

**GREENWICH VILLAGE SOCIETY FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION
EAST VILLAGE
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT**

Oral History Interview
FRANCES GOLDIN

By Liza Zapol
New York, NY
April 2, 2014

Oral History Interview with Frances Goldin, 04/02/2014

Narrator	Frances Goldin
Birthdate	6/22/24
Birthplace	New York, NY
Interviewee Age	89
Interviewer	Liza Zapol
Place of Interview	Francis Goldin's Apartment on East 11 th Street
Date of Interview	04/02/2014
Duration of Interview	1 hour, 32 minutes
Number of Sessions	1
Waiver Signed/copy given	Y
Photo (Y/N)	Y
Format Recorded	96K/24 bit
Archival File Names	140402-000.wav [2.15GB]; 140402-001.wav [1.06GB]
MP3 File Name	Goldin_FrancesOralHistory1.mp3 [74.5MB] Goldin_FrancesOralHistory2.mp3[36.7MB]
Order in Oral Histories	4 (East Village Project)

Background/ Notes:

Interview took place in Goldin's home. 2 interruptions by telephones- recording was stopped.

Additional Materials (shown or given to Oral Historian):

Frances' daughter, Sally Goldin, provided photographs of Frances.



Narrator at her daughter's wedding, May 2014. Photographer unknown.

Quotes from Oral History Interview with Frances Goldin

“I have lived on the Lower East Side for seventy years. And when I came here, I found Nirvana, and I will die in this building - not in a hospital. I'll die in this building. This is my home, and I love it here.”

(Goldin p.1)

“It was such an integrated neighborhood. There were Hispanics and Russians and Italians and Jews. There were Chinese. There were Blacks. It was totally integrated. I've never stopped loving the fact, I think it's the only community in the world—and I'm not kidding, because I've been to the East End in London, which they say is similar—where so many huge amounts of minority peoples, they don't live in buildings where there's only them. They live in buildings where everybody lives. And they're united by one thing, and that's poverty. They're all poor. If you came to this country and you had money, you did not go to the Lower East Side. You went to the Upper West Side. You went to Pelham. You didn't come to the Lower East Side. What bound us all was poverty.

And there's something about poverty that unites people. They might not know what your language is or your color is; they know you're poor. And that if you can't pay the rent, they have a rent party and everybody chips in, and your rent is paid. There's something very unifying about a bunch of people living together in poverty.”

(Goldin p. 3)

“Well, the American Labor Party had a very strong Lower East Side branch, and they were looking for somebody to fill a post. And they said, “Well, the consumer issue is a big issue. Why don't you run?” I said, “I can't run. I don't know—” They said, “You don't have to know anything.” They convinced me to run. They needed a woman on the ticket. They wanted a woman on the ticket, and they wanted to cover the issues of rent control and housing. And that was what I did.”

(Goldin p.9)

“We said, “Urban renewal is urban removal. It's Black removal. It's poor people removal,” which was true. It was all of that. It was only in poor neighborhoods. So ours started by saying, “We love urban renewal. But this urban renewal, the people who live here are going to be the beneficiaries of the plan and not the victims. This plan will basically take care of the people who live here.” And that's what made it different from any other plan. You might be relocated from the front of the building to the back while the front was being renovated, but you were not out of the neighborhood. You might have gone from this building to one next door while yours was being renovated, but you would not go out of the neighborhood. And we kept that promise. Anybody who lived there still lives there or died there.”

(Goldin p.12-13)

“I was a good organizer. And we had something to fight for. When you fight for the roof over your head, it's not hard to organize. And it's hard to fight the price of tomatoes, but not that hard because tomatoes are important. I learned the basics of organizing. If you don't have the troops that are involved in the struggle, you have nothing. You can have the best organizers in the world, and you have nothing if you don't have the people ready to put out for their homes. But

when you're talking about the roof over their head, you're talking about their children's safety, you've got something to work with.

So when we talked about having a roof over your head for your great-grandchildren, they came forth. They came to demonstration. They came to meetings. They paid a dollar a year. And we never had a meeting without food. We always had food. When we'd win a victory, we had a party. We danced. There was always Spanish music. We danced.”

(Goldin p.13)

“Well, we fought NYU when they built the dorm. There's no vacant land left for them to—they'll knock down buildings. All the small tenements are disappearing. They take a tenement and gut it and make it into luxury apartments. The people in Cooper Square are trained. If they see men on our block, on 4th Street or 3rd Street, in suits with a clipboard, they are trained to go over to them and say, “What are you doing?” And they said, “We're just writing down—” “You can't write down these numbers. What do you mean, 'writing down?’ We own these buildings. They're not for sale. We have a big dog, and we're going to get that dog out, and he's going to eat your leg off. Get the hell off this block.” You're very aggressive. You tell them to get the hell off the block. They can't write down numbers. This block is not for sale.

And they love that. And then they do it. They see guys with suits, and they say to them, “Get the hell off this block. It's not for sale.” So we do what we can in the area. Whenever there's a new, when there's a building being turned into—we'll picket it. We'll demonstrate against it. For me, Occupy was a breath of fresh air. It really was a wonderful development.

(Goldin p.32-33)

Summary of Oral History Interview with Frances Goldin GVSHP

Interview Date: April 2, 2014

Frances Goldin

- Early Years
 - Parents from Kiev, Russia
 - Lived in Harlem
 - Four siblings
 - Born June 22, 1924
 - Springfield Gardens, Queens, NY
 - Neighborhood
 - Christian community
 - German neighbors
 - Jews a minority / shop owners
 - Family shunned by non-Jewish & Jewish community
 - Father
 - Self-educated
 - Worked for IRT (Transit Authority) for 37 years
 - Mother
 - Stayed at home
 - Highly organized
 - Education
 - Andrew Jackson High School, Queens, NY
 - Valedictorian
 - Work
 - Jewish Center; Queens, NY [0:15:05.0]
 - Secretary
 - Butcher shop; Ludlow St., Lower East Side
 - Secretary for Harry Schwartz
 - Government agency / War Administration [0:25:26.1]
 - Goldie Russell - head of agency
 - Meets husband at job
- Marriage
 - Housing
 - 11th St., between 2nd and 3rd
 - \$75 month rent
 - Moved to E. Broadway (18 years)
 - \$100 for seven rooms on a floor
 - Moved back to 11th St., between 1st & 2nd
 - Volunteering
 - The Lower East Side Tenant and Consumer Council
 - Neighborhood
 - Integrated: Hispanics, Russians, Italians, Jews, Chinese, Blacks, Ukrainian, but predominantly Italian
 - Seven synagogues on one block

- Family
 - Husband
 - Educated, Socialist
 - Teaches Frances about Socialism
 - Work
 - Government agency / war administration
 - State American Labor Party
 - Worked with Vito Marcantonio
 - Frances' first books about Marcantonio
 - Blacklisted [0:20:00.0]
 - Frances supports family - secretary's salary
 - Printing estimator at a Communist company
 - Children
- Activism
 - Tenant Movement
 - 'Urban renewal' removal of tenants to bring in expensive high-rise buildings
 - Fight to provide affordable housing to current residents & no relocation
 - Urban renewal losses: Lincoln Square & Seward Park, East Broadway
 - Good organizer / strategist
 - Media outlets: The Village Voice, The Daily News, Channel 7
 - Community land trusts
 - Co-ops, affordable housing
 - Non-profit entity
 - Robert Moses
 - Lower Manhattan Thruway
 - Frances fought against the building of the thruway
 - Louie DiSalvio
 - Liquor store owner, corner of Houston & Bowery
 - State Assemblyman in Albany
 - Fights against the Thruway
 - Shift
 - Moses offers DiSalvio a deal / DiSalvio supports the Thruway
 - Mary Perro Nichols, *The Village Voice* reporter uncovers the story
 - Board of Estimate
 - Petition board for a block against the Thruway
 - Seven month process
 - NYU: fight against NYU expansion
 - Margarita López, council member, ally
 - Shift - no longer an ally
 - Rosie Mendez, current council member, ally
 - Bloomberg administration

- Gentrification & high-rise luxury development
 - Occupy Movement
 - Groups
 - Metropolitan Council on Housing
 - Frances helped to start council in 1959
 - Legislative Director
 - Cooper Square Committee
 - Co-founder of committee in 1959
 - Notable members: Esther Rand, Selma Burdick, ALP members
 - Selma Burdick
 - Chairwoman
 - Director of the Church of All Nations (Houston St. & 2nd Ave.)
 - Committee met in church
 - 'The Alternate Plan for Cooper Square'
 - Created by community planner Walter Thabit
 - Plan - residents moved to new housing / no relocation
 - Plan used in Germany, Scandinavian countries, England & Cooper Square
 - Twelve years of community activism
 - Val Orselli - influential player
 - Frances arrested at a community planning meeting
 - Others arrested: Hanno Clemente, Ernesto Martinez
 - Plan approved to build public housing on vacant lot
 - No state or federal money to pay for the plan
 - Alternative solution
 - Force city to renovate existing old law tenements
 - \$50,000 to renovate an apartment
 - Apartments become co-ops
 - Fifty-four year struggle for co-op approval
 - 2014 tenants now co-op owners
 - Jewish Council
 - Built housing for Jewish residents, 4th St.
 - Cooper Square Committee fought and won for integration in building now tenants: Jewish, Italian, Chinese, Puerto Rican
 - Politics
 - 1950
 - American Labor Party (ALP) ticket -runs for office
 - Only woman on the ticket
 - Dr. W.E.B. Du Bois also on ticket
 - Du Bois - 10% of vote, Goldin - 14%
 - Campaign points: housing, rent control, price control
 - Work
 - Substitute secretary for Dr. W.E.B. Du Bois (one week)
 - Publishing (twenty years)

- Literary agent for an editor in chief of a publishing company (seventeen years)
 - Editor-in-chief of E.M. Hale & Company (three years)
 - Entrepreneur
 - Starts own agency in 1977
 - Barbara Kingsolver, client
 - Mumia Abu-Jamal, client, six books
 - Writer
 - *'Imagine Living in a Socialist USA'*
- Notable Neighborhood Locations [1:02:06.5]
 - St. Mark's on the Bowery
 - St. Mark's bookstore
 - Ukrainian Hall, between 8th & 9th St. on 2nd Ave.
 - Union Square
- Current Day
 - Frances Goldin is 89 years old

General Interview Notes:

This is a transcription of an oral history that was conducted by the Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation.

GVSHP began the Greenwich Village Oral History Project in 2013. The GVSHP Greenwich Village Oral History Project includes a collection of interviews with individuals involved in local businesses, culture, and preservation, to gather stories, observations, and insights concerning the changing Village. These interviews elucidate the personal resonances of the neighborhood within the biographies of key individuals, and illustrate the evolving neighborhood.

Oral history is a method of collecting memories and histories through recorded interviews between a narrator with firsthand knowledge of historically significant events and a well-informed interviewer, with the goal of adding to the historical record.

The recording is transcribed, lightly edited for continuity and clarity, and reviewed by the interviewee. Oral history is not intended to present the absolute or complete narrative of events. Oral history is a spoken account by the interviewee in response to questioning. Whenever possible, we encourage readers to listen to the audio recordings to get a greater sense of this meaningful exchange.

The views expressed by the contributor(s) are solely those of the contributor(s) and do not necessarily reflect the opinions or endorsement of our organization.

Zapol: [This is the Greenwich Village] Society for Historic Preservation Oral History Project. This is Liza Zapol. It's April 2, 2014. And if I can ask you to introduce yourself, please?

Goldin: I am Frances Goldin, G-O-L-D-I-N. And I'm going to be ninety in June. I have lived on the Lower East Side for seventy years, and when I came here, I found nirvana. And I will die in this building, not in a hospital. I'll die in this building. This is my home, and I love it here.

Zapol: I look forward to hearing the story about how you came to find this nirvana, and then how you've grown in this place. Can you tell me exactly when in June you were born, and where?

Goldin: I was born on June 22, 1924, in Springfield Gardens, which was a little Christian community in Queens, three miles beyond Jamaica. And it was a Christian community. There were nine Jews in the whole town, and eight of them had shops. They were the hardware store and the drugstore, et cetera. Except my father was not a shopkeeper, he was a worker. And so we were shunned by the non-Jews and shunned by the Jews, because my father was not one of them, and went to work in overalls. He worked for the IRT [Interborough Rapid Transit Company] for thirty-seven years. Started out sweeping the floors at \$6 a week, and when he finished he was in charge of the tool room.

My father created the windshield wipers that are in every subway in the city. The patent, of course, went to the [Manhattan] Transit Authority, because he was working for them at the time. But he was a genius. He was a remarkable, brilliant, thoughtful, self-educated, remarkable man. And although my mother was a great organizer and she could make a penny stretch, I am who I am because of my father.

Zapol: Can you tell me a story about your father? Where was he from? Where was his family from?

Goldin: Both my mother and father were from the small towns near Kiev in Russia. They didn't know each other until they came to this country. And my father wooed my mother for years, and wrote her letters, many of which I have. And she succumbed. They moved. They lived in Harlem, where she had three of her four children. One died at the age of two of diphtheria, which depressed her so. And she cried so long and hard that she broke a vessel in her eye as a result of that tragedy.

And I was born in my mother's bed in the bedroom in Springfield Gardens. And it was very lonely for me. I had no friends. There was a family of nine who lived next door. They were German. And of the nine, seven of them were boys. And once, when I came home from school—I don't remember the reason—but I started to quarrel with the girl whom I didn't like, and she didn't like me. And we shared words, and then we started hitting each other. I was a block from my house. And then we were on the ground. We didn't know how to fight, grabbing each other and ripping clothes and stuff. And suddenly we were surrounded by a circle of boys who were egging us on. And they were shouting, "Kill the Jew! Kill the Jew!"

And when I heard that, when those words penetrated into my head, I went berserk and I grabbed the girl by her ears, and I was banging her head on the ground. The ground wasn't paved. And I was really killing her. And then I felt somebody on my back, and it was her sister, who was very nice to me, and I sort of liked her. And she said, "Frances, she's got a bad heart. Please, Frances, stop. She's got a bad heart." And eventually those words penetrated my brain.

[0:05:23.8]

And I kind of stopped, but it was clear I was beating the hell out of her, that I had won the fight. And I stopped, and I looked up, and down the block was my house. And maybe eight houses into it was my father standing in the front door of my house. I couldn't believe that he let this happen, that he didn't intervene. And the house had a door, and then there were two windows, and two windows, and it was a front porch. It had windows all around, and he was standing in the doorway with the windows all around. I got up and I hobbled to the house, and I was crying and I was angry. And he took me into the sunroom. I was a big person. I was about eleven. I was not a little kid.

And he put me on his lap, and he rocked me. And I'm saying, "How could you do this? Why did you let it happen? Why didn't you stop it?" And he rocked me and rocked me and he said to me, "Girlie, this was your fight. It wasn't my fight. You had to have this fight. And I want to assure you you'll never have to fight again. This was your fight. You did good. You did good."

And what happened after that is that I was a pariah. They saw me coming, they turned around and went the other way. If they saw me coming, they would cross the street. Everybody avoided me like the plague. Because I've been fighting all my life. But his principles, and his self-learning, and his humanity was what shaped my life. So that's my story of where I came from.

And when I got married, we moved to 11th Street between Second [Avenue] and Third [Avenue]. We're now between First [Avenue] and Second. And I lived on the top floor of a building run by a Nazi, who used to wear boots, and I'm sure he heiled Hitler. He was a son of a bitch. I had one big huge room, bigger than this room. This is very big. This is why all the meetings are in this apartment, because this room is so big. And then it was a tiny kitchen and a bathroom, and a tiny room, smaller than the foyer. My both kids slept in that tiny room. And I paid \$75 a month. And I went to the Tenant Council—it was called the Lower East Side Tenant and Consumer Council—to find out, I thought I was paying too much money. So they checked my rent, and I went back the next week, and they said, “Your rent is \$75. You seem intelligent and interested. Would you like to volunteer?”

So I've been in the tenant movement all my adult life, and it was in the same building as the American Labor Party. They had offices, and they had room for the Tenant Council. So that's how I got into housing.

Zapol: How did you end up moving from Queens to this neighborhood? What was that decision process? Did your husband already live here? What was that? [00:09:35.25]

Goldin: No, he lived in Washington Heights. I don't know how I got this apartment. Maybe I saw it in the paper. I really don't remember, but I moved into 11th Street between Second and Third Avenue [in 1945]. And as soon as I moved into the neighborhood, I was accepted by the people across the street. I went to the cheese store. People were friendly. They traded recipes with me. It was so warm and welcoming. It was such an integrated neighborhood. There were Hispanics and Russians and Italians and Jews. There were Chinese. There were Blacks. It was totally integrated. I've never stopped loving the fact, I think it's the only community in the world—and I'm not kidding, because I've been to the East End in London, which they say is similar—where so many huge amounts of minority peoples, they don't live in buildings where there's only them. They live in buildings where everybody lives. And they're united by one thing, and that's poverty. They're all poor. If you came to this country and you had money, you did not go to the Lower East Side. You went to the Upper West Side. You went to Pelham. You didn't come to the Lower East Side. What bound us all was poverty.

And there's something about poverty that unites people. They might not know what your language is or your color is; they know you're poor. And that if you can't pay the rent, they have

a rent party and everybody chips in, and your rent is paid. There's something very unifying about a bunch of people living together in poverty.

And it's the only place in the world where such large amounts of people live side-by-side in peace. In the whole world. Because I've been told the East End is like that, but it's not. It's really not. And more damage was done to it by [Michael] Bloomberg than by anybody else. I mean, when I saw fourteen-story buildings going up here for hotels on the Lower East Side, it broke my heart. And everything has to be gentrified. So that's why I got into housing.

Zapol: So I'm interested in the contrast between the neighborhood where you grew up in Queens, in Springfield, and here. So can you tell me, were your parents involved in the community at all when you were growing up? It sounds like they were very isolated.

Goldin: My mother was friends with Mrs. Schaeffer, who was next door, who was Christian and German. And for some reason what united them was that they were both mothers with children. She had no friends. None. And none of the shopkeepers and their wives were friends with my parents. My father used to bring in a rabbi for the High Holy Days, and he stayed at my house, in order for there to be a minion for the services. My sister went to Laurelton, to the Jewish Center, and that's where she met her husband, who she married. But I didn't go there. And I was lonely and isolated.

Zapol: What did you do? How did you spend your time?

Goldin: Well, since I'm fifteen, I've been working. I worked for the Jewish Center. As a matter of fact, I was in the Jewish Center, working, typing, and the rabbi who was in the room next door—it was a small Jewish Center in Laurelton—came behind me, put his arms around me, pinning my arms, and kissed me.

And there I was, trapped. And I leaned down and bit him so hard that I drew blood, and he jumped up and ran into his room. And when the day was over, he came back in and he said, “Frances, I want to see you.” And I walked into his room. He looked up at me, and he said, “What happened before will be forgiven and forgotten.” And I said, “I'm leaving now.” And I left. I was really upset. [0:15.05.0]

I didn't tell my mother. I waited for my father to come home, and I told him what happened. And he said, “Did you bite him hard?” And I said, “I made him bleed.” And he said,

“Good for you, girlie. You can take care of yourself. You did nothing wrong. You were absolutely right. I'm glad you made him bleed. You're a good girl. Don't worry about it. You did nothing wrong. You will never have a problem with him again.”

So I started at fifteen. And I've been working since I'm fifteen.

Zapol: Did you continue your schooling at that time? Or did you stop? What was school like?

Goldin: Well, in public school my sister was the valedictorian, and she was three years ahead of me. And then I was the valedictorian. So my mother was called into the Andrew Jackson High School by the principal, and he said, “Mrs. Axler, you have a very gifted child. It's very important that she take an academic course.” And she said, “What is that? What is 'academic?'” And he said, “Oh, language, science, math.” She said, “No, my daughter is going to take typing, stenography, and bookkeeping.” He said, “That's a commercial course. That's not for her. She's very bright.” She says, “Typing, stenography and bookkeeping. She's going to get married. She's going to have children. She has to get a job. Typing, stenography, and bookkeeping.”

Which is what I did. I had no education. To this day, I regret my lack of education. My kids all have master's degrees. But there's so much about the world, simple things, that they know that I don't know. And I actually thought recently about going back to school, but I'm ninety, you know? That's kind of crazy. But I really regret not having had a decent education.

Zapol: What were the kinds of jobs that you had?

Goldin: I was a secretary. And when I moved to the Lower East Side, there was a guy down on Ludlow Street, Harry Schwartz, who had a butcher shop, and I became his secretary. And he was starting a kosher frozen food delivery service, which was a big thing in those days. It never existed before.

And I helped him develop that by writing ads and putting stuff in. I was a good organizer. And he taught me how to drive. He's the only man I ever knew who never made a pass at me. I was very good looking as a young person. And I'll show you a picture. I was really good looking when I was young. And he never made a pass at me. He treated me like a respectable worker, and that was great. And then I got a job as his secretary.

Zapol: So you started out on this street between Second and Third. Tell me more about that community. Tell me about some of your neighbors at that time, and then how you started getting

involved in the community organizing.

Goldin: Well, I quickly got involved by finding out if my rent was right. So then I went every week and I volunteered at the Lower East Side Tenant and Consumer Council. And then I was in housing.

Zapol: Had you had experience organizing before that at all?

Goldin: No. But my mother was a great organizer. She could make a penny stretch in a way you wouldn't believe. I mean, I would walk four blocks to save a dime, because my husband was blacklisted, and for many years I supported the family. And I supported them on a secretary's salary until he was able to find work, which he did, as a printing estimator. And they hired him. It was a communist boss. [0:20:00.0]

And then our life changed when we were both earning money. That was good. But the immediate neighborhood was mainly Italian across the street, Jewish, Russian. But there was a sprinkling in the buildings of a Black person, a Chinese person. If they could pay the rent, they were there. All of 6th, 7th, and 8th Street was Ukrainian, as you might know. Cooper Square always had Blacks and Hispanics in the buildings, because they were very old and very cheap. I loved being in a neighborhood that was so polyglot, so wonderful.

Zapol: Did you live anywhere in between where you grew up and coming here?

Goldin: Yes, I lived on East Broadway for eighteen years in one building. And I paid \$100 for seven rooms. It was a floor-through. And just before I left, they raised it to \$105.

Zapol: Wow. And that was before you moved to East 11th Street?

Goldin: And I moved back here, right.

Zapol: Okay.

Goldin: A man on the corner, on Second Avenue between 11th and 12th was a locksmith, Gottlieb, and he knew my landlord's super. And he found out there was an apartment here, and he told me about it.

Zapol: So I'm sorry, just to clarify for myself, you lived on East 11th Street, then you moved

down to East Broadway for eighteen years, and then came back to this apartment?

Goldin: Exactly right.

Zapol: Between First and Second.

Goldin: Exactly.

Zapol: So let's start again with talking about the early days in the other apartment on East 11th Street.

Goldin: [When I lived on East Bowery], there were seven synagogues on one block. One was big, but the [rest] were little. Seven synagogues in one block.

Zapol: Were you involved in any of those synagogues? Were you religious at that time?

Goldin: No. Once my parents came to visit, and it was near Rosh Hashanah. So [they] went to the Young Israel [Synagogue of Manhattan]. That's the biggest synagogue which was right near Clinton Street on the other side of the street. And [they] went there. I was not religious.

Zapol: When did that shift happen for you, that you no longer became religious, or—

Goldin: Well, I didn't know anything until I met my husband. I didn't know that there was a word like 'socialism.' I didn't know anything. As you know, I had a lousy education. I took typing, stenography and bookkeeping. I never took a language. I never took science. I was empty-headed.

But my husband was very educated, and very articulate, and very learned. I never heard classical music until I met my husband. I didn't know anything. I was an empty-headed nothing. And he taught me about socialism. The War Stripping Administration, where I met him—I worked there for many years. It's a government agency. And I had a job getting people who are in the Merchant Marines, who are working in the lowest level, but who were engineers—I could get them out of the Merchant Marine and into the Army so they could serve at a higher capacity. It was during the war.

And that was a good job. I worked there many years. The same place where my husband worked. [phone rings]

Zapol: Let's just pause this for a second.

[interruption in recording]

Goldin: So we spent hours talking, and whatever education I got, I got from my husband.

Zapol: What was his position there?

Goldin: I don't know. It was in some high level position. I don't remember what it was. But the head of the agency was Goldie Russell, and she was also a radical. And she was a woman, and she was really on top of a very big agency. But everybody who worked there was radical. And the guys loved talking to me. And I had endless questions, because I knew nothing.

[00:25:01.12]

Zapol: What were some of your questions?

Goldin: Like, 'How does socialism work?' 'What's the difference between socialism and communism?' These were words I had never heard. My education came from my husband. He educated me.

Zapol: So what was his involvement with socialism?

Goldin: My husband was in charge of the state American Labor Party. He worked very closely with Vito Marcantonio, who was my dear friend. I got a book published about him. One of my first books was on Vito Marcantonio. And he [my husband] was [Henry] Wallace's campaign manager when he ran for President, and he was in charge of the state ALP [American Labor Party].

And in 1950, I think, was the most exciting year of my life, because I ran for office on the American Labor Party ticket. I have a brochure from that time, for state senate. And the head of my ticket, for U.S. Senate, was Dr. W.E.B. Du Bois. And we ran on the same ticket. And during that period his secretary went on vacation, and for one week I was his secretary. And people who hear this don't believe it, because they think of Du Bois as distant history. But I sat with him and took his notes for his letters.

Zapol: What are your memories of him? Of that week together?

Goldin: Well, all we did was talk, was take dictation. We had no personal relationship. But he was a patrician. His skin was shiny. His clothes were impeccable. He was a patrician, really. He came from a very rich, educated Black family. But I spent that year on the microphone, and there's a picture over there of me at the City Market on 10th Street. There used to be a City Market on 10th Street and First Avenue. We had a sound truck, and I'm on the sound truck for my lecture.

Zapol: What were some of your campaign points?

Goldin: Oh, housing, rent control, price control, cost of milk—the consumer issues. It was the most exciting year of my life.

Zapol: How did you choose to do that? What was the process of choosing to run?

Goldin: Well, the American Labor Party had a very strong Lower East Side branch, and they were looking for somebody to fill a post. And they said, “Well, the consumer issue is a big issue. Why don't you run?” I said, “I can't run. I don't know—” They said, “You don't have to know anything.” They convinced me to run. They needed a woman on the ticket. They wanted a woman on the ticket, and they wanted to cover the issues of rent control and housing. And that was what I did.

Zapol: What was happening for you in your family at that time? How did you balance?

Goldin: It wasn't a problem. We had babysitters. He was always at meetings. One of us was home. If we had a babysitter, we'd get home early. It worked out fine.

Zapol: And when you say it was so exciting, what are some of the moments that come to mind?

Goldin: Well, being on a sound truck. Having people respond, to laugh when I told a joke, or to applaud if I made a good point. Just being in the same room with Du Bois, planning strategy. There was a little guy who ran for mayor. I'm forgetting his name, but I can see it. I'm going to give you a copy of that leaflet. It's very exciting. My daughter made lots of copies. We had a lot of meetings statewide, planning strategy and stuff. [00:29:49.02]

I was a good organizer. My mother never went out of one room and into another without bringing something from here to there. My organizing skills came from her. My mental attitude

came from my father. He was very loving, very supportive, called me 'girlie.' He called my sister 'girlie.' That was his term of affection. He was an amazing, an amazing man.

Zapol: So what were some of the elements of the ALP that really spoke to you? It sounds like you were radicalized.

Goldin: Well, obviously it was anti-war. It was price control. It was all the tenant issues: housing, rent control, cost of milk, cost of meat. I don't remember international issues very much. It was always the peace party. And it was interesting because he got ten percent of the vote, Du Bois. I got fourteen percent of the vote, because I was on the only woman on the ticket. And people in Stuyvesant Town, women, and people on the Lower East Side, said, "Oh, she got me a painting." They knew me as having helped them. Women voted for me much more than they did for Du Bois, because they knew me. So fourteen percent of the vote wasn't bad.

Zapol: So what happened after that? How did you decide to continue politically?

Goldin: I didn't. I just was very involved in starting the Metropolitan Council on Housing. That's the same year that we started the Cooper Square Committee. That was 1959. So it's fifty-five years that we struggled to win that fight, and we beat Robert Moses.

Zapol: So you had had other experiences struggling with Moses, is that right, before this? Or was that the beginning?

Goldin: No. Moses came to my neighborhood for two reasons. He wanted to throw down the tenements so that he could put people in who would walk to Wall Street. He walked from 4th Street to Wall Street. He said, "You can get to work in twenty minutes by foot without walking fast." So he's going to put people into these buildings, and they'll be torn down. It's going to be made into co-ops, and you can walk to your job in Wall Street.

It didn't happen. He also decided to do a thruway from the Hudson River to the East River, and it would obliterate Houston Street. The reason we could build with that, we said, "Nobody's going to be relocated. Nobody. They're going to go from an old building to a new building." And the reason we could do that was that on Houston Street there was a big parking lot, a huge block-long parking lot. And if we built our first building on that parking lot, then people from 1st, 2nd, and 3rd could move into those buildings. And then we'd tear down 1st, 2nd,

and 3rd Street, and build housing, and the people from 3rd, 4th, and 5th Street would move into that one. Nobody would be relocated out of the neighborhood.

Now, that had never happened. Because urban renewal was called 'urban removal.' It was called 'Black removal,' because that's what it was. They went into neighborhoods where there were Blacks and Hispanics and made them into expensive high-rise housing. So we guaranteed that no one would be relocated, and everyone would have a decent apartment at a low rent. That was our pledge.

So I don't know what the question was anymore.

Zapol: I was asking you about—it's fine, but lets continue—it was about Moses.

Goldin: When we beat him on Cooper Square, and then we beat him on the [New York State] Thruway, he never did another thing in his life. He was not used to being defeated. He planned for the world, not just for the United States. He dispossessed [thirty-five thousand] people from the South Bronx. [Thirty-five thousand] families for the Cross Bronx Expressway. [00:35:00] He never gave a damn about that. They never were relocated. They never got another place to live. They were just scattered. And that's what he wanted to do in Cooper Square.

Zapol: I see. There was no plan for relocation?

Goldin: No, nothing. They said everybody would get money. It never happened, nowhere. 25,000 families.

Zapol: Let's talk about some of the nitty-gritty. How was the Cooper Square Committee organized? How did it come together?

Goldin: There were two or three communists: Esther Rand, myself, I don't know who else. There were a lot of radical people who were in the ALP. We called a meeting. We asked Thelma Burdick, who was the director of the Church of All Nations, which was on the corner of Houston Street and Second Avenue. It was a big building, and we asked her if she would let us meet there. She became the chairwoman.

And the University Settlement, which is three blocks away, Staughton Lynd worked there as a social worker. And he came to the first meeting. He was the first vice chairperson of the Cooper Square Committee. It was very attractive to him, because you know who he is. He was

kicked out of Yale for going to Hanoi. Anyway, we had a Reds' neighborhood. We had Thelma Burdick, who was very respected, head of the Community House, and Staughton Lynd. We had good, strong leaders.

And then we got members. Fifty-nine years ago, dues were a dollar a year, and today, dues are a dollar a year. That remained the same price—a dollar a year—so a lot of people would join. And we were the founders of it.

Zapol: So how did you get community interest in this? I can't imagine it was hard, but how did you involve people?

Goldin: Well, at the first meeting, by some fluke somebody who knew about it was downtown, and Walter Thabit was a community planner. And there weren't many of them. Everybody planned either for corporations or for government, because that's where the money was. And he never had a dime. He had a rich mother, and she supported him, because he needed money to eat. He had holes in his sleeves and his pants, his knees. Brooks Brothers clothes, but with holes in them. He liked nice things. So he came to the first meeting, and he was at that time the only community planner. There was no money. Corporations and governments hired planners. Communities had no money. But he was at the first meeting of the Cooper Square Committee. And he devised something called 'The Alternate Plan for Cooper Square.' And he did it professionally, in four colors. It was fabulous. It took one year to do that document. Every paragraph he brought in, we fought over. He knew what he was doing, but so did we. And so we worked very closely together to prepare the alternate plan. It's been used in Germany and in the Scandinavian countries and in England, but only in the Lower East Side in the United States.

Zapol: In what way has it been used in those other countries?

Goldin: They built a plan where nobody would be relocated, where everybody who lived in the old housing would move into the new housing without relocation. And I had been involved in two previous urban renewal fights, both of which I lost. One of which was Lincoln [Center], and the other was East Broadway, Seward Park. I lost them both. [00:39:57.28]

We said, "Urban renewal is urban removal. It's Black removal. It's poor people removal," which was true. It was all of that. It was only in poor neighborhoods. So ours started by saying, "We love urban renewal. But this urban renewal, the people who live here are going to be the

beneficiaries of the plan and not the victims. This plan will basically take care of the people who live here.” And that's what made it different from any other plan. You might be relocated from the front of the building to the back while the front was being renovated, but you were not out of the neighborhood. You might have gone from this building to one next door while yours was being renovated, but you would not go out of the neighborhood. And we kept that promise. Anybody who lived there still lives there or died there.

Zapol: So how did you go from the plan to the reality?

Goldin: Well, it was not easy. It started in [19]59, and I think it was in [19]71 that the [New York City] Planning Commission said, “We can work with you on this plan.” So that's eleven or twelve years. We had rent strikes. We had demonstrations. We went to every public hearing.

I was a good organizer. And we had something to fight for. When you fight for the roof over your head, it's not hard to organize. And it's hard to fight the price of tomatoes, but not that hard because tomatoes are important. I learned the basics of organizing. If you don't have the troops that are involved in the struggle, you have nothing. You can have the best organizers in the world, and you have nothing if you don't have the people ready to put out for their homes. But when you're talking about the roof over their head, you're talking about their children's safety, you've got something to work with.

So when we talked about having a roof over your head for your great-grandchildren, they came forth. They came to demonstration. They came to meetings. They paid a dollar a year. And we never had a meeting without food. We always had food. When we'd win a victory, we had a party. We danced. There was always Spanish music. We danced. We celebrated every victory, so it became a reason to get dressed and go down to the party. It's part of organizing, you know? I love being an organizer, and I'm good at it. And they listen to me, because I don't speak fancy language. Yeah, I became a pretty good organizer.

Zapol: So between 1959 and 1971, were there any changes in the neighborhood? What was happening in the neighborhood at that time?

Goldin: Well, when we finished, it took us a year to do the plan. A guy went out on a bicycle in the morning. We spent all night at Walter's [Walter Thabit] office lithographing the plan. And he delivered it to all the city offices. And it fell like a lead balloon. Nobody responded. There was

no response, not by the newspaper, not by the city, not by the planning commission [00:44:07]. They made believe it didn't exist.

So we had demonstration after demonstration after demonstration, every year. And one of the people who supported our fight against the Thruway was Louis DeSalvio. And he owned a liquor store on the corner of Houston and the Bowery, and he was our state assemblyman in Albany. Matter of fact, I would go to Albany because I was the Legislative Director of Met Council [Metropolitan Council on Housing]. And every Wednesday I'd go to Albany to lobby our housing legislation. He would frequently drive me there or back. A lot of the big shots drove me there and back. [00:44:55.06]

And then Robert Moses got a hold of DeSalvio, who was against the Thruway, and he said to him, "On Houston Street and Second Avenue, I'll give the San Gennaro"—which is an Italian organization, church organization—"I will give you that block to build a co-op. You can make millions." So he went from opposing the Thruway to supporting the Thruway. And Mary Perot Nichols, who worked for *The Village Voice*, found a letter in the files in which he agrees to do this deal with Robert Moses. And it was on the front page of *The Village Voice*. That was a huge breakthrough for us.

So they did what they could to get this fucking Thruway. And every month we'd go to the [New York City] Board of Estimate to get our block back, because without that block, we had no plan. If you let them build on vacant land then there's no dislocation. If you don't have that vacant land, everybody has to be kicked out. So we fought like tigers. We went every month for seven months to the Board of Estimate to fight for that plan. This was one of the most thrilling things that happened in the struggle.

So we went back. We decided this was it. We're not going to give up. We're not leaving. We're not taking no for an answer. So the subject came up, and I spoke. And I said, "This is our land." And maybe by then the thing was in *The Village Voice* about DeSalvio selling his soul for money. "We need that land. We want it now."

And I have pictures. Don [Donald] Elliot was sitting in the chair of the chairman, because the chairman wasn't there that day. And he said, "We hear you, Miss Goldin. Please sit down." I said, "No, I'm not sitting down. We want you to vote to give us that land now, right now." And the place was jammed, and there were thirty named people on the agenda. And I'm holding the mic [microphone]. There's a podium. And there's a mic with a hole that's plugged into electricity,

and I'm holding the mic. And I said, "No, I'm not sitting down. We want that land today. We want it now. We've been here for eight months, and this is it. This is the end."

"Miss Goldin, you made your point. You will be arrested if you don't step down." I said, "I am not stepping down until we get the land." And troopers came and grabbed my shoulders and pulled me away. Now, I'm holding the mic. So when they pull me away, I'm pulling the mic. I'm not letting go. So they pulled me more, and the podium crashes to the floor because I'm still holding the mic. So my friend [Genoveva] Clemente—Genoveva Clemente—jumps up and grabs my arm and goes with me. And they put me in the police car. And Ernesto Martinez, who was a fabulous leader on the Lower East Side and a very dear friend, gets up and he says, "I am here to speak for Cooper Square getting the land." And they said, "Mr. Martinez, step aside. This has already been discussed. It's not going to be heard today." And they call the troopers. And my daughter—did you see that picture? Well, I'll show it to you. My daughter and eight other young women jump up and grab a hold of Ernesto. And the cops are pulling him one way and they're pulling him another way. And they arrest all nine of them, eight of these Young Turks and Ernesto. [00:49:47.05]

One cop is taking Reeni down the back steps of City Hall, and the cop behind her grabs her breast. And she is livid. And there's a picture. There was a young Hispanic *New York Times* photographer, and he fell in love with Reeni. So he took her picture. And you pay \$15 for an 8x10. He gave me ten of them. And we have them blown up. You've got to see this.

Zapol: Hold on one second, let me—

Goldin: We'll do it later. So it was in all the newspapers. Rene was featured. She's adorable. I'll never forget that hearing. Now I'm gone. I'm in jail. So they say, "All right, next Mr. John Jacobi from Brooklyn. You're next." This guy, whom I don't know, none of us know, has been sitting through this torment and recognizing that this neighborhood, Cooper Square, is being fucked over by the city. I mean they could see what was happening. So they say, "You're next." So he gets up and he says, "I yield to Cooper Square." And they called a woman from the Bronx, and she gets up and she says, "I yield to Cooper Square." Can you imagine that? This is the kind of solidarity—they just sat there, and they saw what was going on. And he banged his gavel, and he says, "This meeting is adjourned." He was furious. He couldn't get anybody after that to speak. Is that exciting?

Zapol: It is, it's incredible.

Goldin: It was really amazing. That's just one of the two outstanding stories of this struggle. Just amazing.

Zapol: So what was the result of that meeting that day?

Goldin: The next month we got the land back. They didn't want to go through another one of those. A lot of people were arrested.

Zapol: So did that happen in a meeting? You got the land out of negotiations?

Goldin: No, it was after that. And then the city planning commission called us in and said, "We're ready to talk about Cooper Square. We'll make a plan with you." We said, "We have a plan." "Okay, we'll try to implement it."

Zapol: So that was 1971 at this point? Okay.

Goldin: But it went on and on and on.

Zapol: Right. So then how did it get stretched out? What happened then?

Goldin: You'll have to talk to Val Orselli, because he has a much better memory than I do. Then we made a plan. See, we were going to build public housing on the vacant lot to allow three more blocks to move in. Then the Fed [Federal Reserve] went belly up, and it had no money. So then we had to change the plan to get the state to fund the housing. And then the state went belly up, and they didn't have any money. So then we had to go back to the drawing board not to destroy the houses, because there was no money to replace it.

Then we went on a campaign to have the city renovate the apartments, because they had toilets in the halls, bathtubs in the kitchen. Nine people used one toilet in the hall without a sink, just a toilet. And we fought the city forever, and the city started to renovate the apartments. And we figured out that if you did this building, which had the least tenants, then the people from next door could move in. And then you could renovate that. They paid \$50,000 an apartment to renovate an old-law tenement. And in many buildings, there were too many people living in an apartment. So they couldn't make one apartment. They had to make two apartments to accommodate that family.

So we renovated the building in a way that everybody could move back and not be overcrowded. Nobody could move into an apartment and be overcrowded. They could move out [of] an apartment where they were overcrowded, but not into an apartment. So that was tricky. So the building had to be readjusted to have two or three bigger apartments where there were only tiny apartments. Cooper Square's apartments, they were all little. They're not big, even though we have a building on the corner of 5th Street and Second Avenue which has six floors, and each floor is a three-bedroom apartment. [00:55:19.20]

Zapol: That's one building that has larger apartments in it?

Goldin: That's the only one that has all large apartments. Each floor is three-bedroom. Now we had to start fighting with the city to renovate. It cost \$50,000 an apartment! Do you know how much money that is? The city didn't want to do it. We had sit-ins. We had sleep-ins at City Hall. We had demonstrations. The city did it. They renovated every building. It took a long time. People moved into new apartments in the building.

Then we needed it to become a co-op. That was a big struggle. It just was fifty-four years of struggle to win, but earlier this year, everybody signed leases. They own their own apartments.

Zapol: Wow. How was that celebrated?

Goldin: Well, there was a great meeting with a lot of food and dancing. We always had celebrations. We celebrated every victory, small or large, because we had tons of food. People enjoyed dancing. They enjoyed crowing with other people about, "We did it! We did it!" I learned you can't have meetings without food, and you can't have parties without food and music.

Zapol: So that sounds like a long journey to get the city also to pay. So what were some of the strategies that were used? You said sit-ins.

Goldin: We tried not to do the same thing twice. And we always had big events for the press. And they knew that if we called them, there was going to be a show. They knew that we wouldn't picket each time. That wasn't what we did. And we always had a big picnic jug filled with whatever it was, that was loaded with booze. The people who worked for the newspapers are all boozehounds, particularly when it was cold. Like we'd make hot chocolate which was half rum.

And we also gave them a show. Once Walter said, “We're going to build a house in five minutes. The city can't build a house. We've been working for twenty years. They can't build a house. We're going to build a house in five minutes.” So everybody came to watch us build a house in five minutes. And he brought a bunch of boxes from a moving company. And he put one huge letter on each box. And they were in an office. They were in the Church of All Nations. Across the street was a vacant lot. So people were lined up with boxes, and there were ten boxes. And then there were eight boxes. And then there were six boxes. And then there were four boxes. And it created a pyramid. It created a building. And it said, “Mr. Leventhal, act now.” M-R that [phonetic] [00:58:58]. So we built a house in ten minutes. You know, just clever ideas that would get the media. And the media knew that if we called them there was going to be a show. So they came.

And whenever we got a good review, we wrote to the managing editor. And we said, “Mr. So-and-So did a very careful, honest, very professional job, and we want to thank you for having such dignified reporters.” We always wrote letters thanking not the guy, but his boss. So we learned how to manipulate the media. That's one of the rules about organizing: learn how to manipulate the media. If you don't embarrass them, if there isn't bad news in the paper that says they're a bunch of idiots, you don't win. They're embarrassed, they move. [01:00:03]

Zapol: Who were some of your favored press contacts or newspaper reporters?

Goldin: I don't remember. My memory is so bad.

Zapol: No, no, that's fine. It sounds like you had from *The New York Times*.

Goldin: But I have a lot of it in pictures.

Zapol: *Village Voice*. You had a lot of people who were—

Goldin: A lot from *The Voice*. *The Daily News* was good to us. Very rarely we got *The New York Times*. And we were on television a lot. We were always telling the neighborhood, “Put on Channel Seven tonight at nine o'clock.”

Zapol: So it sounds like you got to know so many people in the neighborhood through this entire process.

Goldin: I did, and I do. I know five generations. I knew the grandmother. I knew the mother. I knew the daughter. The daughter now has a baby. I know five generations of people, and they know me. It's really wonderful.

Zapol: So talk about some of your favorite places in the neighborhood, places that you think make this neighborhood very distinctive.

Goldin: Well, the cheese store is one.

Zapol: We didn't talk about that on the record, so if you want to?

Goldin: St. Mark's on the Bowery is another. St. Mark's Bookstore is one. The Ukrainian Hall between 8th and 9th Street on Second Avenue, one of my favorite restaurants. Union Square, which is always very lively. There's a church between 7th and 6th which has become quite radical. It has a Black—

[END OF FIRST AUDIO FILE; BEGINNING OF SECOND]

Goldin: And she came to it, she was made a priest. And the bishop came down, and she stood next to her lover up at the podium. She was with her lover, and they had two kids that were sitting on the first row. That's amazing. Imagine, a Black lesbian in charge of church? Episcopalian, of course.

Zapol: That's a radical change in terms of what's happened socially in this time, too. What are some of the places that have changed a lot in this neighborhood? What are some of the ways in which you have seen big change since you first moved here?

Goldin: Well, all around us, the big buildings that went up to begin with were organizations that built—like on 4th Street, the Jewish Council built a building for Jews to move in.

Zapol: That was part of the Cooper Square Project?

Goldin: Right. We fought that like crazy. At the hearing at which it was going to be decided, the Jewish Council ran in with a letter that gave us what we wanted, at the hearing. And I had bought ten daffodils, and I went on the stage and I gave each member of the Board of Estimate a daffodil, because they voted with us. That building was twelve or fourteen stories, but it was

allowed because it was a community—it's baloney. It's a Jewish organization, and we fought them, because we wanted everybody in Cooper Square who was old to be the first people to move into that building, and we had very few Jews. And every one of them moved into that building. We got every older person in Cooper Square into that building. And it was a great building.

And they bring people from Europe, and they bring them to that building, they show them the directory with all the names that are Jewish, Italian, Chinese, Puerto Rican. They brag about it. And they were forced to do it, against their will. But they show them how 'integrated' their building is, because all the others are one hundred percent, with one exception—the super is a minority—and the rest are all Jews.

Zapol: All of the other buildings that they have throughout the city?

Goldin: Right, are all Jewish. But not here. We wouldn't let it happen. And all of our people moved into that building.

Zapol: So that's a place where they have more assisted care in terms of the older adults?

Goldin: They have some care, but mainly the rents were \$90 a month and it was a beautiful apartment. It was very well-maintained.

Zapol: So that's one building that's a larger building that's been a big change.

Goldin: And there were other buildings that were also institutional buildings that were tall, mostly NYU. And we fought them. We got arrested when they were going up. We fought them a lot. We had Margarita López, a good council person who sold her soul. She's no longer good. Bloomberg bought her off. We have Rosie Mendez, who will never be bought off. She's still our city councilperson.

Zapol: Before we started recording, you said that Bloomberg really changed the neighborhood. In what way?

Goldin: Well, he changed the city. He's making it Hong Kong. Everything is being gentrified. He is the gentrifier personified. He wants rich people, Arabs, to live in the city. He wants everybody else to get the hell out. I don't know who he thinks is going to teach the kids, or clean

the toilets, or work in the hospitals. But everything is for money. Everything is becoming gentrified. It's just heartbreaking. It's heartbreaking because there's no area like the Lower East Side in the world. [00:05:21]

Zapol: What are other changes that you saw here during Bloomberg's reign?

Goldin: Well, everything went to hell. I mean, every piece of land that could be gotten turned into a high-rise luxury development. That's all there is in this city now: luxury developments, one after the other. It's ripping the city apart, in a way. I'm told Hong Kong is like this, you know. He serves his class. He's doing what he was meant to do. He's a billionaire. He wants to be surrounded by billionaires.

Zapol: So what are ways or strategies in which you've continued to fight that kind of change?

Goldin: Well, there's a big citywide effort now, because without a community land trust, nothing stays low. Nothing. It can't. So there's a big push in East Harlem, a place called Picture the Homeless—she's now on the board of Cooper Square—where they have gathered lots that are empty to build community land trust buildings, which will stay permanently affordable.

We are the only one in the northeast that has a community land trust. That's why it's so important, because we're a living success story. In the whole northeast, there is only one, and it's us.

Zapol: So before you explained how the community land trust works. Can you say that again? If a landlord wanted to sell their building, what is their responsibility to you in the trust?

Goldin: There's no landlord. If tenants had a co-op and wanted to sell their building, if they weren't based on a community land trust, it would go market rate. And it has. In the Fifties and Sixties, there were 100 buildings that were taken over by radical young men on the Lower East Side alone—100 buildings. Every fucking one of them is private today. Every one of them. They all went private. All of ours would have been private if they weren't community land trusts. And they still might want to do that, but they can't.

Zapol: They can't because the land is owned by the—

Goldin: Because we'll say to them, “All right. You want your building to go for profit? Move it

to Staten Island.” “How do you move a building?” “That's your problem.”

Zapol: So as long as it's owned by the community land trust, the co-op fees stay stable?

Goldin: Absolutely. And people don't understand, we have people who collect the rents. We have people who make the repairs. You never wait more than a day. If you wait a week, there's something terribly wrong. The buildings are very well maintained. They're very well serviced. They're very clean. The garbage is collected.

When we have a bunch of new tenants, I give the orientation, the history, blah blah blah. And in the front there's this old Chinese man with a very young, dapper son. He's in law school. So he gets up, and he says, “My father has an apartment. He says he's very happy in the apartment. It's very well-maintained, and he pays a very low rent.” He says, “How do you keep that rent so low and so well-maintained? I mean, I don't get it. You've got to explain that to me.” He's in law school, this young Chinese guy. [00:10:04.20]

I say, “It's very simple. May I answer your question?” He said, “Sure.” I said, “The difference between your father's rent and the rent across the street from the same apartment, he pays \$39, they pay \$1,000. The difference between the \$39 and the \$1,000 is profit. There is no profit in Cooper Square.” He said, “You mean to tell me that his \$39 a month pays for the maintenance?” I said, “Absolutely. Ask your father if he ever waited more than two days to get a window repaired.” He said, “No, he gets it done right away.” I said, “The difference is profit.” That's why I wrote that book. The difference is profit. My apartment is \$1,000—this apartment. Below me is \$5,000, and above me is \$6,000 a month. And the difference between \$1,000 and \$6,000 is profit. There's no difference. Mine is well maintained.

Zapol: So this building that you're in right now, how is that run?

Goldin: It's run very well. They can't wait for me to die, because they got \$5,000 for the one below, and they got \$6,000 for the one above me. The exact same apartment. Theirs has a fancier kitchen, maybe it has a fancier bathroom—same big, beautiful rooms.

Zapol: And this is a co-op building? No, this is not. This is obviously a landlord building, right.

Goldin: Imagine the difference between \$6,000 and \$1,000? He makes money on my \$1,000. He makes money on this. Imagine what he makes. The difference is profit.

Zapol: So tell me about this book, and also your work as a publisher.

Goldin: Literary agent.

Zapol: Literary agent, I'm sorry.

Goldin: I'm in publishing for sure, but I'm not a publisher. I'm a literary agent. In 2007, I decided—I worked for a literary agent for twenty years. I worked for seventeen years, and she died. And she was also the editor-in-chief of a juvenile publishing company.

Zapol: Excuse me, I'm just going to hold for a second.

[interruption in recording]

Goldin: I worked for her for seventeen years, and she died. Her fifth husband killed her, but that's another story. And I became the editor-in-chief of E.M. Hale & Company. They did a series of books called Cadmus Books, which were wonderful. They were four-color covers. They were beautiful. And every year we went to Chicago to the Union League Club with editors from Canada and California and all over to pick the books for the next year that were published by different publishers. And then we put them in Cadmus Books.

When she died, I became the editor-in-chief of E.M. Hale & Company for three years. And then they moved the New York Office, which was the only one which was not in Eau Claire, Wisconsin, which was the parent firm. And they closed the office, and that was the end of my twenty years. But for seventeen years, she was both a literary agent and the editor-in-chief of a publishing company. So that's how I knew about literary agenting.

And I got a manuscript that I liked. Francis Fox Piven and Richard Cloward, who did *Regulating the Poor*, were very dear friends of mine and Walter's—by then I was living with Walter, the city planner. And we went to the country, to their house, and I said to Richard, “I've got this manuscript. It's called *Hustling and Other Hard Work*”—that was the name of it—“it's how Black people lived through working, welfare and hustling.” And I said, “It's very well done. I like it.” So he picked up the phone and he called a friend of his who was an editor, and he said, “I'm here with Fran Goldin. She has a manuscript which I think you should buy.” And he told her about it, and she said, “Have her send it to me.” **[00:15:12.14]**

And that's how I sold my first book. And two years ago, I got the last royalty statements

for that book. You know what that means? That means that for forty-two years, that book gave me royalties twice a year. My books tend to be long-lived, because they're not crap. And in the *PW* [*Publisher's Weekly*] *Publisher's Marketplace*, there's a list of agents, and they all write what their specialties are. And when Barbara Kingsolver decided she wanted an agent, she went to the library. She sat down with *PW*, and she read all the little blurbs of 250 agents. And one of them said, "I will handle nothing racist, sexist, ageist, pornographic or unnecessarily violent." And she said, "That's for me." And she sent me a book, a manuscript. That's how I got her.

And it says, "We do books to change the world." There's not another agent that does that. You know, they do horror stories. They do mysteries. They do normal books. But that's not what I do. So it's wonderful to do good books.

Zapol: So you started, you said forty-two years ago was when you started.

Goldin: I don't know how long ago, but my agency started in [19]77.

Zapol: And now I'm interested in this book.

Goldin: I have three goals in life. And I'm very old, so I have to work very fast. The first was seeing Cooper Square being saved, and that happened earlier this year. This is the second goal, and it's in hand. And the third one is to have Mumia Abu-Jamal, who's innocent and never killed anybody, he writes commentaries every single week. His voice is all over the world. He's absolutely brilliant. I sold six of his books. Every one of them is in print. He's working on his seventh book, which is going to be amazing. And he's been behind bars for thirty-eight years. And my goal—which I'm going to live to see—is to see him free. That's my third goal.

Zapol: The second goal when you pointed to the book, just because we're hearing and not seeing, it's your book, *Imagine Living in a Socialist USA*.

Goldin: Yes. I dreamed up the title, and I knew that it was the right—I didn't want it to say 'America,' because I think we're very chauvinistic. America is also Canada and South America. So, *Living in a Socialist USA*. And I knew I couldn't do it alone. And I have dear friends, Mike and Debby Smith, and they're very left, and they're very involved with a lot of people in the academic community than I am. A lot of the people in the book are my clients. But they helped find the rest, and we worked very well together.

So it's our book. And he knows that it was my idea. I would have done it alone if I had to, but it's much better to do it with comrades who are well connected. And tomorrow, they're having a party in their house to support *Independent*, which gave me four pages about this book. I can give you a copy of it. It's amazing. Four whole pages, all about this book.

Zapol: You have wonderful goals, and you're on your way. I'm interested also in your goals or hopes for this community, in particular, this place that you said is your nirvana, your home. What are your hopes for this area? [00:19:54.08]

Goldin: Well, I think the country's going to hell in a handbag. I mean, all the gains we won as women, we're losing them. I can't believe the Republican right, because they're closing down centers where people get abortions. You know how many senators' wives get abortions? They have the money, and they get it. They maybe go to England, or they go to Mexico.

We're losing our rights as women. Not only that, they decided that Blacks and Hispanics are not going to vote for them, so they are taking away voting rights. I don't have to tell you this. You know this is happening. I mean, we're moving backwards so fast. It's so frightening. It's going to take more than the change of a senator here and there to make things happen.

And the ignorance about socialism—they don't know what it is. They haven't got a clue what it is. And how can they know when the newspapers and radio and their churches and everybody tells them lies? How can they know better? The media is controlled on the top by five or six organizations, and they control the whole media. That's why we're having a fundraiser tomorrow night for *Independent*. It's a great paper. Have you seen it?

Zapol: I'm not very familiar with it.

Goldin: So I believe in small changes. I'll support Rosie Méndez to the hilt. I believe in big changes. This is plain English. It's not academesse. We paid \$10,000 to have an editor change it from academesse to English, simple, plain English. I want it for young people. And they're waking up. They're really waking up. There's a lot of student movements that are happening.

Zapol: I saw that you were involved in the Occupy movement.

Goldin: Very much, yeah. I kept changing it. I said, "I'm eighty-seven and mad as hell." Then I was "eighty-eight and mad as hell." "I'm eighty-nine—" Now I have to change my little sign. It's

a wonderful little sign. I didn't know it was a magnet. It's very little. It says, "I'm eighty-nine and mad as hell." And when I go to Occupy Movement—I go to every one I can—the media comes to me and says, "Why are you mad as hell?" And then I tell them. But I didn't realize—it was just a little sign, and it's a magnet.

Zapol: You know how to get attention for your causes.

Goldin: But I didn't even realize that it was a magnet. But it is a magnet.

Zapol: So I'm interested, because you say, 'I'm interested in big change and small change.' So what are the ways in which you would like to see change in this particular community, in this neighborhood here?

Goldin: Well, we fought NYU when they built the dorm. There's no vacant land left for them to—they'll knock down buildings. All the small tenements are disappearing. They take a tenement and gut it and make it into luxury apartments. The people in Cooper Square are trained. If they see men on our block, on 4th Street or 3rd Street, in suits with a clipboard, they are trained to go over to them and say, "What are you doing?" And they said, "We're just writing down—" "You can't write down these numbers. What do you mean, 'writing down?' We own these buildings. They're not for sale. We have a big dog, and we're going to get that dog out, and he's going to eat your leg off. Get the hell off this block." You're very aggressive. You tell them to get the hell off the block. They can't write down numbers. This block is not for sale.

And they love that. And then they do it. They see guys with suits, and they say to them, "Get the hell off this block. It's not for sale." So we do what we can in the area. Whenever there's a new, when there's a building being turned into—we'll picket it. We'll demonstrate against it. For me, Occupy was a breath of fresh air. It really was a wonderful development.

And the people think it's gone. It's not gone. Everybody in Staten Island knows Occupy, because they were the first responders. And they will be in any emergency. They'll be the first responders. [00:24:58.08]

Zapol: They were the first responders with Hurricane Sandy, yeah.

Goldin: That's right.

Zapol: So there's still a supported organizing group.

Goldin: And whenever I can join them, I do. They're really wonderful. And they like my little sign.

Zapol: So I think we're at a good point for ending today. I wonder if there's something else I haven't asked you about, in terms of your relationship to the East Village, Lower East Side, that you wanted to share today?

Goldin: Whenever we see a store leaving, it's so sad. There's very little we can do about it. There is an organization across the street in the church, of this committee that you're a part of.

Zapol: Are you thinking of the Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation?

Goldin: Yeah. And I went to their meetings, and I found them incredibly boring, and their solutions were so piecemeal. They weren't a big solution. I stopped going. I support them with money now and then, but that's the extent of my involvement. I think that they're not aggressive enough in their reaction to the devastation in the neighborhood.

Zapol: That's good to hear. You know, that's interesting, given the ways in which you were successful. So every time something closes, it's devastating. Can you think of a loss recently that's been hard in terms of a place that's closed?

Goldin: You know the blue building? Some place downtown there's this huge blue building.

Zapol: In the Lower East Side?

Goldin: It's such a monstrosity. It is so awful. No more blue buildings. But then again it's very hard. Of course, next door there's a building that's as-of-right [development]. I could not believe, next door to my building there's a new building. It's supposed to be [a] green building. And a studio is \$1 million. A studio is \$1 million. And it's as-of-right. They built it eight stories. If they had wanted nine stories they would have had to go to the board, and we would have defeated it. But they built it as-of-right, and we couldn't do anything about it.

I mean this building has a sister building across the street, on 12th Street. What they could do with these two buildings—but the landlord is making a mint as it is. He's making money on my \$1,000. Imagine what he makes on \$6,000. So anybody who can get this whole area to build a big, twenty-story—it's happening all over the neighborhood. Mostly building by building. It's

just gone. And they're turned into tiny, luxury apartments.

Zapol: Yes. So that shift continues to happen?

Goldin: And it will continue to happen because that's what capitalism does. So I'm glad I'm speaking. There are a lot of radio programs—

Zapol: About *Imagine*?

Goldin: About the book, which is terrific.

Zapol: That is terrific. And you know, it's a way of spreading these ideas that are central to also the Cooper Square Committee.

Goldin: It's interesting because people under twenty, more of them prefer socialism than disapprove. Blacks and Hispanics are very open. They're not negative about socialism. They don't know a lot about it, but they think anything is better than what we've got. So there are major surveys that are making socialism come out ahead. So it's going to be hard, but we're working on it. [0:30:00.0]

Zapol: It's hopeful. All right, well thank you, Ms. Goldin. Thank you, Fran, for today, for taking the time.

Goldin: Call me Fran.

Zapol: Fran, thank you for taking the time today. And this will be shared with you. This recording will be shared with you, and then it will be also in the archives at the Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation.

Goldin: They'll be in what?

Zapol: The archives at the Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation.

Goldin: Okay, good.

Zapol: Thank you.

Goldin: The pleasure is mine.

Zapol: Thank you.

[END OF INTERVIEW]