

GREENWICH VILLAGE SOCIETY FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION
WEST VILLAGE
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Oral History Interview
MIMI SHERATON FALCONE

By Sarah Dzedzic

New York, NY

November 11, 2019

Oral History Interview with Mimi Sheraton Falcone, November 11, 2019

Narrator(s)	Mimi Sheraton Falcone
Address	
Birthyear	1926
Birthplace	-
Narrator Age	93
Interviewer	Sarah Dziedzic
Place of Interview	
Date of Interview	November 11, 2019
Duration of Interview	138 mins
Number of Sessions	1
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Mimi Sheraton Falcone, Photo by Eric Etheridge

Quotes from Oral History Interview with Mimi Sheraton Falcone

Sound-bite

“My name is Mimi Sheraton Falcone. . . In 2020, will be a seventy-five year resident of Greenwich Village. I am known as a food critic and food writer. I’ve done travel writing and, previously, design and architecture, and interior design. I live in a brownstone, in the West Village, where I have been—2020 will be fifty-five years in the same house. But I’ve never thought of living anyplace else in Manhattan, or other than Greenwich Village, and I’ve never thought of living anyplace other than Manhattan once I got here, after growing up in Brooklyn.

My father [Joseph Solomon] was a wholesale fruit and produce commission merchant in Washington Market, down here, which is now known as Tribeca. So food was always a big subject in the family, and my mother [Beatrice] was a very good and ambitious cook. So there was lots of talk about food, lots of criticism at the table, and lots of going to restaurants, local places in Brooklyn and special places in Manhattan. Food is a great handle by which to pick up another culture, and I’ve been very fortunate in that, meeting people all over the world, going to obscure as well as well-known places in search of something special to eat.”

Additional Quotes

“We went to one of the most famous then in Brooklyn, called Lundy’s, which was a seafood restaurant in Sheepshead Bay. Originally, when I went, and I know I was very young because I can remember them having to get telephone books to pile on the seat so I could reach the table. So I must have been three or four. But in those days, before it moved to its final resting place, on Emmons Avenue, it was built out on a pier, right into Sheepshead Bay. And it was a very grand thing to go there for what was called a Shore Dinner on Sundays. They had famous huckleberry pie, and so on.

Then we went to a lot of little Cantonese restaurants that were in all of the Brooklyn neighborhoods. We went to New York style Kosher delis—hot dogs, pastrami—there were a lot of those around, and for special occasions, my parents came into what we called “the City,” and as I got a little older, brought me with them, to places like the Lobster, which was in the Times Square area, and Fan and Bill’s, which was a very famous steakhouse also on the edge of the Theater District. And so we did a lot of eating in restaurants, which I liked to do very much because I could get dressed up, and I could eat what I wanted, not what my mother made, necessarily.” (Sheraton p. 2)

“And 24 Fifth Avenue was the Fifth Avenue Hotel. The same building is there, but it’s condos. They had, in summer, a wonderful sidewalk café, with meals. They had a great barroom

called the Amen Corner, and those were very popular literary places and so on. And then, on Sunday, what was wonderful then, was to go to Washington Square Park and sit around the circle, especially if the fountain was not on. Everybody would bring the Sunday paper, and people would bring sketchpads, and folk singers, including the very famous Susan Reed, with her long copper hair, would sing, and people would make speeches.

The Village then had, as I look back on it, a rather dreamy, sort of a peaceful, dreamy atmosphere. You know, the war was just over and everybody was drawing breath. And I think the Village was—it still was a little bit sleepy. Eighth Street was kind of quiet on Sunday morning, and Eleanor Roosevelt lived just in one of the big houses on the park, and several times when, if we went out for the Sunday paper, she would be out there getting a paper, and walking Fala. And e.e. cummings was around, he lived at Patchin Place, and you would see him and W.H. Auden. You could see those people.

Then there was a victory parade for the end of World War II, and part of the staging area was Washington Square. I think it was tanks. And I sat on the steps of 11 Fifth Avenue, that was the Brevoort Hotel. And there was a brownstone and the plaque that was on the brownstone is still on the side of the big building, the house where Mark Twain wrote something. And I sat on those steps, and I watched the staging area for the parade, the tanks and the people getting ready to march up Fifth Avenue, and I guess at other staging areas, people just filtered in and joined the parade. So that was the feeling of the Village.” (Sheraton p. 6–7)

“But what I pursued on my own time was food. Food markets, restaurants. I brought back cookbooks in languages I couldn’t read, and food was like the hobby.” (Sheraton p. 10)

“When I was at Midwood, I went once—I was a big baseball fan, still am—and some Dodgers came to visit when the Midwood team was playing in Ebbets Field. And I grabbed a notebook, and Pee Wee Reese and Pete Reiser, two big stars, were there, and I got down on the field and I interviewed them. I went home to the editor of the school newspaper, and he said, “Girls don’t write about sports.” He says, “Girls write about food.” So that’s what I did.” (Sheraton p. 14)

“I really liked the community, and I thought there was so much more we could do as a community, particularly an artist community. And I just wanted to help promote the artists who lived there, and this seemed like a logical way to help do that. (Cominskie p. 5)

“Well, it was strange because when Craig Claiborne left as restaurant critic, I applied for the job. And I couldn’t even get an interview. I couldn’t find one woman, no matter how qualified, who was interviewed. The word was out through one of their editors that they thought it should be a man, primarily because Craig Claiborne was a man, and maybe it had a certain kind of chic. And I wrote them a lot of nasty letters, in which the personnel man said, “Well, I can see by the tone of your letter that you will never be material for the *New York Times*.” Boy, did I shove that at him when they called me after five or six years at *New York Magazine*. They

called me! And I wasn't sure I wanted to go because I was so happy at *New York Magazine*, but you really had to go. It a lot more money, and, so, I did. But by that time, Gael Greene had been a woman critic for quite a number of years, but it was the first woman at the *Times*.” (Sheraton p. 16)

“Well, in the first three or four years, ‘76, ‘77, to ‘80, one of the biggest focuses in food was cooking at home authentically. People bought Cuisinarts. For the first time, people wanted restaurant ranges at home. They had to make their own pasta, they had to stuff their own sausage, and they had to have ice cream makers. I covered, one year, all of the cooking classes being given in New York. There were, I think, eighty-eight that I went to. Everybody, even some of the teachers were only one class ahead in a class they were taking. It was a fever! To cook at home. Then suddenly, in the early ‘80s, interest began to go to restaurants. I envisioned kitchens that looked like a deserted mining town in Colorado, [laughing] with tumbleweed coming down—because now everybody’s eating out. Eating late became more fashionable. Kids would go home, work out, get dressed, and go to a restaurant at eight, nine o’clock. That was beginning to trend then. And authenticity was the word because now people were traveling more, and we had food on television. We began to have Julia Child, and Chinese, and so people became more aware.

Also, one of the hugest changes in the Village, and all over, were the things you could get in a vegetable store. When I moved into the Village, it was almost the year of the first Balducci’s, which was then—there’s a pizza restaurant there now—on that stretch between Christopher and Sixth Avenue where Eighth becomes Greenwich. That was the first Balducci’s store. And until that, you didn’t see six kinds of lettuce, or four kinds of mushrooms anywhere, and so all of these things became available, and that was great to write about. Dean & DeLuca opened while I was at the *New York Times* and they brought in cheeses and all kinds of things that no one had ever heard of. So there was a lot of good copy around, and a lot of interest in buying those things because of the food writing, and publicity, and television, and cooking, and the news of restaurants. There was sort of a fever about it, which still continues.” (Sheraton p. 17–18)

“When you live in houses like this, with a lot of people around who have been here a long time, there’s a very nice communal feeling. You know your neighbors, you help each other, you trade names and workers. I even know the sanitation man, the post office—it is a village.” (Sheraton p. 20)

“I guess when you’re as old as I am, and you’ve been here as long, you still keep seeing it a lot of the way it was. It still appeals to me. I don’t see any other part of the city I’d rather live in.” (Sheraton p. 22)

“I had disguises that consisted of three different wigs, and a lot of pairs of eyeglasses. I had a friend in the eyeglass business who gave me six frames with plain glass in them, because I

didn't need glasses. And that was the extent. I didn't dress up. And of course, my husband wouldn't go in disguise, and sometimes he would be recognized. I never made a reservation in my own name. If I thought they might know me, the friends we ate with—we usually ate with four people—would arrive first to get the table, so they wouldn't see it was me and give us the best table in the house. So every once in a while, I would forget the name in which we made the reservation—that would happen. And it was very embarrassing to have on a wig and glasses, and have someone say, “Good evening, Miss Sheraton.” [laughter] You know, as time went on. And I loved it. I loved doing it, I loved being secret.” (Sheraton p. 23)

“My last book and latest book came out in 2015, called *1,000 Foods to Eat Before You Die*, and that has food from all over the world. All parts, ordinary and bizarre, all based on things that I have had traveling, and touching on the cultures. Because it is very true that you make friends, people trust you, when you're talking about food. You want to know what they grew up with, you want to know how this is done, and you marvel at it all. It's a very positive kind of feeling.” (Sheraton p. 27–28)

Summary of Oral History Interview with Mimi Sheraton Falcone

Mimi Sheraton Falcone was born in Midwood, Brooklyn. She attended New York University, commuting into Manhattan to attend class and explore Greenwich Village. At age nineteen, she married and moved to an apartment on East Ninth Street in the Village. She describes the Village at the time—just after the end of World War II—as peaceful and artsy, and recalls some of its notable people and places.

After she finished college, she worked writing copy for advertisements, and because she discovered an interest in writing about home furnishings, attained a certification as an interior decorator. She then worked as an editor at both *Seventeen* and *House Beautiful*, and began to pursue food and food writing as a hobby. She went on to write restaurant reviews for numerous publications, including the *Village Voice*, *New York Magazine*, and the *New York Times*, where, in 1975, she was notably the first woman restaurant critic. As a critic and restaurant reviewer, she maintained her anonymity by employing the use of disguises to avoid receiving any special treatment by chefs and wait staff.

Sheraton was involved in many special assignments as a freelancer, which included working as a consultant on the menu of the Four Seasons in 1959. In 1960, she was hired to produce a complete travel guide to sixty world cities in partnership with Scandinavian Airlines, and traveled extensively throughout Asia, the Middle East, Europe, and Russia. Her book, *1,000 Foods to Eat Before You Die*, features foods she encountered on these and other trips.

A long-time resident of the Village—celebrating her 75th anniversary in 2020—Sheraton describes the neighborhood across many decades, spanning from the era when war rations were still in place to the rise of specialty grocery stores; and from the emergence of American’s interest in authentic cooking, starting in the mid-1970s, to the switch to an interest in going out to eat. She also describes many of her and her late husband’s beloved neighborhood shops and restaurants, and reflects on changes in the neighborhood that have forced many of those places to close.

Compiled by Sarah Dzedzic

General Interview Notes

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

The GVSHP 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 Greenwich 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.

THANK YOU

Oral History Interview Transcript

Dziedzic: Today is November 11, 2019 and this is Sarah Dziedzic interviewing Mimi Sheraton for the Village Preservation Oral History Project. Can you start by saying your name, and giving a brief introduction?

Sheraton: My name is Mimi Sheraton Falcone.

Dziedzic: And a brief introduction to who you are?

Sheraton: I am, in 2020, a seventy-five year resident of Greenwich Village. I am known as a food critic and food writer. I've done travel writing and, previously, design and architecture, and interior design. I live in a brownstone, in the West Village, where I have been—2020 will be fifty-five years in the same house, which my husband and I bought when our son was seven. And my husband died—in 2020 will be six years ago—and I have just stayed in the house because it's big, and I've collected so much junk, I can't think of [laughing] packing up and moving, so the junk and I stay here. It's pretty good junk. [laughter]

Dziedzic: Yes, I'm noticing more and more—

Sheraton: They're all things from travels that I went on. Travel, and food stories. Food is a great handle by which to pick up another culture, and I've been very fortunate in that, meeting people all over the world, going to obscure as well as well-known places in search of something special to eat. But I've never thought of living anyplace else in Manhattan, or other than Greenwich Village, and I've never thought of living anyplace other than Manhattan once I got here, after growing up in Brooklyn.

Dziedzic: Well, let's hear a little bit more about growing up in Brooklyn. Tell me about the neighborhood where you grew up.

Sheraton: I grew up in the Midwood section of Flatbush. We lived in a house. I went to PS 193, now known as the Gil Hodges School. I went to Midwood High School, and then I went to New York University. And that's what got me to the Village. I got there at eighteen. I cut a lot of classes to poke around the Village, mostly around Third and Fourth Street, and Bleecker, and all of those, which was very different then.

I had a very quiet, nice time in Brooklyn. My father, Joseph Solomon, was a wholesale fruit and produce commission merchant in Washington Market, down here, which is now known as Tribeca. So food was always a big subject in the family, and my mother, Beatrice, was a very good and ambitious cook. So there was lots of talk about food, lots of criticism at the table, and lots of going to restaurants, local places in Brooklyn and special places in Manhattan. And I had a younger brother who died about ten years ago, and that was the family.

Dziedzic: Can you tell me more about the restaurants that you remember going to when you were young?

Sheraton: Yes, we went to one of the most famous then in Brooklyn, called Lundy's, which was a seafood restaurant in Sheepshead Bay. Originally, when I went, and I know I was very young because I can remember them having to get telephone books to pile on the seat so I could reach the table. So I must have been three or four. But in those days, before it moved to its final resting place, on Emmons Avenue, it was built out on a pier, right into Sheepshead Bay. And it was a very grand thing to go there for what was called a Shore Dinner on Sundays. They had famous huckleberry pie, and so on.

Then we went to a lot of little Cantonese restaurants that were in all of the Brooklyn neighborhoods. We went to New York style Kosher delis—hot dogs, pastrami—there were a lot of those around, and for special occasions, my parents came into what we called “the City,” and as I got a little older, brought me with them, to places like the Lobster, which was in the Times Square area, and Fan and Bill's, which was a very famous steakhouse also on the edge of the Theater District. And so we did a lot of eating in restaurants, which I liked to do very much because I could get dressed up, and I could eat what I wanted, not what my mother made, necessarily. [00:04:57]

Dziedzic: And so, how did the Depression impact your family and what you were eating?

Sheraton: Fortunately, the Depression did not impact my family very badly. It did a number of other family members. Some of my mother's family was very hard put. We were pretty good. I don't remember the Depression; I suppose it made it a little difficult on my father's business, but I was never aware that we were in danger. In fact, what I do remember is when I was little, and I would come with them into the city for dinner, we would drive back—we drove to Brooklyn.

And as we went across the Bowery, to get to the bridges, we could see bread lines. My father would say, “That’s people who don’t have enough to eat,” in the bread lines there. And of course, I heard a lot about it, and read a lot about it, and knew that some of my relatives were impacted, lost their jobs, had to go to other cities to take whatever job they could get, you know. But we were sort of middle-middle, and we were ok. At that time, my father made a very good salary for that time, and there was no income tax. So—

Dziedzic: That’s right.

Sheraton: We had to make choices. Like, should we repaint the front of the house, or get a new car? You know? But that’s not a terrible choice for the time of the Depression. My mother always had cleaning help in the house, sometimes full time, sometimes every morning, or twice a week, but there was always help for that. And, as I say, I could hear my parents having to make choices. “Oh, we need a car. I’ll get a new fur coat next year.” Something like that. But heard a lot.

Also, what was beginning to boil at that time was all of the labor movements. And we lived next door to a family that had one semi-grown daughter—then, she looked ancient to me. I guess now she was about twenty. [Dziedzic laughs] But she was a rabid Communist, and she had a boyfriend who was an even more rabid Communist, and they used to picket stores in favor of the union. And there used to be a store on the edge of the Village, a big department store called Hearn’s. It was on Fourteenth Street. I’m not sure of the avenue, whether it was Seventh—but they had big labor problems. And I can always remember Beattie—that was her name, Beattie Dressner—going down to picket Hearn’s. So I kind of heard that.

The other cause celebre was the Spanish Civil War. This Bea Dressner—and I was little kid—had me saving tin foil. What they did was they saved tin foil from all sorts of things because it was in on the wrappings of cigarettes and chewing gum and so on, and they made great big balls of it, and it was supposed to go to the Loyalists to be made into bullets. So I can remember being a very little kid and saving, mostly from chewing gum wrappers—I can tell you how to do it! The foil was lined with wax paper and you had to separate the wax paper from the foil, and you did that by folding it into many, many little units so that it would loosen the wax paper, and you could peel it off. So that’s my memory of the Spanish Civil War!

The other was the championing of Haile Selassie, when Italy took over Ethiopia. That was another great cause. Then, the big momentous thing in 1939 was the New York World's Fair, where the subject was The World of Tomorrow, and many foreign countries had pavilions that began to close as their countries were invaded by Germany. The French pavilion, the Polish pavilion, and so on. So those memories are, are very, very big. From a quiet little tree-lined neighborhood, which I went back to on my ninetieth birthday. And it looks—except for the colors of the houses and things—it looks just about the same. This is not chic, smart Brooklyn. It's not, you know, Gowanus or Red Hook or Bushwick. [laughing] The people who live there have never heard of those places, I bet.

Midwood High is still there, and I've gone back and done some special seminars for English as a Second Language studies [ESL/ELL, English Language Learners], having them write about food in the cafeteria, or other food. [00:10:16] Those were the subjects with which they used English. And I did that for two years, in a series of seminars. Because I really loved Midwood and was happy to have a late-life connection with it. And one of the kids wrote a thank you note: "We always appreciate the elderly coming to speak to us." [laughs] That was about eight years ago! They ought to see me now! You think elderly? Well! [laughter]

But the lure, to me, was always "the City," which is what everybody in Brooklyn called Manhattan. And it was the IRT—the subway—and we had to take a trolley to the subway. That was, to me, where everything was happening, and I thought, why don't I just live there? Why am I always coming back to Brooklyn to change my clothes? And then when I graduated from Midwood and went to NYU, it brought me to the Village.

I think I had had one Village experience before that because when I was in high school, I had a part-time job at a department store in Brooklyn, a very big one called Abraham & Straus, on Fulton Street. And I worked with another salesperson there, who had a husband, and through him, a brother-in-law, and they were all in service and were coming home on leave, and she got me a blind date. And we came to the Village, and we came to a transvestite—I was, you know, I knew vaguely about it—a transvestite club called the Howdy Club on West Third Street. It was later closed by Mayor LaGuardia, when he closed all such places. But for a few minutes, I didn't understand what I was seeing, but then I began to get it. And the Howdy Club later became Eddie Condon's, which was one of the biggest jazz clubs in the Village. And by that time, I was living in an apartment house at 71 Washington Square South, now the site of the NYU Bobst

Library. And the bedroom windows faced south over Third Street, and on summer nights when the windows were open—because there was very little air conditioning in homes then—you could hear some of the music from Eddie Condon’s coming up, and I would think, “That’s the Howdy Club.” [laughs] And sometimes we just went to Eddie Condon’s, but it was nice, too. So that’s really old, old Village. I think he later moved to 52nd Street, which became the street of jazz clubs.

Dziedzic: Can you talk a little bit more about deciding to go to NYU, and what it was like to have a reason to be in the city—

Sheraton: And have a what?

Dziedzic: A reason to be in the city all the time? How did you end up getting out of Brooklyn?

Sheraton: Well, I had hoped to go out of town to college. I wasn’t totally driven, but I wanted to. But my parents were very old-fashioned, and were putting up barriers, which I knew then, and know now, I could have knocked down. But I wasn’t that sure myself. I just knew I was not going to go to Brooklyn College because it was right next door to Midwood, which is now known as Midwood High School at Brooklyn College. They have sort of an association. So and of course that was free, and NYU was considered expensive. It was, I believe, \$7.50 a point when I started. Eventually, by the time I graduated, it was \$9—it had soared to \$9! So, NYU was the logical choice.

Once I got down here, I was in the Village, and looked around. And then in 1945, I had a boyfriend who had been in the Air Force, and he came home, and we eloped. I was nineteen. We went to Greenwich, Connecticut because the age of consent in New York at that time was twenty-one. But the age of consent in Connecticut was eighteen. So we went up there and got married, and then called my mother, and so on. That was the end of my sophomore year. My parents, of course, wanted me to continue college, and I wanted to, but I didn’t want them to have to pay for all my living expenses, and so on. They could pay for college. So I switched to night school, and I finished my junior and senior year, at night, at NYU. [00:15:00] Which made it, not only that I wanted to, but sensible to live in the Village, cause I was close to NYU, and the classes went until 10 o’clock at night, and so I could walk home.

The first place I lived was 7 East Ninth Street, between Fifth and University—but much closer to Fifth—in a one-room basement apartment in a brownstone. It’s now a floor-through, and I think it’s been made into a duplex because every once in a while I look in the window. [laughter] And I could see—first I could see it was a floor-through, and then I saw it advertised as a duplex. So that’s what they eventually did to that building.

World War II had just been over when I eloped. It was like two weeks after V-J Day. And apartments in New York were impossible to find! There had been no building during the war because all the materials went to the war effort, and people used to get the *New York Times*—the *Sunday Times* came out on Saturday night and people would go to the obituary section, see who died, and if there was an address or a phone number, call and see what was going to happen to the apartment.

So my then husband, Bill Sheraton—which is where the Sheraton came from—and I, just started walking the streets looking for an apartment. It was a hot, hot day, and finally, we had to have a sandwich and a cold drink. We went to another iconic Village place, which was just around the corner from there, called Ed Winston’s Tropical Bar and Grill, which I had known from NYU because it’s where the students went to drink beer and so on on Friday night. And this was an afternoon weekday. It wasn’t very crowded. It was cool—I don’t know if it was fans or air conditioning. We ordered a sandwich and a drink, and then we said to the bartender, “You know any empty apartments?” He said, “Well, Old Man Sittinham [phonetic] [?] on Ninth Street has one.” We said, “Hold our food, we’ll be back.” We ran out, we found Old Man Sittinham, who lived on 5 East Ninth, and we got the apartment.

It was, for then, very expensive. It was sixty-five dollars a month, furnished, but the furniture was terrible—every chair you moved, the sawdust came out on the floor. Through the years—we lived there six years—we replaced pieces, but we always had to pay for the furnished apartment. My father thought I was insane, sixty-five dollars a month. He said, “Pretty soon they’ll be throwing apartments at you.” I have never been hit by an apartment in Greenwich Village [laughter] since then. And, you know, the usual story of a basement apartment: people knocked on the window, if your window was open people dropped things in. But it was an elegant—and still is an elegant—part of the Village.

And 24 Fifth Avenue was the Fifth Avenue Hotel. The same building is there, but it’s condos. They had, in summer, a wonderful sidewalk café, with meals. They had a great barroom

called the Amen Corner, and those were very popular literary places and so on. And then, on Sunday, what was wonderful then, was to go to Washington Square Park and sit around the circle, especially if the fountain was not on. Everybody would bring the Sunday paper, and people would bring sketchpads, and folk singers, including the very famous Susan Reed, with her long copper hair, would sing, and people would make speeches.¹

The Village then had, as I look back on it, a rather dreamy, sort of a peaceful, dreamy atmosphere. You know, the war was just over and everybody was drawing breath. And I think the Village was—it still was a little bit sleepy. Eighth Street was kind of quiet on Sunday morning, and Eleanor Roosevelt lived just in one of the big houses on the park, and several times when, if we went out for the Sunday paper, she would be out there getting a paper, and walking Fala. And e.e. cummings was around, he lived at Patchin Place, and you would see him and W.H. Auden. You could see those people.

Then there was a victory parade for the end of World War II, and part of the staging area was Washington Square. I think it was tanks. And I sat on the steps of 11 Fifth Avenue, that was the Brevoort Hotel. And there was a brownstone and the plaque that was on the brownstone is still on the side of the big building, the house where Mark Twain wrote something. [00:20:17] And I sat on those steps, and I watched the staging area for the parade, the tanks and the people getting ready to march up Fifth Avenue, and I guess at other staging areas, people just filtered in and joined the parade. So that was the feeling of the Village.

It was known to be very arty, of course, and you knew all the famous people who lived here. You also knew a lot of people were gay who lived here, and the gays, if they weren't being secret about it, were very flamboyant. I can still remember an open car, what we called a roadster, with a back open seat, and a very beautiful gay young man with blonde hair was looking in a mirror putting on lipstick. Those who were out were really blatant.

I wrote a piece for the *New York Times*—I know this is an interview, but there's a lot of stuff in it—about my fifty years in Greenwich Village. I walked with a map on every street and avenue of Greenwich Village twice. My husband made a map for me, and I redlined it as I did each street. And I said in it, when I told my parents I was moving to Greenwich Village, my

¹ I remember volunteering for Henry A. Wallace, going around the Village raising funds for his campaign. He was the presidential nominee of the Progressive Party in the 1948 election and the first candidate I ever voted for.

father said, “So you want to be a bohemian?” But my mother didn’t like it because she felt there were mixed marriages, by which she meant black and white; fairies, which was the kind name then for gays; and Communists, and that was the worst. She wasn’t too upset about the others, but Communists because they didn’t believe in god. I mean, we were Jewish—my maiden name is Solomon, Miriam Solomon. Mimi is always the nickname for Miriam, so that’s how I got that. They were moderately religious, but the thing about Communists was that they didn’t believe in God. So she was a little upset.

But nobody really—especially the part of the Village I moved into, which was sort of elegant, with the Fifth Avenue Hotel. Oh, and One Fifth Avenue was a hotel, and they had the Number One Bar, where Otto is now. And that was a choice, stylish place to go. Then, on Ninth Street and University Place, a very famous hotel, the Lafayette, which had a very expensive French restaurant. I was always interested in restaurants, but I couldn’t afford some of those places, even then. I made forty dollars a week, and even though a meal was two dollars and fifty cents, I went to a lot of those restaurants and I ordered the chopped steak, which was the cheapest thing on the menu. I never understood what anybody saw in those restaurants! But that’s because I was eating chopped steak! [laughs] I had more of a meal at each of those places eventually, but that was a very fancy part of the Village then.

Dziedzic: Did you want to be a Bohemian? [laughs]

Sheraton: Did I want to be what?

Dziedzic: A Bohemian like your dad accused—

Sheraton: [Laughs] I don’t know if you want to be; you either are or you aren’t. I was not very bohemian! As I said in the *New York Times*, more bourgeois than bohemian, going from tenant to landlord, and writing, and so on. So I wasn’t, really. We were just relaxed kids. Never bizarre. The other thing we loved was singing carols under the arch on Christmas Eve. We always had, right from the beginning, company on Christmas Eve. We would break for the arch, and then come back and have meatballs and spaghetti. That was [laughs]—

Dziedzic: That sounds really nice!

Sheraton: Yes. We would wait to buy a Christmas tree until very late on Christmas Eve because they went down to one or two dollars for a tree, if you waited that late. Because nobody was going to buy a tree on Christmas Day. So, all those little things. Then in '48, I think, there was a huge blizzard. [00:25:00] And because we were in this basement apartment, where the windows were right on the street, woke up and the windows were totally covered. You couldn't see out, it was like this thick white.

Dziedzic: Wow. Now, you mentioned you were making forty dollars a week—what was the work that you were doing?

Sheraton: Well, when I switched to night school, and I was studying advertising and journalism, it was announced in one of the advertising classes that at the Advertising Club of New York, which I think was 35th Street and Park, that there was going to be a job-finding forum. So I was going to be a copywriter, advertising. So I went to that, and I got a job right there. The man who interviewed had a company, and he, for whatever reason, picked me out. So I began writing copy for an ad agency—it was known as a matte service—that serviced small retail operations all over the country that could not do their own ads. Each month they would send us requirements. They gave me jewelry stores and furniture stores to do. The jewelry stores would say, “We want a birthstone ad, we want a wedding silver, we want—” I would write the copy, and then they had many illustrations on mattes. Mattes were like pressed pink paper, embossed with the picture. They were plates for printing that would go out to the advertiser with the illustration and the copy, and they could put it in the local newspaper.

So in the daytime I worked writing copy for jewelry stores and furniture stores, and four nights a week, from six to ten, I went to school. They were very good at the agency. They liked me, they gave me raises. My last year there, I asked to have the summer off because I wanted to go to day school, and make up time and graduate with my class. They were willing, and that's what I did. And I graduated, and worked for them another year or so. Then I wanted to do other things, so I left. And because I had written copy for home furnishing stores, I was hired at *Good Housekeeping* magazine as a home furnishings copywriter. And I liked that so much that I wanted to be a home furnishings editor. I liked room settings.

So I went at night, for a year, to the New York School of Interior Decorating, now known as the New York School of Interior Design. I was certified as a decorator and got a job at

Seventeen magazine—I didn’t want to decorate, I wanted to write about it—and I got a job at *Seventeen* as the home furnishings editor. And I did home furnishings and more and more furniture design. I became the managing editor of *House Beautiful* supplement division, and for the first almost ten years pursued home furnishings, which had a lot of travel in it, especially to Scandinavia. Scandinavian design was very big.

But what I pursued on my own time was food. Food markets, restaurants. I brought back cookbooks in languages I couldn’t read, and food was like the hobby. At *Seventeen*, I shared an office with the food editor, and it had a test kitchen. So I used to splash around in that with her, and when she left, the editor said, “Why don’t you do that too? It’s not so much on *Seventeen*, we don’t do—” So that got me into food editing and writing as well. Then I freelanced for twenty years before I began to have more permanent—

By the way, one of the places that I first critiqued restaurants was the original *Village Voice*, which had just started then, and it was very lively, and feisty, and very Village-y. I remember doing a review of the Coach House, shortly before Thanksgiving, and his business was so huge that Thanksgiving that he had to find out through the magazine where he could send flowers. Leon Leonides was his name—very much belongs in Village history. He sent me the biggest yellow chrysanthemums I have ever seen—magnificent!—from a florist that has been there since I moved in, although it may have changed ownership. It’s on the southeast corner of Tenth and University Place. That has always been a florist, since I was here. [00:30:00] One of the few. The other was, there’s a liquor store a few doors away from that on the same side, that has always been there, too.

Dziedzic: So what was the landscape of food writing like when you first started doing that for *Seventeen*? What were people writing about, and what was *Seventeen* covering?

Sheraton: Well, they were writing about cooking and recipes. In the area I was, no one was doing restaurant criticism, which didn’t really begin till a good deal later, till Craig Claiborne went to the *New York Times*, and that was about—I don’t know, you can look it up, but ‘55, ‘56, something like that [1957]. By the time I did it for the *Village Voice*, I did mostly Village restaurants for the *Village Voice*.

Dziedzic: And you were reviewing them, doing restaurant criticism.

Sheraton: Yes, anonymous, and reviewing them. There were some that had been here for a long time. There was a wonderful one called Rocco's on Thompson Street that's now Carbone, and then it was Gran Ticino, which was northern Italian. And Eddie's Aurora on Third, near Macdougall, where a bottle of Soave Bolla was ninety-five cents, and linguine with clam sauce was ninety-five cents. Across the street was a charming restaurant called Mother Bertolotti's. It's now, I think, called Volare, or something—that's always been Italian. There's a restaurant where there has always been a restaurant, partly because the plumbing and the gas are in, and they can get a permit for the location.

When I went to NYU in the day, before I was married and living down here, I had several friends from Brooklyn who also went to NYU, and we would arrange one night class a week so we could have dinner in the Village. That's the first time I ever went to Sea Fare of the Aegean, on Eighth Street, which was a very important restaurant in New York. He—Chris Bastis—went on to have many more, and finally to have a very great one on 56th Street between Fifth and Sixth. So there was a lot of interesting places to review. Charles French restaurant, on Sixth Avenue between Tenth and Eleventh, was very, very fancy. The one that's always been here is Gene's, on Eleventh Street between Fifth and Sixth; I think that opened in 1919.

The war was just over, in a way, and people were getting back to things. People traveled, the guys came back from the war, they knew foreign dishes. You suddenly heard about gazpacho. Pizza suddenly went into all neighborhoods—I never heard of pizza growing up in Brooklyn. It was in Italian neighborhoods, but suddenly everyone had pizza. All of this travel, and war experiences, and you could begin to import things again. We had rationing during World War II, and it lasted, at least, I think my first year or two in the Village. I had to get stamps for meat, and flour, and sugar, and shoes—anything made of leather, which fostered a whole industry of fabric shoes because if the shoes were made from fabric, you could buy them, but leather was for the war effort.

The first time I started shopping for food, at a high service Gristedes on University between Ninth and Tenth, it was a custom store. You didn't do anything yourself. You said, "I want oranges," the clerk went and got the oranges. You want carrots, he went and got the carrots and you waited at the counter. Very expensive, Gristedes, in those days. But I had to show stamps. Chicken was not rationed, fish was not, but meat was. And butter. Butter! The butter saw the beginning use of margarine. Margarine came in a sealed plastic bag that had a capsule of red

coloring in it, and if you wanted to, as the margarine softened, you could press it, break the capsule, and keep squishing around until the margarine was tinted—I never did that, I opened the bag and what did I care if it was red or white. [Dziedzic laughs] [00:34:59] But I remember that, nineteen years old, married, working at night, going to school, I had to deal with rationing. I had to go someplace and get rationing books. I don't even remember where I went, but I had to get them.

And, you know, in the Village—maybe all over—you couldn't get a private line for your phone. You had to have a party line because no wiring had been done. About a year later, that was over. The other difficulty in the Village was at that time it only had DC current. Direct current. It didn't have alternating current. And there were many appliances you could not use on DC without having a converter. I think it was anything that moved. I don't think it was just heating things, it had something to do with moving things. And you had to have a converter. Then, as they could, after the war they finally made the whole Village AC.

Dziedzic: The whole neighborhood was wired that way?

Sheraton: Yes. And of course the Village, then, used to have some very special, wonderful little food places. There were a couple of very excellent French pastry places. One place that was known for very fine French and imported cheeses was called Gatti & Ruggieri. It was on Sixth Avenue near Eighth or Ninth, something like that. They were more artisanal. The Village was considered, by many people—and me—as close to Paris as you can get, so that was the look and the feeling for me, and young friends there. We lived as Parisian as we could, without even knowing what that meant—except listening to a lot to Edith Piaf. [laughter]

Dziedzic: And eating the pastry!

Sheraton: Eating the pastries, and eating Brie, and going to a French restaurant if we could afford it. And, if you wanted to cook, being very serious about your equipment. There was a place—there are still vestiges of it, 666 Sixth Avenue—known as the Bazar Français, and all of that is still up on the building. That's where you went for your cookware if you were a serious person. There was a dirt floor. They were importers, but the ground floor was a retail store. And I bought—I can show you—I still have the original lettuce basket, which is a wire basket, which is when you wash the lettuce, you put it in, and you shake it back and forth until all the water is

gone. And the only place I could do that in this one-room basement apartment was over the bathtub. [Dziedzic laughs] And I did! Because I really wanted to do it the French way. [laughter] But that was a very, very big famous place. All the signs are still up on the building. I may be the only person in New York, by now, who remembers what it ever was, or meant to us. [laughter]

Dziedzic: Wow. And who has a lettuce basket!

Sheraton: Too. I still have that lettuce basket.

Dziedzic: Wow! What was it like working in the magazine industry at that time?

Sheraton: You mean by the time I got to *Seventeen*. That was—when did I get to *Seventeen*? Let's see. I got married, then I worked two years—it was '49. It was a whole new world to me. I didn't even read that magazine. But it opened up a whole new way of life because it was very arty, and it was full of young people who dressed in—then the look was dirndl skirts and Capezio ballet slippers. That's what the art department wore, and the underlings. The editors, of which I was, wore suits and wore hats in the office. I did not wear a hat in the office. I said very early on, "I'm going to develop a hat-less chic," [laughter] and I did. I did! Because I noticed, when I went to an industry luncheon or something, there were a couple of really smart-looking women that didn't wear hats, and I thought, that's going to be me because I looked good in hats—I could wear them—but I thought, oh, god, it's so hot, and you have to be careful how you move your head [laughter], so I didn't wear hats.

And the clothing—Lord & Taylor, which closed, made me so sad. I was thinking of writing something about this for the *Daily Beast*, for whom I write now and then. [00:40:00] Lord & Taylor was our goal. The American clothing designers were very much—Claire McCardell and Ann Fogarty, and all those. So Lord & Taylor was where you saved money for, or you followed something until it went on sale and then bought it. Of course, what else was down in the Village, for a good part of my early years, was John Wanamaker's. On Ninth and Eighth and Broadway. Part of it is where Stewart House was, and then another block down, Wanamaker's had two buildings. So you bought a lot of stuff—mostly home stuff—at Wanamaker's, and then that had a huge fire and went out of business. Stewart House—I don't know if anybody knows it now—is named after a man named A.T. Stewart, who had his own department store on that site, that was later sold to John Wanamaker.

Dziedzic: Were you also working with women editors at *Seventeen*?

Sheraton: All of the magazines I worked on, for the most part, had women—powerful women—editors. In fact, there were many powerful women in jobs. Lord & Taylor was Dorothy Shaver. Bonwit Teller, very fancy store, was Mildred Custin. All of the magazine editors in the women's field were women, and tough women, who went around to the owners of the publications and sold them on the idea of doing this. So in the fields I aspired to at that time, it didn't seem that being a woman was a handicap. But that was a particular sector. And those were the magazines that dealt with the problems that were a women's province anyway. I mean, if I did home furnishings and food, the wife stays home and fixes the house and cooks. So it wasn't like a sports magazine.

When I was at Midwood, I went once—I was a big baseball fan, still am—and some Dodgers came to visit when the Midwood team was playing in Ebbets Field. And I grabbed a notebook, and Pee Wee Reese and Pete Reiser, two big stars, were there, and I got down on the field and I interviewed them. I went home to the editor of the school newspaper, and he said, "Girls don't write about sports." He says, "Girls write about food." So that's what I did. [laughs]

Dziedzic: You could have been a great sports writer, but [laughs]—

Sheraton: [Laughs] So, you know, Elizabeth Gordon invented *House Beautiful*, and sold it to William Randolph Hearst—went to see Hearst in his castle. Helen Valentine created *Seventeen* and sold the idea to Walter Annenberg. *Harper's Bazaar* and *Vogue* had women editors. A couple of the home furnishings magazines had men editors. But—the tops of the companies, the publishers and owners—those were all men. The corporate people were all men.

Dziedzic: Can you talk about deciding to work as a freelancer? How that happened?

Sheraton: Well, after *House Beautiful*, I had had a divorce, and then married Richard Falcone. I was really tired of—it was the supplement division of *House Beautiful*, that did special magazines, and I really didn't like it. I really didn't like the people I worked for. At that time I had a friend, she was a well-known editor at *Cue*. *Cue* was a weekly, like *Time Out*. And she knew I loved food and restaurants, and they were looking for a restaurant critic. And she said to the editor, I have this friend, Mimi Sheraton, blah blah. I got the job, but they thought my name

sounded fake, so they gave me the name of Martha Martin. And for the first two years there, I reviewed restaurants for *Cue* as Martha Martin. Then I came out and used my name.

By that time, I was remarried, and finally became pregnant, and thought this restaurant reviewing, with a new baby—I couldn't go out every night—so I began to truly freelance.

[00:44:54] *Cue* started me on the freelance because I was just restaurant reviewing for them. I wrote freelance for *Town and Country*, and a magazine called *Coronet*, which was sort of like *Reader's Digest*, and I did a lot of different things. But for twenty years, I freelanced.

Eventually—though it's considered freelance—on a contract to *New York Magazine*. So I was a regular in *New York Magazine*, but I wasn't an employee. I wasn't on staff. After doing that for about six years, the *Times* called and asked me to come over, and that's how I did that.

Dziedzic: When did you start working at *New York Magazine*?

Sheraton: Well, I started with the *Times* in December '75, and I had been at *New York Magazine*, I would say, about six years before that, so '71, '70 I began. It was about two years old when I began working for it. I didn't do much on restaurants. I did food stories, but not restaurants.

Dziedzic: And what was *New York Magazine* like at the time? Since it was fairly new?

Sheraton: Not so different from what it is now. It's a model that has worked, and lasted very well—it had been started by two editors who had been on the Sunday magazine section of the *New York Herald Tribune*, Clay Felker and Milton Glaser. And they bought the title *New York Magazine* from the *Herald Tribune*. And it was iconoclastic, it was muckraking, it was very big on politics and scandals and so on, and restaurant reviews. And I think the model has held very well.

Dziedzic: I think you had described it as being edgier, or seeming edgier, at least, compared to the *Times*.

Sheraton: Yes. It was! Gael Greene was the restaurant critic. I did a lot of food stories, but I also did a story on Gucci as being the rudest store in New York. And I got to interview Aldo Gucci, and among the things he said was, "I tell my staff, we must be nice to everyone, even the Japanese, who are not very attractive. But they are our best customers." Well, at *New York*

Magazine, that would be a take at “the Japanese are not very attractive.” And then I did a piece at a time when McDonald’s was trying to come to New York—there was no McDonald’s—and it was a cover story called “The Burger That’s Eating New York.” Pros and cons, but mostly cons, and they were sued [laughing] but settled. That’s what it was. You could make people mad.

Dziedzic: And can you talk about going to the *New York Times*, and what that process was like?

Sheraton: Well, it was strange because when Craig Claiborne left as restaurant critic, I applied for the job. And I couldn’t even get an interview. I couldn’t find one woman, no matter how qualified, who was interviewed. The word was out through one of their editors that they thought it should be a man, primarily because Craig Claiborne was a man, and maybe it had a certain kind of chic. And I wrote them a lot of nasty letters, in which the personnel man said, “Well, I can see by the tone of your letter that you will never be material for the *New York Times*.” Boy, did I shove that at him when they called me after five or six years at *New York Magazine*. They called me! And I wasn’t sure I wanted to go because I was so happy at *New York Magazine*, but you really had to go. It a lot more money, and, so, I did. But by that time, Gael Greene had been a woman critic for quite a number of years, but it was the first woman at the *Times*.

Dziedzic: Yes. I know you’re known for your very thorough research methods—

Sheraton: Eating everything. [laughter]

Dziedzic: And I wondered if going to the *Times* changed your methods at all. [00:49:55]

Sheraton: No, I could be even more thorough because they had an almost unlimited budget for me to go as many times as I wanted to. They also at that point realized they had to make people mad. And I not only did restaurant reviews, I did food stories for the food section, and a lot of those were uncovering fakes. Like I once did a story, “Is it Really Red Snapper?” How do you know if it’s red snapper, not garden snapper or white snapper. Or how do you know if you’re being cheated when you buy caviar. I did a lot of those kind of stories. And they were very fine about that because it got attention; that’s what they wanted.

Food became a hotter and hotter topic. Now, they spend an enormous amount of money because it must be one of the big pulls for the paper, which is of course struggling. I mean, they are even financing a full-time California critic—that’s an enormous expense. And *The New*

Yorker, for the first time in its history, I think, two years ago, has a restaurant critic! They never did that before. They would have some kind of cultural story on food now and then, but it was not a regular thing. But they realized it's what people want. And now, with all of the ethnic implications, and equality questions expressed through food, it's become a very rich topic for all kinds of journalism and reporting, cultural and so on.

Dziedzic: Can you describe a little bit more what a *New Yorker's* attitude towards food and restaurants were during the time that you were at the *New York Times*?

Sheraton: Well, in the first three or four years, '76, '77, to '80, one of the biggest focuses in food was cooking at home authentically. People bought Cuisinarts. For the first time, people wanted restaurant ranges at home. They had to make their own pasta, they had to stuff their own sausage, and they had to have ice cream makers. I covered, one year, all of the cooking classes being given in New York. There were, I think, eighty-eight that I went to. Everybody, even some of the teachers were only one class ahead in a class they were taking. It was a fever! To cook at home.

Then suddenly, in the early '80s, interest began to go to restaurants. I envisioned kitchens that looked like a deserted mining town in Colorado, [laughing] with tumbleweed coming down—because now everybody's eating out. Eating late became more fashionable. Kids would go home, work out, get dressed, and go to a restaurant at eight, nine o'clock. That was beginning to trend then. And authenticity was the word because now people were traveling more, and we had food on television. We began to have Julia Child, and Chinese, and so people became more aware.

Also, one of the hugest changes in the Village, and all over, were the things you could get in a vegetable store. When I moved into the Village, it was almost the year of the first Balducci's, which was then—there's a pizza restaurant there now—on that stretch between Christopher and Sixth Avenue where Eighth becomes Greenwich. That was the first Balducci's store. And until that, you didn't see six kinds of lettuce, or four kinds of mushrooms anywhere, and so all of these things became available, and that was great to write about. Dean & DeLuca opened while I was at the *New York Times* and they brought in cheeses and all kinds of things that no one had ever heard of. So there was a lot of good copy around, and a lot of interest in buying those things because of the food writing, and publicity, and television, and cooking, and

the news of restaurants. There was sort of a fever about it, which still continues. I had lunch with Giorgio DeLuca last week. We talked about the first Dean and DeLuca, and it was the day it was announced that they were auctioning off everything in the closed store in Soho.

Dziedzic: Wow.

Sheraton: You're going to have to excuse me for a few minutes.

Dziedzic: Oh, sure.

END OF FILE A, BEGINNING OF FILE B

Sheraton: One of the biggest changes in the Village now is the different kind of people moving in, who are not—basically, in my opinion, or anybody else's opinion—Villagers. They're very rich people, who have country houses that they go to on the weekend, and they don't shop in the Village. It's changing the demographics. The whole row of them behind me on Bank Street, they build roof gardens and put in hot tubs. There's one next to me digging out the basement to make more underground rooms. But they don't stay—I mean, Villagers who are fortunate enough to have a house go out with a cup of coffee and the paper and read in their garden—they don't go to the Hamptons for the summer.

Of course, the increase in real estate value has been just amazing. And from the moment that I moved in—even before I moved in, I always wanted to live in a brownstone—the only time I didn't was when I lived at 71 Washington Square South, which was an apartment house. But from the one-room basement, and then after that we had a floor-through in the brownstone next to The John Adams. A floor-through was a big goal. Then we bought this house, so we had a brownstone. My second husband worked, in the beginning, at Gimbels, so he could walk to work. My son still lives in the Village. My son, Marc Falcone, was raised here; he went to First Presbyterian Nursery School, and he went to Grace Church School. And then for high school he went to Horace Mann. He lives very near here with his family. He just never wanted to leave the Village. He liked it so much.

Dziedzic: I can understand. [laughs]

Sheraton: Yes.

Dziedzic: Can you tell me about moving to this house?

Sheraton: We moved to this big house. We bought it—by the time the sale actually went through and we signed all the papers, I think we had ninety dollars left in the bank. [laughs] It sounds ridiculous now that it was sixty-eight thousand dollars, but we didn't have sixty-eight thousand dollars. [laughs] We had to have a mortgage and borrow money for the down payment, but it obviously paid off. And I've always had a tenant. We always rented the floor below to a tenant. And we lived on three floors.

Dziedzic: I see.

Sheraton: It was a lot of house when our son left and went to school in Chicago, and then had his own apartment, and now it's just me. But it's just too hard to move. It's been a great pleasure, but owning a house has certain problems too, and you have to call people to fix things, and it's very hard to get things delivered if you're not home all the time. And now, in this age of online delivery—it's touch and go for all the deliveries. But the local stores are great on delivering, and that's not a problem. I buy almost everything by phone—D'Agostino, Citarella, Florence Meat Market, which is a Village story. That's a historic butcher shop that's been forever on Jones Street between Third and Bleecker.

SIDE CONVERSATION

Sheraton: I still love the Village. It's changed a lot, but in many ways it's relatively what it was. If I'm in a cab and come down Seventh Avenue and I pull into Eleventh Street, I sort of exhale. The houses are human scale, there are trees all down Fifth Avenue, and I see the arch and so on. I still love it, as much as I did when I moved in, in spite of the changes.

Dziedzic: And, how did you decide on this house? What was the street like when you were looking for houses?

Sheraton: It was just about like this with one really big exception for us: what is now the condo across the street was a garage. So there was a lot of action: the cars coming and going in the morning, and trucks going in. Then it was converted into a very expensive condo, so that was good for the neighborhood. There's still a rather seamy part down at the end of this block, this

way, some old, old houses that are rooming houses. I guess the owner won't sell. I guess nobody can make them do anything. [00:04:55]

As you know, it's heavily landmarked, so if you buy a house, and you want to do anything to the exterior, you really have a job on your hands because getting approval is very difficult—as I think it should be—of a change of plan. I think the people who are redoing next door wanted to make some change to the windows, and they weren't allowed to do it. You can do almost anything you want inside, as long as it meets the building code. But the facades and part of the back have landmark status, and they can dictate the color of the paint you can have on trim, and a lot of people don't like to have their houses landmarked because it makes it more difficult to sell. There's a big battle now, as you know, that Andrew [Berman] has been involved with around the landmark status of the Strand Bookstore building.² And so it has pros and cons depending on who you are.

But when you live in houses like this, with a lot of people around who have been here a long time, there's a very nice communal feeling. You know your neighbors, you help each other, you trade names and workers. I even know the sanitation man, the post office—it is a village. Our great loss, and we all fought it—my husband was very active in it—was Equinox gym, on our corner. It was a movie house, the Greenwich Theater, and it was a duplex, so we had two movies we could go to see without crossing a street. And that went. When we moved in, there was a very big movie theater on the island where the new gay park is [New York City AIDS Memorial]. It was the Loew's Sheridan. And that was a big movie house, and that went.

More recently, in the past five years, we have lost an awful lot of pleasantly serviceable restaurants, Greek coffee shops, good places where the neighborhood could go two or three times a week. Not dirt cheap, but not impossible, with very nice food on a night when you didn't feel like cooking. That's gone! Everything trendy has moved in because the restaurants that did what I call “pleasantly serviceable” couldn't charge enough for that level of cooking to meet the expenses they have to meet now. You're going to a place where dinner for two was forty-five dollars, and suddenly it's seventy-five, and you say, “Here? Seventy-five dollars? I could be someplace!” And we lost at least five, within this area, in the past six years.

² See for reference “The Strand Bookstore Is Now A City Landmark, And The Owner Hates It,” published by Elizabeth Kim on *The Gothamist* (June 11, 2019)

Dziedzic: And what are those restaurants that you're thinking of?

Sheraton: The Village Den, which is now called the New Village Den, and they do kale bowls. Good [Restaurant], which is now nothing. It was Nightingale for about six months, and they closed and went out—they made it look like Las Vegas. Wallflower, which was a wine bar with very good food just across the street. Marienetta Pizzeria, which went out a long time, which is now Don Angie. A lot like that. And other stores too. Dry cleaning stores, things like that. I'm beginning to take it personally because everything I use is discontinued. [laughter] Now, my lipstick color, my bra, and the shoes that I'm most comfortable in are all [laughing] discontinued. And I think there's a message in that.

Dziedzic: Oh, no! [laughter]

Sheraton: And, of course, we miss Saint Vincent's hospital. Had a lot of occasion to use the emergency room. So that was a great loss. I hear that this facility has been very good for a lot of people who have used it, what do they call—

Dziedzic: I think it's Lenox House, maybe?

Sheraton: North Shore Lenox Hill [Northwell Lenox Health], yes. Some neighbors have used it and thought it was good. We've lost lot of nice little shops, there used to be a wonderful gift shop, of the most unusual things, on Greenwich Avenue. I never knew how to pronounce it, but it was something like "mix plix," M-X-Y [the shop was named Mxyplyzyk]. They said the new people coming in just don't shop there. They moved out and there's only been pop-up shops to replace them. Nothing big or major has replaced them at all. [00:10:04] Of course, the new people moving in just don't shop here necessarily.

There used to be a very good butcher shop, Walter's, on the corner of Jane and Greenwich. Gone for years. There's not enough people to support it, so it's changing. But as I say, it's still—relatively to the city—I mean, maybe parts of Brooklyn have become more like what Greenwich Village was because of the artists moving in, but I don't see the stylishness moving in. The mix in Greenwich Village was always, I think, a feeling of the high style, or the elegance along lower Fifth Avenue, and then the more bohemian part south of the park. Bleeker Street, all those little bars, little things, and it was a very interesting mix. Now it's all much more corporate than it used to be.

But I guess when you're as old as I am, and you've been here as long, you still keep seeing it a lot of the way it was. It still appeals to me. I don't see any other part of the city I'd rather live in. I've always said, if I weren't going to live here, I would live around Lincoln Center because there are a lot of theaters and movies, and a lot of things to do. But I've never seen a part of the city I would rather—and we've looked! When my second husband and I were looking for a larger apartment—because we were living in the two and a half room at 71 Washington Square—we went to upper Fifth Avenue, and saw great big apartments, for very reasonable sums, and then we would come back here and say, “You know, if we get out of the Village, we're never going to get back.” We just looked around at the neighborhood, and came back here, and paid much more money for much less space, by that time.

There are also, what I like, there are people in the streets at night, and people in the streets, and I like that. When I look at the fancy part of upper Fifth Avenue, it always looks as though the plague went through. I mean, at night there is nobody! [Dziedzic laughs] And here, Greenwich Avenue, the restaurants at the foot of the street bring traffic, and I like to see people.

Dziedzic: Are you a night owl?

Sheraton: No. Not really. I mean, out to dinner, but I'm a very early morning person. I was down here at 6:15 this morning making coffee. [laughs]

Dziedzic: You beat me by an hour and a half. [laughs]

Sheraton: I have very nice tenants now, an Australian couple, and they're very, very nice. We've had wonderful tenants. Our first tenant was Bruce McCall, who writes humorous pieces, and has done, I think, seventy-five *New Yorker* covers. He's an artist and a writer. He was our first tenant, and he's remained a friend through life. And he was here eight years. So we've had very interesting people. The people who take the apartment downstairs have to be a little arty, a little romantic.

Dziedzic: [Laughs] It seeps up through the floor, right? I wanted to talk a little bit about when you were at the *New York Times*, and as you've written, in disguise, eating out, almost every night—

Sheraton: Every night. 1983, my last full year, we had dinner home five times, in the entire year. And those were Christmas, New Year's, Easter, Passover seder, my husband's birthday. Mothers' Day! We didn't go out for Mothers' Day because that's the most crowded day of the year, and it's impossible in restaurants. But always, Saturday, Sunday. I always went out on Saturday night to see how those people would be treated because Saturday night is when a restaurant would be likely to get what they call the bridge and tunnel crowd, and those were the people who were most likely to get short shrift, and to whom it means the most to spring for a dinner at a big restaurant. So I was always interested in seeing what it was going to be like.

I had disguises that consisted of three different wigs, and a lot of pairs of eyeglasses. I had a friend in the eyeglass business who gave me six frames with plain glass in them, because I didn't need glasses. [00:15:00] And that was the extent. I didn't dress up. And of course, my husband wouldn't go in disguise, and sometimes he would be recognized. I never made a reservation in my own name. If I thought they might know me, the friends we ate with—we usually ate with four people—would arrive first to get the table, so they wouldn't see it was me and give us the best table in the house. So every once in a while, I would forget the name in which we made the reservation—that would happen. And it was very embarrassing to have on a wig and glasses, and have someone say, "Good evening, Miss Sheraton." [laughter] You know, as time went on. And I loved it. I loved doing it, I loved being secret.

Dziedzic: Did you innovate that strategy of having your friends come in first—

Sheraton: Well, Craig Claiborne never wanted to be seen. He never wanted to be known. And of course he never made the reservation in his own name. But he didn't wear disguises. I think Ruth Reichl has made a big thing about dressing and wearing costumes—that was long after me, and I didn't do that. And I don't even believe that she did that. But I did do the wigs, three different kinds.

Dziedzic: And what about having your friends go first, and always eating with about four people?

Sheraton: I had some friends go first, especially to the original Four Seasons because when I was freelancing, and wasn't a critic, I had done some work on the creation of the Four Seasons. So I knew they would know me, so I said to them, "You go first and order an appetizer, and

we'll be a little bit late.” We came in just as they were about to be served smoked salmon from a cart. The captain saw me approaching the table, and realized I was joining them. That cart went away, and the all-cut-up piece they were about to serve was replaced with an absolutely fresh piece of salmon.

They used to have dessert carts—for dessert they would wheel over a wagon with all kinds of cake. If the cakes were all cut open, if it was a late dinner, they would take out the wagon and put out all fresh whole cakes on if they saw me and knew me. A lot of little things like that. And they used to have photographs of me in the kitchen, and I can remember reviewing one restaurant called Hungaria, and we had very bad seats near the kitchen door, and every time the kitchen door swung open, my husband saw my picture on the wall. And nobody recognized me because they didn't connect me that picture, that person. Had the owner been there, he probably would have, but the staff is so busy getting food in and out that it never occurred to them. So not only was it a terrible table, but it had the advantage [laughing] of being able to see my photograph on the wall.

Dziedzic: Can you talk a little bit more about the Four Seasons? The consulting that you did for the Four Seasons restaurant.

Sheraton: Yes, it was during my research period. I had left *Cue*, and I had done some writing for *Town and Country* and other magazines. Restaurant Associates was the company, and they were beginning to do research to create the Four Seasons. They had several people, food writers and things, who could help with research on certain kinds of foods and ideas, and I was one of those people. I remember what they wanted very much was information on all sorts of seasonal food expressions in countries around the world, like if there was a rice festival in Indonesia. More and more cultural things behind the seasonal story of food. So I did a lot of that research. I also found recipes for all kinds of expressions of that. And I also helped with some of the menu writing. We would just all sit around and make up a menu, and so on.

One of the things that was most delightful was the dry runs, the rehearsals of the food. [00:20:02] At that time, Restaurant Associates had a restaurant in the Hotel Lexington called the Hawaiian Room, and in the banquet room of that, we did testing of all of the Four Seasons dishes. We went through, every day, cold appetizers, hot appetizers, soup, cold dishes—thirty-five dishes a day. For about four weeks. I was at most of those sessions. And nobody learned as

much from my research as I did. For me, it was a huge learning experience because I could bring in anything that seemed to fit the theme and they would try it, and then I would know about it.

Although I had already been a critic for *Cue* and the *Village Voice*, I really learned to be a critic during that experience because I began to see that everything that goes into a restaurant is a choice that the management makes: are the forks good, will the steak knives really cut the steak, how is the salt and pepper going to be presented? Because that was that kind of company at that time. The man at the head of it at that time, Joseph Baum, was like the Cecil B. DeMille of restaurateurs. It took us ten days—two weeks, something like that—to choose the kind of pepper we were going to put on the table. And it was just fabulous for me. Then being told I had to come to the dry runs and bring friends before it was open, where they tried things; we were there every day, eating, and it was just a wonderful experience.

When the new group took it over, Major Food Group, they had me on a retainer for about a year and a half because they were originally going to try to reference the old Four Seasons. I thought that was a very big mistake, and ultimately they did not, except in a few dishes that no one will recognize who didn't really know. But they've done a very good job. They are also the people who took over Rocco's, which was our favorite restaurant down here—it's now called Carbone—but they have still, I think in neon, the Rocco's sign still shows underneath. So they tried to pin it to some reference to the past.

Then, in 1960, I produced a book called *City Portraits*, and it was a guide to sixty cities all over the world. Not just food, but a complete travel guide. And for various reasons, SAS [Scandinavian Airlines] asked me to do that book. I had been working for Restaurant Associates—so I needed cash to do it because SAS would take me all over, but they weren't going to pay for the hotels and the food. And I did a research project for Restaurant Associates on the food in every country I went to: how they serve it, what the ingredients were, good ideas that we could use. It was a huge thing. I started in Denmark because it was SAS. Then I went to Russia for two weeks.

At that time, SAS was flying the polar route to Tokyo, and I was on that flight and we had two engines go out and landed in Greenland and stayed there for two days. And then I came back through Japan, and all through Southeast Asia—you couldn't go to China then—Hong Kong, Thailand, Vietnam, Indonesia, India. I went all through the Middle East: Egypt, Jordan, Istanbul, Lebanon. And writing the report for Restaurant Associates.

In that time I did four articles for *Mademoiselle* magazine, which was a very big on travel. I did it on four of the cities I was going to be in. I bought samples of folk art for Georg Jensen, to whom I had done some consulting on a bridal registry because one of the magazines of which I was managing editor at *House Beautiful* was called *Guide for the Bride*, so I had a lot of contacts with people who made wedding cakes and wedding gowns. And Hallmark had just opened a shop with a gallery on the corner of 56th and Fifth, where Abercrombie & Fitch is, and the lower level was going to be cultural exhibits, that's what Joyce Hall wanted.

The first one was the Art of the Wedding, and I met the director at a party, and he said, "You must know people who do this. Come do the show for us." And I did, after that, many, many shows for them. I was there for about five years. [00:24:59] And I did some products for the Hallmark line, and some consulting on food establishments in Crown Center, which was a very lush shopping center in Kansas City that Hallmark was building just then. I had a lot of connection with that. But the traveling for *City Portraits*, I was gone for four months, and went all over that part of the world, and did all of these different things, which took me into interesting avenues. I mean, I look around this room, and everything came from someplace. Vienna, Paris, Florence, Havana, Japan, Egypt! You know? That's all India. [laughs]

Dziedzic: Yes. And all the copper pots in your kitchen? [laughs]

Sheraton: Well, they're all French, but it was part of what my husband had in his showroom.

Dziedzic: I see.

Sheraton: When he closed the showroom, it was so expensive to pack those and send them back to France that I said, "Why don't you ask them what it would cost just to buy it?" I have more upstairs. We hung it up, I don't think I've used a third of it. [laughter]

Dziedzic: That just seems like an incredible amount of travel, especially for that time.

Sheraton: Yes. Alone!

Dziedzic: Right! Was anybody doing anything comparable to this?

Sheraton: Well, people would travel. Craig Claiborne went to someplace and did a story. I mean, you went someplace for a story, but that kind of vast thing was—

Then I had another turn—didn't take as much time—but the first issue of the *Condé Nast Traveler*. When I left the *Times*, I had a contract with *Time* magazine to write about food. And with *Vanity Fair*. The *Vanity Fair* thing only lasted a year because editors changed, and the new editor, Tina Brown, didn't care about food. But Tina Brown's husband was Harry Evans, and he at that time was the head of the *Condé Nast Traveler*. He said, "Why don't you come to us? You can travel and write about food." For the first issue, he asked me to travel around the world business class, on as many airlines as I could, but every leg had to be a major meal. So I went on eleven different airlines in about two and a half weeks, and I stopped in a few places to do a story for them because I said, "This is very expensive for you, and if I spend a few days in Singapore, and a few days there, you'll get other stories out of it." So that's what we did. And that was a wonderful trip too. I got to Australia, and I had not been there before. Some of the places I had been to before. So I've had good fortune with a lot of that.

Then, when I went to *Time*, Henry Grunwald, who was the head of all of the *Time-Life* magazines, had been to China and had terrible food, and said, "We're going to send Mimi to China and find out why the food is not good." [Dziedzic laughs] So for four weeks, with my own interpreter, three weeks in mainland China and about four or five days in Taiwan, and a couple in Hong Kong. That's about the third time I had been to Hong Kong. I've had great trips, and I usually have tried for trips. The man I worked for, who was the head of the Hallmark Gallery, once said to me, "You're a person who seems to be doing one thing, but you're really doing something else." [laughing] And he was right! I was really thinking of a way to get to here or there or some part of the world, and have someone else pay for it. [laughs] I was very good at that. [laughs]

Dziedzic: It seems like a lot of what you were doing—food is an entry point to understand culture more broadly, so a lot of what you've done is really almost like a folk study, folk life study.

Sheraton: Yes. My last book and latest book came out in 2015, called *1,000 Foods to Eat Before You Die*, and that has food from all over the world. All parts, ordinary and bizarre, all based on things that I have had traveling, and touching on the cultures. Because it is very true that you make friends, people trust you, when you're talking about food. You want to know what they grew up with, you want to know how this is done, and you marvel at it all. It's a very positive

kind of feeling. And it is marvelous because of the different approaches and the different ways of dealing with the local difficulties. [00:30:04] I mean, Chinese food, which to me is the world's greatest cuisine, is stunning to anyone who knows anything about cooking. I know a lot of professional chefs who feel the way they do things and the things they use are so ingenious. All built out of necessity, cleverness, a long history, and many different borders. Because it's such a big country bordering so many places, there are other influences that come into various parts of the country. It's all grouped as Chinese. The only problem is you can't find all of it here very well done. You find some. But when you go to China, it's a whole new world of food, and its production, and products.

Dziedzic: All the trips that you've taken were astounding for me to learn about.

Sheraton: Also, you get to parts of cities you wouldn't get to otherwise. I remember going to a restaurant, one in Rome, and one in Tel Aviv, where, the one in Tel Aviv was in the middle of the whole area of auto body shops. Just a broken down car with this great, great seafood restaurant. Or in Rome, the area that was all the wholesale butchers, Testaccio. So you get to places that you probably wouldn't go if you were on a vacation trip.

I have often thought people should pursue some contact with people in their own careers in almost any other profession, and yet I have friends who say, "Oh, no, I don't want to have any part of that when I'm on vacation!" And I know you're missing out because you meet other people on a common ground, whether it's food or medicine or law—go to the courts, see how they do—it's like you have a common area and against that you measure your differences. Why do they do that this way? Why do we do?—I have so many correspondence friendships with people in all parts of the world because we made friends over food. On 9/11 [September 11, 2001], I had calls from Israel, and Japan, and Paris, and Argentina, all kinds of people worried about us because we're downtown. But it all started with this common interest in food. I'm sure there are other areas. I'm sure law, medicine, gardening, that kind of thing—and yet people say, "Oh, it's my vacation. I don't want to hear about that." [laughter]

Dziedzic: Well, I guess you have to eat on every vacation, but you don't necessarily have to care for a patient, or something like that, so—

Sheraton: Right. Yes, I learned that early on. When I was at *Seventeen*, there was a point where I decided that I had to see Europe. I had never been to Europe. It was 1953, and I was prepared to quit. I wanted to take a three-month trip with my first husband through many, many countries in Europe, sampling. I went into the editor, and I was prepared to quit. It was '53, and I started in '49, so I had been there, and I said, "I want three months, my husband and I are going to drive through Europe." And she said, "Well, if you will visit the advertisers in your field who are in Europe—" because I was doing home furnishings and tableware. Girls who read *Seventeen* in those days—outside of the Coasts—had hope chests. They would collect sterling silver, and pick china patterns, and they didn't even have a man, but they were picking their bed sheets. And we had a lot of china manufacturers in England, a few in Denmark, and Limoges. So she said, "If you will call on those advertisers—see what they're doing, make nice, you're an editor—we'll pay you half pay for the whole three months." Well, we had saved for two years for this trip, and suddenly this bonus! And so that's what I did.

The places I remembered the most, where I had the best time, was where I visited these people, who then said, "Let us take you to lunch." "Let us take you to dinner." "Be sure you go to see this." Things that would not have happened if I were just a tourist. Once seeing that—and also because I was working on most of the trips—that was the way I pursued it. But that was '53, and we went to England, and Denmark, and all through France and Italy and Germany, and Spain. And I really learned a lot that I used ever since. [00:35:08]

Dziedzic: Do you always travel with a guide in the countries that you're in?

Sheraton: You mean a person?

Dziedzic: Yes, to show you places to eat that aren't necessarily the tourist places.

Sheraton: Yes, not quite professional guides but people I meet. They'll say, "I have this little—" That's what I live for because it's a native thing. We went to Limoges, we went to Haviland, he took us to a workingman's café for lunch where I saw marvelous, marvelous things, and would not have gone alone. Of course, if it's a restaurant story, I read the foreign publications, or what they're saying about places. You go to the Tour D'Argent, you know those names. But the little ones you get from the neighbors, or the people you work with and so on.

Dziedzic: Are there any restaurant critics now that you kind of pay attention?

Sheraton: I pay attention to all of them and sort of put it together. I read some of those online—New York Eater and Grubstreet, mostly. Of course, Pete Wells at the *Times*. Ryan Sutton, who is, I think, New York Eater. Adam Platt in *New York Magazine*, and his stuff is on Grubstreet. I kind of read all of them. There's a now restaurant reviews in *The New Yorker*. What I do not read, and what I do not care about, are the consumer-driven reviews. Yelp, Open Table, Rezzies, Zagat, I place absolutely no confidence or credence to any of those. The only thing useful about Zagat is addresses. If you want to know what's in the neighborhood, say, around Madison Square Garden, then you can look up in Zagat and see, and then you can decide if there's any you've ever heard of or want to go. But other, I certainly don't trust the opinions.

Dziedzic: And you talked a little bit about this before, when you were coming back down the stairs, about how the Village has changed, and the restaurants that have changed, and I want to ask about what you think is important to be a good Village resident.

Sheraton: You mean why is it good to live in the Village, or how can you be a good Villager?

Dziedzic: How can you be a good Villager?

Sheraton: Boy, that's tough, I don't know anymore! It has to be in your blood. I guess you have to be of a certain age to know the reputation of the Village, which a lot of young people might not even know—you know, the glories of the '20s and '30s and '10s and so on. I think you have to like things that are a little unusual. You have to not want the restrained formal elegance of the Upper East Side, with the empty streets. You might not be happy with the hoi polloi activity of the Upper West Side. I prefer the Upper West Side to the Upper East Side. Or the really closed-off privacy of Gramercy Park. I suppose if you move in now and you want a feeling about it, you have to believe the legend. Because there are still writers and painters and everyone living down here, but they're not struggling artists. Unless they're sharing an apartment or something like that. It's a state of mind, I think.

Dziedzic: That seems like it's based in history, too.

Sheraton: Yes! And of course now, as far as restaurants, there's more activity in terms of new restaurants downtown than uptown. I have a lot of friends on the Upper East Side who would

say, when I was reviewing, “Can’t you find anything to review up here? Nothing new is here. Everything up here is corny!”

Dziedzic: And then I just want to ask, as we’re coming to an end here, if there’s anything that—I mean, we’ve touched on so few pieces of your life in just two hours, but—

Sheraton: It’s a long one! [00:39:58] I’ll be ninety-four in February, so. My seventy-five years in the Village, and my ninety-four—cause I moved in at nineteen.

Dziedzic: Maybe we can look at your life as a lesson for how to be a good Villager, in a way.

Sheraton: Well, I don’t know that people should try to act in a way other than they are. I have some friends who live on the Upper East Side or the Upper West Side who would not be happy down here, I think. They like a lot of what they have up there. I think if you’re a real Villager, you want to live in a brownstone. I really do. Whether you get a floor-through, which can be a very large apartment, or buy a house, or have a house—what’s happening now is these new people who move in know the legend of the Village, but they’re not going to live in the Village way. Harvey Weinstein was across the garden—he didn’t live like a Villager but he had to have a house in the Village. He was across the way from the Waverly Inn, and he knew Graydon Carter, who now sold his house and doesn’t live there anymore—though he lives on 11th and Fifth, so he stayed down here.

SIDE CONVERSATION

Sheraton: My son, he wouldn’t live anyplace else. Grace Church, First Pres, and when he was at Horace Mann, his friends, would give him orders like “Buy me this poster or that poster,” because he lived in a place where all the stores were open at night. Village hours, that was another thing. Things opened at noon, and stay open till nine.

I think I’m going to have to call it, too. We can do more by phone or any other way, if you think you need it, but—

Dziedzic: Ok! All right, thank you.

END OF RECORDING