississippi boy, you know, a person doesn't sound like a Jamaican or, you know, a guy from Liverpool. It's all English; fascinating about English.

I: So, was "Destiny" kind of a statement about you or the language or the music or a combination of?

[X2296] 18:45:02 Wolf Krakowski: Yeah. Yeah. So, the music itself, living on. This is destiny -- destiny, another future -- is the future of, you know, the Transmigrations since I basically think I -- would'nt say revived from the dead, but those guys -- those guys I'm sure are flipping happily that, you know I'm singing, you know, I'm singing Friling, [inaudible] and these songs. I mean they're all consigned to oblivion, really. Friling got around a little bit because it's romantic. But some of these other guys I Sung, finished. People -- as soon as they died, man, anything, you know, a couple of other records keep going through some old contracts like, you know, a French label, you know, South American label.

[X2296] 18:46:00 A guy in Argentina puts out a few things. And these are all, I think, excluding the -- the copywriter radar at this point as well and end of an era. You have to accept this, you know, just know -- the fact that what I did put out as good, you know, and, -- I used to -- with Zorn, when he's trying to tell -- telling me I'm going to change the title, change the cover. So the only thing that came to my defense was -- I said, James Joyce published Ulysses on his own. They did not -- when he got a publisher, they didn't changed the title, or change the cover. He said, I hate to tell you this, Wolf, but this ain't Ulysses.

[X2296] 18:46:51 I said, I know that, but I'm making a point here, you know, why should an artist - why should I cede. I built up this reputation and the album's been hit in his own way for five years. And then what -- change the title and make it seem like a new thing you came up with, right? You're a radical Jewish culture, you know, imprimatur. So anyways, he's difficult and he'd be a tough guy to -- to think about doing -- doing anything with just the way -- the incredibly brusque and arrogant. It doesn't fly. It isn't necessary. Want to change the title, going to change the cover. He could've had a little bit of a softer approach, you know, then might have made a difference; you know?

[X2296] 18:47:50 But I knew -- I stood my ground. What would I be? I'd be such a Schmuck, a pushover. It's my own album. I wait 50 years to make my own record. He's not going to take my name off and take the title off it, you know, I worked at for five years what kind of schmuck and a pushover would I, you know, would I be, you know, so that didn't happen. And it lives, you know, and every once in a while you get an accolade. An interesting response. And yeah, it's a shot of dopamine. It's a joy.

I: That means something to you?

[X2296] 18:48:24 Wolf Krakowski: Definitely. You know, I don't have the, you know -- you get -- what do you have to -- that you're proud of in your life, you know? I made these things, you know, in a very, I can say in a -- I made them in a crucible and every things authentic about it. I -- I might cringe at the moment just for myself because I know I'm OCD about, you know, a syllable or something. But I -- I can back off that and just realize that nobody hears what you're hearing and nobody cares because it makes no impact on anybody. But you as a singer, oh, that's terrible, turn it off; you know?

[X2296] 18:49:13 They say John Lennon, too. he like hated his voice. He's always saying to Derek -- not Derek Taylor, it was a producer, George Martin. Do something about me voice; can you do something about me voice? You know, and singers all - singers feel that, I think singers just --because they know who they like and then it usually somebody they like is probably fucking killer. Just only like the best, you know, ever. We all like. That's why they're the best, historically; you know? So --

I: I feel like we've covered a lot of ground. Is there anything --

[X2296] 18:49:57 Wolf Krakowski: I like to say, Toronto in my teenage years, it was a very fertile town and besides all the, you know, the traveling, you know, bluesman, and folksman, and Jazzman; had homegrown people. And guys actually, you know, working class guys and, you know, middle class guys; the guys actually put together bands as a -- as a way to, you know, to -- to have a job, you know, to make some money and with a viable business. You had a -- had a band, you played in bars, you know, you could play across the country. Canada is a big country. He's got a major city every once in a while. These places all hire the local sort of people to drink beer too; you know?

[X2296] 18:50:37 And, like that, you could aspire to that. And there were local bands and local singers that I was exposed to and nobody had heard of them outside of Toronto for the most part. And, oh, gifted people, man. Gifted people. No sense of business pro- -- promotion; you know? Couldn't get a performance together if their life depended on it, but some did. But then too, we ended up playing, you know, band shows for kids and sock-hops -- they still had, you know, sock-hops where you have The Band, you know, that became the band for Bob Dylan; these guys were Levon and the Hawks.

[X2296] 18:51:25 So, they were like, you know, like a high school, sock-hop band you know. It was, they, they backed up -- they became the band for Bob Dylan, and for Ronnie Hawkins. And through that they became the band for Bob Dylan. And that's the kind of -- a little trick I picked up on. Like, yeah, so I'm almost 50 years old, I want to make this record. I can't start -- I can't start these personal relationships with all these people. Hire the band. They already know how to play together, you know, they're already friends. They all know -- they can communicate and stuff. I have the freaking Lonesome Brothers, you know, not bad.

[X2296] 18:51:59 You hang out with Jim, a guy like Jim, you know, and we were driving on the countryside, get -- you know, doing little studios and getting mixed. And the thing is, you know, you come away with great sense of humility. Because these -- what these guys do is, it's freaking world class and it's, you know, it's a god given talent, you know, but they're incredibly humble about it and they give it freely; you know? And that's -- and it's fantastic to be, you have to have a quick chat with -- with guys like that; you know? And then you know, the other like, you know, like Charles Neville was, you know, just a total miracle.

[X2296] 18:52:39 If you think of the fact that, you know, that when I'm a little boy, you know, on top of the paint store in Toronto. And I'm listening to the first rock and roll records. So thereby Ray Charles, James Brown, and Fats Domino and -- and those people. Charles Neville is on some of those records. What are the chances that I actually end up living down the road from this guy, and have a record contract and be able to invite him to a recording session.

I: He came?

[X2296] 18:53:05 Wolf Krakowski: Yeah, he's on Goyrl. He's on two cuts on Goyrl. He played really soulful, really sweet. He lives right near here. He lives -- Armenti, his house. The studio is halfway between his place and mine. And I can record with Charles Neville. So thinking about the little -- so here's why there is a God. I could do all this and I don't even go through a traffic light to do all this. That's ending up pretty good. I mean, somebody's got me worried, they want me to be --

I: That's destiny.

[X2296] 18:53:38 Wolf Krakowski: You know, yeah. I'm somewhere where I'm supposed to be for stuff like that, you know, to happen. I mean, I -- I like to tack on a little bit of a mystical edge. I will say Toronto is a very fertile time, a very fecund city. A lot of music. There were little bands, little local bands that were great inspiration. Kensington Market, they were a band. And they grew. Some people I knew, too. Lighthouse became a big band along the lines of Chicago, you know, jazz rock, those big bands. There was another guy out of Montreal, Frank Marino and, you know, Mush McCann [ph].

[X2296] 18:54:22 Also these psych --you know, these psychedelic groover bands. And, the did good and play, they played if people -- did audiences and it went on for a long, long, long, long time. Kensington Market is -- Little Caesar and the Consuls. Local bands, local guy, George Oliver, one of the great club singers you've ever seen. He had the most incredibly developed neck and upper neck and he sang so strong but couldn't write a song to save his life. So he did covers, yeah, living off covers; you know? And, but yeah, they could sing their asses off and, you know, people like that. A very robust folk circuit. You know, where coffee houses were, you know, kids could hear, could get in there and not drink. And these places --

I: It sounds like they had a great effect on you.

[X2296] 18:55:21 Wolf Krakowski: It's -- it's what I had for a whole environment and civilization and culture. My parents were working people, they did not have the resources or the energy for anything beyond feeding and sheltering us; you know? So, I gravitated to what to, what attracted me, obviously, you know, and, like those guitars. And I liked that music stuff and, you know, if I could get in on it in a little way, you know, in a small way, it helped. I think you might -- it's something to do.

[X2296] 18:56:03 Something I felt were worthwhile, you know, and I got -- okay. So, by the time I even get to make -- so this is the kind of funny thing -- by the time I get to make Transmigrations -- so I'm on the heels of 50, but basically the fierce guy who is basically doing -- living the life that enabled that music, he -- he's long gone, like at, you know, at 35, you know, he's already -- by the time I get married to Paula and stuff, that guy is already long gone. And all my, you know, very, you know, high risk, adventurous, you know, you have very movable, you know, days; you know?

[X2296] 18:56:51 And in -- in the context -- in the context is, you know, younger guys. I'm telling you like what -- what it was like in 1970 in America after Kent State; you know? After '68 actually after the rep-- after the -- the Democratic convention in Chicago, you know, they were clubbing people you know, and it was a hell of a thing; you know? The Vietnam War and, you know, the counterculture, you know, and all that stuff. Huge, it was huge.

[X2296] 18:57:24 And something was awakened in me, I think that's sort of representative of the years and years of, you know, oppressed Jewish people. I was the first guy that really got to have fun; you know? And I think to really expr- -- express myself. Not live under some fucking yoke of oppression; you know? Be a political second class citizen; you know? Marked for death; you know? All that kind of, you know, all that kind of shit. Which God knows how I would have done. I probably would have mouthed off to the first German -- that son-of-a would have shot me, you know, that kind of thing.

[X2296] 18:58:06 My mom always told me, you know, borders, authority, shut your mouth; keep your mouth shut. You know, it was good advice and you know, for this mouth. The little bit of dopamine you're going to get by telling some -- some asshole to go fuck himself, you know, shut up, you live. You know, not all the people have that sense; they don't have the editing. They didn't have the editing; you know? And --

I: Which came in when you were speaking with Zorn.

[X2296] 18:58:39 Wolf Krakowski: It did; you know. I tell you, it was so emotionally -- so emotionally draining, the whole thing. These guys they look at me; you know? I'm like over 50, you know, socially -- socially, I'm a zero. You know, my friends went to medical school, you know, people who are social workers, you know, they -- they got -- they got IRAs, you know, a million plus to talk this shit. I'm nowhere near this life, I'm nowhere in this life; you know? If I have a positive bank balance, you know, I'm happy, I'm happy. You know, got few hundred bucks; if I'm in the thousands, oh man, you know, I'm rich.

[X2296] 18:59:14 And, but I'm used to having -- being -- being up, you know, a few hundred bucks; you know? So, yeah, my life got -- my life got a lot better when I got with Paula. Marriage, you know, the -- the emotional benefits of marriage and a --

I: A good woman.

[X2296] 18:59:45 Wolf Krakowski: Fantastic, you can't, you know -- I maintain, in the words of Big Joe Williams, if God made anything better than a woman, he kept it for his self. Words to live by. And, yeah, I'm really, really lucky. But, it comes with a lot of -- you need encouragement to take risks. And, I don't know how many guys now, today -- I still look at life as -- if I had three, 400 bucks, I figured that was enough of a stake to take me to another city. That's a lot of money; you know? So, you know, I'd say it was a good -- it was a good environment in terms of the exposure.

[X2296] 19:00:43 You know, I started playing with people the first time. I got in a band called The Upper Canada Ragtime Mama Jug Band] that had to future stars, kind of folk stars in Canada. It had a woman named Daisy DeBolt. She was later got -- gained some fame with a duo called Fraser and DeBolt. They made it an album on Columbia maybe two passed. She was from Winnipeg, Ukrainian Canadian folksinger. And she was tough.

She was tough. She could sing like, she was a tough woman to come from tough circumstances as a -- just the whole population, you know, that it's not very much exposure in the media.

[X2296] 19:01:31 But these are the people like the miners, the lumberjacks, the fisherman; you know? Their families, they work hard -- they work hard, very hard. And you -- to come from this, you appreciate it. You got an opportunity -- as fuck, you know - - singing a club and get paid for it? These people, you know, you know what to jump on when you see the alternative; you know? Like farming -- farming, yeah, Fourth of July and Christmas off, that's it. That's it. You work, you work and -- and this is a life for; you know?

[X2296] 19:02:10 Well, I forget the year, but until a certain point in American history, some huge amount of the country was -- was family farms. It's how people lived; you know? And all the development in the recording industry around all that, you know, the marketing of records, regional records, it's all fascinating. And, yeah, so, when I make -- so when I'm on a record with guys like Charles Neville, we played with all these first generation rock'n'rollers. Brian Mitchell. Brian Mitchell played and recorded with Bob Dylan.

[X2296] 19:02:43 So that knits me in. That gives me a sense that, you know, yeah, this is where I was -- kind of want it to be; you know? That's who I -- I, you know, I consider my -- my community. I never ever thought that, you know, I had -- I was the musical equivalent, you know, of any of these guys. I know that I can do what I can do. I am musical, I am musical. But -- and I know what I can do and pretty much what I can't. But there's often a -- it's fun to be challenged to be pushed a little bit; you know?

I: Sure.

[X2296] 19:03:20 Wolf Krakowski: I'll say that -- but, another guy, too. I'll tell you who came as pure happenstance. Because Toronto had all these bars and supper clubs and stuff too, that, uh, we got an ilk of guy. We got -- there was a fantastic blues man from the '20s, incredibly smooth. His name was Lonnie Johnson. So, he had hits in the '20s and he was smooth. He was like -- anyway so he disappears from history. He becomes a sous chef somewhere and he emerges in Toronto as an older guy playing in the supper clubs.

[X2296] 19:03:56 So, you could see him and then he'd be on local TV and stuff. He's a master, like a master. He played just incredibly -- it was called the blues, but it was the smoothest jazz and stuff. And you know, and you'd see him like on new local tv or appearing somewhere, you know, for the price of a drink you could -- and stuff like that. And we had, yeah, there's record stores; there's a musical culture. And the record stores, the bands, you know, the dances, the coffee houses.

I: It's been amazing to hear about it all today. I'm afraid if we don't start breaking down soon, we're going to -- we might be spending the night here. We do have to get to Boston.

[X2296] 19:04:46 Wolf Krakowski: Well, it's up to you of course, but I'm going to keep on thinking of stuff and people and, and you know, these name -- guys who never went anywhere but they were not musically, but there were musical people and I got -- I was able to, you know, there was people I was able to connect with just by being a teenager, you know, roaming downtown and, you know, making friends, you know, and uh, just coffee house environment. In Toronto they had a place called Yorkville, which was like Greenwich Village. You know, a lot of these folk clubs emerged just, you know, I was too young.

[X2296] 19:05:23 You don't realize its anything out of the ordinary, but you're going through a cultural transformation. This stuff wasn't there before and all of a sudden it's kind of there and the -- and other people are marketing different aspects of it and whatnot. But, gosh, a lot of, you know, a lot of people that did go onto greater things that, you know, you rub shoulders with, just in passing. There was a woman. So, there was a place that if you find yourself downtown, after the buses and streetcars started running -- this was when I was still living with my family -- so, there's a woman, she was a folk singer. It was Vicky Taylor.

[X2296] 19:05:59 So her apartment, you know, her apartment was a place you could grab some floor space and crash. So, I crashed there one night with a couple of friends of mine. You know, and every inch of floor space was taken with all these, you know, homeless folk singers and the emerging, you know, hippies and whatnot. So, I wake up with really cheek by jowl, he's the guy next to me, John Cave, Steppenwolf -- get your motor running. And he and I became buddies. He's in Toronto -- he's from Toronto. But - - and they said, they said Neil Young had occupied that -- that floor space the night before.

I: The same spot, yeah.

[X2296] 19:06:43 Wolf Krakowski: Yeah, night before. And he -- Neil Young was partners in an act. You'll never believe it, but he was partnered in an act with Rick James. Do you remember Rick James?

I: Mm-hmm.

[X2296] 19:06:54 Wolf Krakowski: You do? Had long processed dreads, as it was this style. So, they were a team and they performed together. And just as they were about to sign a mo- -- a record deal with Motown, the, what do you call them, the military police came for Rick James. He was AWOL, AWOL. And they threw him in the brig. And Neil Young never signed with Motown. Who else was around? Joni Mitchell's around.

What's her name before she married that guy, Mitchel -- name was Anderson. She had a kid up there, gave that kid up for adoption.

[X2296] 19:07:43 Years later, there's a big story about how she found this kid and -- and financed her education and the parents are cool and everything's cool. It's just Joni Mitchell's, you know, daughter. And who else was up there? Oh God, Ronnie Hawkins, of course. Who was this legend. Ronnie Hawkins is like, you know, brought out -- brought rock and roll to Canada. So, he's actually contemporary of Elvis and Jerry Lee and those guys and he's still going strong. And, and the guys who had been through his bands are the legion, there just legion. He trained -- he brought rock'n'roll to Canada and he trained a lot of guys, you know, through -- through his band.

[X2296] 19:08:22 And who else, other guys -- was a famous guy, Don Franks. He was an actor or a Broadway guy. He was in the Paint your Wagon on Broadway. He -- he lived locally. I see him until -- not quite recently because he lived in my brother's neighborhood. He had adopted a native way of life. He lives in a townhouse in Toronto. But he grew his hair down to his ass, he tucked it into a wig when he did -- did these TV shows. He played like a detective on TV. Shooting -- shooting and running and everything. He had -- he had like a foot of gray hair under a wig. And Don Franks. And he sang in clubs and he's very good. He was -- so he goes way back. He went back to the '30s and stuff and I worked with him, as an actor and then, you know, and then we'd shoot the breeze on the street; you know?

[X2296] 19:09:23 Other actors, senior actors -- God, can't even remember. But I -- I will mention just -- Peter Martella and Ray Bennett, they're just street guys and they could really play. But they never did anything in music in terms of a career. There was another guy, Craig Black, also could play -- play guitar amazing. So he -- he, yeah -- You know, people, they don't, they -- you got to have all your ducks in a row. And even then that last duck is luck; you know? And I had guys who could play lying on their backs, you know, they could play rings around people, you know, they couldn't get -- they couldn't get -- couldn't take the first step in getting themselves marketed and no one to do it for them.

[X2296] 19:10:23 Now, when I started doing my stuff, I said, yeah, well we got to get some management here and you know, parlay this thing into, you know -- I'm ready to, I'm ready to pay the guys and I'm ready to -- to perform; you know? A manager wants, you know, it was 1500 bucks a week to -- to basically tell you I'm working for you, I'm making calls for you; you know? But, you know, it's a scam because they take a lot naive people who are enamored with the music business. They think this is what is -- what's going to do it. It's not going to do it. What's going to do it is new financing.

[X2296] 19:11:01 Well, sacrificing, financing, then that shark have a manager who could pull it all together. And the big successes in our time have all had that shark of a manager; you know? And that's a, that's a special vi unto himself, you know a special

talent. And the bands that have not, they might have, you know, they might've started to, you know, at the same time, you're the same race, you know, but they went nowhere. They went nowhere.

[X2296] 19:11:37 You know, Beatles, it's Epstein. Dylan, it's Grossmam. The Stones, it's a guy called Andrew Loog Oldham. And then eventually -- he's a guy who fabricated, marketed, you know, the anti-Beatles, bad boy thing and that -- that sold spectacularly. He's like, these guys are, you know, so the wors- -- these are the worst guys. These are the worst, you know, nasty guys; you know? All nice guys -- And Keith's a great guy apparently. Jagger gives a -- bread to charity and everything, You know, but the image, marketing; you know?

[X2296] 19:12:16 So, I -- I never got -- I tried a little bit. No one -- there's no business that exists enough to justify trying to put me out there. The only way that will really happen is backing, you know, you financed your own gigs, hope for the best and hope you come around again and you and maybe make profit; you know? But the economics are what they are. You know, money doesn't lie. You know, you're either pulled in enough to pay that bill or you didn't, you know?

I: Yeah, I've been there.

[X2296] 19:12:53 Wolf Krakowski: And somebody's -- somebody is going to want their money; you know? So --

I: I did my time in the hustling, trying to make the money and dumping -- and dumping your own funds into records to get them made and dealing with the record companies. Yeah, like you, I don't wish it -- I don't wish it on anyone.

[X2296] 19:13:17 Wolf Krakowski: Yeah, it's -- it's really tough.

I: It feels really good when you -- when you create something that you think --

[X2296] 19:13:23 Wolf Krakowski: That is terrific, it appeals to a certain person, a certain time in their life, certain circumstances, lack of options; you know? Sometimes you know, and that might be your best freaking option; you know? Or, you know -- or like boxing, you know -- you know, get your brains beat out, you know, every Saturday night for like 10 nights before we maybe even make -- make money, you know, and then like that sort of thing. So that's the way -- that's the way it is.

[X2296] 19:13:58 Like I said, every once in a while something very nice comes back about the record. You know, Transmigrations is now like over 20 years old; you know? I was proud to hear, you know, thing is out there 15 years and I'm still hearing about it; you know? So --

I: It's not a fad; you know? Your records, they will, they should keep meaning something to people.

[X2296] 19:14:25 Wolf Krakowski: I think somewhere, someone will kind of get the context and figure it's kind of meaningful a little bit, you know, to them; you know? But - and they -- just the idea, you know, that, a guy he's singing Yiddish, this kind of music, you know, with full, authentic Yiddish language skills, you know, and not as a parody -- and not as a parody. And that's what I definitely wanted to do. Because it -- I said it really bothered me that, you know, I said, why is black music and Yiddish -- why are these -- these cultures are brought together. Why does it have to be as a joke? I didn't, would not buy that; you know? That's just belittle and ridicule and, you know, the trivialize this whole -- this whole group of people in their -- in their culture.

[X2296] 19:15:19 So, did you want to talk to Paula for a couple minutes about anything?

I: We can. We could. I'm just a little worried about getting packed. It's going to take these guys a little while to break down.

[X2296] 19:15:34 Wolf Krakowski: Maybe get a little background on Paula. Maybe about her the music and how we made The Eternal Question. I think, you know, a few minutes with her. Then she could get to be in the archives too. All right. Paula, come down please. What? Okay.