

Narrator: Judith Kane¹

Interviewer: Remi Welbel

00:00:00.130

Remi Welbel (she/they): Okay, it is November thirteenth, 2022. It's nine o' eight am. And this is Remi Welbel and Judith Kane.

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Remi Welbel (she/they): Okay. So Judith, where do you think is a good place to begin today?

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Judith Kane: Uh, at the beginning. Around Ellen Lippmann's² dining room table, 30, almost 30 years ago.

00:00:25.870

Judith Kane: Good morning, by the way, good morning.

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Remi Welbel (she/they): Morning.

00:00:30.790

Judith Kane: So, you just want me to talk? Or are you gonna ask me questions?

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Remi Welbel (she/they): Yeah, you can. You can tell me what the beginning was like. What does that mean to you?

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Judith Kane: Well, [clears throat] I was a member of a of a synagogue, that closed its doors after many, many years—a Reform synagogue in Brooklyn. And Ellen Lippmann had been the student Rabbi for two years at that synagogue, and then, when she was ordained, she went on to work for Mazon, the Jewish response to hunger.

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Judith Kane: But she missed the interaction, and she missed the pulpit.

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Judith Kane: So, she decided she wanted to start a congregation, which is an insane thing to pop into someone's head—I thought.

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¹ Judith Kane is a founding member of Kolot Chayeinu and current “card-carrying” member who resided in Brooklyn for many years before moving to New Jersey and Florida.

² Ellen Lippmann is the Rabbi Emeritus of Kolot Chayeinu.

Judith Kane: And her vision—her vision was to have she, she always noticed that people were very stiff and sort of starchy during the service, but they were relaxed and interacted afterwards, at the Oneg Shabbat³. So she decided that, not only did she want to start a new synagogue—this is what she said, she wanted it to be like a coffee shop with a Bima.

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Judith Kane: Which which was... anyway, she asked several people to... She invited several people to her house. She invited my friend, and a fellow congregant of the old synagogue, Fred Miller, and he invited me to come along. So Ellen didn't invite me directly. I didn't hold that against her, anyway. So we we went to her house in Brooklyn, sat around her living room, and then the dining room table.

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Judith Kane: And she presented this vision, and almost thirty years later, look what we started!

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Judith Kane: Anyway, when we... the other people, by the way, that we're around around in that first meeting, were people from other facets of her life. I don't remember now what they were, and one one of the seven represented, seven families represented, was was a long time member of the congregation as well. I think to this day. The others I I don't know what happened to them, anyway. A lot of people from Beth Or⁴, that was the old congregation that had closed its doors, heard about Ellen's experiment, and they sort of put a toe in the water.

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Judith Kane: We used to meet in an individual's homes on a on a Shabbat morning. There there were children that were playing on the floor in the in that, in the room where we were, or another room, this this predates Zoom, or anything like that, you know. And and Ellen held. We had a service, and you know we we had a Shabbat service, and everyone we used to say, "Ellen's Synagogue," and she hated that reference.

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Judith Kane: She said, "we need to find a name," and we we were in someone's home, I think. I'm not quite sure. And she had a, we had a blackboard or a chalkboard, if you will, and people came up with ideas, English ideas that she translated into Hebrew, and from all of this, I don't know how long it took, but from all of these ideas, we came up with, Kolot Chayeinu, which means, if you're aware, it means "voices of our lives." Perfect.

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Judith Kane: And we went on from there. We met in, no we rented a couple of places, but for high holidays, I can't think of it now, a meeting basement of some one kind or another, and one of the first ones that we rented was like a nice Columbus Hall kind of thing, and they used to um. They had a flea

³ An Oneg Shabbat literally translates to the "joy of Shabbat" and it practiced as a festive gathering after the Shabbat service

⁴ Beth Or was a synagogue in Brooklyn that Judith and other founding members of Kolot belonged to and where Rabbi Ellen trained as a student rabbi.

market there, so they had all sorts of merchandise and science all around this place. So a few people came in early before the service and put brown paper over all these clothing and and merchandise and and science, so that it wasn't as offensive as it would have been otherwise; and we had our service, and every we we we kept moving along with with with a little a little more little more little more effort, a little more energy.

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Judith Kane: One year we had a Shabbat, we had a a dinner before a high holiday service. I think Rosh Hashannah, and my friend Fred and I, I think, looked for a place where we could do that.

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Judith Kane: The the bottom line was because we were inching our way along, if you signed on to this, this, this idea of Ellen's, you did whatever had to be done. There was no such thing as being a card-holding member, which is what I am now, you know.

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Judith Kane: So, as I said, Fred and I, we researched places where you could have a service. So we did that one one high holiday, and it was just, it was an adventure. It was an incredible adventure. We saw that people were signing on, and people were signing on, because because it was such a comfortable place to be. Because the mission statement, which you must be aware of, is all hands are needed, like it takes the village kind of thing, and doubt is an act of faith. So these two combined brought people, attracted people that would not have considered going to a regular synagogue, I'm speaking Reform, Conservative, didn't matter what the denomination was anyway.

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Judith Kane: And we grew to be what we are now. It was amazing. In the beginnings, as I said, you did whatever was required of you, or whatever was needed to keep this thing going. So I, one year I actually organized the high holidays, meaning I gave out the parshas⁵ for people to read, and you know, I, believe me, it was the farthest thing from my comfort zone was to do something like that. And then we decided we wanted to communicate with people outside of our little circle. So we wanted to put out a newsletter. It was a one page, two page, I don't remember, and I actually solicited for people to write something, and I put it together. Again, something very well off of my comfort zone and here we are.

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Judith Kane: Yeah, I don't know what else to say. This is it's a place where every lifestyle is represented. Ethnicities are—they melt away because whoever—going back to that first day, in Ellen and Kathryn's home, as I said, she was a student Rabbi at Beth Or for two years. So we thought we got to know her pretty well. But that day, that evening at at her house, when we went around in introducing ourselves before we started talking about her vision, this woman said, “my name is Kathryn Conroy⁶, and I guess i'm the Rebbetzin.”

⁵ A parsha is a portion of the Torah that is read or chanted during services

⁶ Kathryn Conroy is Rabbi Ellen Lippmann's wife and has been with Ellen since before Kolot Chayeinu was founded.

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Judith Kane: My friend and I looked at each other. We both held on, so we didn't fall off our chairs. We had no idea that Ellen was a lesbian. We had no idea I mean it, it just never entered our minds, and we never met and never met Kathryn. Not that that matters, it's just a fact, you know.

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Judith Kane: I was not raised with a lot of Jewish background. As a matter of fact, I, I, a friend of mine when I was a kid, had a traditional family, and I gravitated to that. So I used to get dressed up for the high holidays, and I used to fast on Yom Kippur when I was twelve⁷. My mother used to call out of the window at noon or one o'clock, "Judy, honey, come have lunch, you've fasted enough already." So I didn't have it, this Jewish background. But when I met Ellen Lippmann I started to—I joined the other synagogue because of my daughter. I thought she needed to have a needed to have a Jewish background, especially because we lived in an Orthodox neighborhood. But when I met Ellen, I had the sense that she really, truly had a calling. I mean she's, to this day, she's a friend of mine.

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I was there a couple of weeks ago for Shabbat dinner with another long-time congregant in Brooklyn. I live in New Jersey. Now I'm in Florida now, as a matter of fact. But she was—she truly had a calling, and it was it was a pleasure to be around her and to help with her vision from the beginning. [badumbum]

00:10:06.930

Remi Welbel (she/they): That's so beautiful. I really could feel that when I was there the other weekend—just how much the community has all come together.

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Judith Kane: Well, well it's been a long time. We started, as I said, in people's homes. And then we went to these, these Nights of Columbus kind of cellar meeting places. And then we started to rent something for the high holidays, because people heard about us, people came, and of course the the main reason I think people came to begin with, was, they knew that this is a synagogue, in quotes, this is a congregation, I should say, that did not charge for the high holiday. You didn't need a ticket and it was a very smart thing that Ellen—her philosophy—but I don't think she did it intentionally, but it it it attracted many, many more people than we would have otherwise, and they came because it was free. But they stayed because it was wonderful and they became members. And and before they realized that they were getting involved with, you know, with the workings, and I mean to this day like I do Zoom. I didn't do it yesterday because I was at my daughter's, but I do Zoom most Shabbat mornings, even when I'm in New Jersey. And it's amazing to me now when I, when I see a face that's familiar. They are few and far between.

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Judith Kane: When I was was actively at the meeting place on Yom Kippur the, the afternoon of Yom Kippur, it was so heart warming to meet, to see the people that I've known for so very long from the congregation. I hadn't seen [them] because of the pandemic. You know, and the reason I went into

⁷ In Judaism, it is traditional to begin fasting for the high holiday of Yom Kippur upon reaching the age of bar/bat/bnei mitzvah, 12 or 13. The Yom Kippur fast is 25 hours long. It begins at sundown on Erev Yom Kippur and ends with breaking the fast the following night when three stars are visible in the sky.

Brooklyn, which is like a major event for me is I have had the reading—were you at services? I don't know if I don't know what you're familiar with.

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Judith Kane: I have had the last reading on the on Yom Kippur for at least twenty years, I believe. Twenty years and it was something that was very important to me. The year before, I was at Ellen and Kathryn's house for the—to break the [fast] for the last services, and I did the reading with her in her study, but with her with her next to me, and she pointed out to me this this this year we've been together for the high early days for thirty, some odd years, because she was a student and what have you, and it's it's very it's very meaningful to me that I have this privilege that I'm a founding member, anyway [badumbum].

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Remi Welbel (she/they): So the Kolot community has evolved so much over the years. Do you want to speak a little bit to that?

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Judith Kane: I don't know. I don't know most of the people now that are part of the Kolot. I don't know the people that are that are elected officials on the board, because I've been been apart from it other than, I mean even before the pandemic. I live in New Jersey, and I, right now, I'm eighty five years old now, but I was eighty-two, whatever eighty three. I was not driving into Brooklyn on a Friday for Shabbat, or a Saturday morning to go to services, so I missed an awful lot of it. I just I would go away for the high holidays uh prior to the pandemic. And then when with Zoom, it was like brave new world. Now I could be there without being there. I love that you know [phone noises]. [clears throat], cause I I enjoy the service. I love Lisa Segal's voice. I really love her voice, and even though Ellen's not there anymore, I miss Ellen, I miss Rabbi Ellen Lippmann, but it's still my congregation—still my spiritual home, you know, a little a little aside and a little patting myself on the back one hundred years ago. At the beginning of this endeavor, 100 years ago, this young woman came to services. Her name was Lisa Segal⁸, and she came with this guy that she was dating his name is Arthur Strimling, and it turns out she's very knowledgeable about Judaism, and she's from somewhere in the Middle West, where I didn't know there were Jews, and she she had a beautiful—she would sing. She had lovely voice, and Ellen, the Rabbi, heard her sing and was aware of her knowledge, and invited her to come up and to to join her in doing the services. I think she was a little reticent to do that initially, but she did, and I remember saying to her early on, I don't know what what you do for a living now, or I don't know what you do, but you have a lovely voice. You really should think about going to cantorial school, and she said, “What! You're crazy, What? You're crazy, what, what what?”

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Judith Kane: Well, fast forward. I don't remember. I don't remember the time frame. But fast forward I remember her calling me, or saying to me, “Remember when you said blah blah blah, she said. Well, I just enrolled in cantorial school and I had to.” And I was—we weren't friends. I just knew that she was much younger than me. She and Arthur got married, whatever, and I, I get this communication from her one way or another. She invited me to her investiture when she had graduated. Because, she said, you are the

⁸ Lisa Segal is the current cantor of Kolot Chayeinu and her husband Arthur Strimling is an active member of the community.

first one you know, who said something, and it's I miss it. I miss it but I [phone noises] you know, anyway, so I don't know what else to say.

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Remi Welbel (she/they): Yeah. Are there particular moments that you feel like the community has really rallied together, or are there particular members of the community that have made a deep impact on your life?

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Judith Kane: I met some people that I consider almost friends, you know, or or friends, you know. And, of course, some people from Beth Or that I was, I knew for many, many years gravitated, and I felt I was really very heart warmed about that; that, in fact, one of the one of the couples that came over, she became the president at one point, Natalie Levy. Her husband had been President years before at Beth Or and I was pleased about that but it—my daughter had already been Bat Mitzvah'ed, had been confirmed, before—my daughter's fifty two. She was before.

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Judith Kane: So I don't have that connection with the school. I understand we have an incredible school. A couple of hundred students and it would be an award winning school. I see that when I see a Bar or Bat Mitzvah on Zoom. The youngsters are phenomenal, incredible. I can't say enough about them. That like I always have this feeling that we're we're gonna be okay in the world because these young people are gonna be running it in the future. So it has to do with the part of it has to do with their parents choosing this congregation, for all of its attributes, and part of it has to be this this school, that that the religious school that is preparing them for their Bar or Bat Mitzvah.

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Judith Kane: Otherwise, as I said [phone noise], I, I miss being there, but there are very few people that I know that are still, that are still around, you know. And by comparison to the numbers otherwise. And I don't know I, I'm proud to be a founding member of Kolot Chayeinu.

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Remi Welbel (she/they): Yeah. Yeah. But do any particular moments over the many years stick out to you?

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Judith Kane: I don't think so. It just, it's been an incredible journey with Ellen and with the congregation. I am grateful that I am now just as I said, a card carrying member. But I'm aware of all the things that I contributed without having any idea that I could do those things in the early years. Nothing that I can think of in particular. Yeah, in the early years. When I, my husband, died, my husband died, and several years later I connected with someone from my youth, and we embarked upon a relationship. We had a love affair in our old age, and I remember Ellen's saying to me, when someone falls in love, I give them six months, and then I will expect them to come back [laughs]. Because I was—we were traveling where I was. He lived in the city. I was in the city, I didn't I didn't go to service, but I used to be at services on a

regular basis. So I got—I remember her saying that you know. Well what one of the things that it seems, is those centering things about me.

00:19:39.930

Judith Kane: From the time that we started this congregation I never felt, I never felt really connected when you, when you read, when you use the prayer books with all the masculine pronouns⁹ [phone noises], so I never discussed it with anybody. I just changed the language. You know we would read if it said “he,” I said, “God.” Out loud, I mean that's when we were reading out loud. I didn't scream it out. I was—I used to drive. I used to drive to services on Friday night in particular with two women friends of mine. One of them died, moved to Hawaii, and then she died a long time ago. The other one is in her nineties and lives in New Jersey. I see her every couple of months. We drove together with whoever drove, but they wouldn't sit with me when we got to the to, wherever we were having services because they said when I changed the language, I threw them off. I made them crazy. Fast forward. I don't remember the time frame, but this was—oh, this was back this is Beth Or, even before Kolot.

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Judith Kane: So what—when a rabbi came on the scene, a student Rabbi, I'm going backwards now. Who—he did a funeral service before he came to to work with the congregation, and he he changed the language. He made it all gender neutral, and several of my friends, or several people I knew came over to me afterwards and said, “how did you get to him?” And then and now in recent years, the reform congregation, the Reform movement has come out with the book with a prayer book that's gender neutral. [Remi: Yeah!] Yaaay! It was—I've always been a—I've always been very assertive.

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Judith Kane: I'm not trying to change the world, just my little section of it [Remi: yeah], and it's very nice when it catches up with me once in a while, you know. But maybe that was one of the reasons that I was gravitated to Ellen and her vision. Because it was so [phone noises] way out there, and she was so gung-ho about it that she made it sound like it was like it was possible, and not only possible, but you know—it's quite amazing. It was a is was its twenty-fifth anniversary, twenty-fifth celebration, I think a big gala of a big fundraising gala, and unfortunately I was travelling, or I was not there, I couldn't go, but I wrote. I took a space in the journal. You know, to support it, and all I wrote was, “Ellen, look what we started.” Or, “look what we did.” Yeah, and I'm very proud of that.

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Remi Welbel (she/they): Truly. Yeah.

00:22:32.820

Judith Kane: I haven't shut up for a minute.

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Remi Welbel (she/they): Yeah, this your piece of the story, and it's just [Judith: ok] so lovely that you're able to share.

⁹ In many Jewish liturgical texts, masculine pronouns are used when referring to god.

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Judith Kane: My fellow, the guy that I that [I] connected with, he—it was—he died nine years ago. But, after some period of time, he would, we would share the high holidays. He lived in Manhattan, and we started [at] his synagogue, and then we would go to my synagogue, and he immediately was like, and he was very—he was a very comfortable guy financially. So, he honored me by supporting Kolot, you know, and I remember people would say, “that Jerry. Boy, boy, that Jerry.” I didn't know what he was doing. He never told me he was. He wasn't—he didn't brag about. He just did it, you know. And, she, when he died, she [Rabbi Ellen] came to Virginia to do the funeral service, by request. She she changed her plans because she was my rabbi at the time [phone noises] and she knew, he was important to her because he made me happy, and because he supported the synagogue, whatever. And she, I asked her and she came, and I was very pleased by that. Anyway. And he supported three synagogues. His in the city, mine in Brooklyn, and when we were in Florida. It's on the on the west coast. He supported the Conservative synagogue, and he said he honors his parents. He doesn't even know if he believes in God, which is interesting. Yeah, anyway.

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Judith Kane: Ask me another question. What else you got?

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Remi Welbel (she/they): What has been challenging in forming this community or growing this community over the years? And if you want to speak to, if you feel like, I know that you are more of a card carrying member, as you say. But if there is room for Kolot to grow in the future.

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Judith Kane: I think Kolot is is growing ongoing because we're—word word gets out. And the people the people that come to Kolot, are people that probably would be very hard pressed to be comfortable in any other setting. As I said, in our mission statement, “where doubt is an act of faith.” I mean, where do we? Where do you see that? Anywhere else on the planet? You know it's not a, not a blind commitment.

00:25:26.080

Judith Kane: And, I am, as I said earlier, I am constantly awed and impressed with the with the children, so certainly their parents must be pretty terrific, as well, you know because it starts at home. And then with with our school. I just could see us growing. I don't—I don't see anything note worthy [phone noises] other than us growing and continuing to impart Ellen's vision.

00:25:57.780

Judith Kane: Yeah, because we don't—it's not a—it's not a coffee shop. But people are very friendly, and very outgoing, yeah.

00:26:07.130

Remi Welbel (she/they): But do you feel like there have been any challenges that the community has overcome over the years?

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Judith Kane: Not well the—to this day we don't have our own hall, we don't have our own building. We're still renting and we started off renting like early on the same place where we had services for the high holidays, and realized very quickly that that would not suffice.

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Judith Kane: We used to—we used to line up. People have a line up outside of the the building, and somebody would come with apples and honey for the high holidays, and walking up and down the line with the tray, you know. But, some of the members were upset that you let people in first come first serve when they opened the doors; that a dues paying member could be shut out because the place was too small. So we started renting larger places outside of of of the church at Gethsemane.¹⁰

00:27:12.620

Judith Kane: And one of the places—one year we rented was Brooklyn College Auditorium, and you know that was wonderful, because it was so close to where I lived in Brooklyn. And now we meet in this city tech downtown Brooklyn, which is a huge auditorium for the high holidays, because we need we need the space.

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Judith Kane: Just as an aside. Nothing to do with the history, but the first year that Jerry, that's my fella—what we needed to put on Yom Kippur services, Rosh Hashanah services, I think Rosh Hashanah. The night before we met a whole bunch of people in Brooklyn for dinner, and then we went to the services, and he saw that we had a line up outside and wait to be let in, and that did not please him at all. He was, he definitely, he wasn't a snob, but he had no interest in doing that.

00:28:12.340

Judith Kane: So fast forward like—the next year again we went. We went to services. We went to dinner with people, and we went to Erev Rosh Hashanah and I'm going in line, he says, "No, no, come," I mean, what do you mean? We—he went to the out the—so this is when we were still in Gethsemane we went to the entrance. And we're walking in, I said, "what are you doing, Jerry? What are you doing?" And there was a a tallis on a pew. It's like fourth pew from the front, and Kathryn, Ellen's partner, brought us, so I said, "what's going on here?" He said, "I made an arrangement with the Rabbi. I didn't want to wait in line," and the arrangement he made was he could communicate with her, and he said, well, how can I avoid? He made an offer, and he, for all the years that he was alive, from that time on, he would communicate with Ellen, before the high holidays, and he would find out how much the rental was for the high holidays wherever we rented, and he sent a check, to pay for it.

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Judith Kane: I didn't know this for for a while. Yeah. And and that was the only caveat to the check was that he wasn't going to wait. We didn't have to wait in line. After he died, I went to services, and they—someone came and got me off the line, and I was, I was crazed, and I said, "no, this is where I still go. This is not going to work. I don't I don't want." I was embarrassed, and anyway, So this was the

¹⁰ [Church of Gethsemane](#) is a Presbetyrian Church on Eighth Avenue in Brooklyn in which Kolot Chayeinu holds Shabbat services on Saturday mornings.

relationship between Ellen and Jerry, and I'm proud of that as that [phone noises] I brought that to the congregation. Yeah, that's all.

00:29:59.550

Remi Welbel (she/they): Yeah.

00:30:04.630

Judith Kane: And, people ask me like in Florida. Have I made a connection with a synagogue. I really haven't even looked because, though I miss the interaction, I know I would be left wanting if I went anywhere else. I'd rather do the Zoom when I can now, and I don't know how long it's gonna last. But you know I was thrilled with the Zoom. And even in New Jersey I have not—I went to a service some time ago at a Reform congregation. It was like uhh his is not not a place I could be comfortable.

00:30:44.870

Judith Kane: So, Remi, ask me a question, or what?

Remi Welbel (she/they): Yeah, what is it about Kolot that's always made you feel so comfortable all these years?

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Judith Kane: The genuineness of it, the genuineness of it! Ellen was not pompous. She did not pontificate. She lived it, I mean she, as I said she, she really has a—I feel she has a true call into the—to the, the pulpit. And I don't—I've never been. I never encountered—not my best, not experience—but in my experience, I haven't encountered that with anyone else, whether it's a minister or a priest, [or] rabbi.

00:31:35.430

Judith Kane: Not that they're all phonies, but they sort of. I don't know, it's a separate—it's like a job, but for Ellen, it wasn't a job it was, it's who she is to this day. It's just amazing [phone noises].

00:31:49.640

Judith Kane: And her partner supports that. I mean they've been together thirty-five years. So, she supports that. Which is—she's not Jewish, Kathryn, and she she didn't—people were asking her about that. And, she actually—they had it—we had a service one Shabbat where Ellen and Kathryn spoke together on a Saturday to explain why she didn't convert. She makes the Jewish home, Ellen would say, but she she wouldn't hurt—she didn't want to offend her family, Kathryn's family, by disavowing them. Yeah.

00:32:27.030

Judith Kane: But it's a—I don't know it's a place that I'm grateful that I had the experience to be in and to be a part of, and I miss it.

00:32:41.010

Remi Welbel (she/they): Yeah.

00:32:43.660

Remi Welbel (she/they): So you said that your daughter was a big reason why you decided to search for a synagogue. Do you want to speak about that experience?

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Judith Kane: Well, my husband was Jewish. I'm Jewish. My daughter was named in this, in the synagogue when she was born, that's the tradition¹¹. We lived in an apartment, and when she was four years old we bought a house. I didn't realize when we bought the house, that it was really, and it was. It was in a relatively mixed neighborhood at the time, but it very quickly became an Orthodox neighborhood. And then there was my little my house in the middle of all this.

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Judith Kane: So she was five, must have been five-years-old. She gets on, on her tricycle one more morning. She rides up the block. I mean, she, this is a different time. Children went out on their own, and you didn't have to worry about them. Yeah, she rode right up the block with her tricycle, and uh, I was outside watching her and she comes back [phone noises]. I can still see her. She's fifty-two. I can still see her knees up and down as she was frantically riding back, coming back, and she goes, "Mommy, mommy!" as she was riding, she jumped off the trike, ran up the few steps, and she said, "Mommy, are we Jewish?" And I said, "Yes, Bonnie! What? What? What? Why do you ask that question? She just went to the call on this little girl, Hannah. I don't know her name. Up the block to play with her, one of her friends. And the mother—who was much younger than me—but the mother knew absolutely knew that we were Jewish, and the mother said to her, "Bonnie, Chaya can't come out to play on her bicycle because it's Shabbat, Shabbos, and we're Jewish."

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Judith Kane: So this confused, so with that, I mean you could see how confused she was. It helps, you know. That evening I had a conversation with my husband, saying, "Bonnie needs to have a Jewish education, because in this neighborhood she needs to have an identity. So he said, "What, we're gonna send her to Synagogue? I said, "No, we're not gonna send her, we're gonna take her." Which was—yeah.

00:35:01.500

Judith Kane: And I, this is the synagogue that I used to go to on the high holidays. I crashed the synagogue on the high holidays. One year, it was on the weekend, I took one of my Gentile friends with me. Never even—wasn't smart enough to make a donation. We we went to that synagogue and found out they had it—they had a religious school, and I signed my daughter up. We joined the synagogue, or I signed her up for the religious school, and I said to my husband, we're not going to send her, we're gonna go. So we went to services, and for me it was like, wow! This is a brave new world. It was something that was obviously missing from my life, which is, which I would never have known it, you know. So I became involved with—I would go to services every Friday night with my friends [phone noises], and Saturday morning I would take my you know, my daughter whatever, and it was like, it I was very involved with Beth Or. I was never President, but I was on the board, and...

¹¹ In Jewish tradition, babies who are assigned female at birth are given a baby naming ceremony in which they receive their Jewish or Hebrew name, typically a name that honors one of their ancestors.

00:36:06.580

Judith Kane: My daughter had her religious education. She was Bat Mitzvah'ed, and she was confirmed. And at the age of 15, after her confirmation, she said, "I don't do this anymore." I said, okay, you, that's your choice. I said, "one request: I'm going to request you go with me to one high holiday service every year," and she agreed with that and I we go. And she, I mean she wasn't she wasn't one of these Bat Mitzvha kids, she we belonged to the synagogue. So she knew all the prayers, and she could read the Hebrew or could memorize it, whichever¹². It was—it's something that's instilled in her. So that's that's something, that's how I became involved in Judaism, and that's how it's—so it was my neighbors with the blessing and disguise, that woman that I was so angry with, you know. Yeah.

00:37:04.710

Remi Welbel (she/they): What does Judaism mean to you?

00:37:10.800

Judith Kane: Interesting question. I'm proud to be Jewish. I wear this [a Jewish star], I don't hide it. You know it just happens it's under my shirt, but I don't hide it. This was my mother in law's, and I wish people wouldn't hate. Whether you're Jewish, Muslim, Black, whatever, I just wish people would make it, would make life simpler to everybody if if we didn't hate. Don't love me, but don't hate me. Yeah, that and I never thought about what Judaism means to me. It's part of my identity. I've been to Israel at least four times. I have a niece who lives there.

00:38:08.430

Judith Kane: I'm, I was very, very pleased with my daughter. My my granddaughter is adopted. My granddaughter, she's gonna be thirteen next month. She's she's adopted, and I was very pleased with my daughter, said, "Mom we need to have a conversion ceremony." So she was. She was born of an Irish Catholic woman. I was very pleased that she said it because I was thinking about it, and I arranged it because she asked me to help her arrange it, and they joined the synagogue when she was a few years old and enrolled her in religious school. I was ecstatic over [it].

00:38:48.360

Judith Kane: And then the new Rabbi in in Florida. New rabbi came on the scene and changed the religious school from Sunday to Saturday, and the children had all kinds of other activities on Saturday. So a lot of young families with children left. No, this isn't. This is in Northern Florida, where it's hard—you're hard hard pressed to find a Jew to begin with, and she is, this is a reform congregation. The only one in town. She was one of the families that left, and I asked her once or twice through the years if they made any other connection, she said, "we're not gonna, we're not doing this, so don't even, don't ask again." So that was the end of my granddaughter's Jewish education.

00:39:26.200

Judith Kane: Last year we were invited to Phoenix, Arizona to a cousin's bat mitzvah and I took my family and we all went, and my granddaughter, who was twelve, eleven, twelve at the time, said, "Mima,

¹² Traditionally, Jewish prayers are in Hebrew, so individuals typically read the Hebrew, read the transliteration, or memorize the prayers.

Why can't I have a bat mitzvah?" I said, "Oh, absolutely, you can have a bat mitzvah. I said, "but you have to study." And she said, "never mind." [Judith and Remi laugh together]

00:40:07.000

Judith Kane: That was the end of that. So it saddens me that my daughter did not think it was important enough for her daughter to have a full education. But, I don't get a vote. I'm trying to remember to remember that at this tender age. I'm trying to. I don't get a vote not in their life, you know, but it would—I guess Judaism means a lot to me, because I'm disappointed. That would please me if I could share with her, you know, coming of age, that kind of thing. But, not gonna happen.

00:40:33.530

Remi Welbel (she/they): Do you feel like Kolot has changed your relationship to your Judaism?

00:40:38.990

Judith Kane: Oh, I didn't have a relationship to my Judaism before before—well, I sort of did with Beth Or. But, not—yes, it, it just it just made it more important in my life for a period of time. It's uh, I miss it. As I said, I miss it now, but I—there's no way that I'm, you know, even when I'm in New Jersey that I'm gonna be driving on a regular basis. And I still drive but—And, yeah.

00:41:18.800

Remi Welbel (she/they): Yeah, how did you feel stepping into that leadership role almost immediately, not really having as much of a relationship to Judaism before?

00:41:27.870

Judith Kane: It was it just was. I never even thought about it as a leadership role or—it just it was. This was, this is a a community that I wanted to be a part of, and this is a community that had the following needs, and they would—no one had to ask you. You didn't even have to raise your hand. You just stepped up and took over here because it was it was necessary to perpetuate this community, which is what we wanted to do. You know I was, as I said, I was a trustee, I was never, I never wanted to be a leader. I was on the board, but I didn't want to have office. I don't want to hold the office. I was not interested in being a leader in an organized sense, but uh—[pauses] and here we are.

00:42:30.270

Remi Welbel (she/they): Yeah, well, just what you were saying of planning the high holiday services, it certainly takes leadership.

00:42:41.250

Judith Kane: Well, I mean the—there's the service, and you know, and it's pre—the service is predetermined, and it was a matter of having—giving away and giving parts to the people who wanted to read, or whatever. I don't even remember what I did actually. Just like the newsletter. It wasn't a twelve page thing, but I just remember that it had to get done, and I did it. I just it was—I don't know if I did a good job or not. But it was, it was a job that got done, and I was pleased to be able to do that.

00:43:21.660

Judith Kane: I was also pleased to just sit back and just go to services and not and not do as we grew. It was, I was pleased to see that there were people who were able and who wanted to do all the things that we had to do. Interesting. I just, as I said that, I said this earlier, I, I'm very proud to be a founding member, and I say that with— I mean if I have a conversation I don't throw it in, but it if we're talking about synagogues or whatever I say [it].

00:44:02.030

Judith Kane: No, I'm not interested in finding a synagogue here in Del Ray Beach, because I'm a founding member of a synagogue in Brooklyn. That's my spiritual home. Yeah, it's it's fun to relive some of the memories. I thank you for that.

00:44:22.450

Remi Welbel (she/they): Yeah, totally! Thank you so much for sharing with me. Were you a part of the group of people that created the mission statement¹³, the working mission statement of Kolot?

00:44:38.900

Judith Kane: I don't think so. I don't remember. So I, I really don't think so. But it was, appropriate, absolutely appropriate. Yeah, if I was a part of it, I would have absolutely agreed and voted then for that without that, you know. And the fact that people used to say, “two women up on the bima¹⁴!” Because of the rabbi, Ellen Lippmann, and [the cantor] Lisa Segal.

00:44:59.110

Judith Kane: Yeah. And what's your point? [laughs] When two men are up there it's okay? Yeah,

00:45:06.500

Remi Welbel (she/they): Really!

00:45:09.060

Judith Kane: It's—this has nothing to do with the synagogue. This has to do with me. I'm not an easy person. I used to say people love me, or they think I'm a loudmouth and that's ok. Because I am. It's um, you know they, “if you see something, say something,” I could have originated that statement. [Remi: yeah]. This is one example of me again, having nothing to do Kolot.

00:45:41.360

¹³ Kolot Chayeinu's [mission statement](#) is: “Kolot Chayeinu/Voices of Our Lives is a Jewish congregation in Brooklyn, where doubt can be an act of faith and all hands are needed to build our community. We are creative, serious seekers who pray joyfully, wrestle with tradition, pursue justice, and refuse to be satisfied with the world as it is. We share a commitment to ending structural racism and becoming an antiracist congregation. And, as individuals of varying sexual orientations, gender identities, races, family arrangements, and Jewish identities and backgrounds, we search for meaningful and just expressions of our Judaism in today's uncertain world.”

¹⁴ The “bima” is the podium on which the clergy and members of the community stand on to lead Jewish services.

Judith Kane: Beth Or, that's the other congregation that I was involved with, and I was I was a trustee there as well. Early on, maybe the second, third, or whatever high holidays, do you know they have aliyahs¹⁵, uh, an honor of being called up to the Torah.

00:46:03.570

Remi Welbel (she/they): yeah.

00:46:05.420

Judith Kane: And there was like there was seven aliyahs, and one of them was a woman, not me, a woman, and the other six were men, and was very disturbed about that, [Remi: yeah] so I submitted my resignation from the board, and a few people got a little crazy, and they said, “why?” and I said to them, “I feel disenfranchised.” I don't feel as though, you know, I just didn't feel comfortable. This is that—they should have known that because this is me. I was—this is after my changing the language that everyone, they knew that you know. And they said what they said, “well do you want us to have a have a like a count, you know of three. I said, yeah, yeah, if you have to do that, until it becomes natural, yes, I want it to be. You know. [Remi: yeah]

00:46:58.350

Judith Kane: Not that I want. I'm not talking about my wanting an aliyah, but I want to see women represented. And they rescinded my resignation, they said they didn't let me resign, and they, things changed, things changed, and I feel very proud of that. [Remi: yeah] And in general, because people in my world used to say, “Judith was a liberal before it had a name.”

00:47:26.420

Judith Kane: Yeah, I, but it's true, and it wasn't, it wasn't for the points. It was because it's the right thing [Remi: totally], you know. So, I don't know I don't know why I mentioned that, but very few places are like Kolot Chayeinu in terms of the comfort and the legitimacy, the genuineness of the congregation. I don't know. I don't know this, rabbi, Rabbi Miriam¹⁶. I don't know her. I would think if the committee chose her, she must be the real deal. I I don't know, you know.

00:48:06.910

Judith Kane: Her services, Zoom services. I mean she—Lisa does most of the services and she does the commentary and whatever, you know. She seems pretty pleasant and connected. But I don't know her. It's not a negative statement, it's just a, you know: I don't know whether she would have attracted me to the congregation the way Rabbi Ellen would have. But I knew Ellen. So, you know, that's not a fair statement.

00:48:40.310

Remi Welbel (she/they): Yeah, what was the transition like for you between Rabbi Ellen and Rabbi Miriam?

¹⁵ An “aliyah” is the way in which Torah readings are divided. To have an aliyah means to either chant the portion of the reading or to bless the reading before it is read.

¹⁶ Rabbi Miriam Grossman is the current rabbi of Kolot Chayeinu and stepped into the role after Rabbi Ellen retired.

00:48:54.650

Judith Kane: It was—I miss Ellen, but, as I said, I wasn't around [Remi: right.] So it wasn't—I didn't even attempt to have a voice, because it wouldn't have been right, because it's like about complaining about something that I want, that I wasn't going to participate in. So. Yeah,

00:49:05.600

Remi Welbel (she/they): Yeah.

00:49:10.700

Judith Kane: Ellen was ready to retire. I think that was because um uh that. I certainly wouldn't have expected— Kathryn retired, I wouldn't expect her to stay on for us, you know. I get a kick out of the baby now because Rabbi Miriam has a baby [Remi: yeah]. She bounces that baby up and down, you know. [both laugh]. I don't know, whatever.

00:49:36.800

Remi Welbel (she/they): Do you have a vision for the future of Kolot?

00:49:41.760

Judith Kane: Just to continue and to grow, you know, just as we're thinking of growing, I'm thinking to myself, maybe someday they'll even require tickets for the high holidays. My, a friend of mine, a friend of mine from the congregation feels superior. He was president at one point, but he and I um—we're still friends to this day, I still consider him a friend. He and I decided that there was line up outside of the high holidays, and there was a possibility that a dues paying member could get shut out, before we moved to these bigger places. So we both went to Ellen, to the, to the Rabbi and said, "We're growing now. So how about we change our policy a little bit, and start to require tickets for the high holidays." And her response, I'll never forget it, her response was, "and any time you can decide to require tickets for the high holidays, with another Rabbi." [Remi: laughs]

00:50:45.720

Judith Kane: That was that was her answer, very quiet. So we got the message loud and clear, and obviously it is not gonna happen because Rabbi Miriam Grossman hasn't changed anything, you know, so... And it was, as I said earlier, maybe I I don't think she did it as a ploy, but I think it was a very good thing to happen, because people came, and they they were really very excited and interested in and wet their appetite. And they came again, and they ended up, most of them, a lot of people, ended up becoming members. And then becoming involved. Which is wonderful and that probably wouldn't have happened, you know, going back, if they didn't come to begin with, obviously, you know.

00:51:33.400

Remi Welbel (she/they): Yeah, absolutely. Is there a particular ritual that Kolot does that's meaningful to you?

00:51:41.500

Remi Welbel (she/they): Whether that's part of the religious service or before or after the service, Shabbat dinner...

00:51:52.000

Judith Kane: Hmm. Well, one thing that I love that Ellen started after, like Yom Kippur, in particular. I didn't have other services. When Yom Kippur's over, before you break the fast, we would do, we used to do it right in the in the congregation, so like—the synagogue, people in this area were sitting, and then there's this one building that I think about. There was a a stage, and so we would have people volunteer or we catered. I don't know which, but they put out a basic break-fast. But, we we start with the with the with the challah, and somebody would hold hold up the challah, and everybody would hold hands to connect with the challah. I mean hundreds of people that you know, and then we say the bracha over the challah, and then we, you know, break it. Pass it around. That was the first time that we did that. I thought that was beautiful. I love doing that. I love that connection, you know.

00:53:11.220

Judith Kane: Because I really am a people person. So I really love it. I think that's—I think that....And then when we, when we do the the the the Kiddush, we sing V'shamru¹⁷ [starts singing V'shamru and makes hand gesture, both laugh] and I learned this from her as well, and I still do it with my coffee [Remi laughs], or whatever I'm doing it with on Zoom, you know.

00:53:36.350

Remi Welbel (she/they): A classic [both laugh].

00:53:40.400

Judith Kane: Yeah, I—it—we used to go to services, and I was on with, when Jerry was alive, we used to go to services in in Florida, and they would—after the service that you—when you went into the to the Oneg, there were trays of of wine. Take a little glass of a little cup of wine, and then we did a Kiddush¹⁸ before we have coffee and everybody else would be doing like waiting, and I'd still be the one that they thought I was a little nuts. But that's—I love, I love that, anyway.

00:54:18.530

Remi Welbel (she/they): [laughs] Yeah, absolutely.

00:54:23.110

Judith Kane: Yeah.

00:54:25.190

Remi Welbel (she/they): Yeah. You, you talk about being a vocal, assertive person. Do you feel like you have brought that to Kolot?

00:54:35.860

Remi Welbel (she/they): Are there particular things that you've been vocal about in that community?

00:54:43.080

¹⁷ [V'shamru](#) is a prayer about keeping Shabbat, i.e., observing the Sabbath.

¹⁸ Kiddush is the blessing over the wine for Shabbat.

Judith Kane: Well about the—I didn't have to be particularly vocal with Kolot because I was with like-minded people. I mean the few of us had started. We're also, you know, “don't tell me we can't do this” kind of thing [Remi: yeah]. I mean Ellen is much more um...How can I put it? Ellen is as outspoken as I am. It's not more so, [Remi: laughs] but she's much more subdued about it. People don't know it when she is doing it. I'm a little rougher. I'm. I'm a lot rougher around the edges than she is, [Remi: laughs] but she—but we absolutely yeah, she's—that's what I love about her.

00:55:23.800

Remi Welbel (she/they): Yeah.

00:55:25.750

Judith Kane: As a, when she was a student Rabbi, she was—she was a student Rabbi, I think at Beth Or, and I don't remember the circumstances, but some somebody, Rabbi was there that week. A congregant, who I thought, was rather a loudmouth, and a sort of well-beyond his ability, did services. And he he did something—he attempted something that really upset me because I thought it was—I don't—he didn't have the ability to do it, and I said something. I mean it at the service. I said something to stop him from doing it, and he went to the Rabbi [Ellen], I mean. But whenever, whatever he spoke to her, and she approached me about it, and I don't remember the circumstances, but I remember that it happened. I said to her, “this is what happened, and this is what I did, as a set up, and you would have done exactly the same thing.” That was the end of the conversation because she couldn't. She couldn't challenge that because it was true, and that was the end of the conversation.

00:56:42.050

Judith Kane: And I knew that about her. You know that's part of what I love about her. [Remi: yeah]. She's the most—I know you're talking about Kolot and I'm talking about Ellen. But she, Ellen Lippmann, is Kolot Chayeinu as far as I'm concerned. She definitely is, is opinionated and assertive, but it is so gently done that you don't even know it. I mean I know it because I can recognize it, you know. But, I don't know whether she would look at me like I was crazy, or she'd laugh hearing me say that. But yeah.

00:57:25.720

Remi Welbel (she/they): Yeah, what are those core values that you feel like you share both with Ellen, but also with those founding group of people? And now.

00:57:47.690

Judith Kane: I lived, as I said, I lived in an Orthodox neighborhood in Brooklyn for twenty some years. [Remi: yeah], and I resented the fact that these people, these Orthodox people, were [pauses] holy of the now, but they would have ignored me or run me over in a minute. As far as I'm concerned, the basic tenet of Judaism is to be a good person, and that doesn't mean to my own people, or to be I'll be a good person selecting the people to whom i'm going to be a good person,

00:58:13.560

Judith Kane: I'm not, I'm not Orthodox¹⁹, but I'm religious in my own way, and I believe in the Golden Rule. It's as simple as that, and I used to resent these people. I used to say to them, you wear all the outremont, you know the tzitzit, but you're really [REDACTED] because you don't love everyone the same, and to me that's the most important thing. I'm a good person, bottom line. I may say what I think, and it may upset you, but I'm not saying it to upset you. I'm saying it, because it's it's a fact, and I'm not—I know that sounded a little wacky.

00:59:04.120

Judith Kane: And I grew up in a neighborhood that was integrated, for which I'm terribly grateful. I am, I see color, but I think total like you see, the trees are green, and the the flowers that are different colors, not to to make a separation, and I just—It sounds like I'm patting myself on the back. I'm a good person, and that to me is the basis of any religion, in particular Judaism, do one to others.

00:59:41.890

Remi Welbel (she/they) Yeah...

00:59:42.910

Judith Kane: Absolutely.

00:59:49.270

Remi Welbel (she/they): Is there anything else about Kolot that I haven't touched on that you want to share?

00:59:58.140

Judith Kane: You know I don't think so. Kolot was a, Kolot was a gift that Ellen gave to those of us that were there initially, and then anyone that came after. And I hope she's a—I know that she is pleased about how we've grown, and I hope she's pleased about where we are today. At this point, and again I want to. I want to say, look what we've done, because I was there at the beginning, you know.

01:00:35.300

Judith Kane: And I know from what I hear during the bar mitzvah, from the parents, people that—people that have not that have no idea who they are, what they are, that they appreciate Kolot as well, because it's it's a unique place, and Ellen did this. Ellen did this.

01:00:56.020

Remi Welbel (she/they): What has Kolot really meant to you in your life?

01:00:59.500

Judith Kane: So I said, it's my spiritual home. I'm not a religious person, you know. I don't do much of the ritual. I'm not Kosher, but I—it underscored that it's the right path to be a good person. To live by the Golden Rule.

¹⁹ Orthodox Judaism is the branch or sect of Judaism in the U.S. that sees Judaism as abiding strictly by the letter of the Torah and, some sects within Orthodox Judaism believe that the Messiah, or savior, is going to come.

01:01:27.180

Remi Welbel (she/they): Yeah, thank you so much for sharing your story with me.

01:01:38.280

Judith Kane: Remi, thank you for the effort that you're making, and I, yeah, I hope to be able to see this finished product at some point, or it will—you know in whatever form it's gonna take.

01:01:48.330

Judith Kane: I I I don't know who else you're interviewing. I hope one of the people that is being interviewed is Phil Saperia. I don't know if he's yours, he's one of the, one of the early members and past president, and a very knowledgeable person with regards to Judaism to begin with, and then Kolot.

01:02:17.260

Remi Welbel (she/they): Yeah, well, I know Lisa spoke about the impact you had on her life of encouraging her to go to cantorial school.

01:02:24.680

Judith Kane: That's funny. I mean that she is— this is not me. Remembering it—she was, as I said, she, she remembered it. She acknowledged it, which I was happy about. And this is this is just me being me if I do—if you see something, say something. It's what I thought. I could never— like lying is not something I would ever even attempt to do, because it wouldn't. It just wouldn't work. [Remi: Yeah] My my system would be opposed to it. Yeah.

01:02:57.520

Judith Kane: It's. I'm grateful. I'm grateful that I was able to share in the growth of Kolot, and that I was able to share in the beauty of it through all the years [Remi: Yeah]. I wish I was able to be there more often. You know, but I'm grateful for the Zoom when I can do Zoom.

01:03:19.220

Remi Welbel (she/they): Yeah.

01:03:20.760

Judith Kane: You know, I can't be upset about things I can't do.

01:03:39.850

Remi Welbel (she/they): Well, I feel like the beauty of Kolot is that you're always there because you're always a part of that community, and you're always someone that helped start that.

01:03:46.220

Judith Kane: That's lovely to say I—I don't know how many people even know. Like when I was there for Yom Kippur and I got up to do that reading, a handful of people I knew, knew that that's a reading I've done through all those years. The mass of people that were there, they had no clue. Just another person that that—But it was meaningful to me, and that's all that's important.

01:04:02.140

Remi Welbel (she/they): Totally, yeah lovely. Okay, I'll stop our recording. Okay, thank you for doing this.

01:04:09.180

Judith Kane: I wish you. I wish you success. And as I say to people, this is my thing, be safe and hug the people you love.