



Al Lurie

I was born on April 16, 1923 in Brooklyn and grew up on the Upper West Side. The most memorable relative I had was my grandfather on my father's side. Grandpa Luria came over as a 17-year-old from Russia, Riga I think, speaking no English. He was what they called the Shamash of an orthodox synagogue in Brooklyn and when I would go to synagogue with him and I'd hold his hand as we walked down the aisle. I'd feel very proud of being with my grandpa. My grandfather was the 17th generation descendant of Yitzhak Luria, who was one of the great scholars of the Jewish religion. But Luria as a name meant nothing to me as a kid; I heard it was some figure. I would dismiss it. What was important were Babe Ruth and Joe DiMaggio.



I can vividly remember as a child, maybe five years old being in the car with my mother. She was delivering something to a Catholic church, she wasn't Catholic, but she went in to deliver something quickly, and I sat in the car. I started playing with what we used to call gearshifts. She was only a couple of minutes, and when she started the car it lurched backwards, and in lurching back it hit the priest. We got out and we looked and he was on the ground. I was horrified. I didn't realize I had done it, I mean I had no connection with the event, but he got up with some assistance and he walked into the church and we walked in accompanying him. I was crying. I guess I was really that scared.

This priest put his arm around me and he comforted me. He was like an angel. It was incredible how comforting and consoling he was. There was no blame. That was the most religious experience I had at that point, or the first one I can remember. That experience as a 5 year old, has influenced me in my dealings with the Catholic Church to this day.



My father's dress manufacturing plant was in the city. It was 1400 Broadway as a matter of fact, which was then a new building. That's the heart of the garment district, so called. Yeah, I would visit the factory. There was one brief frightening moment when he was struck. The International Ladies Garment Worker Union, ILGWU, they were as powerful as the teamsters. They struck him; there were some dangerous, scary actions. You know they didn't play bean baggers. I don't really know, I was a youngster at that point, but the guys came with clubs and they were intimidating.

This was a factory; these were not showrooms. Women were sewing and they were models showing buyers. This was not fancy stuff. What's the term? Schmata? These were like 5 dollar dresses. They were sold to Orbachs at that time. I don't think it still exists. Well Orbachs was a big customer; it was the low price merchandise. I never had any intention, desire or interest in going (to the factory). That was what my father did.



In 1955, we made a bid on a house in Larchmont, and we didn't get it. We had given up our lease, so we moved to wherever we could, and we got into Pelham.

You know everything Bronxville is supposed to be? Square it, that was Pelham in those days. It was a hostile, anti-Semitic community. We had no idea what Pelham was. We had a garden apartment in on Pelhamdale Avenue. My son went to kindergarten, and when they celebrated Christmas, each of the kids were telling what they did for

Christmas and our little Jim, who was the only Jewish kid in kindergarten, talked about Hanukah, and the kids all wanted to sign up for gifts for eight nights.

A year after that, there came a call by word-of-mouth: if you are Jewish you might be interested in a meeting that they were going to have in the basement of the high school. There were about 150 in that basement, “You’re Jewish?” “And you’re Jewish?” I mean Jews had been *passing*. You know what *passing* means? *Passing* means not admitting you are Jewish. Primarily you wanted your daughter to be in dancing class or in skating class. Jews were not always welcome. So we decided to see if we could put something together in the way of a community. So we formed a Jewish community center, which evolved years later into the Pelham Jewish Center. It still exists now as a reform synagogue.

At one point, we tried to get a building, a house on the Post Road. Located between two gas stations. There was a serious fight in the zoning board meeting, in which Mr. Ely arose and said, “Some day you people, you people will appreciate what we are doing here to preserve the character of this community.” We didn’t get the house.



Once during the war, when I was in college, I was the night editor of the *Cornell Sun*. The office was downtown in Ithaca. Cornell was up the hill. The AP wire had this story about Rudolph Hess, flying from Berlin to defect and landing in a parachute over Scotland. We thought it was a hoax. This is ridiculous; the number 3 doesn’t fly out of Germany. We’re putting the paper to bed as we used to say. Finally at about ten o’clock at night, Marion, my (future) wife, had brought the late woman’s page down, and

suddenly I said to her, “You know this story looks like it is real.” Well who knows, we’ll put it in a little box on the third page of the newspaper. Well it kept working at me, what’s going on? Is this for real?

We go down to the *Ithaca Journal* offices and I said, “This is going to be big, TEAR THE FRONT PAGE!” We are going to redo it. And right there at the *Ithaca Journal*, at one o’clock in the morning we rewrote, and put the banner headline in 14 point lettering: **Hess Number Three German Flees, Lands in Scotland.** We reprinted and reset the whole front page.

That morning the *Cornell Sun* beat the *New York Times* in Ithaca. And Marion was with me that night. I had really forgotten that connection. So that may have been the reason we got married. We were certainly close together that night. We had a hamburger at the diner on the way up at 3 o’clock in the morning. We drove up the hill and I brought her up to her dorm.



She was a writer; she was on the *Cornell Sun*. So was I. In fact, the first time I ever saw her was when she brought the women’s page down to the publishing facility that the *Cornell Sun* used, downtown. She walked in, beautiful girl, almond eyes, white skin. I was the night edit. She walked in with the woman’s page and I asked my assistant, “Who was that?” And he told me Marion Weinberg. So it all started right there.

It wasn’t love at first sight, I had to win her. One of the guys she was going with was wearing a uniform on campus. I remember there was a *New Yorker* cartoon that shows this nerdy guy going up to the Abercrombie and Fitch salesman that said, “I need something to compete with the uniform.” That cartoon is my life at that point. We had a great marriage that lasted 62 years.

Al Lurie finds Chevra Torah to be an irresistible addiction and returned to active committee life at Larchmont Temple by joining the brotherhood board in 2012.