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Speaker 1:

Okay, well actually it's not recording. Right.

Shelley Morrison:

Who am I looking at during this? Who's ever talking to me?

Christian:

Who's ever talking.

Shelley Morrison:

Okay. You just want to check the sight lines. I'm looking at George.

Christian:

Well, the camera's pretty much just facing you, so do you want it a certain way? Do you want it to face a profile there?

Shelley Morrison:

No, no.

Speaker 1:

She can answer George.

Christian:

Okay.

Speaker 1:

She's going to look at George.

Christian:

Okay. Sorry, I'm so a little rusty, but, okay. So we are going to start this video off by introducing ourselves. We are here at the studio for Southern California history. It is Friday, May 27th, 2011. And interviewing Shelley Morrison is me, Christian Line, and George Castillo, the person in charge of the Common Ground Project. And firstly, we'd like to thank you for coming in and donating your oral history for this project. It means very, very much to us that we get to have a history of yourself as well as the Ambassador Hotel. Your time at the Ambassador Hotel. The focus of this project is to document the history of the Ambassador Hotel and the surrounding neighborhoods with oral history videos and research that's done at the site within the school that is now on the site of the former Ambassador Hotel. So is there anything else that I should... That I'm cutting off on? Okay. I'm sorry, I'm a little rusty. It's been a while. All right, so well let's start the interview. So will you tell us your full name?

Shelley Morrison:

Oh, God. Okay. My full name. I was born Rachel Metroni in the Bronx. When I decided to become an actress and I was at City College. I didn't... I thought my name was Rochelle. I didn't know it was Rachel. I

didn't know it was Rachel until I applied for my passport, '66. And there was Rachel instead of Rochelle. I hated Rochelle because everybody called me Roach. I hated that.

And when I found out my name was Rachel, that was cool. But I was an actress and I didn't want to be typecast because, hello, this is not all-American. And so Shelley, people called me Shelley, and my father's name was Maurice, but we called him Morris. This is a long stupid story. Anyway, that's where I got Morrison from. And then when I got married I became Shelley Dominguez. But on my passport and on my driver's license, I'm Rachel Dominguez. So Shelley Morrison goes to work and Rachel Dominguez or Shelley Dominguez comes home and chops vegetables.

Christian:

And you say you were born in the Bronx?

Shelley Morrison:

Yes. In a tenement.

Christian:

I'm sorry?

Shelley Morrison:

A tenement.

Christian:

Oh, okay.

Shelley Morrison:

Six story tenement. 80 families in one building. Well you got streetwise. Got tough.

Speaker 1:

Do you recall the address?

Shelley Morrison:

1533 Townson Avenue, apartment 1G.

Speaker 1:

Is it still there?

Shelley Morrison:

Yeah, but it's a crack house now. They're trying to do something to help there, but it's... Parts of the Bronx are cool, but a lot of it still is... We were back there. They honored me by naming a street after me on the Grand Concourse. And every year the Borough of the Bronx honors five different people who have made a name for themselves. Colin Powell, Stanley Kubrick, Al Pacino. [inaudible 00:04:14] When my agent told me that they had chosen me, I couldn't believe it. It was amazing. So on the Grand Concourse on 159th Street, it's the Walk of Fame, Shelley Morrison. And that means so much to me that just... It's better than any award. It's like the home girl did good.

Christian:

Can you tell us a little bit about your parents?

Shelley Morrison:

Oh, they were remarkable. They spoke six different languages. My first language was Latino, which is the Sephardic language. And I had to learn English phonetically and I've still kept it. And I've taught my husband all the swear words.

Christian:

The best words to teach.

Shelley Morrison:

My parents... I got my mother's sense of humor, I got my father's... My father was Don Quijote. He was always tilting in windmills. Got to right this wrong. He was always writing the president, writing poems to Jacqueline Kennedy because he was just... Something else. He was fierce. And my mother was the comedian of the family and the best cook. And whenever I'd come home from school, she would be reading always. She would do whatever housework she had to do, but it was always reading. So at a very early age, I just became [inaudible 00:05:44] the written word. We didn't have television then. My mother and I used to listen to the radio and [inaudible 00:05:52] and the FBI and War & Peace and just... Jack Armstrong, all-American boy, these wonderful, wonderful radio shows. And your mind would create all the sets and the costumes. And so your imagination would go... We would have Saturday morning shows like Let's Pretend and Grand Central Station, Crossroads, and A Million Private Lives, and you're a child, but you're creating. And my parents loved the theater, they loved opera.

My father would take me to the Metropolitan Opera on Saturday afternoons and standing room only and he would hold me on his shoulder to watch the opera. And my mother loved the movies. She was just such a movie fan. So it was pre ordained. It was pre ordained that I should... I started as a dancer, but because when you lived in the Bronx, you kind of talked like this and I thought I'd have a problem getting an acting job. And working with a voice teacher for a long time, I finally was able to have a very well modulated voice, but no work because I looked too ethnic and I didn't want to play Tanta [inaudible 00:07:19] all the time, walk around carrying a spear.

So I really got involved in theater and my parents were incredibly supportive. Incredibly supportive. I went to school at City College with James Coburn and Robert Vaughn and we did all the plays. We did Shakespeare, Gibson, Chekov, [inaudible 00:07:42] Tennessee Williams. And I remember our teacher, our drama teacher and Jerry Blunt would say to me, this is the best material we'll ever have. And he was right.

Walter:

Shelley, can you mention that... Talking about Los Angeles City College.

Shelley Morrison:

Los Angeles City College. All of this is in Los Angeles. I jumped around.

Walter:

You mentioned that you moved here.

Shelley Morrison:

Yeah, moved here in 1946.

Speaker 1:

Would you tell us your parents' names and also what was your mom's... Your favorite dish that your mom made?

Shelley Morrison:

I have a great story about this. Okay. My father's name was Maurice. My mother's name was Hortense, but we called her Dina. And there was a neighbor that used to live down the street from us that... Here in Los Angeles, on the same street that I live on now, where I moved to in 1946, the same house. An anchor. Where the neighbor down the street stopped my mother and said, "Is that Hortense?" And my mother said, "No, she looks perfectly relaxed to me." And so... Where my wicked sense of humor comes from.

I was not quite 18 when I went to LA City College here in Los Angeles. The best theater arts department in the country. It was just amazing. You learned everything. It was incredible. It was a fire in the belly and passion. And my parents were supportive and my mother would always be making her cream cheese cookies for everybody. And anything my mother cooked was fabulous. Anything she cooked and she taught me a lot of the dishes.

And they would come to see all the plays and my father would bring flowers for all the ladies in the cast and then take everybody out to eat afterwards. They were just remarkable. Remarkable. And then I started getting work on summer stock, winter stock, busing, truck companies, national road companies, live TV, radio, film TV, features, producing, writing, directing, learning everything I could about this industry. And I had a really good run. I had a really good run. Now it's time for the younguns... To have to love the work. You have to love the work. If you don't love the work, then don't do it. Don't do it. Don't do it just to be famous or to wear a designer dress.

Christian:

So as you said, it was preordained that you would become an actress. How about did you get started on the road to becoming an actress?

Shelley Morrison:

First I was a dancer. I was a chorus girl. And then I injured myself in a benefit at the Shrine Auditorium and decided to go into acting. And I was not quite 18 when I would [inaudible 00:11:04] And from then on it was the love of the work. And there was an opportunity to fail then. There isn't now. And these young people, if they're not ready when they're called upon to work, they're just going to be used up like Kleenex. And there was a camaraderie that... It exists with a crew. When you're on a show, you become a family. And my heart is with a crew. God bless them.

When I was doing... I was doing a show called The Flying Nun. This was in the late sixties and my father became very ill. And this was before Medicare and he was virtually a vegetable. And the executive producer of the Flying Nun, William [inaudible 00:12:05] called me into his office and asked me how it was going. And I said it's tough. And he wrote out a blank check and signed it and handed it to me. And he said, if you need it, use it. And I never used it. But that he did that, but that he did that, you don't... That exist today. It's become very corporate. And when you see something that has imagination and passion in it, it's... You clasp it to your bosom with hoops of steel. Thank you, Shakespeare.

Christian:

All right, I wanted to ask, you moved here in 1946, what triggered the move from New York all the way down to Los Angeles?

Shelley Morrison:

My father came out the year before, right after the war. And he and my mother's brothers had a factory where they manufactured [foreign language 00:13:15]

Christian:

Will you explain what...

Shelley Morrison:

Aprons, house dresses. And my father, who was very courageous, brought the entire family out in 1946 and bought a four unit building that I still live in with my husband. We occupy two of the apartments now. We rent the other two. But my relatives live in all the other apartments. And he created this company called Copeland of California, which was a high end clothing manufacturer. And my parents made me promise that after they were gone, that I would stay and take care of whoever was left.

And when they crossed over and then we had my widowed aunts and Walter and I took care of... My husband and I took care of my mother and we took care of my widowed aunts. And as they crossed over then we would rent the apartment. So there was always family, there was always family around. And it was paradise here. It was trees and grass and clean air and birds singing in the morning you can hear the birds. It was just an incredible place. Just incredible. And my earliest reminisces of all the orchards, all the orange growers and lemon and grapefruit, avocado, just, oh, the air was sweet. It was sweet, wherever you went. And so now I'm just kind of sad... People should remember what that was like. Because if we keep going the way we're going, we're going to just make this whole city one big developer's dream. And boo hiss.

Speaker 1:

Where is your house? You don't have to give us the specific address.

Shelley Morrison:

It's an area called South King Carthay. And I went to school... Grammar school in fifth and sixth grade in Carthay, and then Louis Pastor for middle school, which isn't there anymore. And LA High. I didn't like high school. I was bored. I was just... I wasn't into the rah rah and stuff. I was always interested in writing the talent shows. I didn't perform, I didn't perform. I majored in journalism as well, so I know what your end of it is and what soundbites you need.

Christian:

All right. I wanted to ask... I wanted to ask about what were some of your favorite places here in Los Angeles to go to when you were in school?

Shelley Morrison:

The beach. That was beautiful.

Christian:

Did you have a particular favorite beach?

Shelley Morrison:

Wherever the bus took you, you know, you went down at the corner, you got on the bus, wherever it took you, that's where you go with your girlfriends. And I love the beach. And love movies. Saturday afternoon was going on Hollywood Boulevard with my girlfriends to the Egyptian or to the [inaudible 00:17:06] Chinese. [inaudible 00:17:10] Oh, that was so cool. Yeah, I would say those two were my two favorite things.

Christian:

And before going into acting, what were some of the jobs that you had?

Shelley Morrison:

Okay, I started working when I was 14 as a sales girl. And I lied about my age at the company so I could get a job. [inaudible 00:17:41] housewares.

Speaker 1:

Where was this?

Shelley Morrison:

May Company, [inaudible 00:17:46] Fairfax, which is now part of the museum, an elevator operator at the Robinson's that used to be in Beverly Hills. And that was some kind a job. It never failed, but just about every day someone would say to me, how do you like the ups and downs, girly? And one day this very dapper elderly gentleman came on the elevator and he said, "How'd you like the ups and downs, girly?" And I said, "It's not the ups and downs that bothered me. It's the jerks." And he was head of personnel. And I got fired.

I've worked for a publicist. Oh, I worked as a practical nurse.

Walter:

Shelley, here's a lovely story, if you don't mind sharing it, at the May Company when you...

Shelley Morrison:

Oh yeah, yeah. I had this... I was 15 and I was working in housewares and I had this wonderful bird, Chico, a little parakeet that I taught to speak. And I loved this bird. And my bird died and I went to work and I was distraught. I was really distraught. And there was a wonderful actress named Mercedes McCambridge. She won an academy award for All The King's Men. This is an... I worshiped this actress, I worshiped her.

Christian:

I do too.

Shelley Morrison:

And she came in to buy a pot or something and I was in the corner and I was crying. And she came over to me and asked me what was wrong. And she was just so kind in her... And I told her about my bird and everything. And she was so dear, she was so dear. And this extraordinary actress that I idolized. And it not only comforted me, but it taught me something. Taught me something. And so I guess I'm approachable because wherever I go, when people do see me, they'll come up to me and say, well thank you for making me laugh. I had a really tough day. And I thank them because that's what I want the legacy to be, that I made someone laugh that I made them... I cheer them up a bit. Yeah, God, that whole memory came back.

Christian:

Wow. That is amazing.

Shelley Morrison:

I never told that to anybody except him. Him the husband, camera should pan over. he's really cute.

Christian:

So you studied at LACC, right? Sorry, excuse me. You started studying to act there.

Shelley Morrison:

Everything, stagecraft, lighting, makeup, direction, [inaudible 00:21:00] acting, history of the theater, I mean everything. And plus, I was carrying all these other... Taking an English class. I was taking this class, that class, I was ending up sleeping in my car. There was a thing called the Kosher puppy. The kosher pup, which was across the street from the school. And it had a little parking lot there. And the owner of the place would let me park there and sleep in my car because I was working a part-time job so I could get to class the next morning. So finally I dropped all the other classes and only took things related to acting and to directing. And because I knew that's what I wanted. So why should I take all these other classes? And [inaudible 00:21:49] if I don't know about something, I have to read about it. I love the thing about doing research when you were going to do a character, the research, if you were doing Title of the Gates, you want to read about the Trojan War, Green World, the Lilacs... Oklahoma's based on, you talk about the Oklahoma land grab.

So it involved so much, it filled you, it filled you. So when I started working professionally, I was very fortunate to be working with really incredible people. I mean, we're talking Edward G. Robinson and Gregory Peck and Eli Pollack, and Anthony Quinn. So I wouldn't go sit in my dressing room. I would sit on the set and watch them and watch what they did and maybe through osmosis... And I studied at the Actor Studio briefly with [inaudible 00:22:49] who was phenomenal.

I studied with Quinn in a masterclass. And you cut too many years later, I'm co-starring in a television show with him. And we have this big scene in this cemetery. We were out Palmdale and it was blistering hot. And I know he likes to work in improvisational way. And so I wasn't really giving him in rehearsal, what I was gifting him in front of the camera. And he said to me, he says, "I like the way you work. Who did you study with?" And I said, "Well, about five or six years ago, I had a master class with someone who was really good." He said, "Who?" I said, "You." [inaudible 00:23:36] you love that. I don't know where I was going with this train of thought, but...

Speaker 1:

Your self education.

Shelley Morrison:

Yeah. And that continues to this day. I mean, I'm no spring chicken. There are a lot of things I can't do what I could do before. But there's still a lot that I can do. And it's mainly with my mind. And that's why I've gotten involved with my husband and his projects. I still do voiceovers. I would prefer, unless it's such a good script. Someone asked, because I kind of retired from acting on camera, and someone said, will you ever consider going back and doing anything? And I said, "Well, if George Clooney, whose opinion I respect, came to me and said, here's an indie film. There are a couple of good scenes that I think you would really enjoy doing. We're shooting it here in LA. I'll send a driver for you and the heater will be on in the dressing room when you get there in the morning." I'm in. It's not too much.

Speaker 1:

Not too much.

Shelley Morrison:

I'm in. And they still send me some scripts and they say, "Just grab the money, the money and run." No, we can't do that. Never did, can't start now.

It's hard work. It's hard. It's hard work because you really, it's not only the work itself. It's like if you do get on a hit series, it's all the publicity you have to do. Every day there's interviews and photo shoots and this radio interview and this TV interview and this [inaudible 00:25:39] And you have to be here and you have to be there and you have to be here. And you have no life. You really have no life. I mean, you have to be totally committed to this. And I had a good run and I tasted it. And Walter and I, my husband and I, met extraordinary people that we are just so thankful for. We never would've had an opportunity to meet different political figures and directors and actors and just wonderful people just off the street. And so there's a lot to be grateful for that. But it's knowing when to go before they get the hook. It was a good run.

Interesting, a director, [inaudible 00:26:38] I was only 23 years old when I was playing the lead in that, the director said, you're a cylinder and your experiences fill up the cylinder. And when you're really into a character and you draw on all your life experience up until that point that you filled cylinder with, you've given everything you can and the cylinder's empty.

So you have to go back and you have to refill the cylinder, otherwise you get stale and you're doing the same thing again and again. So I was telling my husband this just the other day, I feel in some way that I'm filling up the cylinder again. But I don't know what the outlet is going to be. I don't know if it'll be acting or writing or what or volunteering. I don't know. Because we have so many different interests and we're involved in so many different projects. But it's like going into the computer now, I call it. Filling up the cylinder and going into the computer. And so you are aware of everything. You're aware of what people are wearing, what their expression is, what they're saying. And now when we go out to eat, I can sit back and just observe.

I can just observe because it's fascinating. I was watching this morning on Good Morning America, Lady Gaga. She was in Central Park... Concert in Central Park and the place was filled to capacity. She's amazing. She's amazing. She's just such a pure spirit. She's imparting something that is so needed today. I was born this way. Be yourself. Be yourself. And I just, oh, thank you. Thank you, Lady Gaga. I love you.

[inaudible 00:28:47]

I'm almost 75 but I'm hip.

Christian:

That's great because it doesn't just cater to one specific crowd. It caters to everybody.

Shelley Morrison:

The crowd was amazing. It was just across the board. Across the board. And I love that. I love that. Instead of the cookie cutters, I'm sick of the cookie cutters. Kim Kardashian, sell that fakakta ring and give it to charity.

Christian:

Oh my God. Just, I have to say it. I love you. I have to say it. That's okay.

Shelley Morrison:

Right in front of my husband. It's a good thing he's not a jealous man.

Speaker 1:

I've already proposed to Walter. [inaudible 00:29:35].

Shelley Morrison:

You did what?

Speaker 1:

I proposed to him. Even though I'm married.

Shelley Morrison:

You watch it [inaudible 00:29:38] I wasn't born in the South Bronx for nothing. You watch where you look. I can tell you which way they're hanging. But that's all I...

Christian:

On the subject...

Shelley Morrison:

Outtake, outtake.

Christian:

On the subject of your husband, I'd like to ask how you both met.

Shelley Morrison:

I was offered a film, an independent film. I was going to shoot in Lake Arrow, yet the dead of winter. They weren't paying that much. It meant that I had to get someone to take care of my mother and my cat. And something kept telling me that I should do it.

So I went to meet the producer, the writer, the director, and this building up on Highland in Hollywood. And I walked in and the first person I saw was my husband. And he was behind the counter there working on some people. I just looked at him and he looked at me and it was like, hmm, what is this? Well, at that moment I decided to do the film. And unbeknownst to me, Walter had been in... He was

the assistant director on the film and he was debating whether he should do the film. And years later, not that long after that, he told me that it was at that moment that he decided to do the film. But he was going with someone and my thing is hands off. Anyway, we became really good friends on the shoot, really good friends. But I was really falling for him. And he was really cool.

Christian:

May I ask what year this happened?

Shelley Morrison:

1973. January 19... February 1973. Well, to cut to the chase after location, we came back to LA and he kept asking me out and I kept saying, no, I can't go out with you, you're going with someone. And anyway, my adopted brother said, "For God sakes, go out with him." And I was a basket case. And I went out with him. And the first, I guess, real date was April 19th, 1973. Not that I'm sentimental or anything. 1973. And we went out. I was a basket case, and I won't go into all the details, but within two weeks he had moved in and my mother adored him. Adored him. Oh, she'd love him. And in August of that year, we eloped to Reno. We didn't even have rings. We were in Levi's and boots. And it was a Saturday night. And the justice of the peace wouldn't marry us until all of the family was over. So we had to sit there and watch television with him and then he would marry us. And then we went camping to Yosemite and that... In this August, it'll be 38 years.

Christian:

Congratulations.

Shelley Morrison:

It was meant to me. It was meant to be. We're both volatile. We're both Hispanics, we're passionate about things. We love being together. We never run out of things to say. And we have the same values. We have the same values. It comes down to that. It's what your belief structure is. And when you meet someone that it meshes with and we each learn at different tempos, I may be ahead on something and then I'll say, "Come on Walter, come on." And then he's ahead of me and he'll say, "Come on Shelley, come on." So you're always moving forward. You're always bringing the other with you, whoever it is. And so you keep learning and you keep expanding and it's never done.

So I remember someone asking me before I was married, because I didn't want to get married. I'll throw another curve here. When Walter and I got married, I was 36 and he was 25. In favor of the younger man. Someone asked me, "What are you looking for in a mate?" And I said, "Someone with the mind, someone who has the same values, someone with a sense of humor, and someone who turns me on." And they went, ha ha ha. Well, almost 38 years later... I waited, I waited. And they're rough times. They're rough... As you... I guess the rough periods for our wedding. You fight to maintain your own identity. That's when people clash when they're fighting to maintain their own identity. So all through the years we haven't blurred together and we've kept our own identity. And that's a biggie. This has nothing to do with Los Angeles, but Los Angeles is the springboard from whence all good things come.

Christian:

And I'm actually glad you put it that way. That's a really great way of putting it, because I definitely agree with you. I wanted to hand it off to George to go ahead and...

Speaker 1:

Will you ask her about Wilshire Boulevard in general too, since she has a bigger history with it? And the Ambassador?

George:

Okay.

Speaker 1:

Thank you.

George:

So we're going to transition on to asking more specific questions about the Ambassador Hotel and the General Wilshire New Pits area.

Shelley Morrison:

Okay. I have a few reminisces... What's that?

Walter:

Memories.

Shelley Morrison:

Memories, thank you. And a few jokes about the Ambassador Hotel. Now the first one is in the late forties after we came to Los Angeles. And my father loved to dance. He loved to dance, and he was a good dancer. He taught me how to dance. And my mother didn't like to dance. So my father would go to the Coconut Grove and he would tell me all about it. And I was too young to go and [inaudible 00:36:21] Martin with his orchestra there. And he was just elegant and wonderful. So, okay. We cut to a few years in the sixties. Now we're in the sixties and I'm doing a show called The Farmer's Daughter with [inaudible 00:36:39] Stevens, who was a very close friend of mine. And we were asked to narrate a fashion show at the Ambassador Hotel.

Oh, was that elegant? Oh my god. James Galinos, who used to design for Reagan, Nancy Reagan. And we were told that we weren't going to get paid, but we could get a really good discount on a Galinos outfit. And that was the thing at that time. I mean, that was the time where we wore hats and we wore gloves. And I got this wonderful opera suit, long skirt jacket. My mother used to tell me, the less you show people, the more they'll be interested. So I always wore... I'm talking about, you know what I'm talking about. Anyway, that day was just the way that that room was set up for the luncheon with crystal and linen napkins and flowers. Just everything was pristine. Okay, we cut to a couple of years later, now. I'm doing The Flying Nun and my father had just passed. And publicity at ABC, we had to... Every summer we had to do at a place called... Either the upfronts, which they have now in New York or the junkets, the press junkets.

And they were doing a huge press junket at the Ambassador Hotel. And they turned the whole gardens into this whole big wonderful thing for all the reporters and photographers. And to cheer my mother up, I was going to be one of the people that had to be there and be interviewed, and Ronna Barrett was supposed to interview me. I don't know if you remember her or not. She was a columnist here in Los Angeles for many years. And I thought I'd take my mother to cheer her up to see how... My mother, you

never knew it was going to come out of her mouth. She told it like it was. And we were sitting... Seated in the garden there. And so Phil Krieger, who was head of publicity then called, he's said, Shelley Morrison, come on down here and meet Ronna Barrett. So I got up to go and my mother pulls on me in a loud voice. She says, "Well, lipstick, you're an actress." Everybody cracked up. So that broke the ice. That was terrific.

But it was beautiful and lovely. Now we cut to a few years later, it's the mid eighties and I'm doing a show called First and 10, which was a series on HBO starring OJ Simpson. I have to backtrack a little bit to say that on The Flying Nun, OJ Simpson, the first thing he ever did acting wise was a guest on The Flying Nun. And he was kind of sweet and innocent. He was in a scene and the football player. Now we're a number of years later, we're at the Ambassador Hotel and we're shooting the whole week there, inside interiors, and exteriors. And things are starting to look frayed and things are just being neglected. And it smells kind of funny there. And OJ Simpson comes to work and he treats everyone like dirt. And he's kind of... And not a very good memory of that. Okay. Now we cut to a few more years later, we're into the nineties now, and a good friend of ours is graduating from chiropractic school. And so the graduation is being held at the Ambassador Hotel, a dinner, whole thing.

And it's just dreary looking and dank and just sad, sad. And then you cut to a few years later we're into the early 20... I think it was 2000, when a friend of ours was doing a film called Bobby, with Emilio Estevez at the Ambassador Hotel. And what he had to go through in order to shoot the film there, because as he was shooting him, they were like tearing it down. He would shoot a scene here, he'd move here, they'd tear this down, shoot a scene here, move on. They'd tear this down. So he was under the gun constantly. And how he achieved what he achieved is marvelous. So it's kind of seeing it from the glory days into its decline. And it was... I just want to remember it from the glory days because it was, and so many things, so many things in Los Angeles... Bullocks Wilhire, ah, the best luxury tea room in the city. And everybody, you know, you wore gloves to go shopping, you wore a hat. [inaudible 00:42:12]

George:

It was a very glamorous era when John Kennedy is...

Shelley Morrison:

Could you come a little closer to the camera so my eye line isn't... Oh, that's a nice shot.

George:

That was a particularly glamorous era from John Kennedy's wife, Jackie, who... She pretty much just gave out that image of being glamorous and wearing hats and being very pristine in...

Shelley Morrison:

We had a dress code. We had a dress code in high school. I mean, we either had to live bobby socks or stockings. So it would be really hot. And I didn't want to wear bobby socks and I didn't wear stocking. So we'd get an eyebrow pencil and you go in the ladies' room and you paint a line up the back of your leg, the line for the stockings.

Because it used to... We always had to... Stockings. And you had to wear a full slip. You couldn't wear half a slip. And it was really a dress code.

Speaker 1:

I don't think we even make slips anymore. Because our society's changed so badly.

Shelley Morrison:
They wear spansks.

Speaker 1:
Yeah.

Shelley Morrison:
Spanks.

Speaker 1:
You are.

Shelley Morrison:
Pardon?

Speaker 1:
Spanks. You're very hip.

Shelley Morrison:
Oh honey.

Speaker 1:
I've only heard about that on TV.

Shelley Morrison:
Oh, well when you're in the biz, honey. And you have to go to a red carpet affair. And I'm not a pencil and I'm a cancer survivor. So these are the prosthetics. They slip into the bra and it's a pain. It really is. I remember being interviewed on Entertainment Tonight, Jan Carl, sweet Lady. And this was after my second mastectomy. And she said, you didn't do reconstruction. Why? And I said, if I were 40 years younger and then it's... I'm not defined by my breasts. And more women need to hear that, you're not defined by your breasts. I miss them. They were a great rack, but I'm still here. Where was I?

Speaker 1:
You mentioned a term earlier about crossing over, about your family crossing over, which to me shows a kind of viewpoint about life after death. I want to ask you your feelings on that because I have specific feelings about it too. And I think people who have an idea about it should talk about it.

Shelley Morrison:
My grandmother, who I never knew, was psychic. My mother was psychic. I'm psychic. It's a blessing. It's a curse. You see things that you wonder why other people don't see them. Or you hear things and or smell things and you wonder why other people don't see it. What helped me kind of put it together, my husband and I follow the Native American traditions, Lakota Sioux. And we have for over 30 years. And

we've been to many sacred places in the United States, here in California, in Oregon, Colorado, Mexico, South Dakota. And have been involved in a lot of the ceremonies there. And the philosophy that they have imparted to us that resonated with me is that everyone and everything sacred. It levels the playing field. It levels it. And if you just open yourself up to that, it's a blessing and a curse because it's a blessing in that you don't have to judge. It's a curse in that you get hurt. So you have to just [inaudible 00:46:33] and the older you get, the more you ask for signs.

I have a place on our deck where I... I'm an early riser. I go out on the deck to have my cigarette because I'm not allowed to smoke in the house. And oh, screw it. I'm still here. So I'm smoking, big deal. Seven cigarettes a day. It's not going to kill me. If it doesn't. It's not my growth. But I go out there to pray and I pray for everybody. I pray for everybody in the world. I pray for all our family. I pray for our friends. I prayed for my hairstylist today. She had surgery. I pray for the snails that are on the deck. Nobody stepped on because they're my buddies. And then I said, can you give me sign? And then the hummingbird will come. Or a sound from a beautiful bird will come, or a cloud moving will come.

And I say thank you. So you're not alone. You're not alone. That's comforting. I guess that's how I would interpret it. And everyone has their own imagery and they should hang onto that imagery. Because why not?

Speaker 1:

Hummingbird's very powerful.

Shelley Morrison:

Yeah. They're the messengers. They're the messengers, and the lizards. Lizards are the messengers. I remember Walter was on a vision quest. I was concerned about him. And he had been there all night and the weather was kind of gnarly. And I was at the base camp. I wanted to know how he was, and so lizard came. And I said, find out. Find out how he is. He took off. Oh, what was her name? Oh gosh... I can't think of... Paula. Paula. Paula was coming back from the vision quest, she was coming down the road and as she was walking past, because she wasn't allowed to say too much until after she spoke to our elder. And all she did is she walked by and she just said to me, Walter's fine. She kept going. Magic, magic. Magic everywhere. There's magic everywhere. As long as you can cut through the bullshit.

There's a lot of that around here. And just cut through it. You don't have to have this to feel this. You don't have to own this to own this. You don't have to wear this label to do... Come on. Wear what's comfortable, wear what... Look clean, look nice.

Speaker 1:

Beautiful. Beautiful.

Christian:

Excuse me. I haven't been particular with brands. I shop at Target.

Shelley Morrison:

Target.

Christian:

Target. Exactly. If it looks good, it feels good, why not?

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Shelley Morrison:

Yeah. And if I could put it in the washing machine and put it in the dryer, better.

Christian:

Exactly.

George:

So what other places did you often tend to visit on Wilshire?

Speaker 1:

From the May Company on?

Shelley Morrison:

Okay. There was a wonderful place called the Wilshire Theater that was on Wilshire and Western. And went to... I went on a lot of dates there.

And then, oh gosh. Saw Sting in concert there, which was really cool. This is much later. And now I don't know what's happening there. Too bad.

Speaker 1:

It still has a concert...

Shelley Morrison:

Does it?

Speaker 1:

Yeah. I actually teach a... Can we hit pause?

Shelley Morrison:

The Carnation building, just east of LaBrea, great ice cream there. There was also the Fox, the Fox Wilshire, which is now the [inaudible 00:51:02] Theater, right. East of La Cienega. Saw a lot of films there. I know all the movie theaters, the Flying Arts, the Four Star. I remember in 1949, walking there with my girlfriend to see... Which was kind of a schlep. To go there to see a movie called My Foolish Heart with Susan Hayward and Dana Andrews and cried, cried, cried. And you cut two years later. And my best friend, who was a wonderful screenwriter who has since passed, whenever it was on television, we would sit and watch it together. This is before I was married. And I just fell in love with a character that Dana Andrews played. And his name was Walter.

It's all... It's all connected. It's like we have different, I call them the circles and we are in... We know these people and the circle, and then we move to a different circle. And then sometimes one part of the circle intersects with the other. And then there's another circle. And then you come back to the first circle. So it's all intertwined. And everyone who's ever come into your life, they've come into your life for a reason. Good, bad, and indifferent. They come into your life and it's how you process it and what you do with it. And so what's easiest for me to do is to utilize that in a character.

But let's say Rosario, on Will and Grace, I worked hard on that. I mean, I wouldn't throw anything away. I would really... And the way that we did the show, we did it in front of a wide audience and we got a new script every day. Every day there was a new script because they were always honing, there was always fine tuning. And we'd shoot the first scene in front of the audience and then the writers and the director and producer would get into a huddle and they would change it. And they'd call us over and they'd say, okay, Shelley, say this. Don't say this. Megan say this. Don't say this. Jack... Sean, say this. Don't say this. Okay, run it. Do it. Okay. And you do it and you move to the second scene. And so the concentration was... It was like a laser beam. And how to spontaneously... But we trusted each other so much that we could play off each other and work off each other. And I knew that I had to be the grounder because they're flying every which way. And Rosario was like...

And to keep a straight face sometimes was difficult. Especially my bedroom scenes with Sean Hayes, who was adorable. Adorable. I love him. And we would have some scenes where we would just, we kept saying, think Holocaust. Think Holocaust, just to get through the scenes. It was funny stuff.

Christian:

Yes, it was. You had me literally holding my stomach on the floor every week on Thursdays.

Shelley Morrison:

Pepto Bismal's good for that.

Okay. I'm trying to think of what else was on.

Walter:

Oh my goodness. There's so many other things. Did you ever go to Perino's?

Shelley Morrison:

No. My father went to Perino's and he was very impressed. It was a very famous restaurant. He was very impressed.

Christian:

Well, you said your father had gone to the Coconut Grove. After you grew up and you came of age to be able to actually go into the Coconut Grove. Did you ever decide to attend any events there?

Shelley Morrison:

No, I was busy trying to get a career going.

Speaker 1:

Did it measure up to your father's description?

Shelley Morrison:

Oh yeah. Oh yeah. He loved it. And there was another place called Slapsy Maxy's. Max [inaudible 00:55:25] and Slapsy Maxy [inaudible 00:55:25] They had a club here.

I knew most of the clubs on Sunset. The Crescendo, the Interlude, Whiskey. That was...

Walter:

Pandora's Box.

Shelley Morrison:

Pandora's Box, yeah, yeah, right there.

Walter:

Buffalo Springfield.

Shelley Morrison:

Yeah. Yeah.

Walter:

Sunset Riots.

Shelley Morrison:

Oh yeah, yeah. We could be here for two days now.

Speaker 1:

What do you think the Ambassador Hotel should be remembered for?

Shelley Morrison:

It's hard to say what it should be remembered for. I think everybody brought their own memories to it. Whether it was for a prom or a date, or a assignation, you know, a triste. There weren't that many elegant places. There were Ceros, there was a Combo, there was Earl Carroll, but the Ambassador Hotel, it just... The name, Ambassador Hotel with the gardens, all these other clubs didn't have the gardens like the Palladium. They had these... It had sweep, I guess. It had sweep. And it's... When you see something like that there, it's like it just opens you up. So there was the... And then to stay at that hotel, I got to save the rooms. By the time I saw them were pretty shabby. Pretty shabby. And unfortunately I hadn't seen any of the rooms prior to that. So I guess that's, they would... For the sweep of it.

Speaker 1:

And since you live... Tell us about... One last question. Is there anything we should have asked you that we didn't ask you?

Shelley Morrison:

Oh, thanks a lot. My blood type.

Speaker 1:

I actually would like to follow up and do more interviews with you about LA and your life history. But maybe when you have more time and maybe in a space that isn't so [inaudible 00:57:57] and echoing.

Shelley Morrison:

Walter would be good too. Because he... God bless him. It's getting a little old up here.

Speaker 1:

No, you were fantastic. Are you kidding me?

Shelley Morrison:

I can remember things from the past, but five minutes ago, gone. We have post-it notes and I have to write everything down and stick them to myself.

Walter:

Oh, her memory is great. It's just that she's used to having such a phenomenal memory. Something truly phenomenal. She can go back and remember that what we ate 25 years ago in this place. I've totally even forgotten about the whole event or the place that I even went to. But she remembers details like that. I think part of it is...

Shelley Morrison:

I think trained myself as a child. I think... I would memorize the ads in the subway. I would just memorize all the... I would memorize everything. I just had a thing about memorizing everything.

Speaker 1:

Oh my God. Will you please say welcome to the Studio for Southern California History in a Bronx accent for our voicemail?

We can use the audio on our voicemail.

Shelley Morrison:

What is it again?

Walter:

Welcome to the Studio...

Speaker 1:

For Southern California History. We're not here.

Shelley Morrison:

Studio for Southern California history. Welcome to the Studio... We're not here. Welcome to the Studio for Southern California. We're not here.

Walter:

Add history. Southern California History.

Speaker 1:

It's too...

Shelley Morrison:

Southern California History.

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Speaker 1:

The Studio for Southern California...

Shelley Morrison:

Studio for Southern California history. Welcome to the studio for Southern California History. We're not here.

Speaker 1:

Yay. Thank you very, very much. We're going to ask you to sign a release as well. Do you have the releases, Christian, they were just here, right?

Christian:

I had them in my hand. I probably put them down in...

Speaker 1:

Have the caveat about contacting the union...