

Interview with Kathryn Conroy by Isabella Cady

Sunday, November 5, 2022

Length: 1 hour 41 minutes and 49 seconds

ABSTRACT:

In this interview, Kathryn Conroy recounts the early stages of Kolot Chayeinu through the lense of her marriage to Rabbi Ellen Lippmann and their vibrant, interesting, and successful lives together. Conroy reflects on Lippmann's ambitious founding of a new and inclusive Brooklyn congregation with characteristic dry quips and tenderness. Some charming moments of the interview are embodied in phrases such as, "What did I know?" The interview showcases the intricacies of both Lippmann and Conroy's lives. Conroy's career is broadly documented throughout the interview, noting her involvement in the founding of the first women's shelter in the state of New York and her tenure as Assistant Dean at Columbia University, amongst many other endeavors. Stories about Conroy's early years as a social worker alongside the constant character of her partnership with Lippmann showcase Conroy's traits as both a diligent trailblazer and spouse. Themes of success, partnership, leadership, care, and dedication are all found within this interview.

KEYWORDS:

Ellen, people, job, congregation, rabbi, Columbia, Brooklyn, student, policy, leadership, education, ordained, dining room table, social work, child welfare, battered women, home.

This transcript has been minimally edited for readability. Some transitional language has been removed, but Kathryn Conroy's recorded language has not been altered to accommodate standard English grammar structure against natural oral speech patterns.

Isabella Cady 00:03

Amazing. Okay, so my name is Isabella Cady, and I am here for the Kolot Chayeinu Oral History Project with—

Kathryn Conroy 00:11

Katherine Conroy.

Isabella Cady 00:13

The date today is: November fifth of 2022. We are in Brooklyn, New York. Very exciting. Yeah.

Kathryn Conroy:

Have you not been here before, in Brooklyn?

Isabella Cady:

Have I not been?

Kathryn Conroy:

Have you not been to Brooklyn before?

Isabella Cady:

I have been to Brooklyn.

Kathryn Conroy:

Okay, great.

Isabella Cady:

Great. It's wonderful. It's warm. It's a warm day. Yeah. So, to start our conversation—my first question for you was: Where does your relationship to Kolot start? How? Where? When? All those questions. So, take it away.

Kathryn Conroy 00:49

So, I met Ellen in 1984. I met Ellen in 1983! I was in the mayor's office in New York City, and she was hired. She was a librarian. She was hired to do a clearing house for a literacy assistance center that my boss was starting. So we worked together and got together in February of 1984. Shortly after we got together, she *did* tell me she was thinking of rabbinical school, that she had actually thought about that for a *lot* of her lifetime. But, women hadn't been ordained until there was a woman named Sally Priesand¹ who was ordained. And, that kind of opened the floodgates, but still, she didn't go to rabbinical school. She went to college, and then she became a librarian. And then she worked at different programs. And then we ended up working together in New York. Then as I say, she self actualized and decided, "You know what, now I want to go to rabbinical school." And I, having been brought up Catholic, but living in a very Jewish neighborhood. on Long Island. I was born in Brooklyn, but we left when I was five. I-I sort of knew what rabbis were, they seem to have relatively normal lives in and out, they had families. I didn't think too much about it. And, I also knew that it was her passion. I knew what she wanted to do. And I also knew that if we were going to be together, she couldn't stop me from being a social worker and I couldn't stop her from being a rabbi. So I said, "Sure, not knowing what I was doing. And, and she got into rabbinical school, and then spent a year in Israel.² She came back. And, had four more years of school during which time she had a number of student pulpits. I did kid her because every pulpit she had the place closed two years later. But that-that was not unusual. Because, student rabbis were sent to places like Ellen went to West Virginia, and other

¹ Sally Priesand was the first woman to be ordained as a rabbi. More information about here can be found here: <https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/priesand-sally-jane/>

² Some rabbinical programs require that students study abroad in Israel during one of their years of study.

places where there were very, very few Jews left and they couldn't even afford a rabbi. So, they'd get some poor student for high holidays. And then the student would leave and, and soon thereafter, the place would kind of fold because the people were elderly, and they were aging out. And so, she did that. And then, in her final year, she had a pulpit, sort of around the corner in Brooklyn called Beth Or where she shared it with another fifth year rabbinical student.³ And so, she was there every other week. This, this was the early 80s. And, the school did not ordain lesbian and gay students. And so Ellen and a couple of the other classmates of hers who were lesbian and gay, were deeply in the closet. And so I didn't go to see her do services or anything. I think I finally, I think I did go for one of the high holiday services at Beth Ore. She then got a job with—so then she gets ordained—and it was kind of astonishing, because even to this day, while her seminary now accepts gay and lesbian students, it does not accept intermarried. I'm not Jewish. And so it was, it was kind of dicey. So she—so, so we weren't in the closet for being gay, we were now in the closet because we were intermarried. But my point is, after ordination, Ellen said to me, “Don't worry, I'm going to get an agency job.” Because by now, I realized that being a congregational Rabbi took a lot of time. You know? And I wanted to see her. So she said, “Don't worry, I'm gonna get an agency job.” So she gets an agency job with this group called MAZON⁴.

Isabella Cady 04:57

And what's an agency job?

Kathryn Conroy 04:59

It means nine to five, Monday through Friday. You know, like, you go to the job and you come back, you come home. No. She gets the job with this group called MAZON, which stands for MAZON: a Jewish response to hunger. And, she ends up away almost every weekend because she would go to different congregations and do the spiel during the services about, “Please donate to Mazone.” So, so one of the things that happened was that she went from—I don't know if she says this in her narrative—but what she said to me was, she saw one horrible experience after another of services. Just people not being *engaged*. Not to be critical of the rabbis, but not being particularly mindful of social action, or very inspiring. Make a long story short, she said, “I have to do my own thing.” So we lived two blocks away on Kermit place. And, we had a dining room. And, Ellen got together—there were seven of us, myself, Ellen and five other people—around our dining room table. And some of them were people who had been Beth Or where she had been a student rabbi, others were friends. And, and she said she was going to start a congregation. What did I know? And she did. And that's how Kolot came about. Now, it wasn't called Kolot then, it was mostly called Ellen's congregation. And, and it was after there were about 25-30 people that were involved, that we were at the house of the person who was the first president of the congregation, where Ellen and somebody else—I forget who—kind of led the

³ Rabbinical school typically takes between 4-6 years of study.

⁴ More information about MAZON can be found here: <https://mazon.org/>

group of 20 or 30 people through a process of identifying a name. And they came up with Kolot Chayeinu, which is, “voices of our lives.” Because my recollection—but you should take Ellen’s over mine—was that people in the room, mostly were—not all—but mostly were disaffected Jews. They were people who didn't feel at home, in any congregation that they had recently been at. Most of them hadn't been active in a, in a congregation for a while. And, and they felt that this was giving them a voice. And that's how Kolot Chayeinu happened, “voices of our lives.” So, that's how I got involved with Kolot. Long story. I fell in love with a woman who could only be a rabbi, unbeknownst to me, who had to start a congregation. Had to do it. And so, that's how I got involved in Kolot.

Isabella Cady 07:52

I'm curious about the time in between. Like you mentioned distance, and when she was training, and I'm assuming that you were in transition in your career or maybe living ,like, lives separately, but also together in companionship. What was that like when Ellen was training and going to different places before Kolot and then leading up to Kolot?

Kathryn Conroy 08:14

Sure. Her seminary is in the village, and we lived in Brooklyn first, in Sunset Park. And then, she was in Israel, she was in Israel, and I came home. Sunset Park in those days was very dicey. It was 85, 86, 87 in Brooklyn. Place was overrun with gangs and a lot of drugs. And, she was in Israel for the year. I came home from work, and on the bottom of the block was the outline in chalk of a body. And I said, “I'm out of here, we're out of here.” And before Ellen and I had gotten together, I had lived in a collective with a number of other people, women. And our deal was we all put in money to buy this house in Park Slope, when you could actually buy a house in Park Slope. And the deal was that when you wanted your money out, you would get it out as if it had been in a savings account. So, I spoke to the other women and I said I really need the money out. I moved out of the collective to live with Ellen and we rented. Now I said I really want my money out. And so they were fine, and they gave it to me and I looked around and I put a down payment on a house. Ellen wasn't even here. And I bought this house on Kermit Place. And I sent her pictures. The crazy thing was that Ellen came home from Israel before the pictures arrived there because this is before email. You know, they were hard copy pictures in a-in an airmail envelope. Cost I don't know how much money to send it. It was ridiculous. So she came home and I had told her on the phone and I said, “Dear I bought a house.” And she was like, “Oh really?” I said, “I'm not living in Sunset Park anymore. It's too dangerous.” I had a kid you know, and she, at the time, was five or six. So we can't live there. So, Ellen comes home, and then she's in school. And, she's not going away on weekends to do the—was it to do the student gig? That was really high holidays. It wasn't every week. When she was a fifth year student, then it was every other week over at Beth Or, which is like 10 minutes from here in Brooklyn. So we were together a lot. We were, you know, not sure what the question was.

Isabella Cady 10:32

I was just curious about that distance. Just being in distance and like, hearing like language of cultivation, just you've mentioned your career and being like, "I'm going to be a social worker, Ellen's gonna be a rabbi, that was a given." And so I hear like, a lot of growth together, but also independently.

Kathryn Conroy:

Oh yeah. Oh yeah.

Isabella Cady:

So, I was just curious about that.

Kathryn Conroy 10:53

Sure. So, when Ellen and I got together, I was in the mayor's office. She went to, she went to Israel... Why do I forget which happened first? Anyway, I left the mayor's office. So let me just say without, you know, sounding like I'm arrogant, I have had a *fantastic* career. Fantastic. And I have never gotten a job I applied for, which is really bizarre.

Isabella Cady:

Amazing.

Kathryn Conroy:

Except my first job when I was 17, which was hideous, I was a sales girl at Abraham and Straus. But, I've never gotten a job I applied for since. So, I'm in the mayor's office, only because I made a phone call. I had finished my doctoral studies at the Graduate Center of City University Graduate Center in social work, and I went to the dean at Hunter, where I got my master's and I said, "You know, I want to, I want to come on faculty and teach policy and administration." And he said, "We'll hire you tomorrow to teach casework." Which is clinical, you know, one on one. And I said, "Hal," and everybody always referred to him as the Jewish patriarch. He was very formal with this *huge* head of white hair. And then he was like a patriarch. He said, "Well, no, Kathryn, I'll hire you to teach casework. You've got your master's in casework, actually took a double major in administration." I said, "Yeah, but I just finished my doctorate in social welfare at the policy administration." He said, "Yeah, but I need casework teachers." I said, "Hal that's bullshit." I said, "You only hire men to teach policy administration and you hire women—to hire—to teach casework." I said, "I want to teach policy and administration." He said, "Well, you've never done policy." I said, "Hal, I ran most of an agency." I didn't, I wasn't the executive director. But, I was number two. I've dealt with all kinds of policy, federal, state, city, HR, everything. And by the way, half the teachers I had in policy hadn't done as much as I had. "No, no, I'll take you for casework. You have to get policy experience." I said, "Fine." So what happened was I then called up somebody I had gotten money from in a grant, who was in city

government, Marian Schwartz. I said, “Marian, do you know of any jobs around that I can apply for that are policy?” She said, “Sure. Come work for me.” And that's how I got to city government. And then a year later, I met Ellen there. So then, somebody in city government was going to Community Service Society, which is the very little known, largest privately endowed, social welfare organization in the United States, not a foundation, not like Ford, but it's \$100 million endowment. And the guy who went there asked me if I would come and be number two. I said, “Sure, David.” So I went, and I did that while Ellen was in Israel, or shortly before I actually forget. Anyway, so now I'm at CSS. And unfortunately I get there and I'm not number two, I'm number three—about which I am immediately pissed. But, so I lasted there three years. And, Ellen and I are writing back and forth. I must have gone there before she went to Israel. Anyway, I want out of CSS. And, I applied for three jobs. I didn't get one of them. And then I got a phone call from the associate dean at Columbia: would I come in interview to be assistant dean there? And I said no.

Isabella Cady 14:42

Why'd you say no?

Kathryn Conroy 14:43

Because I didn't want to go to academia. You know, it was like boring already. I mean, I was doing real stuff. And then—no Ellen's home by this time, Elena is home by this time. Right, now I remember. Ellen's home by this time and I come to her and I say—you know, we're living in this house around the corner—and I say, “Dear, we're going to have to live on rice and beans because I can't take this job anymore. I have to quit. And I know I've got a little bit of savings, I got a kid, there's you and me. You're in school. I gotta get out of this job.” So she says, “Fine, we'll manage.” So, Columbia calls again. And, and Ed Mullen⁵ Associate Dean says, “Kathryn, you're highly recommended. Would you please come in and interview for this job?” I say “No, I'm not interested.” I had another iron in the fire. It didn't pan out. I don't have a job. I quit CSS. My last day is Friday. Monday, I am unemployed for the first time since I was 17. Okay, I've worked full time since I was 17.

Isabella Cady 15:53

And what did it feel like?

Kathryn Conroy 15:54

I was out of my mind! I was terrified. And I was like, “What the fuck am I supposed to do?” You know, it's like, nine, it's eight o'clock in the morning and I'm not at my desk. What is the story here? And Ed called at noon and said, “*Please*, would you come and talk to us about the job?” I said, “Yes.” I had the interview on Wednesday. I had the job on Friday. So the next—I took

⁵At this time, Ed Mullen still teaches at Columbia University. More information about Ed Mullen can be found here: <https://socialwork.columbia.edu/faculty-research/faculty/emeriti/edward-j-mullen/>

a month off—and I started, I started at Columbia. And I loved it. I was Assistant Dean, but I was also Director of Field Education. So I had 800 students out in internships. I had great staff, which I actually built up. And I taught. I taught as much as I wanted. And my areas were child welfare, child abuse and battered women. So, I've taught Policy and Administration in child welfare. And I taught clinical work with battered women, because I am a licensed clinical social worker too. So, I was there for 18 years.

Isabella Cady 16:50

Do you remember the first class you taught after you got the job?

Kathryn Conroy 16:54

Oh, well, actually. So, I was an adjunct. You know what adjuncts are, right? They're hired, you know. I was already teaching at Columbia as an adjunct. I was teaching the child welfare class. And I do remember the first day of that I was terrified. I'd been adjuncting since I had gotten my masters in 79. So I got my masters in 79. And then I was hired to teach places the next year. So I always had a full time job and a teaching gig at night. So I already taught a course at Columbia. That was one of the ways he knew me. But also, because, one of the jobs that I didn't get that I applied for, the head of the search committee loved me. And she was also on a search committee at Columbia for the Assistant Dean. So, that's how I got in there. Yeah, I love teaching. I, the first class I ever taught on a masters level was, was Clinical Work With Victims Of Violence Against Women: Rape, Batter, and Incest. What can I say? And then at Columbia, the first class I taught before I got the full time job was Child Welfare: History Policy Program Research.

Isabella Cady 18:17

So where does the founding of Kolot fit into this timeline? When was that when you were at Columbia? Or after or before?

Kathryn Conroy 18:33

Ellen: It would be about the beginning of my time at Columbia. I got to Colombia in 90. And Ellen was ordained, 91? I think 91. So it was right around there.

Isabella Cady 18:48

Was there ever a moment where or was there a specific moment where you really saw everything and you were like, "Wow, this is gonna be something big?"

Kathryn Conroy 19:00

Two things. One: no. I was like, seven people around our dining room table. How bad could this get? And, I knew that Ellen was going to accomplish great things. So, it was both. It was both, and. I never thought it was going to just be seven people around our dining room table because it pretty quickly moved on. I did not think it was going to get as big as it was. But, I also knew that

Ellen was going to accomplish great things. So it was, you know. First, I'm a clinician and then I'm an administrator, although now I'm an administrator 100%. Um, so there are—I believe—there are two marks of adulthood. The ability to hold ambiguity—let's just stay with that. Ambiguity. Oh, and ambivalence. That you can't be an adult unless you can be both those things, unless you can hold ambiguity, unless you can be ambivalent. So, I was ambivalent about this. You know, it's like this is going to eat up my life. This is going to take over everything. And I was right! I was right. And Ellen will tell you, well, it was kind of a joke we got together. I'm Irish Catholic. I don't practice anything. I haven't practiced anything in 50 years. When I, when I used to teach Family Systems Theory, I would describe Irish-American as Gaelic retentive. We don't, we don't like, offer things we don't—in a sense of—we're not, we tell great stories, but we're not necessarily self-revelatory. We're really not. And I would describe that as Gaelic retentive. Or, you know, in a family, talk about important things. I mean, ever, ever. And you know, I'm only secondary, my grandparents were born in Ireland. So, I'm only second or third. But anyway, it takes a while to get out of that. Anyway, the joke was that when Ellen and I got together, and this is a little stereotypical for both, I think Jews and Irish. I had only boundaries, and she had none. She had no boundaries. And I only had boundaries. We have come to a place in the middle, where she will actually credit me with developing some boundaries, and I will credit her with having a few less. So yeah.

Isabella Cady 21:40

Did-did the boundaries, or does this boundaries concept in your relationship also factor into like how Kolot came into your life? I mean, I hear like, I hear the phrase, like, “Eat up,” you know, like, “eaten up my life.” And like, it seems like it's coming from an endearing spot. But I'm like, curious if you can talk more about that?

Kathryn Conroy 22:00

Well, it's endearing. Now looking back. Yeah, it wasn't so endearing at the time. I mean, so Ellen would—there's a couple of jokes. One was that she was—Kolot was in a place that didn't have a clock on the wall. And services could go on forever, forever. I mean, and, and I made friends with a number of the people. And they'd be like “Kathryn, can you do something?” I'd stand in the back and I'd put my finger slitting it across my throat like stop already. And I didn't really even go to services that much. But actually, I don't, I only go to high holidays. And we do Shabbat every Friday night, regardless of where we are. And whether we're alone or together. It's a commitment I've made to her. But she, she would go on and on and on and on. The boundary thing around Kolot—when I say, “eaten up my life.” In the beginning years, I mean, she would be 24/7. And so finally I was like, I mean I was pretty busy too. But I just, this cannot go on, this cannot go on. And so we did establish that we would have a date every Wednesday night, every Wednesday night, and try to be together Saturday afternoon and Sunday. And I would say that worked 75% of the time. You know, you can't plan when somebody's gonna die, you know, and you can't plan when there has to be a bris or something like that. Or, a sick call that she had to

make. So Saturday afternoons and Sundays could evaporate, but it was a plan. That was the plan. Saturday afternoon, hopefully most of Sunday, and every Wednesday night, and I'd say we've managed over the years, about 75% of the time.

Kathryn Conroy 24:02

You're probably new in a relationship. We've been together 38 years. So it's a long time. And you know, we did see each other as we were traveling, and my last full time job. I traveled a lot. You know, we saw each other every morning and we saw each other every night. And yeah, we tried to make Wednesday night, Saturday afternoon Sundays work. Yeah.

Isabella Cady 24:27

Also to be clear, coming from a place of like reflecting on what you said it too. And like giving space for silence. So I'm like, my, my little thought was like, my little expression was, "Oh, I'm thinking about what you said."

Kathryn Conroy 24:45

You're what?

Isabella Cady 24:46

Oh, my expression was like, Oh, I'm just thinking about what you said. Like I don't know if I made a funny face. Sorry.

Kathryn Conroy 24:47

No, not at all.

Isabella Cady 24:48

Um, can you speak more about your involvement in Kolot? Like, like things you would do? I mean, you mentioned high holidays but also some other things if there were.

Kathryn Conroy 25:00

There were two: Well alright, so when—when they did the name. I didn't vote for that one, I voted for another one, but that's okay.

Isabella Cady 25:10:

What'd you vote for?

Kathryn Conroy:

Congregation Beshert.⁶ Beshert is the word for “happy happening by accident.” Which you actually should ask Ellen what the real translation is but it basically means, “Wow that happened, this is great.” Okay, beshert. Which I thought was totally cool. And I remember sitting on the steps with—oh, Noah Forman—Noah Foreman who was a kid at the time. And everybody could vote and I was like, “Noah, vote for that. Noah, vote for that.” But we didn't get it. The more erudite people voted for Kolot Chayeinu.

So, how was I active? I carried a lot of chairs. She was like, I use the word bedouin. She was like a bedouin, you know. The congregation would meet here and meet there and meet someplace else. So if it were, like I said, I didn't go to Friday night services, Saturday morning services. I didn't go to Torah study. I go to high holidays, and I would go to special events. I didn't go to all the High Holidays. I don't like Simchat Torah⁷. I do like Tu B'Shevat.⁸ So I went to the ones I liked. Except, I liked, I absolutely went to Rosh Hashanah, the whole thing. And I also went to everything of Yom Kippur. And I like them. They're very quiet. They're very reflective. I have a meditation practice that works for me. I just go there. There used to be these horrible Friday night dinners. Nobody's gonna, I don't hope nobody else talks about this, like I do. I hated them. Once a month or every other week. Ellen's concept was a cafe, that there would be a cafe and people would have coffee and nosh and pastry, and then they would go into service and they would have already connected on a human level. And, partly that was her response to all of the services that she attended that were followed by food and drink. And so, her experience as she described it to me, but she'll tell you guys herself, what she described to me was, you go into this cold building, you go into this service, everybody says the words they need to say. And then they go and have coffee and pastry and everybody lights up. Everybody's talking to everybody and there's all kinds of connection. And what she wanted to do was flip that, and have people go into a room where there was coffee and pastry and food and bagels. And everybody would connect and then connected, they would go into a room to do services. So, there were these horrible dinners. I forget, what it seemed to me that it was every Friday night, but it wasn't it was either one Friday night a month or every other Friday night. It would be in the basement of Gethsemane, where you were today. There's a social hall down there. And I don't know if you were down there. Okay. So we would go early, we would set up tables. I hauled more chairs for Kolot than I ever thought I was going to do it. It was like the Santini brothers. You know, we

⁶ *Beshert* means “inevitable” or “preordained.”

⁷ Simchat Torah, “also spelled Simhat, Simhath, Simchas, Simchath, or Simchat Hebrew Simhat Torah, (“Rejoicing of the Torah”), Jewish religious observance held on the last day of [Sukkot](#) (“Festival of Booths”), when the yearly cycle of [Torah](#) reading is completed and the next cycle is begun. Torah scrolls are removed from the [ark](#) and carried through the [synagogue](#) seven times in a joyful procession, sometimes followed by children waving flags.” <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Simchat-Torah>

⁸ Tu B'Shevat “is on the 15th of Shevat. It is meant to celebrate the life of trees. It is stated that one may not eat the fruit from a tree for the first three years. The fruit on the tree on the fourth year is meant for G-d. The fruit may be eaten on the fifth year. It is customary to eat fruit on this day. Jews also plant trees on this day. While the celebration of the new year for trees is mentioned in the Torah (Mishnah), it is considered to be a rabbinical holiday.” <https://www.betyosseflasvegas.org/jewish-holidays/>

were bringing out tables, bringing out chairs. And then, and then everybody would come. And, a lot of people had children. And mostly they didn't control them. So, so they'd be running around screaming and yelling. And it was potluck, and that was fine. I always brought a dish. Other people brought dishes. It was never a question of food. Everybody brought food, that was all good. But, the noise and the screaming and the yelling and the trying to do you know prayers over kids who were out of control. It was the worst of the stereotype of the Park Slope child who is really an artisanal project. And perfect. It's a stereotype and it's 100% accurate. Anyway, I hated them. So, they kind of petered out. I forget why. I was just relieved.

Isabella Cady 29:33

What would you cook?

Kathryn Conroy 29:35

Oh, one of the things they did was because some people were differently observant than others. And there was a question around Kashrut and people keeping kosher. Everything was always vegetarian, which was great because I don't eat meat. So, I would do lentil salad. I made vegetable soup. I did pasta kind of things. They weren't. I don't think anybody was vegan. If they were, they just ate other things. I would do lasagna, vegetable lasagna, things like that.

Isabella Cady 30:08

So, oh, that all sounds delicious.

Kathryn Conroy:

I actually like to cook.

Isabella Cady 30:16

Is food a part of your like Shabbat practice for Fridays? I mean, you said you had a commitment, but I don't know if there's like a customary thing that you and Ellen do together or separately, but if you don't like the food in the larger setting, would you cook together? I'm just kind of curious.

Kathryn Conroy 30:27

Wait if we didn't like the food when we went to those dinners?

Isabella Cady:

Oh, you were? Well—

Kathryn Conroy:

No, no, you had to eat there.

Isabella Cady 30:33

I mean, you had to eat. But you were just saying you didn't like that environment. But I'm wondering if–

Kathryn Conroy 30:36

Oh, the food was fine. It was that people out of, *kids* out of control running around screaming and yelling was just really annoying.

Isabella Cady 30:45

Yeah, I was just thinking about food as a part of like, your personal ritual at home.

Kathryn Conroy 30:50

Oh, food is a big part of ours. Ellen doesn't cook. Mostly wouldn't want her to cook. Although, I've been away and she has sent me pictures and things that she's made that have not been bad. No, I like to cook a lot. And so, because—So I haven't eaten meat for the last, maybe, 15 years. Before that, every single Friday night we had chicken. Which is part of her childhood, I think, although they used to have fish. Because, she loves chicken. So I would roast chicken. And so every Friday night we had chicken. And it was a little dicey because I worked. ASo I learned to do things with timers and stuff and the crock pot and whatever else. And so, we always had Shabbat dinner. And then when I stopped eating meat, Ella was okay with that. She actually didn't eat meat for two years. But then she said, “This isn't for me.” So she went back on it. But we're okay. So I think almost every Friday night we have fish. A different fish dish. Not always but I'd say 90% of the time we have fish.

Isabella Cady 32:04

Yeah. Cool.

Kathryn Conroy:

Well, we said challah one of us picks it up. Yeah. I like to cook.

Isabella Cady 32:13

And with high holiday services, yeah. When you would go—especially in the earlier days of the congregation—would you go as Ellen's wife?

Kathryn Conroy 32:22

Yeah.

Isabella Cady 32:33

Or as a member? Yeah.

Kathryn Conroy 32:25

Well, I was both. I mean, I signed up, I paid my money, my dues. I've been a member since there was membership. I felt that that was important. That was an important way to support her. And also to model for people that if you're going to be coming in the door, you should really put your money where your mouth is, and you should sign up. But we were—that was one of the reasons for Elena to start a congregation. I think. I think one reason for her to start a congregation was what I said before, she saw so many horrible services that she just felt there were other ways to do it that were better. That was one. Number two, Ellen had a career and then went to be a rabbi. So she was older than a number of her, not all, but a number of her classmates. I think she was unfit for being an assistant rabbi. You know, she just, there was no way she was going to work for somebody. It wasn't going to happen. And third, she was intermarried and it was wrong. I mean, it was—as far as they were concerned—it was illegal practically. So, how could she get a job as an assistant rabbi? And, in those—it was early, early days of it being okay to be gay, and it still is not in the Reform Movement, okay to be intermarried. So, the congregation is not movement aligned. She happens to be a Reform rabbi. Her successor, Miriam, is a Reconstructionist rabbi. So it's not a congregation that is solidly in a specific movement and only in that lane. And, and because Ellen was going to be out about being intermarried, she sort of had to start her own place. So yes, she went—In fact, when the people were sitting around the table, I think one of the folks that you all are interviewing is Jude Kane. Judy Kane was the first—was at the table with the seven people that started Kolot. She was one of the very few people, maybe one of two, who came from Ellen's student pulpit at Beth Or in Brooklyn. And as we went around the table, I hadn't met these people because I didn't go over to Beth Ore. Except, I think once for one high holiday service. We went around the table and what came to me I said, "I'm Kathryn Conroy, and I guess I'm the Rabbtizin." And Judy Kane almost hit the table. She was like, "What?" And then she says something like, "That's great. That's great." It's like, I mean, if she hadn't, it would have been a problem. But yeah, so we've been out as a couple. And I think that both being lesbian, but I think more being intermarried has been an open door for other people that probably Kolot has had, still does, but has had a higher percentage of intermarried couples than because they don't feel comfortable... other places. You know, only twice have I been asked why am I not Jewish? Which is kinda good, you know, you would have thought in the Jewish congregation where people. I mean some people may assume I am, but I'm not. So, but I've only been asked twice.

Isabella Cady 35:43

Was that earlier and close or later or just...

Kathryn Conroy 35:45

It was earlier. And was more like, aren't you Jewish?

Isabella Cady 35:52

Interesting.

Kathryn Conroy 35: 53

No.

Isabella Cady 35:55

Yeah. Is that a continued conversation? Or was it a continued conversation? Or was it just something that came up? Like at those brief moments.

Kathryn Conroy 36:02

When I was asked?

Isabella Cady 36:05

Or just, being an intermarried couple? Was that something that you felt was a part of—more a part of—the, I guess, like identifying with Kolot as a member? Or, because you just mentioned that it's like, it's a really like, great, but also different thing about being an intermarried couple, interfaith. And I'm just, I'm curious if it like, if it still feels like a prominent thing that people will comment on? Or if it generally feels much more open?

Kathryn Conroy 36:39

Oh, I think it feels much more open. I think that the strength of Kolot is the diversity that Ellen has built in. I mean, it's not the gay congregation, that's CBST in Manhattan. But many, many gay and lesbian people are there. A transgender guy that I know said the other night he is now living geographically someplace else. And I said to him, "Oh, are you gonna to switch to (and I mentioned a temple that was near him.)" And he said "No all the transgender people are in Kolot." So I think—that I think that language is very, very, very important. And so I'm very careful about language when I'm careful about it. And one of the things that Ellen always said was, we *are* not, we welcome. That's a fundamental difference. There are congregations that say, "we welcome gay lesbian," "we welcome transgender," "we welcome intermarried." Well, bullshit, you know who are you to welcome me. Versus we are intermarried, transgender, gay, lesbian, straight, whatever. It's a fundamental difference. And I think that because Ellen did that. I think if it was we welcome I would have gotten a lot more shit. And I didn't get any shit. I just got like, I can think of two instances where people, one person just assumed I was Jewish. And another person said, Are you Jewish? Like that.

Isabella Cady 38:36

This is also interesting. I'm, I'm curious about the distinction between we are and we welcome and we are, I feel like aligns itself with, like the activist history or lineage of Kolot.

Kathryn Conroy 38:57

Oh, absolutely.

Isabella Cady 38: 58

Yeah. Do you have any thoughts on that or connections there?

Kathryn Conroy 38:59

Ah, I think that, let me go back to the naming thing. The day—I remember when we were at Natalie's house, and the folks that were there worked out the name. And one of the things that they were looking for slogans, you know, how can we describe ourselves? And one of the things I said, “doubt is an act of faith.” And, and they loved that. They loved that. Because these were folks who were not lockstep in their religion. They were Jews who had various histories of synagogue involvement, various levels of Jewish education, and or not. And the idea that doubt is an act of faith was just astonishing to them. I take credit for it, but I know I got it from somebody else. I know that I'm not that creative. I'm sure somebody else said it like to. Anyway, the lawyer, the lawyer who was on the board when Elon was starting to get things organized, made it change to doubt *can* be an act of faith and I have never forgiven him for that. But anyway, I think that that's very important. And then the other slogan that's connected to—slogans, not the right word—but the other slogan that's connected to Kolot, in addition to, “doubt can be an act of faith” is “all hands are needed for the community.” And I think that that non differentiation around need was very important. There isn't leadership, and then the peons, you know, sure there's a board. But... And it has continued. I mean, in the early days, the board would be there setting up chairs along with everybody else. They'd be staying after to do the dishes. It wasn't like the board then left. It was all hands were needed. And I think a really good example of that, to this day, is Anne Sherman—who is the president acts—as a shamas. I mean, I don't know if you went to services today and you're greeted at the door, it was probably in Sherman. She doesn't do it every single Saturday, but she is one of the shamases who is there most of the time. That's—in other congregations—you know, the board is the board. They sit in the front row, you know, and in this congregation, I think because of the way Ellen built it, all hands are needed. And because it wasn't, “I don't welcome anyone” We are. It is, it is who we are. We are everything. We are the immigrant, we are the disenfranchised, you know, we are gay, we are lesbian, we are HIV positive, we are transgender. We are straight. We are, you know, everybody's in there, that that actually emanates from her.

Isabella Cady 41:59

What does “doubt is an act of faith” mean for you specifically?

Kathryn Conroy 42:02

Oh. Oh, I am 100% agnostic. 100%. Do I believe in God? Depends on the day, I would say on average. There were more good days than bad. And so I—I would say, yeah. Other days, I'm convinced there's absolutely nothing. I have. I have absolutely no belief in a personal God. None. I have no belief in a personal God. God as a prime mover, God as the instigator, original

architect, I could I could go down that path on good days. But no, I don't particularly believe in God. I don't believe in any particular religion whatsoever. None. I know, married to a rabbi who was running a congregation. It's kind of weird, but it-there it is.

Isabella Cady 43:04

I'm curious about what things you do believe in, though?

Kathryn Conroy 43:07

Oh! I believe that people have the capacity to be good. I don't believe everybody's good.

Isabella Cady 43:24

How have you seen that like in your work or in the congregation? Or has that been proven to you?

Kathryn Conroy 43:29

Oh, remember that my background is a social workers child abuse and battered women. So that's both a complex question and one that's very easy to answer. It's, it's easy to answer because—about battered women: I started a project that still is in existence called The Safe Homes Project⁹. It's in Brooklyn. And we started before they were shelters. That's, that's both how old I am and how long ago we did it. And in the early days, it was simple. Because, those of us who worked in the battered women's movement at the time, many of the people I worked with came out of the anti-rape work. I actually came out of child welfare, which is very unusual. And it was easy to vilify batterers bad, battered women good. You know, it's much more complicated than that. Not that battered women are ever bad, but that the vilification of the person who's abusing them isn't necessarily helpful and may it not in fact be true. That they may not deserve to be vilified. It's very complex, *very* complex. That was one of the things that used to annoy me about some of the people that got into the work. They just wanted to save women and you don't save women, you help them save themselves. Anyway.

Isabella Cady 45:08

Can you speak more on that project? Or its founding?

Kathryn Conroy 45:13

Safe Homes? Oh, so it was 1976. You weren't born yet. So, 1976. And I was working for Good Shepherd¹⁰, where I worked for 14 years. First as a caseworker and then I went to school as a social worker. And then I did what was called Community Development, which was sort of

⁹ More information about the Safe Homes Project can be found here: <https://goodshepherds.org/program/safe-homes/>

¹⁰ More information about Good Shepherd Services can be found here: <https://goodshepherds.org/>

community organizing, but much more program development than organizing, like Alinsky¹¹ and that kind of model. And, I had two people out stationed at police precincts, the 72nd and the 78th. I was the supervisor. And they were there, we had a grant through LEAA Law Enforcement Assistance Administration¹², which was the very, very first time that the federal government ever looked at what about victims of crime? They hadn't before. I mean, now, now we take it for granted that there's victim compensation. That didn't exist, not until 74. So in 78, I had these workers at the, one at each precinct, and they were working with victims of crime. And they kept reporting back to me the number of women who were abused that were coming in. And then one night, a new clergyman who came into the community, a minister, wanted to ride around in a prowl car with the cops, you know. And he was astonished at the number of domestic violence calls that came in. And so he came back to the clergy association at the time, in Park Slope, long before I met Ellen, and, and reported back. And the other ministers said, "Yeah, you know, in my congregation." And I was there, just as a community developer, trying to figure out which projects Good Shepherd should develop because of a need in the community. And I went back to my boss, and I said, you know, we have to do something about the amount of domestic violence that we have, which is called battered women. And, and she was like, "Sure, do whatever you want." Anyway. She was only interested in child welfare. Anyway, I started a project called The Safe Homes Project. And we did it all with community people. And much to the chagrin of the lawyers at the agency, I actually had people who would house battered women and their children in their homes. Which I mean, when I think back, I was very young, when I think back the liability issues on that are like, extraordinary. And the agency lawyers had a fit. But, we did. And then, then around that time, shelters started to develop and I, my name came up, and I ended up founding with the six other people the first battered women's shelter in New York State.

Isabella Cady 48:23

Wow, yeah. Who were the six other people?

Kathryn Conroy 48:27

It was this horrible coalition of—So, there was a woman named Carol Bellamy,¹³ who was at that time, a state senator, and domestic violence was starting to percolate up as an issue. And she got \$250,000 to start a shelter in New York City. She represented the city. And she insisted that—She looked at who was doing any kind of work. So, I was doing some work while I was doing some work. So there were six people, two from the YWCA, two from the National Congress Of Neighborhood Women, and two from the Brooklyn College Women's Center. And both Brooklyn College Women's Center, and the YWCA asked me if I would be one of the two. So I went with

¹¹ More information about Saul Alinsky can be found here:
https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1057/9780230118539_5

¹² More information about the LEAA Law Enforcement Assistance Administration can be found here:
<https://www.gao.gov/products/ggd-78-21>

¹³ Carol Bellamy was a member of the New York State Senate, President of the New York City Council, 13th Director of the Peace Corps under President Bill Clinton, and a former Executive Director of UNICEF.

the Y. Only because we're geographically close. And so there were six of us, and we started the shelter. And what was really bizarre was the building that we got was in Sunset Park. And Sunset Park had a hospital, it was Lutheran, hospital. And the building that we got was the original maternity hospital that was connected to Lutheran. And we actually had a woman there who was a client about a woman who had given birth to her children in that hospital. Isn't that bizarre?

Isabella Cady 49:54

Yeah.

Kathryn Conroy:

Yeah, it was really... Anyway, so that little organization, Women's Survival Space was what it was called, I was on the board for like, five or six years. And then I kind of moved on. There was all kinds of internal fights about who was a lesbian who wasn't, it was bullshit.

Isabella Cady 50:16

What?

Kathryn Conroy: 50:17

Oh, you have no idea in the 70s and the early 80s. A lot of stupidity. Yeah. Yeah. Why are lesbians interested in domestic violence? You're not with men anyway. I mean, it was just ridiculous. It was just ridiculous.

Isabella Cady 50:35

Wow.

Kathryn Conroy: 50:38

A lot of it was about power. You know, it had to do with power and money and prestige and all kinds of—Anyway, I moved on, I left, fine. I left. Well, I didn't get thrown off or anything. I said, after I think six or seven years, I said, "I've done this for six or seven years. I'm out of here." And besides, I was moving on in my own career, doing stuff. I was doing other battered women's work and make a long story short, Women's Survival Space became The Center For The Elimination of Violence in the Family¹⁴. And it's now something like a \$10 million organization. Well, it's 30-40 years later. Yeah.

Isabella Cady 51:10

Wow. Are you still in contact with some of the people that you worked with at that time?

Kathryn Conroy: 51:16

¹⁴ More information about the Center For The Elimination Of Violence In The Family can be found here: <https://greatnonprofits.org/org/center-for-the-elimination-of-violence-in-the-family>

Yeah, yeah. Yeah, absolutely.

Isabella Cady 51:18

Is there overlap with the kind of work that you've done now? Or through the years? Or is it like, are there a lot of different groups of people?

Kathryn Conroy 51:24

I have some through lines. You know, there were, I would say, we're talking 50 years, I think, in the 50 years, there are four or five people who had been through lines. Which means I didn't work with them in every single situation that I was in, but we were in touch. And when we could work together, we did. And when we couldn't, we were allies. And whatever the work was that we were doing. There's one person, Amy, I've hired three times. Three different jobs.

Isabella Cady 52:01

What were the jobs?

Kathryn Conroy 52:02

Oh, I was at Good Shepherd and we had a school for what we used to call push outs. These were young people who, they didn't drop out, but the school kind of pushed them out. So they didn't want these kids because they were disruptive, or they were they weren't. Mostly they were disruptive. They were disruptive. And so the high school would schedule them for two or three study periods to lunch in a shop. And you know, the kid, the kid, the kid, the youth would come in, like two days and like "this bullshit" and leave. So they actually dropped out as much as we're pushed out. So we had an alternative school for them. And, and I hired Amy for that. Then... Then I was at CSS¹⁵. And we started, that's another piece of child welfare for history, a boarder baby project¹⁶. In the 80s, the children who were born in the early 80s, children who were born to women who were addicted, had any kind of addiction problems, or who were HIV positive, the babies were kept in the hospitals, and were not discharged. And there were no foster homes for them to go to because the number of these children had exploded, both with the explosion of addiction in New York City, it was the crack cocaine. And with the explosion of AIDS moving into the needle community, right. So these babies honest to god were stacked like gerbils in cages. Yeah. In hospitals. Yeah. Yeah. So by now, I—no, CSS. So we found out about this, and they were called boarder babies, because they were boarding in the hospital. They actually weren't quite patients, they were boarding in the hospital. Because there was no foster homes for them to go to. Nor would the city let the parents take them home because they were you know, undesirable because they had addiction problems. We ran a boarder baby project and I hired

¹⁵ Community Service Society of New York

¹⁶ A *Washington Post* article from 1990 chronicles some of the history of boarder babies, as discussed by Kathryn in the interview:

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/local/1990/08/02/federal-agency-donates-house-for-boarder-babies/a0c72322-49ec-4208-8c40-33d782145e02/>

Amy to run it. So she came to CSS to work for me. And then I went to Columbia. And there was a, there was a fight on faculty that full time faculty did not want to have to do what was called Field Advising, which meant visiting the students at their placements, their internships. Over the course of the last 50 years of social work education, what I have seen and it's there's articles written about it, is that the professors have moved farther and farther and farther away from actual practice. They will want to do research. And by the way, that's how you get tenure, particularly in an institution like Columbia, or Penn, or Wash U or any of those big schools, the only way you get tenure is that you do research and you bring in money for your research, and you write 17 articles that are on the same topic. And then you get tenure. So the idea of the full time professors having to go to the Bronx to visit some student in a homeless shelter, they were like, furious. So the dean—I get hired—and the dean says to me, “The faculty isn't going to do field advising anymore, you need to hire a bunch of adjuncts.” I'm like, “I just started in August, I'm supposed to have,” because... fine hire adjuncts. So over the course of, I hired 50 of them. I hired Amy. That was a third time, and then Amy returned the favor, because Amy then went on to be the executive director of an organization called CASA: Court Appointed Special Advocates¹⁷, and she made me be on her board, which I still am.

Isabella Cady 56:10

What does that organization do?

Kathryn Conroy 56:11

Court Appointed Special Advocates is an organization that trains volunteers to be advocates for children who are in foster care. Now, that's really absurd, because why should a child who was in foster care, presumably removed from their parents because their parents weren't able to take care of them, put into a family or group home where they're getting care, why should they need an advocate? They need an advocate because the system will just hold them forever. So, what the advocates do is they do everything they can to either get the child back to the family of origin, also getting the family of origin, whatever they need. If mom needs addiction services, dad needs alcoholism services, family has no housing, you know, help them out with that. So the child can return and an advocate for the child to return or if there is no hope to help the child be freed for adoption, hopefully become adopted. So when Amy was the executive director there, she asked me to be on the board. I said, “Sure.”

Isabella Cady 57:20

What does your work look like when you're serving on boards because I know that you, you have, you've done that quite a few times, currently do that.

Kathryn Conroy 57:30

¹⁷ More information about CASA can be found here: <https://www.casa-nyc.org/>

I think boards are very, very different. I am only on boards where I feel like what I have to offer is needed. And where I have a role to play. I've been on a couple of boards that I've gotten off within a year or two because they had no meaning. They were a board and name only. An executive director ran the whole place, put their friends on the board, which is which is fine up to a point. But just one of the boards are rubber stamp and have no responsibility whatsoever. And to be on a board, that's a waste of time. So the boards that I'm on, and I've been on it for years, one is New Yorkers For Children¹⁸, which focuses on older children in foster care. I'm on the board of CASA, C-A-S-A, Court Appointed Special Advocates, which focuses on all children in foster care. I'm on the board of a thing called FASS F-A-S-S which stands for Fund For The Advancement of Social Services¹⁹. And I'm actually on the co-op board at this building.

On each of those other boards that I'm on, I think it's really important that board members know your place, you don't run the organization, it's not your job to get involved in personnel matters, per se, it's not your job to tell an executive director what to do. Your job is to be the ethical, the ethical guiding voice of the organization to raise money, okay, and to keep the organization on mission. That's your job. So my only thing, talking to an executive director who wants to do a project or he's gonna come to the board and ask for us to raise money for something is, is it on mission? Is it on mission. So if you're, if you're CASA and your raison d'etre is to advocate for children in foster care and the executive director wants to start a soccer team, I'm going to say, "In service of what, what does that have to do with the children in foster care?" Now she can make a connection that, fine, but—so, so yeah. I've liked being on boards and because I've been an executive director and am an executive director I often on a board to get—don't have to chair the Personnel and Governance Committee. Nobody else is interested in reading the bi-laws, nobody else is interested in the articles of incorporation. I happen to find it interesting. So I usually end up doing governance and the personnel because I have hired and fired hundreds of people. I've hired hundreds of people, I've only fired a few. I usually end up Chair of Personnel, and I've been helpful to executive directors.

Isabella Cady 1:00:29

Wow. How has your motivation for aligning yourself with different organizations changed over the years?

Kathryn Conroy 1:00:50

My aligning with organizations also has to do with where I do charity. Okay, so, so I have a commitment that I pay my taxes, I don't try to get out of that. And I give away 10% of my gross income every year. I only give it to three groups. I give it to ones that I respect in terms of children. So child welfare broadly. I give it to women's services. Right now, I'm very interested in reproductive rights. Very. So it's children and women. And then groups where my friends

¹⁸ More information about New Yorkers for Children can be found here: <https://www.newyorkersforchildren.org/>

¹⁹ More information about FASS can be found here: <https://www.newyorkersforchildren.org/>

asked me. I figure I have \$10,000 that's probably constantly in movement. Brenda asks me to give something, I give 500. Then I ask for something and then she gives me 500 here. And then, Elaine asks me for something, I give 500. And then I asked her something, she gives me 500 here. I think we have like \$10,000 that's probably just moving among us. But do you see the statue here? So this is Jizo²⁰ J-I-Z-O, Jizo is, do you now what a bodhisattva is? Okay. You know what a patron saint is? You raised Catholic? Okay. So, Catholics have patron saints, right? So Buddhists have have bodhisattvas and they're sort of like patron saints. My Japanese students gave me that. So Jizo is the bodhisattva for women, children and people in transition between this life and whatever it is that comes next. And I had a couple of Japanese, I always had international, Columbia always had international students, always had international students. So my Japanese students one year, they took my child welfare course in the fall and then they took my battered women's course in the spring. And at graduation they gave me Jizo. So, sweet.

Isabella Cady 1:02:56

It's beautiful to think about that in terms of like, your career commitment to helping people in transition. And no matter what the extreme is.

Kathryn Conroy 1:03:05

Yeah, yeah. Yeah.

Isabella Cady 1:03:18

Are your friends connected to work too? Or are they from just different walks of life?

Kathryn Conroy 1:03:25

Everybody's connected.

Isabella Cady 1:03:26

Everyone's connected. Okay. How so?

Kathryn Conroy 1:03:28

Kind of lame. I mean, all my friends are, are connected to—unless they're through Kolot—I have friends in Kolot, but my my good friends. My good friends are all 40-50 years and all connected through social service. Mostly child welfare.

Isabella Cady 1:03:52

Who are your friends with Kolot? Or how did you make friends at Club?

Kathryn Conroy 1:04:02

That's an interesting question...

²⁰ Jizo translates to “womb of the Earth,” and is believed to be the guardian of children and travelers.

Isabella Cady 1:04:06

I mean, it's a general question, but I'm curious.

Kathryn Conroy 1:04:10

Well, let me, let me just make a distinction about friends. Okay. I have very few. Very few. So who are my friends, my friends are the people that I would call it two o'clock in the morning on Sunday. And they would come. And their people if they called me I'd be there. So they're very few. They really are. And I'm not basically friendly. We joke. Ellen's nice. I'm not particularly nice. In fact, this is terrible. I have a Japanese Zen archery practice²¹. And we have a group, a women's group, meets every Monday night. And I, we start out with meditation and then we do a little bit of work, actually. And then we then we start to practice. And I was describing something, and I said to the other women, there's about six of us—I said yada, yada, yada. “And I know you think I'm nice—” And before I could finish the sentence, They all went “Nah.” Isn't that terrible? These are women that I really like. I was like, “What do you mean, ‘Nah?’” And they said, “You're not nice.” And then, then they then quoted it back to my tagline on my emails, which I didn't even think they paid attention to. I don't know if you noticed my tagline, “Be well. Be kind. Be fierce.”²² They said, “You're kind. You're one the most kind and generous people we know. And you are fierce. You are not nice.” Terrible, Ellen's nice.

Isabella Cady 1:05:54

What do you think kindness versus niceness is?

Kathryn Conroy 1:05:56

Oh. I am not the OED²³ right. I will tell you what I think it is. I think nice, it's kind of a congenital pleasantness. And I think kind is specifically purposeful. I'm not nice. But I am kind, I think. They think I am. I couldn't believe it, though. I said, “I know you think I'm nice.” “Nah.” It's like, jeez. Unbelievable.

Isabella Cady 1:06:34

I love the idea of that, of like purpose, of purposeful.

Kathryn Conroy 1:06:38

Well, that that's, that's where I would make the distinction. Like, like I said, I'm not a dictionary. So you know, we could look it up. But nice, as you know, pleasant. We were Ellen, we're having dinner the other night with two guys. And we're who we're very close to. And there they are a couple and they are having some trouble with a couple that they've been friends with for years.

²¹ Japanese Zen Archery, known as **Kyūdō** is a Japanese form of archery characterized by its long tradition as a martial art for training the mind and body.

²² Kathryn's email signature does, in fact, read, “Be well. Be kind. Be fierce.”

²³ Oxford English Dictionary

And they feel themselves drifting apart from this other couple because they feel the other couple's values have changed. That all of a sudden, they're interested in things that they aren't interested in, like acquisition of stuff. They're, they're all about what they've got, what they've purchased, and what they've bought. And our friends are feeling, "Wait, that's, that's not why we liked this. This couple. That's not why we liked them. We liked them because they shared our values, you know." And so they asked us the question, have you ever purposefully terminated a friendship? And Ellen says, "She has, not me." I was like, "Thanks a lot." Then I explained that I had and it was over values actually, same thing.

Isabella Cady 1:07:55

Interesting connected to the idea of boundaries.

Kathryn Conroy 1:07:58

Oh, yeah. Yeah, yeah. True. True. Yeah, I just. I have to be a little bit careful. I have mentored a bunch of people. When I first, when I was at Columbia, I was still doing. I stopped doing clinical work with individuals when I left the agency, at Good Shepherd. Because I felt strongly that I don't want to be in private practice. I mean, I respect some people who are in private practice. I don't respect most people who are in private practice. Ah. But, as a licensed clinical social worker, I stopped doing practice once I left the agency because then you'd have to get into private practice. And you don't want to do that. But I could use my license to help people who had gotten their MSW get there. It's three years of supervision you have to have. And so I would supervise clinically, people who had gotten their MSW and then gotten a job in social work, where they were working with women or children, but their supervisor wasn't licensed to supervise them. Is that clear? Yeah, okay, you get your master's, and then you have to be working under someone who has their LCSW for you to get your LCSW. So, a lot of people who were in battered women's work, their supervisor was a lawyer. Or in one case, her supervisor was an MBA. And the supervisor was really about running the whole organization. And the social worker reported to her but she didn't get any clinical supervision. So my commitment was I would supervise people for three years to get their license. And I was totally clear with them. I said, I'm doing this for two reasons. One, I have a big commitment to the profession and I wanna see you get your license and number two, I'm not doing direct practice anymore. I'm teaching, I need examples. So I'm going to use your examples and I will credit, I'm not going to say I did this work with this woman, I'm going to say, someone I supervised this and, and so it worked out really well, because then unlike half the social professors, I was bringing into my classes, you know, live material from the day before, as opposed to something that I had done 10 years ago. And people got their licenses. Why am I telling you this? Oh, because because then I stopped doing that when I left Columbia because I went to run a charity. It was called Hedge Funds Care HFC. We changed the name while I was there, thank God, to Help For Children²⁴. But I was raising money in the hedge fund and finance industry and traveling all over the place to do it. But

²⁴ More information about Help for Children can be found here: <https://www.hfc.org/>

we were giving it to programs that prevented and treated child abuse. That was why I took the job. And, and I switched from doing clinical supervision to mentoring people. And I ended up—people use the word coaching and I hate it makes me think of soccer—so I mentored and I've been doing it now for years. Mostly people who either are executive directors, or are people who are program directors, program coordinators moving up, where they are the Assistant Executive Director, and they're looking to move up and so I would mentor them. And one thing I tell every one of them is: I have an opinion on everything. And you should do what you gotta do. Do what I tell you. Do not do what I tell you. Do what you think you should do. And, and they've come back to me and I'd say half the time, like that was a great idea and I did what you suggested it was terrific. And half the time they come back and they go, “you know, I didn't do that. But I did this other thing. And it worked.” And I'm like, “Great!” You know? And I think you have to be careful about that. You know, I have my experiences and I have my knowledge base. And it's not everything. It's not the whole world. And there are lots of things that other people are going to come up with that are outside of my lane. And I may have some ideas about it, and they may not be very good.

Isabella Cady 1:12:16

Fair enough. You mentioned your archery practice. This is so aside, but it was connected to a friendship conversation. I'm curious about how you got into that or why...

Kathryn Conroy 1:12:35

Well now it's 20 years ago, 20 years ago. You know how I said, how I said to Ellen, “We have to have structured time we spend together?” And we have every Wednesday night, hopefully Saturday afternoon, hopefully Sunday. We also actually spent all of July together. Because what Ellen did was, first of all the first two years. She was nuts. And I just said, “You have to have vacation. You can't just do this.” So what she did, was instead of taking any other day off, which she didn't, so she didn't, she took off all of July. All right, and she actually mostly unplugged. And we have a cabin in the woods in Northern Dutchess County. Well, literally, it's a cabin in the woods. It has running water, and it has running water, but it doesn't have heart. And it's on a lake and it's cabin in the woods. So we go up there. And so about 20 years ago, Ellen says to me, “We don't do anything together.” I'm like, “I see you every morning. I see you every evening.” 85-75% of the time. We have Wednesday nights Saturday afternoon, less on Sunday. I said, “What would you want?” She says, “We don't do anything together.” And I'm thinking to myself, “We are so different.” I mean, I said, “Well, what do you want to do?” She said, “Well, I don't know what we need, we need to do something together.” Fine. So, I remembered that she had talked about having a happy time when she was a kid at camp. And one of the things she liked was archery. You know all kids, you know archery. Actually, I think she liked rifles too, but I wasn't about to get a rifle. So I went to this local sporting goods store and I got this crappy little archery kit. You know, okay, you know. Not not not *toy* exactly, but not you know, alright. So I bring it home and I get up. I get a box and I stuffed it up with newspaper. And I put the target and

I say, “El, here's what we're going to do. Everyday, every day we’re gonna do some archery, together! We have something to do together.” She says, “Great.” So, I, we practiced. And so then I got a second one. So we each have the same little dopey little archery kit. And I really didn't realize until then how competitive she is. I would have to stay out there until she beat me. I mean, seriously, she would count. I mean, I still shooting at the thing, and then she’d go like, “Well, you had one more bullseye than I had.” And then and then we have to stay. And then I just like, shoot all you know, just just to be done, you know. So we spent the summer—it was kind of fun. We spent the summer doing archery. We come back to Brooklyn. And there's I, I—this is kinda before Google—I look around and I find an archery place over in Bensonhurst. I go to the place and the archery store is clearly for hunters. You know, this is like big thick bows with a scope on it. And you know, and then they have an archery range, and in the basement, and these guys are down there. And I was like, holy shit, you know, we're not, I don't think we can take our little dinky bows and go do that. So, but then I remember that a million years ago, I had read the book *Zen and the Art of Archery*.²⁵ Oh, there was Google. So I, I Googled “Zen archery”. And then next month, there was gonna be an open house for this Kyudo group. It spelled K-Y-U-D-O, Kyudo group, was going to have an open house and start another session. And so, and I already had a meditation practice. So I said to Ellen, there's this archery group, we could go in and she was like, “Meditate?” I said, “Yeah.” She said, “It's not competitive?” I was like, “No.” She goes,” I have absolutely positively no interest whatsoever. None, zero.” So I went, and I've been doing it for the last 18 years.

Isabella Cady 1:17:27

So you just went by yourself?

Kathryn Conroy: 1:17:28

Oh, yeah.

Isabella Cady: 1:17:30

Were you surprised to find that Ellen was competitive?

Kathryn Conroy 1:17:34

I-number one—I knew she was no slouch. But I had no idea. And I don't know if that was just about me, or it was about archery, or was it she had time off and she had the bandwidth to do this? I have no idea what it was about. But it was startling at the time, because I don't find her competitive. Otherwise, it's it's not like who works harder—she worked harder for years. Well? I always had a job and a half. But she worked harder. She was on call all the time. I wasn't. But I didn't compete with her on that. And she hasn't competed with me on stuff. I mean, who reads

²⁵ More information about *Zen In the Art of Archery* can be found here:
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zen_in_the_Art_of_Archery

more? Who, we don't compete, but the archery thing. Man, it brought out something I'd never seen before. It was a trip.

Isabella Cady 1:18:28

Can, do you? Can you share details about what it would look like in July when Ellen would leave Kolot? And then also, I'm assuming you would take time off too, like how those logistics would work?

Kathryn Conroy 1:18:39

That's what we did. We both took off July, and my daughter would be part of the time and then we'd be alone. What did it look like? We, I cooked a lot. It's a cabin in the woods. Halfway between, you know New York? No, it's halfway between Hyde Park and Rhinebeck, which is basically on the Hudson River. It's gorgeous. So we did a lot of day trips and a lot of hiking and there's a ton of history up there. There are all of these mansions along the Hudson River including FDR's house and a mile across, away from the river is Val-Kill²⁶ which is where Eleanor Roosevelt had her place. The mansions were interesting to visit because of all the history, you know, they were railroad magnets. They were oil people, disgustingly wealthy. But lots of history. We did, we did a fair amount of hiking along the Hudson into the Gunks.... It's a lower range than the Catskills. Everybody just calls it the Gunks. So I can't even remember the whole long name. That's it—Shawangunk!²⁷ And, so we do a lot of hiking. And we ate really well. Because along the Hudson is the Culinary Institute of America, CIA²⁸. Oh, yeah. Well, the guys and women would graduate from there, and they loved the Hudson Valley. So they would go to towns that had some money and they would open up these restaurants. So we would eat in Rhinebeck. Wow. It was fantastic. It was fantastic.

Isabella Cady 1:20:37

Can you think of any meals specifically that stood out?

Kathryn Conroy 1:20:43

Oh. When I was eating meat, we had some amazing duck that was That was wild. Some scallops stuff that was amazing. No, just really just really good. It is really good food. Well prepared, a lot of it local. You know, the whole local thing came in maybe 20 years ago, 15 years ago. Dutchess County is more farm than it is anything else. So, tons of local food and vegetables, really. We'd go apple picking in the fall. You know, things like that. We'd do a lot of stuff in July. It was great.

Isabella Cady 1:21:20

²⁶ Val-Kill was the home of the late Eleanor Roosevelt. More information about the historical site can be found here: <https://www.nps.gov/elro/index.htm>

²⁷ Kathryn is referencing the Shawangunk Range in New York State.

²⁸ More information about the Culinary Institute of America can be found here: <https://www.ciachef.edu/>

How would you take time off and how would Ellen take time off? Would people fill in for her at Kolot and people would fill in for you at work or?

Kathryn Conroy 1:21:28

Yes and no people would fill in for Ellen at work. And she had—Lisa²⁹ was cantor. Lisa had been a congregant who Ellen convinced to go to cantorial school. And then she came back as the cantor. And always had a strong president, and always had a collegial rabbi from Park Slope in Brooklyn who would fill in for her if there was an emergency. And then she would cover for them when they were away, kind of thing. But mostly the Cantor and the president and sometimes the student rabbi would cover it. And she really didn't do anything in July. It was amazing. I mean, she wouldn't, we'd have—we'd have this many arguments, if I did check my email every day. And she would not. I'm away in July, and I'm not gonna do my email. And I'm like, "You're gonna be sorry," but anyway. And sure enough, we would come home and she would be a lunatic for 72 hours. Because she'd start with the email and you know, it's in reverse order. So, so she's reading it, she didn't even know whatever it was, was a problem. You have to go down like 17 inches in your emails to find out, you know what the issue really was. I mean, it's crazy. So after a couple years, I did get her convinced to just check it a couple of times a week. You don't have to do anything. You don't have to do anything. But it'll make your life easier when you go back. So she did start to do that. I did check my email every day. And I did weigh in on stuff. Trying to—Yeah, when I was when I was the ED of something I did, yeah.

Isabella Cady 1:23:11

I'm sorry, when did you guys get that place?

Kathryn Conroy 1:23:14

So, 34 years ago, my aunt died and left me money. And, I bought a place. Second house of a lake in Pennsylvania, 20 minutes north of Scranton. Why? Because a good friend of mine was out here. And so I bought this place. And it was great when my daughter was little because there were other little kids and there was a little beach and they, you know, it was wonderful. But then Emma got to be 17 and had no interest in going there whatsoever. And my friend moved away. And so Elena and I are in the middle of like heterosexual land. I mean, it was pathetic. We'd go to the movies on a Saturday night and we would be the only two women there. Everybody else was—

Isabella Cady 1:24:02

In Brooklyn.

Kathryn Conroy

No, no, this is out in Pennsylvania.

²⁹ Kathryn is naming Lisa Segal, who was also interviewed for the Kolot Chayeyinu Oral History Project.

Isabella Cady 1:24:04

Oh, sorry.

Kathryn Conroy 1:24:05

Yeah, no this was in Brooklyn.

Isabella Cady 1:24:07

I was like, what?

Kathryn Conroy 1:24:07

No, no, no, no, it was out there. So we said, “We gotta get out of here.” You know, we don't even have a little kid to cover for us anymore. You know, it's—this is ridiculous. So there was no way we could afford to be on ocean. Although we both love the ocean, but not in the summer. So do you know that there are two things that Ellen reads every Sunday in the *New York Times*? One is: she reads the weddings. It has nothing to do with who got married. She wants to see who got the gig. “They had that Rabbi do it? Are you kidding me?” You know, that kind of thing. And she reads real estate. She's a closet realtor. So I said, “Well go find something, we'll sell Pennsylvania.” It was my aunt's money. “We'll sell Pennsylvania and we'll go someplace else.” So again, before Google, she finds this thing, in the *New York Times*, a small house. Maybe they called it a cottage. In Hyde Park, five minutes from the Hudson River. Ellen, when I first met her lived in Ossining, which is on the Hudson River, up above, Westchester. It's in Westchester, I'm sorry, it's up above the Bronx. And she said she saw this advertisement. And she said, “I, Ellen, love the Hudson Valley and you, Kathryn, love Eleanor Roosevelt.” And Eleanor Roosevelt's place was in Hyde Park. So we went to go look at it. And, it had been a fish store. Okay. It was five minutes from the Hudson River, but it was, you know, down the street and around the corner and down the street and around a corner to the river. Where, couldn't go on it because it was a train station. And, the house was so skinny and so short. I couldn't stand up on the second floor. The second floor was less than six feet. And it was across the street from a loud bar. And it was next to a parking lot. I was like, “Are you kidding me?” Anyway, so there was no way we were going to sell Pennsylvania to buy that. So, we went back to the real estate office, basically to use the bathroom. And while I was in there, Ellen saw a picture of a cottage on the bulletin board. And, she says to the guy, “What's that?” And he says, “You don't want that it's falling down.” I'm gonna show you a picture. “It's a mess.” Ellen says we want to see it. So we get in the realtor's car and he takes us to...

Isabella Cady 1:26:57

Oh my gosh!

Kathryn Conroy

Yeah. He takes us to the cabin and it was indeed falling down. There were holes in the roof.

Isabella Cady 1:27:06

So is it a burgundy color?

Kathryn Conroy 1:27:07

It was bright red, but it changes over time.

Isabella Cady

Okay. Wow.

Kathryn Conroy

Yeah. We're incredibly lucky. I owe this all to my Aunt Kathryn, whose picture is over there.

Isabella Cady 1:27:19

What's that on, what lake is that?

Kathryn Conroy 1:27:21

It's called Browns Pond. Technically, it's a lake because it has—as my friend Claire pointed out—two means of ingress egress which actually qualifies that as the lake but it's called a pond. So we go and look at it and the realtor takes us down—you saw where the lake was—and takes us down there. And we look up at the house and it's horrible condition. And I say to Ellen, we're going to do it. I mean, you can't buy this, you know, the view, the lake, the whatever. And by the way, it was in November. It was overcast, it was horrible. I said, “Worst comes to worst. We'll take down the house and we'll put up a gear.” She was like “Okay.” So, we did and we sold the house in Pennsylvania really quickly to the people next door. They wanted it for the kids or something. And bought this for less than that, so we had a little extra money to start fixing it up. The first thing we do is get a roof put on it. And then for the first 10 years, Ellen and I worked on it every July. We did carpentry.

Isabella Cady 1:28:37

Wow!

Kathryn Conroy 1:28:38

We did. We took it down to the studs inside. And I mean—there's a mudroom, then there's a great—there's an open room, just two tiny bedrooms. Then at the end of the big room is a kitchen. Sorry kitchen, bathroom, and then there's a big porch. We took it all the way down to the studs and we put up insulation and we put up paneling. We took down the ceiling. We took up the floor. Oh my god. So, of the four weeks that we were there in July, two of them we'd really work hard. And then two of them we'd play and do hikes and other kinds of stuff. And do some, some of the work. And it's after 10 years we really rebuilt the whole thing. The only thing we didn't

do: the electricity, the plumbing, or the roof. But the rest of it we did. When my daughter first came up she said—there's a stone fireplace and there literally was a hole through the wall on each side out into the woods. You can see! Critters had come in. When we took down the walls the bones of dead animals were in there. It was just horrible. Anyway, Emma looked out—to the fireplace. She looked out into the woods, she looked out into the woods, she looked up and the ceiling was coming down. The roof had holes. She said famous words, “I can't believe you bought this piece of shit in the woods without me.” Isn't that great? That's what she said, “I can't believe you bought this piece of shit in the woods.” And then later on, she gave us a postcard which I have framed up there. And it is, you know, it's a postcard, and there's this falling down shack in the woods and the caption says, “Finally found a place we could afford.”

Isabella Cady

Did you have any prior carpentry experience?

Kathryn Conroy

No, no. But when I was a kid, my parents put an extension on the kitchen and finished the basement. And, I remember the guy named Mr. Bleasdale. And, he was very kind. And I kind of, like, followed around and watched him do stuff. And I love the idea. But I was girl, see, and my parents were very, you know, who does what? And so, you know, the idea of me picking up a hammer was, ya know. “Girls don't do that, girls don't do that.” And my brothers had no interest whatsoever, which was kind of hilarious. So I got books, I got the “Reader's Digest Guide to Home Repair,” they're still up there. And another book that told you what to do stuff. And I would read the directions and I'd go out and buy the tools. And Ellen got into it! Although Ellen's favorite tool is a crowbar.

Isabella Cady

Amazing.

Kathryn Conroy 1:31:25

Well, that's only good in the first couple of stages. Because once you take it all down, you have to put it up. She was a lunatic with the crowbar, a lunatic. I think she got out all the stuff that she had accumulated the previous 11 months from the congregation. She took it out on those walls. And then we go to the dump. And we, we had this car and we loaded up with all of this, you know, rotted wood and giant pieces of sheetrock that had gotten wet that we cracked up into small pieces of defeat. And we'd go to the dump and these giant guys would be there. And do you think they'd help us? No, they would like, watch us empty the car. Anyway, we had a good time.

Isabella Cady 01:44

So when did you finish all the renovations?

Kathryn Conroy 01:48

We've been there now. 20...38, 34. We've been there 24 years. We finished the biggest parts of it 14 years ago. So, we worked on it the first 10 years. We worked on it a lot. We slept on the porch because you couldn't do the bedroom. I mean, it was just—it was insane. It was insane. And it was great. It was great.

Isabella Cady

Love that. You briefly mentioned growing up, are you from New York City?

Kathryn Conroy

I was born in Brooklyn, born in Brooklyn. Born in Brooklyn, on Hancock street between Irving and Wycoff. It was the house that actually my maternal great-grandmother owned, which was astonishing for a woman in that time. She owned it. I have yet to figure out—find out—why she owned it. But anyway, my mother was born there. And then I was born there and my brother Tom was born there. And then when I was five, my parents moved to Long Island and then I left as soon as I could at 19.

Isabella Cady

Have you ever lived outside of New York?

Kathryn Conroy 1:33:22

I worked in an institution for Good Shepherd for five years up in Peekskill. That was in Westchester. So, five years in Westchester, and then all the rest of the time has been in New York. When I came down from Westchester, I lived in the village. And then I moved to Park Slope. And then Ellen and I moved to Sunset Park, and then this is Kensington. Yeah. On the one hand, I'm very provincial, because I haven't lived any place else. On the other hand, I've traveled enormously. So.

Isabella Cady

I'm curious. This is going back to an earlier part of our conversation just about the founding of Kolot, but I'm wondering if it felt like Brooklyn and Kolot had to be together? Or if you feel like those things are separate.

Kathryn Conroy

Oh, no. 100% 100%. In fact, there were things that, there were taglines when they were first starting, you know. You know, “doesn't get any better than Brooklyn.” You know, things like that. No, I think it's very Brooklyn. I think Ellen describes herself now as a Brooklynite. I mean, she's lived here longer than she's lived any place else. But, you know, I am unusual in the fact

that I was born in Brooklyn. And I mentioned the address Hancock between Irving and Wycoff. That's Bushwick. Do you know how cool Bushwick is now? I couldn't afford to buy a house in Bushwick. It's just unbelievable. But...

Isabella Cady

Okay, we're at an hour and half. How are you feeling?

Kathryn Conroy

I'm fine. How are you?

Isabella Cady

I'm great.

Kathryn Conroy

You need the bathroom or anything?

Isabella Cady

I'm good.

Kathryn Conroy

Okay. Okay.

Isabella Cady

Um, I think my final thought, and we can keep on talking...

Kathryn Conroy 1:35:22

It's your nickel.

Isabella Cady

Yours too! A lot of nickels for us.

Kathryn Conroy

Do you always wear two different socks?

Isabella Cady

No!

Kathryn Conroy

I'm just curious. Sorry.

Isabella Cady

Not intentionally!

Kathryn Conroy

I thought those might be a fashion statement.

Isabella Cady

Oh, I wish!

Kathryn Conroy

You could have lied. You know, you could have said, “One matches my sweater one matches my slacks.”

Isabella Cady

[Laughs] No, there's just a lot going on. Always. Um, okay. My—my not final thought, because I feel like there can be a lot to this. But, what you think your role in the oral history project is? Obviously you have such a deep history in Kolot. But, if you—if you want to speak to that... ? Why you joined the project and what?

Kathryn Conroy

Why did I join the project?

Isabella Cady

Or? Yeah, I mean, you can respond to that, or just what do you think your role is? So here's my response.

Kathryn Conroy

Yes. Why did I join the project, I was going to be flippant and say I didn't have a choice. Which is true, but for a different reason. I—when I say I didn't have a choice it's gonna sound like what Ellen made me. No, I didn't have a choice because I think I had to, in the sense of nobody else is as close to Ellen as I am. So in that case, in that way I didn't have a choice. And I am positive, both knowing Ellen and the people Kolot, that people will speak of her brilliantly, fondly, lovingly, kindly. I mean, everybody likes—That's not true. The vast majority of people really like Ellen. Really do. The ones that don't, they leave actually. They're not part of the project. I saw who the names were. Ellen was famous at the beginning for saying to people, “Perhaps this isn't the place for you.” And there were times I would say to her, you know, “Just tell so and so this might not be the place for them.” And in fact, mostly they left. It was a handful, a handful. So, I wasn't worried about people not saying nice things about her. But, I did want to make sure that since I do know her more intimately, in this whole process than anybody

else, that my voice was there. And then what do you think my role is? I think I'm one voice among many. Which is fine, setting the course you know, yeah.

Isabella Cady

The image of that founding table is like—

Kathryn Conroy

There's a video that she's got to get. There's a guy, Lichtenstein—I forget his first name—who just won a big award for doing a documentary. Who was an early member, early-ish member of Kolot. And when they had their 10th anniversary, it was done in the boathouse at Prospect Park, they rented the space. And he had made a video and the video is of that table and sitting at the table is a member of Kolot. I don't think she's being interviewed. Maybe she is: Trisha Arlan. And she's sitting at the table, and she's a great raconteur.³⁰ She's fantastic. And actually now what she does is she writes liturgy. She had started rabbinical school and she didn't finish. But she writes, she writes liturgies... beautiful prayers. But, she's sitting at the table in her raconteur mode and she's talking about the founding and, “This is the table.” And so I wish that they could find that video because it's fantastic. It was my... the table was in the basement of my aunt's house. And Ellen and I and Emma went to get it because, long story. We didn't have a dining room table. So we got it. And the car wasn't big enough and Emma was very little and Ellen and I are carrying the table and Emma's under it like this pretending like she was—anyway. So we got a table back and it was a mahogany table and it was really a disaster. So I painted it blue. I painted the top blue and actually came out really pretty.

Isabella Cady

Like a dark blue or light blue?

Kathryn Conroy

Um, It-the blue above your head that scarf. Okay. Yeah, it was that color.

Isabella Cady

It's like a... it kind of looks like my sweater.

Kathryn Conroy

Yeah, yeah. Was like that color blue. And it looked great. It looked great. And, but then Ellen's father was moving from his house. Her mother had died and he was moving from his house to a continuum of care apartment, kind of thing. And so, we ended up with—I don't know, if you stick your head in the dining room—there's a giant oak dining room table in there with the chairs, and then there's a credenza, and there's another thing. So, that table went, but I wish we could get that video back because it was so cool. It was—now it's 20 something years ago. And Kolot at the

³⁰ Storyteller

High Holidays—not this year but last year, the last the last time was in person... no, it'd be three years ago—they told the founding of Kolot around the kitchen table on Kermit place. And I'm like, no, it was the dining room. But you know. So anyway,

Isabella Cady

Where's the table?

Kathryn Conroy

Oh, long gone. When when when Ellen's father said, "I'm getting rid of the grandmother's table." Ellen was like, "That's my inheritance. I want it." So it was shipped up from Washington from Virginia. And so my table had to go.

Isabella Cady

Oh so, it was your table.

Kathryn Conroy

It was my grandmother's table. Yeah.

Isabella Cady

I love that. Oh, well, this was so lovely. Okay. Yeah.

Kathryn Conroy

We done?

Isabella Cady

If you have any other thoughts?

Kathryn Conroy

Not another.

Isabella Cady

Okay. Good. Okay. pause, pause.

APPENDIX

On Monday 11/7/2022, Kathryn Conroy emailed Isabella Cady with supplemental, important information following their interview.

1. “The first Kolot Ark (the “furniture” where the Torah scrolls reside during the Service) was actually built by two Irishmen: me and Evan Ahern. OK, he was ½ Jewish. I just thought it funny that we built the first Ark.
2. The two torah scrolls that Kolot has each lived in its own Army Green duffle bag in the closet in Ellen’s study. For years we schlepped them back and forth to Services.
3. In case no one else mentions it, we had a lot of gatherings at our house on Kermit Place. Not Services. But dinners for the Board Members, dinners for the social action committee, dinners for whatever Ellen thought was important to recognize/celebrate. When we moved to the apartment last April we gave away 20 folding chairs because we don’t need them anymore.”