Merav:
Welcome to the All-of-a-Kind Podcast. I'm Merav Hoffman.

Batya:
I'm Batya Wittenberg.

Merav:
We loved these books when we were kids, we love them now and we hope you do too.

Batya:
Today's chapter is the one where the family prepares for Sabbath. Just this once, Mama takes all the girls to market with her on a Thursday afternoon to shop for the Sabbath. The family stops in the library, then spends a busy time at the market seeing all the offered goods at shops and pushcarts and making their purchases. And then Friday comes and the family brings in the Sabbath together.

Merav:
Today we have Terri Ash with us. Terri Ash is the manager, artist wrangler, and professional killjoy of Geek Calligraphy. She has been part of organized fandom for approximately 12 years and disorganized fandom for a lot longer. If left unchecked, she will talk your ear off on various subjects such as Jewish influences in comics, feminism in science fiction and fantasy, and why all artists need wranglers. Hi Terri!

Batya:
Welcome, we're so glad to have you here.

Terri:
Hi everybody! It's really great to finally be here after all of the holiday delays in recording.

Merav:
Tell us more about Geek Calligraphy!

Terri:
Geek Calligraphy is the art business that I manage and sometimes, as said, was said earlier, professional killjoy, sometimes I have to say that the idea is not gonna work. With my best friend Ariela Housman, she is the artist and also a *soferet*, in other parts of her life.

Batya:
Oh!

Merav:
That's a female scribe.

Terri:
And yes that's a female scribe, which you're not gonna find in these books.
We do both Judaica and non-Judaica geek-themed wall art. And we do work with artists and authors. We've worked with Mary

Robinette Kowal. We've worked with Neil Stephenson and we've worked with Lois McMaster Bujold and most recently with Seanan McGuire

Batya:
Ooh.

Terri:
Doing some licensed, really cool licensed work, that you can all find at our website, geekcalligraphy.com, and sometimes at science fiction conventions when those are happening, when it is not a plague.

Merav:
Okay! It's time for What's on the Page and...

Batya:
What's Not on the Page!
So, I think possibly the easiest thing to cover on

what's on the page for this chapter is, is there Judaism? And oh boy, there is!

Terri:
There is so much Judaism. I have to say that rereading, I haven't reread the whole book yet, but rereading this book for this podcast was such a contrast to rewatching *An American Tail* for a panel that I sat on at a convention, wherein this book is just as Jewish as I remembered it being*. An American Tail*, I remembered it being much more Jewish than it actually is.

Batya:
Mmh.

Terri:
However, this book is as episodic as *American Tail* is, and both of which, I remembered having a much stronger through narrative, which is

weird, but it's amazing what our small brains put together in our heads.

Batya:
I was gonna say, I actually haven't rewatched *American Tail* in an extremely long time, and I probably should.

Terri:
It's not as Jewish as you remember it. (laughter)

Batya:
I'll take your word for it until I see it myself. Your standards, I guess, for “how Jewish is this” change.

Terri:
I remembered all of the mice being Jewish, and not all of the mice being immigrants, which is not the same thing.

Batya:
True.

Merav:
Right.

Terri:
I really remembered it as like a very Jewish perspective and it is not, it is a very immigrant perspective. And those are two different things.

Merav:
But our focus character is Jewish.

Terri:
Super, super Jewish.

Batya:
As we've discussed in earlier chapters, “how Jewish things are” moves in gradually. And I think this might be the first thing we have of –

where the entire chapter is specifically about a very Jewish thing.

Terri:
Mm.

Batya:
An exclusively Jewish thing.

Merav:
Right.

TerrI:
Yeah, I guess for me the fact that I know the family is Jewish makes everything feel Jewish to me.

Merav:
Yes, and I think that that's a perspective that we're all bringing to this book. But I do think that there are a lot of places where we're holding

back the Judaism a little bit in this chapter, and we'll get into that a little more as we sort of do our line reading.
I do think it's interesting that Mama always goes solo to the market. Like that's one of the first things that we learn in this chapter is that she's going over to Rivington Street, where I actually just did a virtual Lower East Side tour, and they talked about how basically all the streets were chock-a-block with pushcarts, except for Allen Street, which had the el. Because nobody wanted to have a food pushcart under the el, which was at the time it was a coal train and it was belching smoke all over everybody's windows –

Batya:
Oh I didn't –

Merav:
– and indeed down, the particulate was coming

down into the space.

Batya:
I don't think I knew that the el, for those of you who don't know, el is not the name of a line as such. It's short for elevated. It's the elevated train.

Merav:
Right, and there used to be a lot more of them.

Batya:
I had not known that the elevated train was ever cargo. I thought it was always passengers.

Merav:
It is passengers.

Batya:
But also – oh, a coal car as in –

Merav:
(overlapping) A coal subway.

Batya:
Runs on coal! I thought you meant carrying coal, but no running on coal would also be very messy.

Merav:
Yes, and one of the reasons that they got rid of that infrastructure when they demolished all of the el trains was because the format of the train was different. So when they moved to electrical trains, they wound up doing a completely different system. I don't remember if they were different gauges or not. I'm sure we have a train enthusiast in the audience who can tell us. But ultimately, that was all removed. And now Allen Street, they actually made Allen Street twice as wide, because when they removed the train, they also took out an entire row of

buildings and that they made what – they wanted it to be a promenade. So they put a sidewalk down the middle of the street with plants on two sides for about ten blocks worth, to try to make it like Park Avenue.

Terri:
Ah.

Merav:
But going back to the Rivington Street Market, Mama is going there because the prices are lower, because she can haggle. Prior to this point, we've pretty much seen Mama in the house.

Batya:
This is one of the points where running the household requires you to leave the house and do things outside. The household budget is hers to handle.

Merav:
Mhm.

Terri:
And it makes sense specifically that she tried to make it as expansive as possible for Shabbat.

Merav:
Absolutely.

Batya:
For sure.

Terri:
Any other day of the week, you get by on what there is, but for Shabbat, you're going to try to make as much as possible. So you're gonna try to stretch that money even farther.

Merav:

Yes, and we definitely see her pulling out preserves later when we talk about like applesauce with dinner, and we see the difference in the bread. So normally they're eating pumpernickel bread, but on Shabbat it's called out that they're eating white bread and it says white bread braided loaves. It doesn't say *challah*, which I thought was really interesting. And I can't tell if that's, they don't wanna be Jewish on the page because here's another foreign word, or if that's, here's a description of what it is, that's basically just a small infodump.

Batya:
I feel like that's less “we don't want to be Jewish” because by this point, that ship has sailed.

Merav:
Thankfully.

Terri:
Oh yeah!

Batya:
It's too late to pretend there isn't a really Jewish stuff going on. I think it's the same reason that it is throughout Sabbath and not *Shabbat* or *Shabbos* –

Merav:
Right!

Batya:
– which is one of the two – they most likely would have been pronouncing it *Shabbos*,

Merav:
Almost certainly.

Batya:
But Sabbath is an English word.

Merav:
Yeah.

Terri:
I wonder, because I'm just looking back at the copyright, and this book was written in 1951. Now it is deeply pervasive to call braided egg bread *challah*.

Merav:
Yes

Batya:
Yeah.

Terri:
I don't know if that was the case in 1951.

Batya:
I don't think it was. I don't even think it was

common in like the 1980s, when I was a kid, that anybody would know what *challah* is.

Merav:
You mean inside or outside the Jewish community?

Batya:
I mean outside, I mean generally. Terri, I'm guessing that's what you meant too?

Terri:
I kind of meant both because as far as I'm concerned, I mean, *challah*, and this is coming from a deeply observant perspective, *challah* is an action, not a bread.

Batya:
It's true.

Terri:

Challah is a thing that you do. You separate – let's get super infodumpy here for a minute.

Batya:
Yes!

Terri:
You separate – if you make a certain amount of bread, you separate out some of the dough. And in theory you give it to your local neighborhood priest who doesn't necessarily have land from which to make his own bread, and he bakes it and he has food. We don't do this right now because our local neighborhood priests – well, one of them lives in my house but –

Batya:
(laughing)

Terri:

No one can ever actually answer the question, “am I supposed to take challah or not?”, now we burn it because all of the situations in which a local neighborhood priest is supposed to be eating this bread, those conditions are not current.

Merav:
Right.

Terri:
So we burn it. So for me, *challah* is something you do for all bread. It's not specific, it is not the name of a bread, it's the name of an action. And I don't know when, both in the Jewish community and certainly in the wider non-Jewish community, we started calling that bread we eat on Shabbat, that super fancy bread, we started calling it *challah*. I don't know historically when it enters the lexicon, so in 1951, I don't know if it's even part of the Jewish

lexicon, let alone the non-Jewish lexicon.

Batya:
I'm pretty sure that by the 20th century, it was part of the Jewish lexicon to call that bread *challah*, but I don't know if you only called it *challah* when you served it for Shabbos or if you called that style of bread *challah* all the time. Because I think that's two separate things.

Terri:
All of these things to say that it's pretty logical actually that she would not have described that bread as *challah*, because that's not a universal term yet. For us, it's a very universal term, in that in plenty of cookbooks all over America, you get told “go buy *challah* for your French toast.” These are not kosher cookbooks. These are standard cookbooks. But I don't know that a cookbook in 1950 would have said that.

Batya:
I am thinking of a recorded comedy piece. This is a bit of a deep dive. I'm sorry, it's early in the episode for a deep dive.

Terri:
Hey, I went into *hafrashat challah*, you're entitled.

Merav:
laughing

Batya:
No, this is fine. This is an old comedy piece that may have been by Shel Silverstein, but I'm not sure. The joke of it was, “I'm so hip, the rest of the world is square.”

Merav:
Yes, and it does have challah in it.

Batya:
Although pronounced hallee, to rhyme with bialy.

Merav:
Which is a very New York City way to pronounce challah.

Terri:
It’s a very Galicianier way!

Merav:
It's very what?

Batya:
Yes!

Terri:
Galicianer, people from Galicia, the way they speak Yiddish specifically, which inflects their Hebrew, puts E on the end of everything, which

confuses those of us of more Lithuanian descent.

Merav:
And also it shows up in *Tick Tick Boom*. There's a song where everybody's having brunch and somebody orders hallee bread.

Transition sound

Merav:
Definitely. We have jumped ahead to the meal, but we still need to do the shopping for the meal.

Terri:
Yes!

Merav:
So the shopping trip is going to commence with all of the girls being given the treat of going to

market with Mama, which I gotta say is probably a big stressor for Mama to do this. So it's significant.

Batya:
Which is most likely why she always does it on her own regularly

Merav:
(overlapping) Right.

Batya:
Because she doesn't have to wrangle the kids while shopping. And I think the assistance they can provide is probably – this probably does not offset the stress of having to wrangle them.

Merav:
Right, and also –

Terri:

As the parent of only one, I would much rather not take my daughter shopping. I love my daughter to pieces, but it's one more thing to think about and worry about and manage, also managing expectations, which with five of them is a lot.

Merav:
I have to say, yeah, Mama's management of the kids with blood sugar is actually really smart.

Terri:
Yes!

Batya:
Mmhm!

Merav:
Because that was always a big issue when I would go shopping with my mother, when I was still like either the first or the only child in the

family. My mother would take me shopping and we would always stop at the nut cart and I would get cashews, because otherwise we would murder each other. So there's definitely some mitigation of that with the fact that the kids all have a penny to get a treat at the market. And I think because this begins at the middle of the day –

Terri:
I think they're going out after school.

Merav:
That's also possible.

Batya:
Yes, she's running late, they're going to be home from school soon …

Terri:
Yes!

Batya:
She says she's going to put off shopping until they get home.

Merav:
Yeah, it's going to be a little bit tight because they just have Thursday evening to go and do the shopping, to get it all done.

Terri:
Yes.

Merav:
So this is quite an extravaganza and Mama insists on bringing the baby carriage, which apparently she doesn't have like a bundle buggy or anything, but she's bringing the baby carriage and she insists to Gertie that it's not for you necessarily. Gertie's like, I'm too big, I'm not a baby anymore. But just in case, right?

Terri:
Just in case.

Merav:
And of course, Gertie does wind up in the baby carriage.

Terri:
When the phenomenon of what we call in my house a bubby cart –

Merav:
Right.

Terri:
– you know, when is that a thing?

Merav:
I feel like those do go back to the fifties and possibly even earlier. Mama is –

Terri:
It's being written in the fifties, but they're not in the fifties.

Merav:
Right, exactly. They're still in 1912. So we are possibly quite a long [way] before the bundle buggy, which is the fold-up, full-length cart that is, you know, wheels on the ground, handles in your hand, and then there's a rectangle in front of you that you push. And it's just a big wire basket.

Batya:
It's actually built along much the same logic as a baby carriage. And I was actually kind of startled when I realized that this is not a universal thing, until I realized, no, this is really only useful if either you're going shopping as a pedestrian, or if you have a long way to go

between your car and your house, and therefore something with wheels to take all the packages is useful. Because we live in New York and we don't have a car. So it just, like, it did not occur to me that not everybody is shopping in the same way.

Terri:
It's much more universal in places like New York City, all over New York City, where car ownership is less likely. Also in Jerusalem!

Batya:
Yes.

Terri:
Everybody uses them, because even if you own a car, you don't want to move it from its parking spots.

Batya:

If you can avoid it.

Merav:
We're also talking about shopping at multiple stores here, right? It's not “I'm walking around a giant supermarket.”

Batya:
Because this is before the supermarket!

Merav:
Well before! So we're really going – in this case, we're going from cart to cart because we're about to get into pushcarts. But even if I was going to the store, like we see Charlotte and Gertie go to the store in a previous chapter, if I was going from store to store and I had a lot of bundles. I just have to stick them under my arms and hope.

Batya:

What else have we got for on the page, not on the page? There's who do we meet?

Merav:
Well, there is a significant meeting in here, which is not a new person, but it is Mama connecting with Miss Allen –

Batya:
Yes.

Terri:
Yes.

Merav:
Which we haven’t seen before. The girls are very desirous to sort of drag Mama into the library and be like, “meet our idol – here's Miss Allen, we love her!” And Mama is eager to meet her because Miss Allen did them a solid, right?

Terri:
(overlapping) Yes.

Merav:
She was the one who put them on a payment plan to pay back the library book in chapter one. They meet each other and they're hugely complimentary to each other. There's this whole sequence of the two of them kind of gushing at each other. “Oh, the girls have told me so much about you!”

Transition noise

So they go in, we have this wonderful meeting between Mama and Miss Allen. And then there's just one wonderful line that “Miss Allen came from behind her desk to join the family.” And I feel like that's like (it’s) slightly foreshadowing, because in a weird way, Miss Allen has joined the family, she's part of their –

Batya:
Huh!

Merav:
Their circle of people. But also then Mama has that little bit of a conversation with Miss Allen where she's like, she's wistful about something. Boy, I bet she has a lost romance.

Batya:
(overlapping) Yes.

Merav:
And that's just this little like twist of arc plot for later. Or it's like we have this overarching romance of two people trying to find each other and it's right there and like, you don't notice it until later.

Batya:

And Mama doesn't actually bring up, oh, I bet there's a lost romance, but she does – “she's smiling, but there's this hint of wistfulness.” It's literary foreshadowing, but I think it's also a bit of a character note that Mama's really perceptive about people.

Merav:
Exactly.

Terri:
Yes!

Batya:
Because none of us and none of the girls spotted anything about Miss Allen that seemed in any way wistful or sad –

Terri:
Well –

Batya:
– but Mama who's lived longer, who's very insightful, who is meeting this person as a fellow adult, which is very different from how children see adults.

Terri:
Right!

Merav:
Yes.

Terri:
That's, yeah, and I don't even remember how old Ella is supposed to be in this book.

Batya:
She's twelve.

Merav:
She’s twelve.

Terri:
And especially when, in a setting where the adult is meant to be highly professional and not display their own feelings, kids are not going to pick up on the kinds of things that other adults do.

Batya:
So this is the first chance we've had for anything like that perception to happen. And I love it. I love placing it here in the book. We're about a third into the book at this point.

Merav:
Right, and we've already had the seed of this plot –

Terri:
Right, I was going to say the kids are pretty perceptive about Charlie, where they are not

perceptive about Miss Allen, but I think to some extent that has more to do with the fact that they interact with Charlie more.

Merav:
And also Charlie disappears.

Batya:
They interact with Charlie more and as you said, far less formally.

Terri:
Yes.

Batya:
Charlie is a buddy. Charlie is not an authority.

Merav:
Yes.

Terri:

In my family, we would have grown up calling him Uncle Charlie.

Batya:
Yes, I was just thinking that!

Merav:
Yes, exactly.

Terri:
Whereas Miss Allen is important, but Miss Allen might as well be a teacher. She doesn't have a life outside the library,

Batya:
Yes.

Terri:
Whereas Charlie is Uncle Charlie and he comes to dinner sometimes.

Merav:
Right, and moreover, when Charlie disappears, then it's an opportunity for comment. Miss Allen doesn't disappear. If Miss Allen was gone, then all of a sudden the girls would be like, why is Miss Allen gone?

Terri:
Right.

Merav:
But we never get that because Miss Allen shows up for work every day, no matter how sad she is.

Batya:
And with her work face on, where she's – even to the adults she encounters, she is not really supposed to have any interiority. She is there to provide a service –

Merav:
Right, she's the personification of library to the children.

Batya:
But she meets on a personal level with Mama, just temporarily. You were talking about the symbolism of her coming from behind the desk.

Terri:
Yeah.

Batya:
That's a bit too. She is stepping out of her professional place just briefly, and that's long enough for a personal connection to happen.

Terri:
Yeah.

Merav:

And I think that that's why this sequence is here, is to really give us Miss Allen as a person, even though we like her already as an authority figure. And it's also to just sort of like, here are two adult women in the world, right? Which up until this point, we just don't see, because those are the only two adult women who've been introduced on the page.

Terri:
And it gives a sense of Mama having a personality beyond being a parent –

Merav:
Yes.

Terri:
Which is kind of nice.

Batya:
Also true.

Merav:
Absolutely, and that's much needed because she is very much in the role of “Mama” as opposed to – like, she doesn't have a name on the page yet. She's just Mama. Papa is just Papa. They don't have names.

Batya:
And we don't have a first name for Miss Allen.

Merav:
No, although we get one later. So.

Batya:
Not yet, we do, but at this point where Miss Allen is – she exists in a professional capacity, and in a professional capacity, it's title and family name, it's not first name.

Merav:

Exactly. Just like the people who own the stores that the girls visit in the prior chapters. So now we're going to leave the familiar of the library and we're going to go into the unfamiliar of the marketplace.

Batya:
Which gets goes to our usual What's On the Page question of interior space versus exterior space.

Merav:
Suddenly we are outdoors.

Batya:
Most of this chapter. Yes.

Merav:
Outdoors and it's cold because we're in the winter months.

Batya:
It was November, I think, in the dusting chapter, and we haven't had the month named since. But November in New York is already –

Merav:
It's very cold.

Batya:
Pre-global warming at least, November in New York is cold.

Terri:
Even post-global warming, we're already in socks and boots territory for me, and sweaters.

Batya:
Yeah, my gauge always used to be, by the night before Thanksgiving, it's not just sweaters and socks and boots, it's hats and scarves and gloves.

Merav:
Right!

Batya:
And that's not always the case anymore, and who knows? At this point, for sure, it's cold.

Terri:
See, when I lived in New York, for me it was, “are the radiators on?” but interestingly, this book takes place before the Spanish flu, and thus, before the installation of stupid amounts of steam heat in every single New York City apartment building. That is, by the way, why apartments are the way they are in New York. It's so that they –

Batya:
Oh gosh, is it really?

Terri:
Oh, cool! You're one of today's lucky 10,000.

Batya:
Yes! Hit me!

Terri:
So the reason why, certainly in Manhattan, why your apartment is always stupidly hot is so that you can have a warm apartment with the windows open.

Batya:
Ahh!

Terri:
And it is an artifact of the Spanish flu epidemic. A bunch of articles got written about it in like 2020 and 2021. But basically that's why New York apartments are that way. It's so that you can leave the windows open for extended

periods of time, but not freeze to death.

Batya:
That makes so much sense.

Terri:
It does! It very much has a very specific purpose. It's just we don't think about it anymore because we build buildings differently now with different HVAC. But at the time, this was everyone's best compromise between keeping the buildings warm enough and also being, people being able to open their windows so that they wouldn't get other people sick.

Merav:
And at this point, I actually learned this when I was doing the virtual Lower East Side Tour from the Eldridge Street Synagogue. And one of the things they said is most of these apartments that they're living in were built for the German

immigration wave. And the tenement was unique to the German immigration wave. And then as the German families were able to move out, these tenements became available. A lot of other people moved in, including Jewish families. And moreover –

Batya:
Jewish, Irish, and Italian, wouldn't it have been?

Merav:
Yes. Moreover, there were only two windows and then you'd back onto another apartment. So you only ever had the two windows in the front room. So what Terri is describing about the ventilation had to be completely redesigned from this style.

Terri:
Yes. But –

Merav:
Because this would not have provided any ventilation.

Terri:
Furnaces starting to clank in the building is not yet a signifier that it is winter.

Batya:
Yeah.

Merav:
Right, and I mean in this case there is no furnace. This is a completely unheated building. You know, as far as I can tell –

Batya:
Yes, or rather it's heated by the same stove that they cook with.

Merav:

Exactly. The only reason they have heat is either because they're putting irons into the bed or because the stove is on. So definitely at a certain point the windows don't get opened because otherwise you're just losing heat.

Batya:
And you can't afford to lose heat.

Merav:
Right, exactly.

Batya:
Because you do get – and I think you do still get, even with global warming – you do get at some points in a New York winter, cold that will kill you.

Merav:
Absolutely.

Terri:
Yes, very much so.

Merav:
So speaking of this, we now see peddlers out in the street, and they've been out there all day, and they are freezing.

TerrI:
Yes.

Merav:
The smartest peddler, I would say, is absolutely the peddler who has an oven, because then they have portable heat, which is the sweet potato vendor. So we see, we get this little infodump from Sarah saying, oh, look at all the pushcarts. We're transitioning into this market sequence, what's a pushcart, what does this mean?
So we have all of these specialty peddlers,

where they're hanging out on a block that has shops, right, like a meat shop, a dairy shop, a fish shop, a bakery, a shoe store, that kind of thing, clothing shops. But then you have all of these pushcarts. And I mean, we still see this in New York City today where there are food trucks, but the pushcart actually dies out because of a health edict about twenty years after this book takes place. And the whole market system as we know it in this book gets shut down in that period.

Batya:
Because of that, and also I think, because of the advent of cars.

Merav:
That makes it much harder.

Batya:
Because if you look here, that's like, the

sidewalks are clear, the pushcarts are actually in the street, and they're wedged together so tightly that one could not cross anywhere except at the corners. And like, only being able to cross the street at the corners was not a general thing, because there weren't cars and traffic lights. There were carts and they could see you crossing the street ahead of them with plenty of time to slow down. Still wasn't always safe if they were moving fast. But they could not move as fast as a car.

Terri:
So it's interesting that you're saying that the entire pushcart ecosystem dies out in about twenty years from now, because I can't remember exactly when it's set, but I had a book that I loved in my early adolescence called *The Pushcart War*. And...

Batya:

I win my bet with myself.

Merav:
We knew you were gonna say *The Pushcart War* as our friend Meredith also loves it.

Batya:
I've never actually read it and I need to.

Terri:
It's such a good book! I haven't read it in years and years and now I kind of want to read it again. Because it takes place in New York City, where there's apparently still a thriving pushcart ecosystem, and also Mack trucks. I don't know! I would have to look up when it was written.

Batya:
It's fun doing this when we actually have Google right at our fingertips –

Terri:
Yes!

Batya:
– and can look stuff up if we're not sure.

Terri:
Ah, it was written in 1964.

Batya:
And when is it set?

Terri:
it's set in the early 1960s, and in Greenwich Village.

Batya:
Huh. There you go. There are still parts of New York City even now where there are street vendors. Where am I thinking of?

Merav:
Well, there's definitely street vendors up around Columbia University. I mean, there were book tables for years.

Batya:
There's some, yeah.

Merav:
And I mean, I definitely still see it in Midtown.

Batya:
Mm-hmm. There's Chinatown.

Terri:
And there's still farmers markets, which are effectively street vendors. It's just, it's just, you don't get as much in the way of hot food and raw meat.

Merav:

I think that that's really the main change from this period –

Batya:
Or fish!

Merav:
Is that a lot of these – now we're selling you meat or dairy or fish, those are actual stores, whereas everything else is in a pushcart.

Terri:
Right.

Merav:
So a lot of the things that we see being served out of pushcarts, like the chickpeas and garlic, most of those things are basically dry or they're hot and dry. So it's not like I'm serving you wet food out of a cart. It’s – here's, you know, hot dry chickpeas. The sweet potatoes are in their

jackets, but some of them are cut open. Those things potentially could create a health problem. But each of these people theoretically is being however meticulous they can be to provide healthy food for the neighborhood. We don't really know.

Batya:
Or they're not, and people are getting sick from buying their stuff. That has happened at people selling food throughout the entirety of human history. There's a running joke about that in Terry Pratchett's Discworld books, you have –

Merav:
Yes.

Terri:
Yes. Sausage in a bun.

Batya:

– the fellow selling the dubious sausages in a bun and even more dubious meat pies, and the recurring joke about how you will always, always, always regret eating anything you buy from him, but you always come back.

Terri:
Yup!

Merav:
Yep, because it smells so good.

Batya:
Regrettable street food is an ancient human tradition.

Terri:
Dirty water hot dogs!

Merav:
Yep, exactly.

Batya:
Dirty water hot dogs! And it really is a relatively recent and rare phenomenon to say you can't sell food that will make people sick. And if you are regularly selling food that makes people sick, we're not going to rely on word of mouth. We're going to actually pass laws to shut you down. I think overall, this is a good thing –

Terri:
Yes!

Batya:
– but it's not a universal human thing. And I think just people figured you took your chances, and that was normal.

Terri:
We're almost at modern germ theory, but again, 1912, people just – the way that people think

about things was just very, very different – like maybe they would know that milk that was off could make you sick, but washing hands wasn't, still wasn't a universal medical practice.

Batya:
That's true, too. It was starting to be at this point. I think it was starting to be an understood thing that you wanted to be clean if you were dealing with sick or injured people.

Merav:
Right, but we're still in the era of the outhouse.

Batya:
I've noticed that we don't get outhouses mentioned in these books, as far as I can find.

Terri:
Again, this is also a highly romanticized portrayal.

Merav:
Yeah.

Batya:
Romanticized, sanitized, the uglier parts of this are mostly not talked about.

Terri:
One presumes that there are still chamber pots under every one of those beds that all the kids are doubled up in.

Merav:
It seems likely.

Batya:
Oh, quite possibly.

Terri:
We're not going to talk about them because

that's not fun for small children, and that's the target audience of this book.

transition noise

Merav:
… which of course calls back to a favorite childhood book of mine, which is *The Carp in the Bathtub* by Barbara Cohen.

Terri:
That is such a good book.

Merav:
Which is, it's a great book. And I mean, obviously, like gefilte fish on the page is very Jewish, right? And they talk about like Mama's gefilte fish is whitefish, yellow pike and winter carp, because it's winter, so that's what she's buying. And presumably that switches up in the summer for something else, or possibly Mama

just doesn't make gefilte fish in the summer, because if you're using the stove, it's gonna be pretty hot.

Terri:
It's much too hot, and frankly, too fragrant to make gefilte fish in the summer.

Merav:
It might've been a winter treat. And we also get the idea that it isn't an every-week treat. But it is interesting that she says there's a bathtub, because we know that there is no bathroom. At least not private to the house. So presumably this is one of those tubs that gets hung on the wall. And I think we see a bathtime later in the books where they take the tub down and they fill it with kettles of water.

Batya:
I think you're right. Yeah, we're talking about

like a big knee deep tin –

Merav:
Tin tub.

Terri:
Yeah.

Merav:
Which my father grew up with when he was living in, there was a neighborhood in Toronto called Markham, and when they lived on Markham Street they had a tin tub, before they moved into a house with a real bathroom.

Batya:
You mentioned *The Carp in the Bathtub*, which my lord, I haven't reread in so, so long. And yeah, I do wonder if, when Sydney Taylor originally wrote this, the line was, you know, I like to see them swimming around in the

bathtub, but I don't like it when Papa kills them.

Merav:
Right.

Terri:
Yes.

Batya:
Eh, let's maybe not, I don't like it when Papa cleans them afterward. We're just skipping right past the fact that if you bring home live fish you're going to eat, someone has to kill them.

Terri:
To be fair though, I mean, have you ever watched someone clean a whole fish? It's kinda gross.

Batya:
I have – I have seen it. It's not fun to watch.

Terri:
Yes, there is the sanitizing of the word kill, but also in and of itself, that sentence is very much a – that's not something that most kids who are squeamish would want to see anyway.

Merav:
Absolutely.

Batya:
Yes. I mean, honestly, “cleaning” the fish is already a euphemism. You are gutting it, you are de-boning and skinning it. It's that... “Cleans” is very much a euphemism.

Merav:
Yes, absolutely.

Terri:
Well, so is many of the words we use around

food.

Batya:
The fact that we have two different sets of words with some animals, for the animal when it's alive and the animal when you eat it.

Terri:
Yes.

Merav:
Yeah, nobody says “I eat cow.”

Batya:
Which, I mean, sometimes we do, but you do it to be …

Merav:
To be silly.

Terri:

Deliberate about things.

Batya:
Deliberately funny and whimsical.

Terri:
Yes.

Batya:
Where I do think that that's mostly…? specific to English, but I may be wrong.

Terri:
Nope! Hebrew very definitively has different words for the alive animal and the purchasable animal.

Merav:
Yeah.

Batya:

Oh gosh, does it?

Terri:
Yes, because a cow is a *par* or a *para* and meat that you eat is *basar*. And the same thing for chicken. A running around chicken is a *tarnagol* or a *tarnagolet* and chicken on the plate is *of*.

Batya:
Right! Oh my heavens!

Terri:
No, Hebrew very definitively has different words for running-around animals than animals on the plate.

Batya:
Wow! And now I'm wondering how much of that goes back to biblical Hebrew and how much of that is Ben Yehuda building modern Hebrew and being influenced by English.

Merav:
Or French.

Terri:
I don't know because in English we get some of it from French.

Merav:
Right, I was going to say that's definitely French.

Batya:
That's the whole thing. For the people who take care of the cow, it's a cow. For the people who eat the cow, it's *boeuf*.

Merav:
Right, exactly.

Terri:

Yes.

Merav:
And certainly Ben Yehuda was influenced by French as witness *glace*, which is French for ice cream, becoming *glida*, which is Hebrew for ice cream. Because there's no *glida* in the Bible, because there's no ice cream in the desert. But would that there had been, I think maybe somebody imagined manna into ice cream, but perhaps they were ahead of their time.

Batya:
Oh, that's beautiful. We have gotten into another deep dive. This is inevitable.

Terri:
It's three Jews talking about something?

Merav:
Yes.

Batya:
It is specifically three Jews talking about food. There's gonna be – We're gonna go in all different directions here.

transition noise

Batya:
This is such a food-rich chapter, and I love that, by the by.

Terri:
Pickles! There are so many pickles in this chapter. I love it.

Batya:
Yes!

Merav:
Yes!

Merav:
Let's talk about what's at the pickle stand for a minute. I love the fact that we get this very diverse pickle stand. It's got watermelon rind. It's got sauerkraut. It's got pickled tomato. We do have actual, cucumber pickles, which is what we think of as a pickle. But we do have this. This is a nickel for a *shtickle*, right? You want a little piece, which is a *shtickle*, you give me a nickel, right? So a nickel is a lot of money to the girls. So it's just, it's very interesting that we have this English-Yiddish overlap.

Terri:
It's not in the pickle store though.

Batya:
I was just trying to find – a *shtickle* of what?

Terri:

It's in the deli! It's in the delicatessen, it's for, it’s sausages.

Batya:
Yes.

Merav:
Yes, that's right. The little bit of sausage is five cents, because of all of the work that has to go into making sausage. But I love the fact that it is a deliberately rhyming slang, which is possibly from England, like that's a thing that's big in England, I don't know if it was big in England back in the day, but then we have a nickel for a *shtickle*, which is a Yiddish word for a little piece. And so those two words are clearly being used in tandem because they rhyme, but they're also sort of highlighting the English-Yiddish dichotomy of this neighborhood.

Batya:
Yes, an English word rhyming with a Yiddish word, which tells you who is selling stuff here and who were they selling it to.

Terri:
Yes.

Batya:
They expect their customers to know what a nickel is and to know what a *shtickle* is. This is a polyglot crowd.

Merav:
Exactly.

Terri:
But it is also polyglot and insular.

Batya:
Yes!

Terri:
Today we would call that targeted advertising.

Batya:
Yes.

Merav:
Exactly.

Terri:
Yes, it is assuming that you are assimilated enough to speak English, but it is also assuming that Yiddish is a language that you speak. And that is, that is a very, I mean, it's not small, but it is a narrow slice of New York.

Batya:
Although I am wondering now, in that period of time, how many non-Jews could be expected to know a smattering of Yiddish words, the same

way that a lot of New Yorkers and a lot of Los Angelinos know today because of the concentration of people who drop Yiddish words into their everyday speech? Any New Yorker knows what *schlep* means, whether or not they have ever actually met and talked to a Yiddish speaker.

Terri:
I don't know though that by 1912 –

Batya:
Well, that's what I'm wondering. Yeah – I'm thinking about this neighborhood specifically –

Terri:
The Eastern European immigration wave is not yet complete enough for Yiddish to have spread quite so far. But, I mean, in the neighborhood, it's certainly possible. I mean, the intermingling of cultures is a thing that definitely happened.

Looking at you, everybody who says corned beef and cabbage comes from Ireland.

Batya:
laughing

Terri:
This neighborhood is where corned beef and cabbage comes from.

Batya:
I just recently was reading a whole thing about that, of how potatoes and cabbage boiled together with a little tiny scrap of whatever meat was the thing in Ireland. And most likely it would have been pig, if anything, and much more likely it wouldn't have been any meat at all, it would just have been cabbage and potatoes. Which can be very nice. I've had a cabbage-potato boil that was genuinely really tasty with a little mustard. But the addition of

corned beef to that boiled dinner came specifically, as you say, from this neighborhood where the Irish immigrants to New York were like, you can get how much meat for how little money? And the butcher shops they were going to were primarily the Jewish ones. Just from proximity.

Terri:
And even if they had a *treif* butcher in the neighborhood, Americans cut up pig differently.

Batya:
Oh!

Terri:
This is one of those weird things that if you've lived in more than one country – which I have, I've lived in Israel for a couple of years – you learn that the way that people cut up animals is not universal. In Ireland, when they could get it,

they would cook something called a bacon joint. If they could get it, that's what they would be cooking with their cabbage. They could not get that in America because in America they weren't cutting up pigs that way. The style of breaking it down was just different. So you couldn't buy a bacon joint. You could get beef for how much? Are you kidding? And their neighbors were doing this really cool thing where they were pickling it.

Batya:
So it would last longer.

Terri:
Great. So we're going to do that instead. In the same way that, when the Italians were coming in, eggplant is a very strange vegetable that no one's ever heard of, but you can buy chicken for how much? And that's how you get chicken parm, which is not a thing that they cook in Italy

at all.

Batya:
There is so, so much that has been written about and so much more that could be written about the transformation of regional cuisines by and between different American immigrant groups.

Terri:
American “deli food” is what you take [get] when you take poverty cuisine and all of a sudden people have money.

Batya:
So much of American immigrant food is stuff is available in greater quantities for less money. Sometimes it's different ingredients than you could get back home. Goose! Goose fat used to be the cooking fat for a lot of Jewish European communities.

Terri:
Mm-hm.

Batya:
And I don't know if it ever was, it certainly isn't now an easily accessible thing in America.

Terri:
In America, we don't raise goose for consumption in the same way that they did in Europe.

Batya:
Also really big in American Jewish cooking is attempts to approximate what our neighbors are eating in a way that we didn't do in Europe. Or that we didn't do in the same ways, or we didn't have the same neighbors.

Terri:

Yes, and the neighbors that we had were generally trying to kill us.

Batya:
Well, yes, I wasn't gonna say it. But…

(general laughter)

Batya:
Just because they're trying to kill us doesn't mean we can't try to copy their food. But it's easier when you know you can go to the neighbor and ask, “so how do you make this?”, and not worry that it's going to go very badly.

Merav:
There's a more kindly-looked-on fraternization on the American side.

Batya:
Yeah.

Terri:
Yes. Just, you're living cheek by jowl with these people. Yes, the *Shetlakh* were small, but in the tenements, everybody was in everybody's business.

Batya:
Yes, they're in each other's pockets in a way we weren't before.

Merav:
It's not even clear to me that every peddler that we see in this sequence is Jewish.

Batya:
I don't think they are, and there is no – this interests me. I don't know if it just wasn't part of their approach to things or it just isn't on the page because they didn't think it would be interesting, which, legit, it's not interesting. I

have to do it all the time and it's boring as hell. Having to determine everywhere you go, can I buy this, can I eat this, is this sufficiently kosher?
I don't know to what degree the family kept kosher, except that as far as we can see, they don't eat non-kosher animals and they don't mix meat and milk. But like, I don't know if when they're going to the butcher they are looking specifically for a kosher butcher or if they're just going to a butcher who sells beef. Do they even have to think about it? Is this neighborhood so densely Jewish that anybody they could go to [would be kosher]? I'm not sure.

Terri:
That is on the page! It’s on page 72. They have met the mushroom peddler. So the paragraph after “How sharply the shoppers hunted for bargains …” starts with “Only one tongue was spoken here: Yiddish. It was like a foreign land

right in the midst of America. In this foreign land, it was Mama's children who were the foreigners since they alone conversed in the alien tongue, English.”

Batya:
Aha!

Terri:
So I would say that it is much more of a, you don't have to say that she went to only this one shop to buy her meat.

Batya:
Because the whole shop is Jewish and there is just an understanding that if you're buying from a *landsman* you don't have to worry.

Merav:
We don't see the family eat a lot of red meat. What we do see is chicken. And chicken

explicitly doesn't have to be kosher slaughtered as such. It just has to have the head whacked off. So we literally see them go and get a chicken and Mama brings an apron to pluck the chicken because the chicken has just been killed right in front of her. She's witnessing this, right?

Batya:
That's true!

Terri:
My great grandmother used to get a case of live chickens.

Merav:
Mmhm!

Terri:
And I believe the *shochet* would come to the house. This is actually right before – ten years

before my family gets to America. My maternal grandmother was actually the first person in her family born in this country. And she didn't speak English until she went to public kindergarten. She only spoke Yiddish. She was born in 1924. And she's the first person in her family born in this country. So about ten years after when this book takes place is when my family get to America for the first time. A lot of this is stuff my grandmother would have done, or my great-grandmother would have done, and my grandmother would have been the children in this book.

Batya:
Just now occurring to me, as we discuss this question, that “Mama went to Rivington Street Market where the prices were lower.” That might not be the full explanation of why they shopped in the Rivington Street Market, but where the shops were kosher doesn't get

brought up because most readers aren't going to know what kosher is or why it matters.

Terri:
Right.

Merav:
Right. We get into it in a much later book when they're doing the chicken.

Batya:
Yes.

Merav:
But right now, it's just, this is the space where we shop.

Terri:
I read this book as a Jewish kid, but I was not necessarily its target audience.

Batya:
Certainly not the sole target audience.

Terri:
This is a book designed also to explain the immigrant life, the life of the Lower East Side to people. And there's, to some extent, there's assumptions that I probably went, oh, of course that's where they went. That's where all the kosher stuff was. And I don't think I would have thought of it when I was a kid because we only went to the one kosher butcher and we all, you know, I grew up being very careful at the grocery store.

Batya:
Mm-hmm.

Merav:
Yep, same. We were label readers because there weren't a lot of things in Canada that were

kosher certified. So we were constantly looking at labels to see if there was gelatin or if there was specific kinds of red dye that might contain bugs. So there was a lot of the careful reading of labels. In this case, the food is not labeled. The food is coming to them in large wooden carts. But they know which vendors to trust.

Terri:
Yes.

Batya
I think that's gotta be it, yeah. Either it's they know which vendors to trust or it's just an unspoken assumption that all the vendors in this area can be trusted. I envy that, I'm not gonna lie, I envy that a little bit.

Terri:01:02:04.439)
And I think that's sort of the point of the paragraph that says everybody spoke Yiddish.

It's telling the reader who knows enough to know that that's why.

Merav:01:02:19.736)
It’s a mutually established trust.

Terri:01:02:31.499)
And gefilte fish is a treat because they're poor. Well, it goes back to Fiddler on the Roof and Tavia saying, when a poor man eats a chicken, one of them is sick.

Merav:01:02:38.792)
We have this whole sequence with the market where they're kind of constantly acquiring food or eating food. And I think this is just one of these like sensual delight chapters where we get all of these like visuals of the chickpeas and the cart, the big orange sweet potatoes. Like I didn't even really like sweet potato, but I was like, oh, that sounds delicious because there's

the orange and there's the gray and the visual nature of it and it's hot, and all the girls are sharing their snacks. It's very communal.

Terri:01:03:15.47)
Even though the color of the pickle is not described, you know what that pickle looks like.

Batya (01:03:20.726)
You can see that color, absolutely. I can see it in my mind.

Merav:01:03:21.617)
Yeah.

Terri:01:03:24.906)
Not only can you see the color of the pickle, you can see that pickle sitting in the barrel outside the pickle store.

Batya (01:03:34.35)

Fished out with tongs.

Terri:01:03:35.955)
Tongs? What tongs? These guys are using their hands!

Batya (01:03:39.926)
These guys are probably using their hands, you're right.

Merav:01:03:39.952)
Yeah. This is a very pre-germ theory world, and people are scooping things out. I mean, there is a paper cone for the chickpeas just to keep them in –

Batya (01:03:52.838)
But also just scooping out hot chickpeas with your bare hand is not smart. Otherwise they'd be doing that.

Merav:01:03:56.56)
Teflon hand! I mean, we're not sure that he isn't sticking his hand at it and pouring them from his hand into the cone. But it is definitely a slightly less sanitary world. And we go from this world of like, the market, which is big and loud and a little bit unsanitary, into this sanctified world of Shabbat.

Batya:
Yes.

Merav:
Where we're sort of transitioning into and you know, Ms. Allen's like, Oh, tell us all about your adventures in the market because that's like a big raucous thing that they're doing. And then we get into the quiet of Shabbat.

Terri:
We use the library as a transitional space twice

in this chapter.

Batya:
That’s – yeah.

Terri:
There's something there!

—--

Merav:
We enjoyed talking with Terri Ash so much that we’ve decided to split this into a double-header episode!

Batya:
Tune in next time when we’ll hear Miss Allen say: “I guess we’d better be quiet.”