

ELSIE  
*Fetterman*  
SHARES *her*  
SECRETS  
TO  
*Youth*  
& MORE

INTERVIEW BY MUSIA KAPLAN



**MK: HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE  
YOUR CHILDHOOD IN AMERICA  
DURING THE GREAT DEPRESSION?**

**EF:** I was born in the small town of Danielson, Connecticut, in 1927. My parents, Nathan and Dora Blumenthal, owned a hardware store which was more like an old-fashioned general store. We did not fare badly after the stock market crash of 1929, as my family had not invested in stocks and sometimes we bartered for food with the local farmers.

When my mother was nine months pregnant with me, she was still climbing up and down the rickety ladder in the store. One fine day, while perched on the top rung of the ladder to reach a product, she turned to the clerk and said calmly, "Please finish helping our customer." After the clerk finished with the customer, Dora told him, "I'm having this baby." There was no time to make it to the hospital, and I was born at home.

By the time I was seven years old, I had been helping out in the store for a few years and was supremely proud of my vast hardware knowledge. My parents paid me a dollar a week—a fortune at the time!

A man once walked in carrying a briefcase and asked if I worked in the store.

"Yes! How may I help you?" I responded proudly.

My father saw me talking and started yelling at me in a language I didn't speak—Yiddish. Although I couldn't understand his words, I perceived his message perfectly, and ran away. The man with the briefcase was a labor inspector! Thankfully, he never returned.

Another time, I decided I wanted a bicycle. My parents had a couple hundred bicycles in the back of their store. When I asked my father, he said, "You can buy a bicycle



The wedding of Elsie's parents, Nathan and Dora Blumenthal, 1924.



The Blumenthal children, 1944 (L-R): Meyer, Bernie, Miriam, Elsie, Morty, and Harold.

## 'DAD, YOU'RE GOING TO CHARGE YOUR OWN DAUGHTER?'

and pay it off in a time-payment book. I'll subtract a dollar from your pay for 39 weeks until it's covered."

"Dad, you're going to charge your own daughter?" I asked.

"See those lights? Feel that heat? Everything costs money."

I made a face, so my father made another offer. If I did not want to give my whole salary (I was earning \$1 per week), I could give just half of it every week, and then it would take 78 weeks for me to get the bike.

So I paid a dollar a week for 39 weeks, and only then was I given the bike. And I kept that precious bicycle until I got married.

## WHAT WAS IT LIKE BEING JEWISH IN DANIELSON IN THE 1930S?

**EF:** My parents were third-generation Jewish Americans from Norwich, Connecticut. In 1924, they were the first Jewish family to move to Danielson. My mother kept a strictly kosher kitchen. She had separate bars of soap, red and blue, for washing the dishes. She ordered kosher





Elsie (Blumenthal) Fetterman High School Graduation, 1945.



The wedding of Elsie and Irving Fetterman, 1950.

meat from Hertz Brothers in nearby Norwich. It would arrive by bus and we would pick it up at the bus station.

My parents set a fine example for what Jews are and how Jews behave. They were known in the community as honest, kind, and generous people who treated everyone, Jew and gentile alike, with respect.

As a young woman, I managed the accounts for their hardware store. One day, I went to my father and told him about a certain woman in the neighborhood who hadn't paid her bill. My father told me, "That lady came to me and told me that she is thinking about the bill but her husband is sick and she needs more time. My motto is that if the customer is worrying about the bill, then I don't have to worry. It

is the customer who owes and does not call who I have to worry about." With that attitude, my parents made many friends.

One time, my mother, Dora Blumenthal, noticed the boy who delivered newspapers was doing so on foot and it took a very long time and the bag was very heavy. So my mother said to him, "Wouldn't it be better to do this job on a bike?"

"Yes, it certainly would, but I don't have money to buy a bike!"

"You look like a person who is trustworthy, so we could help you out with that. We'll give you the bike now. We'll give you a booklet of time payments, and you pay \$1.00 per week until the booklet is empty and the bike is paid for. How does that sound?"

He was very excited by the idea. "I can do that?" he asked. My mother assured him that he could. This happened with adults too. My mother would see a customer admiring an appliance, and she would offer that customer the same deal. Of course, when it came to deciding to whom to offer credit, she chose carefully.

About 12 years ago, at my high school reunion, a man named Fred Comtois remembered this story and shared it with me. The newspaper delivery boy had been his brother, and he never forgot how he had been given the bike on trust, and had paid it off, week by week.

Now you might be wondering, why was the newspaper delivery boy given the bike on credit, and then allowed to pay it off, whereas I, their daughter Elsie, had to first make all the payments and only then receive the bike? That's an excellent question. My daughter Vita says, "The message here is to be lenient with others, but strict with yourself."

My parents' generosity paved the way for the Holocaust survivors who moved to Danielson after WWII. Over 40 Jewish refugee families arrived in the Danielson area between 1948 and 1952, and they received a warm welcome from the gentile community, simply because my parents had made them feel friendly and grateful toward Jews.

As the Jewish population of our town grew, my parents led the initiative to build Danielson's first synagogue, Temple Beth Israel. Before opening the synagogue, we would host High Holiday services and *minyanim* for *Kaddish* in our



*Mrs. Lyndon B. Johnson poses with the recipients of AHEA Fellowships and International Scholarships who shared the stage with her on International Night at the 1964 annual meeting. Left to right are Mrs. Margaret D. Simko, Reiko Shimonaka, Mrs. Johnson, Mrs. Elsie Fetterman, and Bok Cha Yoon. The story below lists AHEA fellowship awardees; turn to page 513 for International Scholarship awardees. Wide World Photo.*

## 1964-65 AHEA Fellowship Awards

Against a background of United Nations' flags ranged across the stage at Ford Auditorium in Detroit on Wednesday, June 24, Mrs. Florence W. Low, AHEA president, announced the names of 11 winners of AHEA fellowship awards. It seems quite in accord with today's thinking on home economics continued education that all but three of the recipients are working-for-wages or advanced-study-students who are mothers of from one to four children ranging in age from tots to late teens. Seven awardees received AHEA-VRA Fellowships in Rehabilitation, the total grant for which was doubled in this, the second year rehabilitation traineeships have been administered by the American Home Economics Association. One other AHEA-VRA fellowship was extended into a second year.

First Lady Mrs. Lyndon B. Johnson poses with the recipients of AHEA Fellowships, 1964. Mrs. Johnson is third from left. Elsie Fetterman is fourth from left.

own home. Services started at 7:00 a.m. so that the businesspeople could

get to their stores by 8:00 a.m. My job as a child was to go door to door to our Jewish neighbors and wake them up to join the *minyan*.

Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur were the only days of the year that my parents closed their store. I was not allowed to go to school on those days, which ruined my perfect attendance.

Nowadays, there are "excused absences" but that didn't exist then. I begged my father to go to the school board and explain the reason for my absences, but he didn't want to make waves.

Here I am at 97—still upset about those unexcused absences.

I was the first president of The





The Fetterman family, 1967, at David's bar mitzvah. Back row (L-R): Elsie, David, Vita, and Irving. Front row (L-R): Judy and Roy. The women in this picture made these blue dresses themselves.

Sisterhood of Temple Beth Israel—I'm the only founder still living, and still on the board, today. We established a Hebrew School, led by Rabbi Yisroel Gordon as a visiting (then still single) rabbi from Worcester, MA. The Lubavitcher Rebbe sent him to us. We hosted community events and sent out a monthly newsletter with a list of birthdays, anniversaries, get-well notices, and a recipe of the month. In the 1950s, we produced the first *Temple Beth Israel Kosher Cookbook*. This past Chanukah, we held a celebration for rededicating the Temple building, after completing some much-needed repairs. In addition, my daughter Vita Goldstein spearheaded the rededication of the old Temple Beth Israel cookbooks, introducing *Recipes Revival*, a new kosher cookbook which can be ordered online. Google "Temple

Beth Israel Preservation Society Cookbook." [Check out the recipe section in this magazine for recipes from *Recipes Revival*.]

### HOW DID YOU MEET YOUR HUSBAND?

**EF:** My parents only permitted me to date Jewish boys. When I was 14, an Italian boy from my school gave me a box of chocolates. My father said, "You give them back to him!"

"Dad, I'm only 14. What do you think is going to happen?"

"It starts with a box of chocolates, then you'll go to the movies, and then you'll marry him," my father responded. He had a niece who had married an Italian. So I gave back the box of chocolates.

I wanted to attend my senior prom in high school, but there were no Jewish boys around. So



Rabbi Yisroel Gordon as a *bachur* in Danielson, CT. He was *mekarev* the Kranz family and convinced (and helped) Yankel Kranz to leave home and go to yeshivah. He was also *mekarev* the Shatzman family and convinced (and helped) Brana Shaina (later to become Deitsch) to leave home and go to Bais Rivkah. On the left is Ben Goldstein. On the right is Ben's father, Meyer Goldstein, who had just donated a *sefer Torah* to Temple Beth Israel.



Elsie with her children in 2022, celebrating Elsie's 95th birthday. L-R: Judy, David, and Vita. Elsie is seated.

## I DECIDED RIGHT THEN AND THERE, I DID NOT WANT TO TAKE SECOND PLACE TO A COW!

I invited Bernie Polinsky—the only Jewish boy I knew. He lived on a dairy farm 15 miles away. On the night of the prom, Bernie was running very late. Why was he late? The cow had a calf! Maybe the cow got first place that night (and also in the 4-H County Fair), but I decided right then and there, I did not want to take second place to a cow!

Several years later, a group walked into the hardware shop while I was working behind the counter. It was a family from Long Island who had just bought a farm in Brooklyn, Connecticut, to escape the hustle and bustle of the city.

When I asked what they needed, they all said, “Ask Irving.”

Irving Fetterman, a member of



Elsie with two of her granddaughters, Bethami (Goldstein) Gold (L) and Robyn Engel.

that family, knew exactly what they needed, in what quantities, and what brand. Our relationship took off from there. My father said, “I sent my two daughters to college and where did they meet their husbands? In my hardware store.”

I feel incredibly fortunate to have lived most of my life with my wonderful husband Irving by my side. My mother died suddenly in 1948, when my younger brothers were ages seven, 12, and 15. My father could not take over the household; he did not even know where the socks were! So Irving agreed to move into my parents’ nine-room house with my three younger brothers and help me raise them. I was 22 and he was 26, but we took on all the responsibilities of the household. My father continued to run the store, and passed away at the age of 92, in 1986.

Irving and I had four children: Vita, David, Roy, and Judy. Irving supported me in all of my roles as a mother, wife, student, teacher, and policymaker. In the 1950s, he was way ahead of his time. He used to say, “Where did G-d write down that men should do this and women should do that?” He believed men should help at



## REFLECTIONS

# VITA (FETTERMAN) GOLDSTEIN

### VITA IS N'SHEI CHABAD NEWSLETTER'S HARD-WORKING AND DEVOTED DISTRIBUTOR IN ERETZ YISROEL

Although not religious in the traditional sense, my mother, Elsie (Elka) Fetterman embodies Jewish values which she learned from her parents. Here are 10 valuable lessons I learned from her:

**1. HACHNASAS ORCHIM:** Our door was always open to guests. In the past, my mother kept the doors unlocked in case anyone needed a place to stay.

**2. FRUGALITY:** "Be an educated consumer" and "don't buy it if you can't pay for it" were her mantras.

**3. TZEDAKAH:** She volunteered her time to teach others how to improve themselves with vocational education and job training. The Rambam taught that empowering someone to make their own livelihood is the highest form of *tzedakah*. My mother personified that teaching. (Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day; teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime.)

**4. CHINUCH:** "An education is something no one can take away from you."

**5. MASHPIA:** She turned to her personal mentors at every pivotal moment. She had three "*mashpia*" figures in her life.

**6. HEALTH:** She never smoked or drank liquor. She exercised her entire life and continues to take fitness and diet seriously until this day.

**7. HAMAASEH HU HA'IKAR:** "Don't waste time talking about it—do it!"

**8. HUMILITY:** She never flaunted her success. When she got her PhD, she did not want her students to call her "Doctor" because she felt that would distance them from her. Due to a shortage of space at the high school she worked in, she asked the custodian if she could share his closet for "office space."

**9. SIMCHAH:** While there is a natural tendency to focus on what we do not have, my mother's attitude always was: "My glass is overflowing!"

**10. COMMUNITY OUTREACH:** Like a *shlucha*, she devoted her entire life to reaching out and uplifting the people around her, and even now stays immersed in community activities.

**IN SUMMARY:** My mother is an all-around good citizen and she makes a *kiddush Hashem* wherever she goes.



**WHEN I TURNED  
90, MY DAUGHTER  
JUDY INSISTED  
I GO SEE A  
GERONTOLOGIST,  
A CARDIOLOGIST,  
AND AN  
AUDIOLOGIST.  
EACH ONE ASKED  
ME, “WHY ARE  
YOU HERE?”**

home in every way they could. I used to get nervous when he was driving the car because he had a hard time staying focused on the road. Finally, I said, “Just let me drive!” He said, “No problem.” People would tease him that his wife does the driving and he would say, “I love it.”

When I earned my Master’s Degree in Education from the University of Connecticut, I took a Miller Analogy Test (a graduate school admissions test) and scored the highest in the history of the university. My professor, Dr. Philo Pritzkau, encouraged me to continue schooling to earn my PhD. “That’s impossible,” I said. “I have four children and a full-time job!”

But when I discussed it with Irving, he said, “If you want to do this, then I want you to do this.” I went to school for three nights a week for seven years to earn my PhD in education. I graduated with honors and won

the American Home Economics Association (AHEA) Fellowship Award in 1964. This award was presented to me by Lady Bird Johnson, the wife of President Lyndon B. Johnson.

In my acceptance speech, I said truthfully: “I could never have done this without my husband.”

**BESIDES YOUR  
HUSBAND, DID YOU  
HAVE ANY MENTORS  
THROUGHOUT  
YOUR LIFE?**

**EF:** Absolutely. My father’s sister, my aunt Mary (Miriam), empowered me to follow my passion and study the field of education. She advocated on my behalf to my parents when they wanted me to study business. Ruth Cowles, an administrator in the State Department of Education in Connecticut, also encouraged me in my studies and always took a personal interest in my life. Both of these women helped fill the void created by my mother’s death by giving me a lot of love and support. I used to take them out on Mother’s Day in appreciation. My third mentor, who I mentioned earlier, was my professor Dr. Philo Pritzkau. I remember sometimes going to his office to discuss my dissertation and bringing all my kids along. Dr. Pritzkau didn’t seem to mind when they sat on the floor and colored with crayons. His belief in me helped me believe in myself.

**CAN YOU TELL US  
MORE ABOUT YOUR  
PASSION FOR  
EDUCATION?**

**EF:** The focus of my doctorate was putting a wage-earning emphasis on education for high school students. Kids need to learn how to make a

living! I interviewed hundreds of employers to find out what criteria they were looking for in employees and started seven programs in public high schools to bring those necessary skills to students. I especially wanted young women to learn how to earn money from home so they could have the option of staying home with their children, even if they needed to earn money. I was also the city supervisor of all the home economics teachers in the city of Windham, CT.

After 17 years teaching high school students, I was invited to bring the curriculum I had developed to the University of Connecticut and take a management position there. At first, I turned it down. “I don’t have a degree in management; I only know education development,” I said.

They told me, “If you somehow managed to have a full-time job and raise four children and get a PhD with honors, you can be in management.”

I still wasn’t convinced. But then a dear friend who I worked with at the time told me, “If you don’t take the position in the university I’ll never be given the position of supervisor here.” That’s the only reason I accepted the job.

In the 1960s, I was active in the university, I wrote papers, and I was appointed by two Connecticut governors to be head of the Consumer Education Council. I was involved on a national level in making policies that would protect consumers (such as limiting credit card spending and debt) and hosted a TV show for ten years called *Speaking for the Consumer*.

**WOW! HOW DID YOU  
JUGGLE ALL THAT WITH  
YOUR ROLE AT HOME?**

**EF:** My parenting philosophy is: Delegate, delegate, delegate. It’s impossible to be everything for



Elsie with her personal trainer, 2023.

everyone all the time and feel good about it. Mothers, allow your children and spouse to take on additional responsibilities. I never minded having more children because I knew my husband and kids would always do all the laundry! (My husband owned a laundromat, so we never had a washing machine at home. Irving would take all the laundry to the store and take care of it there.)

### YOU'RE ONE SPUNKY LADY. WHAT'S YOUR SECRET TO STAYING VIBRANT AND YOUTHFUL?

**EF:** First of all, I was blessed by G-d with good genes and believe that every day is a gift that deserves a *Shehechiyanu*.

Second, my family keeps me young. One year ago, for my 96th birthday,

my older daughter, Vita, flew from Israel with my granddaughter, Bethami. Another granddaughter, Robyn, drove in from Pittsburgh. Vita prepared a fantastic salmon meal and invited 12 of my Mahjong friends to celebrate the occasion. We got mani-pedis, went on a boat ride, and just had a good time together. I tell you, if that doesn't energize a person, what does?

Third, I have always kept physically healthy with diet and exercise.

My mother was overweight and passed away young due to kidney failure. Due to

her health issues, I became very disciplined about my health and was a lifelong member of Weight Watchers and Diet Center. I don't eat sugar, bread, or beef, instead centering my meals around vegetables, with salmon or white chicken for protein.

Finally, I have tried to maintain a positive attitude towards life and find the good in every situation. I lost my son Roy when he was 28 years old. He died in a motorcycle accident. I remind myself, "I had eight more years with my son than I had with my mother." I am just thankful for the years that I did have with him.

When I turned 90, my daughter Judy insisted I go see a gerontologist, a cardiologist, and an audiologist. Each one asked me, "Why are you here?" My response was, "My daughter sent me." The gerontologist said I should take Vitamin B12 and go to

Pilates. So I take my vitamins and signed up for a Pilates class. When the instructor met me, he asked, "Do you have all your original parts?"

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"Have you had hip replacement surgery or anything else I should know about?" I told him that other than a partial denture, all my body parts are the originals.

Thank G-d, I can still drive and go dancing every month. I have a personal trainer who comes to my house twice a week. I never want to move into a nursing home, so I have made the small property next to my house wheelchair-accessible. If I ever need to, I can move in there, but for now I rent it to college students. Every time I pull into my driveway, they run up to the car and carry in my groceries. Being surrounded by young people also keeps me young.

### HOW DO YOU APPLY YOUR POSITIVITY TO THE CURRENT STATE OF THE WORLD?

**EF:** When I see Hamas holding babies hostage, I can't help but wonder what direction the world is going. But then I look at a small town like Danielson. I mentioned before how we rededicated Temple Beth Israel and launched the *Recipes Revival* cookbook in December of 2023. On the day of the launch, it was pouring rain and we were worried that nobody would show up. Instead, over 100 people arrived at Temple Beth Israel and squeezed through the doors. There were dozens of gentiles in the group, who just wanted to show us their support—especially after October 7th. This event warmed my heart. At the end of the day, there are good people in the world. The good people are the silent majority. They just need to speak up. 🌟

# RECIPES

## MASHED POTATOES WITH A CRUST

(also called Twice Baked Potato)

*Elsie Fetterman, Dora Blumenthal*

**Yield:** Serves 8 to 10

**Prep Time:** 40 minutes

**Cooking Time:** 20 minutes

**Preheat Oven:** 350°F

### INGREDIENTS:

**8-10 potatoes**

**1 tsp oil**

**1 egg**

**salt to taste**

### PREPARATION

1. Peel and cut potatoes.
2. Boil (about 20 minutes) and drain.
3. Mash. Mix in scrambled egg.
4. Coat casserole pan with oil.
5. Place mixture into coated dish.
6. Bake for 20 minutes at 350° F or until they have a nice crust on top!

*Variation: Sautéed chopped onion can be mixed into mashed potatoes before baking.*

## Giveaway

These recipes are from **RECIPES REVIVAL**. *The N'shei Chabad Newsletter* has one copy of **RECIPES REVIVAL** to give away. If you are the first person to make any of these recipes and email us a picture of it, you get the cookbook! -Ed.

## ROASTED BEET SALAD

*Marlon (Schneider) Taylor*

**Yield:** Serves 4

**Prep Time:** 15 minutes

**Cooking Time:** 1 hour

**Preheat oven:** 400°F

### INGREDIENTS:

**2 whole beets**

**10 oz dark leafy greens (spinach, arugula, baby kale, baby chard)**

**4 oz goat cheese, crumbled**

**½ cup walnut pieces**

### VINAIGRETTE:

**½ cup olive oil**

**3 Tbsp white balsamic vinegar**

**1 shallot, minced**

**1 tsp Dijon mustard**

**salt and pepper to taste**

### PREPARATION

1. Wrap beets in foil with skin on and roast at 400°F until soft, for 45-60 minutes, depending on the size of the beets. When cooled, peel skin and slice to desired size.
2. Toast walnuts if desired by adding them to a sauté pan and cooking over medium heat, constantly stirring for about 5 minutes, until they are slightly browned.

### VINAIGRETTE

1. Combine olive oil, vinegar, mustard, minced shallot. Whisk until fully emulsified.
2. Layer the greens, beets, cheese, and nuts on salad plates with dressing on the side.
3. OR toss everything in a large salad bowl, and add salt, pepper and dressing just before serving.





## SEAFOOD SALAD

*Rosy (Roback) Granoff*

**Yield:** Serves 8 to 12

**Prep Time:** 15 minutes

**Cooking Time:** 10 minutes

### INGREDIENTS

**2 lbs white flaky fish like haddock or scrod**

**1 large onion**

**1 cup celery diced**

**½ -1 cup seafood cocktail sauce (start with ½ cup)**

**mayonnaise to taste**

**salt and pepper to taste**

**lemon juice (start with ½ lemon)**

### PREPARATION

1. Boil fish and onion (cut in half) until fish is flaky, but no more than 10 minutes, and cool (no skin).
2. Add salt, pepper, and lemon juice.
3. Separate fish into large chunks.
4. Add celery, sauce, and mayonnaise until it holds together.
5. Carefully toss.
6. For more color and texture, add diced red/yellow pepper and pimento.

## MARINATED MUSHROOMS

*Vita (Fetterman) Goldstein*

**Yield:** Serves 12

**Prep Time:** 10 minutes

**Marinate:** 2 hours

### INGREDIENTS

**8 oz white mushrooms**

**½ cup olive oil**

**¼ cup balsamic vinegar**

**1 tsp salt (pepper is optional)**

**2 garlic cloves, crushed**

### PREPARATION

1. Slice mushrooms.
2. Mix oil, vinegar, salt, crushed garlic, and mushrooms in a bowl.
3. Add pepper if desired.
4. Cover bowl tightly and shake.
5. Let stand 2 or more hours before serving.

## MILI'S RESPLENDENT PASTA SALAD DINNER

*Mili Rapp*

**Yield:** Serves 4 as main dish, 6-8 as side dish

**Prep Time:** 15 minutes

**Cooking Time:** 7-10 minutes, cooking quinoa penne

### INGREDIENTS

**8 oz. quinoa penne**

**1 med. carrot, shredded**

**½ med. yellow pepper in matchstick slices**

**3 scallions, minced**

**½ cup Kalamata olives, pitted, halved**

**½ cup chopped walnuts (optional)**

### DRESSING

**⅓ cup sesame oil (minus 2 Tbsp for sautéing)**

**3 Tbsp lemon juice**

**1 tsp orange zest**

**1 tsp fresh ginger juice**

**salt & freshly ground black pepper to taste**

**2 ripe avocados, cubed/diced**

**¼ cup fresh basil leaves**

### PREPARATION

1. Boil quinoa penne according to package directions.
2. In a separate pan, heat sesame oil.
3. Add bell pepper, carrot, green onions, olives, walnuts and sauté slightly.
4. Lightly toss sautéed vegetables with pasta.
5. In a separate bowl, combine remaining sesame oil, lemon juice, orange zest, ginger juice, salt and pepper.
6. Peel and cube/dice the avocado and add to dressing, turning gently to coat.
7. Add the avocado and dressing mixture to pasta mixture along with basil leaves and toss gently.
8. Taste and enjoy mindful eating with family and friends.

*Variation: Add tuna.*

