

## **INTRODUCTION TO INTERVIEW WITH LUCILLE HURST**

Lucille Feist Hurst welcomed me to her home in the North End of Tacoma on a warm May evening. The view from her living room, looking over the entire panorama of Tacoma and Commencement Bay, has to be one of the best vantage points in the city. As the interview progressed and the sun began to set, the sight was truly magnificent.

As I looked around the living room (I had been here before), the art work, as always, caught my eye. Strategically placed were powerful, beautiful sculptures of alabaster, marble, and other stone I did not recognize. Summoning my courage to finally ask where, when, and how she had chosen these pieces, I was astonished when she told me she had made them herself. Lucille Hurst is a physically tiny, finely-boned woman with the delicate appearance more suggestive of porcelain than of granite and marble. However, beneath the deceptively fragile exterior, one quickly discovers a no-nonsense, independent lady with a tremendous amount of strength. Here is a woman whose husband died suddenly in his thirties, leaving a young widow with three small children to raise alone. She raised them, in the house where she still lives, and she never remarried for reasons of her own. Those children are grown now; two becoming medical doctors and one an accountant. All reside in Washington.

From the spacious and airy living room, almost sparse in design with modern blond wood furniture, we next go into the kitchen. At once it can be seen that this is a workroom. Like Rabbi's study and Steph's workshop, the room is cluttered with tools of the trade. Stained glass, shaped to conform with the upper part of the kitchen window almost like a solid valance, has a motto etched in it about "cooking with love and butter." Lucille explains that she wanted this window so she made it herself. Somehow the fragility of the colored glass with the leaded supports suggests the character of the artist. This is a *bubbie's* (Jewish grandmother's) kitchen with solid pans and cookware hanging within arm's reach to be used frequently and with the skill that comes from a lifetime of practice. No dilettante gourmet's kitchen this... but a no-nonsense functioning room where delicious food is prepared. Although she is of my mother's generation, Lucille Hurst's kitchen reminds me of my grandmother's kitchen. This makes me homesick for that not dissimilar lady in my own family who was a combination of steel and lace and who also knew how to cook a meal and raise children "with love and butter." The women in my own family have been intelligent and strong--have had to be--and I feel a kinship with Lucille Hurst that surpasses our common bonds of being female and Jewish.

This lady has shared some of her family history with me, and it serves somewhat to explain the person she is. Her father, Theophile Feist, came to the U.S. from Alsace (a province claimed in turn by both France and Germany, located on the Franco-Prussian border). He emigrated because Germans pushed him off of the

sidewalk, and he was not a man to abide meekly in such a political climate. Settling in Tacoma, he soon developed a life-long love for this city. With a partner, he founded the downtown ladies' wear store of Feist and Bachrach around the turn of the century. Buying the stately structure from the Gross brothers, this building stands today between 11th and 13th and Broadway as a lasting example of nineteenth century architecture.

On one of his many buying trips to New York City, Theophile Feist met the woman he would marry. She was a New Yorker born and bred, and her thoughts at coming out to the northwest wilderness we can only guess at. Mrs. Feist returned to New York to give birth to each of her children, thus Lucille Feist was born back east, but raised in Tacoma.

And so we come to Lucille's story. She attended Annie Wright Seminary and was given the best cultural exposure possible and went on to graduate from college in the late 1930s. By that time, due to the Depression, the Feist family had sold their building and business to J.C. Penney, which remained in the same location for the next thirty years. (Today the original Gross/Feist-Bachrach/J.C. Penney building is housed by Pierce County Medical.)

After graduation from college, Lucille Feist made an independent move for a woman of her day. She went to New York to work for two years. Then several factors came together in short succession that ensured Lucille's destiny. Visiting Tacoma to attend her sister Doris's wedding, Lucille's father passed away almost simultaneously. Staying to help her mother with family and

business affairs, Lucille met and married in due course Cecil Hurst. Together they built the house on the hill where I interviewed her.

Lucille Hurst looks much younger than her years...there is an energy and attractiveness about her that is extremely youthful and belies the age that is more than threescore and ten. In youth she must have been quite a beauty, and has matured like a fine wine...not too sweet, but delicate and robust.

It has been my privilege to interview her.

TRANSCRIPT OF TAPED INTERVIEW NUMBER FOUR  
WITH LUCILLE HURST.  
MAY 21, 1992

Nardah Fox: *This is the portion of the interview that deals with the merchant district of downtown Tacoma before 1965. Would you look at some of these photographs and tell me what you remember about some of the stores and the people who owned them, especially within the Jewish community.*

Lucille Hurst: Well, I've looked through the pictures and I remember some of the families--for instance the Andrews family, and their son, I guess still lives in town, but he has sort of dissociated himself from the Jewish community. We don't see him as much. I'm trying to think of the other Jewish families that had stores on Broadway, besides us.

NE: *Now yours was, tell me again--*

LH: It was sold to Penney's. First it belonged to the Gross Brothers, an early Jewish family who moved to San Francisco. And the Grosses built this building, and my father bought it from them.

NE: *Your father was?*

LE: Theophile Feist. We sold at the time of the Depression--things were very bad--and we sold the store to Penney's, and it has since become the Pierce County Medical Building downtown today. We had a women's "ready-to-wear" store. And then my father started a small business across the street on some property that we owned on 13th and Broadway, and the building that the Mecca restaurant is in

was ours. Then he died and my mother ran the business for about a year after until things were settled and we went out of business.

NE: *When did your father die?*

LH: I'm very bad with dates--I don't remember when I was married or when the children were born, so don't ask me those things! I know how old I am and that's about it. So there were--there've been lots of Jewish families who had businesses in Tacoma, and now there are very few. I don't know why that is, but that's the way it is.

NE: *Who had Lou Johnson's?*

LH: That was about the only non-Jewish ready-to-wear store around.

NE: *And Brotmans?*

LH: The Brotman family, which is still here, and the older Brotman was the one who started that. All the boys were there at one time or another. Of course now you know Costco is Brotman's--Jack Brotman, who still does things for this community, was the originator of that.

NE: *And LeRoy's..*

LH: Yes, the Farbers are still in business at LeRoy's.

NE: *What about Arden's and Weisfield's?*

LH: Arden Farms, is that? The only thing I remember is the ice cream place--one of whom was Robbins, of Baskin-Robbins. Baskins

were--my brother-in-law was Dr. Baskin, and his brother is the one who started the ice cream business with the Robbins. The older Robbins was in the ice cream business in town.

NE: *And that all began in Tacoma?*

LH: The connection between the Baskins and the Robbins started here.

NE: *Who owns Thelmann's?*

LH: That's [unintelligible] and her husband's family is still in town.

NE: *I remember there was a Grayson's, and of course a Lerner's.*

LH: None of them were--I don't think any of those were local people.

NE: *Those were chains... The Brodskys...*

LH: Yeah, the Brodskys are still in town. They owned the only uniform business out at the Fort [Lewis]....

NE: *How about Mode-O-Day? I remember that. Was that local?*

LH: I don't think so. I mean, I don't know. Meyer Jacobs had a store down there; I'm not sure if it wasn't [??] or Lou Johnson's. But he went down to San Francisco. Meyer Jacob's children were going to school here--Lamont and Margaret--and they visited him in California a lot. But they're gone now. Families die out.

NE: *What about Oaks, here?*

LH: I don't know the background of Oaks.

NE: *Was Weisfield's local?*

LH: Yes. Weisfields are still up in Seattle.

NE: *And Helen Davis was quite the nice shop...*

LH: Quite the nice shop.

NE: *And what about Lyons--do you know who owned that?*

LH: The Lyons owned that. That was the Lehrers and the Lyons are still families in town. You'll have to talk to Babe Lehrer—she'll know more about the businesses in town. After my father died, I had little interest in the business part of town.

NE: *So your father's interest in downtown pretty much stopped around the Depression?*

LH: Well, my father started a small store after that, but it was not--just never became as big.

**\*\*END OF INTERVIEW\*\***