



# Video Story Transcript

## The Complexity of Our Street – Burying the Unspoken

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**Link to YouTube Video:**  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PzcH6JTjsmk>

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Note : The following is a transcription of a spoken story performance and may not reflect textbook perfect English. It will guide you as you listen (or read) along.

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Hi, my name is Laura Simms. I grew up in Brooklyn, New York. I was born after World War II. Everyone on my street, in Brooklyn was Jewish. It was after the Holocaust, which was a huge conflagration, a genocide, the murder of millions people.

People in my neighborhood spoke seven languages, they had different customs, they wore different clothing. There were Conservative Jews, like my family. Those were Jews who went to synagogue once in a while and on the holidays, ate Kosher food. There were Orthodox Jews. They were seriously religious. They wanted nothing to do with Hebrew. They spoke the language from their old country of Yiddish. They wore medieval clothing. I was fascinated by them. There were Reformed Jews. Those were the more political Jews. Everything had to happen in English. And then there were Sephardic Jews from the Middle Eastern countries like Spain and Greece. They, they had different languages and different food. It was very exotic.

The one thing that everyone had in common was that everyone in my neighborhood spoke Yiddish. Oh, and then there was one other thing that everyone had in common. No one spoke about the war that had just happened. But I was a child and as a child, you feel everything.

My father was the neighborhood dentist, and in the back of our house, in the kitchen, that was the place where he was responsible for making important announcements. One afternoon, coming in at lunchtime, my father said, "Lohala, we have new neighbors. Next door, there's an Orthodox family from Poland. They have a daughter just your age. Her name is Leahala, just like your Hebrew name." At birth, I was given my name Laura and also a Hebrew name, Leah. I got, as usual, very excited. My father, as usual, tried to dampen my excitement. I think it was something about, "Don't get too happy. You'll be disappointed." But he said, of course, "Don't get excited. She won't be your friend. They're Orthodox. they don't think we're real Jews." Now, I accepted it, the way I accepted everything as a child. Kind of taking it in, thinking about it and somewhat forgetting about it.

Next to my house, right, actually, under my bedroom window, was a small alleyway of dirt. Nothing ever grew there. The sun didn't shine. It was where I had my secret graveyard. I loved to bury things. I had pieces of dolls' clothing, my mother's single sock, an earring. I stole little plastic toys from my father's dental office. My favorite things to bury, actually, were Chinese food and pieces of pizza that were not kosher. We had strict Jewish dietary laws. My father didn't allow those foods but when he wasn't home, my mother would bring it in and say, "Don't tell your father." So, I would bury a piece of pizza in a wax paper and then I'd cover it with dirt and put little stones on, like I'd see my parents and grandparents in the graveyard do. I would leap over it or I would throw make believe salt over my shoulders and sing pieces of Hebrew prayers. "*Adon olam, asber malak.*"

I had a favorite doll of all my dolls. This one was crippled on the left side, one eye hanging out, was completely bald. I dressed her in rags and sometimes even put dirt on her. Her name was Lefty Louie, strangely named for my father. I would put the doll against the wall and then I would tell stories about the history of this lost abandoned, destroyed, unwanted object that I had saved, buried, sanctified, made holy.

One afternoon, suddenly, the window from the next-door house opened. I looked up. And there was a little face. I knew who it was it was. Leahala. She held up her hand. She had a wadded sock. She threw it. I caught it. I buried it. And then, when I was covering it up with dirt, putting little stones around it, she called out in a high-pitched voice, "Kaddosh, Kaddosh, Kaddosh." Holy, holy, holy. We became best friends. We buried something every day. Our funerals were fabulous. But our entire friendship occurred with me on the ground and her at the window.

And Saturdays, the holy days, the Shabbats, when everybody in the neighborhood promenaded up and down our street in their best clothes, they would talk to each other politely in Yiddish, regardless of what they said about each other in their own languages at the kitchen table. And when my parents would meet Leahala's parents, Leahala and I would look at each other, turn our backs, pretend we didn't know each other. Our friendship was a secret. In fact, we had a secret mission; perhaps even a bit of secret to ourselves. When I looked back at it, I realized we were little priestesses; digging; burying; sanctifying; telling stories. We were burying all the dead whose stories were unspoken in our neighborhood. It wasn't only Jews in the Holocaust. There were Christians, there were gay people, there were political activists and poets, they were gypsies, anyone considered different.

Then, we both turned 12 and our friendship just disappeared. Leahala went to Yeshiva, an all-Hebrew girls school. My mother told me that she was already betrothed to the rabbi's son. That at her wedding, she would have her hair shaved, she would wear a wig, she would wear long sleeves in August. It's unbelievable to me. I was obsessed with my hair. My hair hung low, long, curly down my back so I could dance to Elvis Presley and gyrate on my back porch. My skirts were getting shorter. I wasn't devoted to religion. I gave up burying the dead. I was devoted to rock and roll.

But I grew up. I moved. Israel on the news, often. And I went back to my neighborhood. I had lived in an old farmhouse, the largest house on the street. It was gone. And there were five, three story buildings, with four families in each. My entire neighborhood had become Orthodox. It was like a shtetl, small village in eastern

Europe. And the graveyard, I couldn't find it anymore. It was buried. And I would look into the faces of people walking down the street. They never looked directly at me. After all I was not really a Jew. But I looked for Leahala. I could barely remember what she looked like.

But then one night, when the sun was going down, I was in an airport in London, about to come back home. And there were a group of religious Jews in their black medieval hats with fur and long, black coats of silk. And they were praying, rocking back and forth, facing the sun that was going down. And beside them were two African Muslim young men on prayer rugs. And I stared out the window at the sun. And it dawned on me.

That sometimes, sadly, history creates a gap that maybe, at another time, would not exist but that remains. Getting wider between the Leahala and Leah. But that place, we all pray to, regardless. And that underneath it all, my friendship with Leahala, always exists. And whenever I tell the story about her, there it is. Palpable and real. And I pray all the time that people only bury as we did. And that the constant burial of the dead from wars and racism, that should come to an end.