

Penn South Archive Project

Interviewee: Katya de Kadt

Interviewer: Susan Ortega, Lisa Ellis

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Susan: Hi, Katya.

Katya: Hi, Susan. Uh, yes, my name is Karen, was born Karen Smith in 1948. And a few years ago, I changed my name to Katya de Kadt. So that's who I am.

Susan: Okay, well, thank you for doing this interview. And we understand that you were one of the first residents here and cooperators at Penn South. So why did your family move to Penn South? And what prompted - when did your family move to Penn South and what prompted your family to do so?

Katya: We moved right when it was first built and it wasn't even finished in 1962. We sort of - we had an application, obviously, but we had to move because my parents and I lived in Stuyvesant Town across town and there was a... the owner of that, which was Metropolitan Life Insurance Company, prevented black people from moving in and my parents were going to have none of that. So they formed an Anti-discrimination committee and were the leaders of that and we moved a black family into Stuyvesant Town. And the result of it is that Metropolitan Life began to discriminate against my family. They didn't give us a lease. They raised our rent uncontrollably out of line. And so finally we were forced to move out and we moved out in 1962. I was 14 and we moved across town to Penn South.

Susan: Wow. That was something. What was Penn South like in the first years when your family moved here?

Katya: Well, as I said, it wasn't finished being built. There were only a few buildings. Our building, building eight, which I'm in now but on the other side... was one of the few buildings that was up. There were huge holes in the ground. And the other problem is that when the place was built, to save money, they did not implode it. They just, you know, so that they - I mean level it and get rid of all the buildings that were here before. Instead they imploded them so that there was unequal ground, uneven ground throughout the place. And it was dangerous. And there were a lot of problems with the construction. And so, uh, my father, who was an old union organizer, decided that he had to form first the House Committee because members of the board were outsiders. None of them were residents. And so they didn't see what was going on. And he also... so first there was the House Committee and then he formed something called the Assembly of Concerned Cooperators, ACC to deal with the construction

problems and many, many construction problems, both around the co-op and in people's individual apartments. We for instance, on the 21st floor, 21F on the 8B side, which was our apartment all of the electrical lines went up through our front closet and all of the mice and rats that were brought up because of construction came up through our apartment. So in one year my mother collected 23 mice in a bag because they didn't send anybody up to help us and dumped them all on Carmen Santiago's desk at one time to make a point that something had to be done.

Susan: Who is Carmen Santiago, just to be clear?

Katya: Oh, Carmen is the head of the apartment allocations in Penn South from the day one to now. You know, she's been there forever. So that was what it was like. But it was also very exciting in the first few years because it was a project that was built by and for, out of trade union money and for trade unionists. My parents were not members of the ILGWU, which was the sponsoring organization, but they were themselves trade unionists in other areas. And there was this dedication in 1962, which I was present at. It was May of '62, but it was an unusually hot May. And Kennedy was there - President Kennedy, Eleanor Roosevelt, Rockefeller, the then Governor. Wagner was there. Walter Meany from the AFL-CIO, and lots of dignitaries were there. And we, my sister who was seven years younger than I am, she was on my dad's shoulders and I was next to him. And you know, seeing Eleanor Roosevelt for me was really a very exciting thing and it was - so the whole thing was exciting. it was new and the activism was new, the energy was new. It was just a very exciting time when we first moved in, but also scary.

Susan: I have another question that maybe... What happened to the people who lived here before Penn South?

Katya: Well that's interesting. Yeah. Robert Moses of... I won't say what I think of him, but anyway, he had this declared: Penn South a need for relocation and a, you know, a blighted area. It was not blighted. It was small brownstones. Very integrated of Irish, Black, you know, across Eighth Avenue was mostly Greek community with great Greek bakeries and stuff that got destroyed when FIT came in - Fashion Institute of Technology. But we, uh, because the state took it over and decided it was a blighted area because they wanted to renovate and put in these middle-income housing in comparison to what was there before, they just kicked the people out. Now, in one of the first annual reports of Penn South, what you'll see is they knew exactly the number of families that were displaced. It was about 2,600. They submit that few of them were given the right to move in here or had the ability to because it was financial. I think they gave first choice to people who they'd kicked out, but not everyone could afford it. And so people were scattered all over the place. In

the end, very few people, my understanding, who lived in this area took the offer and moved in.

Susan: That's too bad. Okay, well you moved in. You were a teenager weren't you?

Katya: I was 14.

Susan: What was that like for you in your first year as a teenager here?

Katya: Well, okay, I had already been in schools across town because Stuyvesant Town was on the east side. And so, you know, I was still focused on going back to my junior high school and taking the cross-town bus and going back. And it was lonely at first. So what I did is I started a... uhm, a program for teenagers. We started a club of teenagers who we met every Friday night. And we had, sometimes we had meals together. We had dance parties together. So we got to know the other teenagers in the development. But that took a while to develop because we were you know, we were moving in. We're getting accustomed to the neighborhood and stuff like that.

Susan: Oh, that's, that's really good that you had other people, you know, young people around you. And, um, what... How did the Penn self-governing body develop? There was a board of directors. How did that develop and how did it change?

Katya: Well, as I said, when we first moved in, in '62, the board was made up of the people from the United Housing Foundation, the sponsors of Penn South and other leaders in that movement - in that housing movement. It wasn't until 1965 that they had an election for the year of 1966 in which five resident shareholders, five resident shareholders were elected to the board for the first time in 1972, by ... I'm trying to figure out when... by 1967, the residents, for the first time, outnumbered the what I call the outsiders, and then in 1972, my dad was elected the first resident president of Penn South and that's a picture of him behind me, Dave Smith. And he stayed the the president until really 1993 and then was on the board as Chairman of the Board for many years and also later on from '93 to '98 and then in '98 to when he died in 2009 he was sort of emeritus. so, um, so that changed with the board. As soon as dad was elected though one of the things he did is he insisted that whenever the board met and they took minutes that the minutes went under the doors so that, he instituted that, so that people would see what was happening with the board and the board decisions.

Susan: What other things did your dad, Dave Smith, put into place at the beginning of working as a cooperative?

Katya: Well, I'm trying to think. From the very beginning, we, in the beginning we were hooked up to Con Edison, and it was expensive and electrical costs were going up and up and up. And so the first thing he did is he proposed what he called an appliance-less Wednesday. Somewhere in the mid seventies where people were told not to use their appliances to cut back on electricity. Then they were, you know, that worked to a certain extent. But then there was a referendum in, um, '78 in which the co-op cooperators agreed by 76% to sub-meter so that people be responsible for their own electricity in their apartment. Before that, it was just, you know, across the board, everybody was just charged electricity equally. And this was to cut down on the usage. About that time, around '78, '79 there began to be discussions: could we make our own electricity? And my father asked somebody on the board named Wheeler Muller, one of the members of the board who was an engineer to do some research about it, and they decided that it was, and they consulted with, of course, a lot of professionals, but they decided that it was possible. And so we developed a co-generation plant that wasn't, did not come online however until... 1979 is when they started planning it. By '86, it was built. It took quite a number of years to get everything in place, but we had our own co-generation, which meant when there were blackouts, as everybody knows, we were on. And you know, we were able to give electricity to others in the community when it was necessary and it was very, very good. The other thing is that in 1973 the first playground was completed behind building 8 downstairs. And it was dedicated. Now the important thing, reason I mentioned that is just like Wheeler Muller was was tapped a member of the board and a resident to help prepare for cogeneration, the playground was designed by a cooperator. A cooperator was an architectural designer and we use his expertise to design the playground. So there was this period in the beginning where not just everything was new, but people were being tapped, who had expertise, to be part of the community. And this was a very important aspect of the life in the community. The other thing that happened in the early years that my father was there was we began in 1976 to prepare taxes. My father always understood that whatever we needed was going to require legislation on the city or the state level. And so we began very early on in his work in the political sphere, bringing those politicians on the state level, the federal level, the city level in as friends of Penn South whether it was to talk, he invited them to talk at annual meetings, he called meetings with them all together. Sometimes he would round up all the cooperators and get a bus and go down to City Hall. When we did the prepayment of taxes, I think it was under Koch that we first did that. And it made people more favorable to us. If we were able to prepay our taxes and help the city, then the city was able to help us on occasion when we needed help.

Susan: You mean taxes for the building?

Katya: Real estate taxes for the building, not personal taxes. Something that very few people know about is the co-op was run so well economically that in 1983, the board voted for one month to waive all maintenance payments of all cooperators. So for one month we had free rent in Penn South because it was run so well.

Susan: That's wonderful. What were some of the practices that were put in place in these years and into what years you're talking about that encouraged cooperating, working together, cooperativeness?

Katya: Well, the board developed a lot of committees: Health and Welfare, Education, and at that time in the early years in the seventies, they let cooperators be members of those committees and, and, and those cooperators and the committees took positions and had ideas that were shared with the board. And the board very often adopted the ideas from the committee, the whole... intergenerational garden was as a result of one of the cooperators, Jeff Dullea, suggesting, he was on the board eventually, but suggesting that there be such a thing because one of the problems in the early years, because of the way this co-op was planned, there were many one bedroom and a few two bedroom apartments, almost no three bedroom apartments comparatively, which meant big families couldn't live here so easily. It was really designed more for seniors and people who needed... or single people who needed one bedroom apartments and or... even, you know, efficiencies and so the, one of the things that happened... We were having trouble with seniors paying their rent sometimes not that they didn't have it, but they needed help. Many of the seniors who came here in the beginning were people who'd come of age during World War Two, and they didn't have families to support them. And so we needed to develop a plan. And so then we had, again, before being on the board, eventually got on the board, someone named Nat Yalowitz and Nat and my father said, we need to develop a program to support these seniors. So they developed the senior center, which became a NORC, a Naturally Occurring Retirement Community. And from that they got money from the state government and others to set up the senior center to help support the seniors. And it was the first of its kind and then became a model across the country. You know, and now we have the senior center. When it was first developed, though, it was developed though something called Penn South Social Services Inc, which was the over body. And it was never meant, that organization, to be only for seniors. It was also meant to be for any program, social programs at any age group wanted to do. So comes the discussion on the garden. And we develop this intergenerational garden that was designed originally to be a senior and a child and a child's family, unrelated so that we could break down what was developing as an antagonism between the seniors and younger population. Because when the co-op had money, it gave the money to senior programs and very little was being done except for a

playground. And there were supposedly more than one, at least a few playgrounds. In the end, we only built two, but the original plan had more than two playgrounds actually in it. And so the young families felt that they weren't getting the same services that the seniors had, and there was a lot of hostility developed. So this garden was one way to break down that hostility. But, I'm just trying to think... so in 1985, the garden opened and also that year was the first year of the flea market, which was originally designed to raise money, when people paid money for their tables, for the garden. That was what it was originally designed for, to help expand the garden and build the garden up.

Susan: What other practices encourage collaboration between residents? Any committees that were formed?

Katya: Well, in these committees, I was talking about the Education Committee, the Housing Committee - I mean the Welfare Committee things would come up that would make people feel as if they were part of this community. And later on, in around 2012, the then President decided that it was too much of a strain on the board to also, which has always been a volunteer board, to also have to run these committees. And so he ordered the removal of all of the... people who are non-board members from these committees. And it changed things completely here because people no longer... felt that they were part of the governance of the committee and it was all left to them. Also in 1992 and I'm skipping ahead, but in 1992 we built a playground the Parents Committee, the old playground that had been built was falling apart. And so we did research and we had a process where we invited all of the parents in with their kids. We had the kids draw pictures about what they wanted in the playground. The parents say what they wanted. We went around, shopped all over the country for a company. We found a company up in Boston, Cambridge Builders, and the parents... when Cambridge came down with their professionals and they supervised the parents in building this place. And it was over an entire weekend. One weekend. All day Saturday. All day Sunday. The first day it rained, but we did it in the rain and we built it. And then years later, when that playground needed to be taken down, not because it was being - it was older decrepit, but because new rules came in that were required different things in the playground to make it safe. The board decided, I had suggested that we do a... that they let the parents do it again, And they said no. We will only let professionals. And what began to happen over time, more in the later 2000s, so I'm jumping ahead, is that the board kept getting more and more into what the lawyers said. What the professionals said. And in doing that, it really cut back on involvement from cooperators who had talents and expertise and a sense of that they were part of this. Also, I think I'm going back and forth if you'll excuse me, it's hard sometimes to remember all this. In 1970, before my dad was president but when he's on the

board, he and a guy named Hal Winston who was on the board who had been a... I think he had been a police officer, recommended that we do a lobby patrols so that people from the building would sit in the lobbies at night, a group of people in each of the buildings, to make people feel - I mean they didn't carry guns or they weren't police, but they were there as a deterrent for people who would come in off the street and make people feel comfortable who were coming home at night. Later on, that was disbanded also on the grounds that it created liability for the co-op. So this thing of constantly moving the co-op towards the legal, the professional really was beginning to erode the, the whole nature of cooperation. Also, whenever we had a big victory, we would celebrate it with a with a big community party. There was a Parents Association which I was like the secretary of for many years, and we would have regular picnics in the sand park on Friday nights so the parents and the kids could bond and we could be part of that. There's no Parents Committee now, but the Parents Committee recently was having over the last few years barbecues and that was nice, but that was only once, one day a year we would have regular parties. And...

Susan: I remember you saying when we were talking before this interview that there were certain years that really impacted life here and one of them was 1966. 1960...

Katya: Well no 1968. 1968, there was a teacher strike in the city of New York and it was an interesting strike. A lot of the people here, as I said, were trade unionists and believed very strongly in the trade union movement, including my family. My grandparents were trade union organizers. My parents were trade union organizer, so we were a firmly trade union family. But the strike in '68 was started in Ocean Hill, Brownsville and it was about communities being able to get control of their schools because a lot of the teachers in some of the schools were racist. There's no easy way to say it, they were racist towards black children and the black parents were tired of it and they wanted more control over who came into their schools. So that was what the strike was about. And unfortunately it pitted the black working class against some of the teachers, which were mostly Jewish working class. My father at that time was president of Penn South, but he was also local school board president. And he said: You know, it's not the union do-or-die. This is not a real trade union strike. It's a racist strike. And so he crossed the picket line and he opened up the school. And what that did is all of the people in Penn South who were part of the trade-union movement and teachers turned on him and were and he got kicked off of being president for at least a year. And very hard feelings that maintained for a very, very long time and that was very impactful. But in 1987, our tax abatement came up. The end of it. We were - the legislation that was passed for Penn South and all of the other limited equity co-ops, the public housing finance law gave us tax abatement for 25 years

and that's what kept our maintenance low. In '87 and that was over. And there needed to be legislation to prolong that. And so my dad, putting on his legislative cap and his political cap, you know, got the politicians all together and they worked on that legislation. But meanwhile we had to have a referendum. In the beginning, dad was the only one on the board that thoroughly supported staying limited equity for another 25 years. Over time, he educated the board and they came around, but he went door to door. I did also. I was, you know, I was older then. I already had a child of my own and I was living here as an adult. I started living here as an adult of my own in 1985. And we went around door to door to convince people that it was greed on their part to think that they could get this place and sell it for private, that they had to agree because there are people on the lists that everybody else could move in also into a limited equity co-op. So there was this vote in '86, October of '86, a referendum in which 76% of the population here voted, of which 68% voted for 25 years to remain limited equity. 27% voted for remain only ten years, and 105 people voted for going private immediately. So we won. That kept us limited equity. And then in 2001 we had to have that vote again. And that time my husband and I who were involved in ACC at that time worked really hard to organize around that and people again I think it was close to 70% voted to keep it limited equity, even though the people had changed by then. A lot of the old timers had died. But there was already a culture in the co-op that this place was limited equity. And then the last time we did that was in 2010 and now we're limited equity until 2052. But it's against the grain. I mean the majority, not the majority, but almost the only two... there are two kinds of co-ops under the Mitchell-Lama law. There is the Article Two, it's actually there are three, Article Two, Article Four, and Article Five. I know this law because among other things, not only have I been a lawyer, but I was a judge for many years. So I understand this stuff separate than just living here. But the Article Two are the Mitchell Lama co-ops, what's called. And their agency is the division of community and housing renewal. We're redevelopment and now there are only two redevelopments left, us and the Bronx Amalgamated. Before there were a lot of redevelopment many of the Mitchell-Lama developments co-ops and the other redevelopments all voted to go private. And then the other article I guess it's two, the Article Two, Four, and Five. Article Four are the Mitchell-Lama rentals but many of them aged out of the, also out of the program but they're owned by private landlords and they've been made to go private. The other thing that that dad did to make not just the co-op here more of a cooperative place, but all co-ops in the movement is he formed two organizations. One... I'm sorry. I'm just looking at notes because it's hard to remember all of this.

Susan: You're doing a good job.

Katya: One was a coordinated housing services. Coordinated Housing Services was an organization of all of the Mitchell Limited Equity Co-ops, co-ops not rentals that bought their electricity together, that bought their supplies for the office together. And therefore was able to get huge discounts so that was one thing he did. And the other thing was he formed with people up in Amalgamated, something called the Council, Coordinated Council of Cooperatives, which would meet on a monthly basis and a different co-op throughout the city, the leadership of the co-ops. And they would discuss issues like security or insurance or things like that and get educated about laws and stuff like that. And Dad always invited, when it was in Penn South, he always invited regular cooperators in to observe the meeting and to be part of it so they could feel that they were part of a larger movement. The other thing that he did is we were part of the cooperative housing movement, and he organized some runs to raise money for the movement. Races in Washington, D.C., which one year my husband, my son, my daughter and I all were part of the race. We did the race. It was a 2k, 3k, I forget which. And then at some point, Dad was inducted into the Co-op Hall of Fame down in Washington, DC for all the work he did because, oh, that's the other thing he would do because he believed in the concept of cooperation more than just the co-op but the whole housing movement, whenever there was a crisis among cooperatives, like for instance, there was the farmers in Iowa, the cooperative farmers that did Land O'Lakes, for instance. The butter company is a cooperative and so what dad would do is that he would raise money if there was, when there was a crisis and they couldn't and they didn't have money for their farm products. We raised money in the Co-op in Penn South with an explanation of why we were doing it with everybody. And so whenever there was a crisis among cooperatives, he got involved. And he also pushed what was called the Rochdale Principles, which are the principles on which Penn South and all of the co-ops were built. That's from a producers co-op in England in 1837 called in Rochdale, England. And so, you know, he was constantly doing that. So when we hit the 25th year, not only did we have this vote to go public, to remain, I mean, limited equity, we had a huge celebration on the blacktop with dancing and music and food and to celebrate this great victory because it was a great victory. Go 25 years later and we were involved in the co-op in the HVAC Project, we had to raise money to redo our heating, ventilation, air conditioning. It was quite a big project and the then President I asked, you know, are you going to do a 50th celebration? We're ready to volunteer and develop committees. We want to blast all over the city that we are this wonderful limited equity co-op. And he said, No, we don't have time. We're busy with this other stuff. He didn't think it was that important. And that's a big difference because my father saw this both as a personal venture, but also it was a political statement. This was a trade - this was a housing project for limited equity, limited equity for moderate income, and low income people, mostly

trade unionists. And it was successful. And he wanted it blasted all over the city and the country. And there was an opportunity in the 50th anniversary to do that. And the then President decided it wasn't that important because they didn't - people who came later didn't have the same political understanding. Now, my father tried years before to also, because the co-op - partly because it's in Chelsea and partly because the amount of the money was quite good in the beginning. There were a lot of African-American families that were choosing to live uptown in Riverton, which was another co-op rather than down here and he was hoping that we could attract more African-American families. And so he went to HPD and said, Can we pick out on the list not one after another, but, you know, family, you know, bring in people of color who would normally Of course, in those days, He didn't use the expression "people of color." It's a more modern expression. But bring more black families into the co-op. And they said no, but he wanted it. He tried to get people in the co-op to go along with that and sent out, you know, notices so people could discuss it. The racial blowback was disgusting. Letters... At that time, I was in high school, and it's true that my first boyfriend, I was 15 or 16... 17 was an African-American guy that I went to camp with. And people sent out things that the reason why Dave Smith is doing this is because his daughter is married to a black man and he has a black grandchild. I was 17 years old. I wasn't married. That's not why Dad was doing it. It was because he believed that everybody should have an equal opportunity to live here. So that happened back in those days.

Susan: Well, it seems like what you're trying to, what you seem to be saying is the whole culture of Penn South has changed from the beginning with this cooperation, cooperativeness that your dad and other people who were here in the beginning and maybe even a little later years put forth and there's something different going on. How do you see that? Do you see that?

Katya: Oh, absolutely. I mean, a few things. even when when the senior center was dedicated in '86, a few years after that, Nat Yalowitz came to me and he said, look, I want to create Penn South Social Services and you're a lawyer. Can you set up the 501(c)3 for me? Not-for-profit status, and I did. Now, that would never be allowed. The board does not want any non professional people who aren't members of the board. And even then, even if you're a member of the board, they only want the professional people, you, you know, consultants that they pay a lot of money to, to do stuff. They don't want to use the expertise of people locally. And the excuse given is that it creates legal - I mean the law, the law, the law. I mean, I'm a lawyer, I was a judge and you know, but they create legal liabilities that there are none and, and... and everything's become very professionalized. Not that it wasn't it was always run professionally. I mean, there were mistakes made. We've had the

windows have been changed twice. The first time it was not a good fix. And they had to do a second time. I mean, there have been mistakes made. But generally speaking, the co-op was run very well from the very beginning. Oh, and the grounds are gorgeous. You know, I don't know if people know, but the original gardener was the royal gardener of Romania. And he trained, you know, our gardeners. And we, I think it was it was either Romania or Hungary. I'm not quite sure which Eastern European country, but we have gorgeous grounds. I mean, beautiful grounds. Now... So, okay, so for many years they kicked all of the non-board members off the committees. Just in the last year, they've begun to bring people back, but it's still different because people have to fight to have their opinions shared with the board. It's sort of like, OK, you can come and you can say but there doesn't seem to be a real crossover. The only areas in the environmental area where they've allowed the non board members of the Environmental Committee to do tours of the garden and to be concerned with the trees around the campus. That's the only place where there seems to be a real - but as people know, there's been a real argument now about the playground and the fact that it is no longer what it originally was meant to be and hasn't been for quite a while. People are using it as their own personal fiefdoms and staying there forever. And it's no longer a senior and a kid. It's just a family and they feel like it's theirs forever. And the board seems to be OK to go along with that. And the way they're handling it is they're going to develop a new space for the garden. So there'll be additional people who can get in, but they haven't yet developed the rules. And there's no reason why the original garden shouldn't go back to what the original intent and the plan was. One of the things that's different now, also, just going back is when the co-op first opened our supermarket was a co-op supermarket with the Twin Pines, and that lasted for many years. And one of the advantages, again, when people were very involved, there was a Health and Welfare Committee and people decided that they were going to do things like explain what the vegetables and the fruits were and how they could be cooked and how they could be used. And these little cards would go up all over the supermarket of recipes that you could pull right off and ways to use the vegetables. And you were supposed to keep your receipts from the market. And then at the end of the year, you brought your receipts in and you got back a percentage because you were a member of the co-op, and that was lovely. But that went under across the country. The co-op markets went out of business across the country. And then we started getting these commercial markets that, you know, that most of them that have been not very wonderful.

Susan: And then they hired Gristedes, which is really overpriced.

Katya: Which is overpriced and particularly not very good I'm just trying to think I actually ran for the board and won in around 2001,

2002. But I only stayed on the board for a year. You know, usually it's three years. I resigned after a year because again, things had changed and everything was what was legal, what was not legal. And one of the issues that came up a lot when I was on the board that year was the thing about the dog referendum and were they going to allow dogs on Penn South. And they did that later on. But when I was on the board, the big fight was if a cooperator was taken to court to get rid of their dog, The board took a position at first that if they won their case, they won their case. But the law, and I knew what the law was, I was a judge then the law was that if they won their case, you had to pay their legal fees. And at first the board said no, we're not going to pay their legal fees but when the co-op won, they insisted that the cooperator pay the legal fees of the co-op. That wasn't the law in the state of New York. And I was in a difficult position because though I was on the board, I was a lawyer and I was not allowed under the rules of judicial ethics, I'm not allowed to give unsolicited advice, legal advice, unless I am the lawyer for the board. And I was not. Years later, their lawyers, one particular now, there were a couple of lawyers on the board, but the one particular lawyer, I'm not going to say who, who doesn't take that position. She gives advice all the time from a legal perspective, and it's wrong. And she uses the law to get what she wants and also the then president of the board, who I will not name, made my life hell like, you know, every time, because I was Dave Smith's daughter and he was jealous that Dave was such a good president. He could never have been as good a president as Dave and he never was. He stood in the way of every proposal that I made. And so when I found out that the powerhouse, for instance, was dumping as waste a lot of hot water, and there was a way, my husband and I found this out. And so I brought to the board that we could instead use that hot water to generate more heat instead of all the waste that was ecologically not sound, in other words. The President and some other member were furious though they knew about this, that I brought this up, you know, because they weren't ready to deal with it. And so I could just see that everything I was doing was going to be blocked. And it wasn't... And it was just too painful. So I resigned from there.

Susan: So it's a big difference.

Katya: It's a, it's a big, it's a totally different community.

Susan: And what about now? It doesn't seem to be...

Katya: Well, what ended up happening is this, because of the HVAC project, we had to borrow \$150 million over \$130, \$150, whatever and that meant that we had to take out a loan and we had to increase both equity first and then maintenance before my father died, the then manager, Brendan Kenney, who was a fabulous manager and was

forced out by this board. I won't get into that now, but he did not resign voluntarily. But it's another discussion for another time. But he was a fabulous person. I mean manager, Brendan, but Brendan talked my dad into the fact that they had to accept what's called the second tier, a higher price for people moving in. And then later on after Dad died, they did the third tier. And so it changed the nature of the people who were moving in. They weren't all trade unionists. They didn't have the same politics that the people had before. The times were different and they had more money. So people began to move in here as, as especially younger families as a stepping stone to, to saving up money and then moving out of the city and getting a house. Now part of that was because they couldn't get three bedroom apartments that many of them needed, but it was also seen as a cheaper place to live rather than a community over time. Also, in the beginning, all of the... the Education Directors that worked for management really would bring people in and interview them to get ready to move in here. And explain to them what cooperative living was. The current Education Director, Mario Mazzoni, doesn't like doing that evidently very much and doesn't do it very well and hasn't done it for a long time. And so a lot of the new people moving in don't have the same cooperative spirit. You know, it's a combination of them and what we provide here. So the whole community is changed. It's much more housing project, you know, a well-maintained, well maintained housing project, but never, never would any of us have ever suspected that they would take land, a building on the land. That, that'd have to be torn down. A decision was made to not repair it. I think it was a wrong decision, but they let it go down because they knew that there were problems, there were. There were violations in the building. And so they let it run down completely. So now it's gone. So given the pandemic and the loss of income, both from renters, and from commercial spaces, they needed, they couldn't, they didn't have enough money to make the repairs they needed. Understood. But they didn't really take the time to examine with our friends in the legislature and Chuck Schumer, who's come to us a lot, and our then Congressman, Jerry Nadler, ways that we could raise money. People said they did, but they didn't really check with politicians. And so they went, they took the easiest way out. They took a private developer who's going to tear down a building on our land and... They didn't sell it to them, but they leased it to them for a hundred years and they're going to put up a fair market housing with only 30% affordability. That is a shame. And a shanda. It is going to change the nature of this co-op over time. And my fear is that as we run into more financial difficulties, we have to do our... powerhouse is going to have to be either completely torn down or retrofitted because of new laws that requires certain emissions only. And we can't comply with that now. So they're going to have to tear it down. They're going to have to rebuild it, and it's going to require a lot of money. So if we can't raise the money among us, does that mean we take another empty space

and give and sell that and give that to a private developer to build? I mean, is that going to be the way the board is going to balance the finances in the future? Is that I mean, once upon a time there was the idea of building a building over the parking lot in the eighties called MASH: Mutually assisted housing. So it was going to be senior housing, like what is it called... assisted living for people in Penn South. But there was a very strong opposition to it. Because it would cut out light and air. And so it was shot down. But that wasn't for profit. That was for it to help cooperators. Now, they're talking about using our land to make money to pay our bills, and that's just not sustainable for the community. And it's not what this community was designed about. And because the way the board handled that in this most recent round is to bring it up very quickly, send people out a note saying if you don't agree to this, you're going to have to pay \$500 a month more in your rent. And none of us could afford that. It scared everybody out of their mind. And so they got a majority of people to vote allowing this developer to come in. It wasn't even a vote. It was a referendum. It wasn't a binding referendum. But under the law, the business corporation law most of the referendums, with the exception of, if they want to ever re-constitute this in private, that has to be a binding referendum. But even the dog referendum was... they were all what's called advisory referendums because the board has what's called fiduciary a duty, they're responsible. And so the buck stops with them. That's why they don't have to have a referendum. I think that's a mistake. I think that the law should be changed so that things like selling off our land should be a required referendum by the whole community. But that's not what the law requires now.

Susan: Well, it seems like you're really - in what you're saying... A lot of what you're saying and telling in the history of Penn South, is very helpful for new cooperators. And I'm wondering what your recommendations would be to bring the spirit of Penn South back to Penn South, or is it not possible?

Katya: I don't know if it's possible. I mean, I think we need an Education Director who's committed to really educating people. I think that we should have more... Now, the senior center has stepped up the plate a little bit and has programs and things that are... The senior center's wonderful. And during the pandemic, it was like nothing else. I mean, it'd shop for people. It just got people food. It just did wonderful, wonderful things. I think we have to have more activities that push for cooperation, I think we have to have some more... Nobody in the world today, and particularly living in New York will deny that there's a shortage of affordable housing. Everybody understands that. And even those be in our neighborhood. The NYCHA houses are having a problem now because of the need to rebuild. And they're bringing in private developers and giving them some of the land as an incentive for them to to to make the place,

fix up the places that should have been fixed up years ago. So there's a real issue of housing. And I think we have to educate people that this is not just because it's not that affordable now. I mean I know a lot of people who get called and can't move in here anymore, But that this is a community. It's more than just a place to pay less rent. It is a community. We have to educate people. We have to have activities. We have to elect different people to the board. People have to step up in the community who understand that and run for the board. There is maybe one person on the board that really gets the sense of this community. And I think the rest of the board has to be replaced. I don't think it's a good board. So those are some of the things that I think have to happen. I think we have to look into more activity, intercultural, what we call intergenerational activities, not just the playground, so that some of the, particularly those seniors who are alone have a sense of family with people in the community. Given the pandemic, and that people can't travel maybe we could have some more social activities between elderly and kids. We, Betty Macintosh and I, she lives in Building 7, and we used to be on the board. We were the ones that designed the playground when it got built in '92. She and I had written a proposal that we gave to the board which they rejected. It was, it was an intergenerational proposal in which we suggested that the kids through the Parents Committee... on seniors' birthdays that we go to, especially homebound people, that we bring a welcome wagon, a little wagon with a cake and wish happy birthday to those people. You know, there are things that we could do to make this more of a sense of community but it has to be a board that's willing to. They will say, oh, we're so busy running this place financially. We don't have time for these other thing. The other thing, a big thing is that in the past when we had elections for the board, meetings were held in the lobby. So that people could come down into the lobby and meet the candidates and ask questions. Now people have to go over to FIT or go over to the place on 23rd street the SVA, I forget... the School of Visual Arts' building. It shouldn't be. We should have back meetings in our lobbies. I think we should have more meetings in our lobbies. If the board didn't feel like everything has to come from them and they could share some responsibility with what now is called the Co-op Council - it was originally called the House Committees. Then they could, you know, run some of it. It doesn't always have to be every member of the board, their hands on everything. The board also has to stop demonizing groups that are critical of it. I'm part of a group that I helped form called LEAPS: Limited Equity and Affordability in Penn South and we got started in 2009 for the vote in 2010 to be limited equity again. And we organized. We organized hard. We did a good job but because we've been critical of the board, they have prevented us from using... they've created these rules, which if we challenged them we would win but nobody wants to go to court and try this. They don't let us use the bulletin board during election season. We're

not allowed to use the bulletin board because we oppose candidates or for candidates. They will not allow a discussion publicly. They will allow... people who officially run for board can... They organize a meeting in some of the rooms and in one of the buildings, Building 2, for people to meet the candidates. But if we want to have a meeting to talk about people running for the board, we're not allowed to do that. And they have created other obstacles for us to function. For a while they were charging us for the rooms which is against the law and that they changed. But for a while they were charging us for the rooms that we use and that was pointed out to them and they changed that. They have to start demonizing people who are questioning them. I mean, this is a community. We have a right to question things that go on. And also the minutes are so poorly written. They, you know, they just vote and who voted and not positions. They also do a thing now where over the last ten years of a lot of things they put in what they call executive session, which does not have to be made public. And some things... there are things like how much money you pay the staff, who's getting an apartment. There are some things that do have to be in executive... But they put far too much in executive session because they want to it's like we serve the board, not the board serves us. They want to keep their positions. And so they don't want people to really know how they vote about things. And that lack of transparency is really hurting the community as well. Like, who knows when the... I mean, do you know when they're going to start the construction on the new building? I don't know. We will probably be told a day before, you know, so this is the kind of thing. It's not that open a community anymore. It's not a cooperative community anymore. And it really makes me very sad.

Susan: Yes.

Katya: The only thing that's left of the cooperation is the senior center.

Susan: Well, I think you've really helped us understand the history of Penn South and what it was about and your concerns about... It's not so much about what it used to be about. And you're also giving us some ideas about what would make it become more like it used to be about. And it's up to the people in Penn South to follow up on this. So thank you very much.

Katya: You're Welcome. Thank you.

Susan: Just wondering if there's anything else you might want to add before we end our interview. That you seem to make very good points.

Katya: I can't think of anything else other than the one thing that I'm very pleased about through the senior center is that they're

taking seriously for the first time a discussion of racism in our community. And I'm and I'm very pleased about that. We've recently, through a committee, the Anti-racist Committee of Penn South Senior Center, been able to do a survey and we'll see where that goes... to develop programs, again, not to criticize the board, but to develop programs. What's a shame, once again, is the board feels threatened by this that's their problem. We're just trying to make a more inclusive community, and we'd like to have some signs up in the community that this is a hate-free zone, which the board has also denied up to now. So it's a struggle, you know, and la lucha continua. The struggle continues. Thank you both very much. I appreciate it.

Susan: Thank you.

Lisa: Thank you.