

Rosa Lowinger Interview

Kathy Hersh: Today is March the 2nd, 2017. My name is Kathy Hersh. I'm interviewing Rosa Lowinger. Did I pronounce it correctly?

Rosa Lowinger: You did.

Kathy Hersh: This is for the Miami Beach Visual Memoirs Project. We're really focusing on Miami Beach, but I want to hear about your early life. You came to the Beach when you were four years old. Can you tell us about that? Can you remember that?

Rosa Lowinger: Yes, of course. A bit. Do you want me to look at you, or the camera?

Kathy Hersh: Me.

Rosa Lowinger: We came to Miami Beach in 1961 from Havana. My family was in Cuba. My parents were born in Cuba. My grandparents were Eastern European immigrants to Cuba in the 1920s, at a time when there were very strict immigration laws, and lots of fear of immigrants in the United States, kind of like we have today. They wound up in Havana, rather than in the United States, where they were coming. Both of my parents were born in Cuba. I was born in Cuba. We lived in a lovely neighborhood of Havana, called Vedado, which many people know.

After the Cuban Revolution of 1959, my parents stuck it out for two years, hoping that it was going to settle into something reasonable. When it became clear that that wasn't going to happen, on January 6, which was several days after the United States broke off diplomatic relations with Cuba, they decided to leave. They left in a rather stealthy manner, because there were spies in their building, essentially. It was Epiphany, Three Kings Day. My grandfather had a store that sold, among other things, toys. They kept the store open in the morning, for people who had to work the previous day, and needed to come in and buy toys that morning for their children. They closed the store at noon. We came home, and we packed, and we left.

We arrived in Miami Beach in '61, and again, of course, I was four years old at the time. I'd just turned four, and memory is one of those things that you don't know whether it is your actual memory, or whether it is a memory of somebody that told you something, or just a photograph that conjured something. I have some very impressionistic memories of that time. For example, I remember looking out the window of our apartment, which was on Drexel Avenue, at 14th Street, but had a window onto Washington – the bedroom. It was a one-bedroom apartment. My parents and I, and my two uncles lived in it. My parents and I shared the bedroom, and the two uncles would pull out the couches as foldout beds every night.

I remember this one memory, which was looking out the window on to Washington Avenue, and thinking to myself, "What's the big deal? This



is not all that different from where we came from," because unlike people say, who went to New York, or somewhere else, or California, Miami Beach looks not that different from the north coast of Cuba, of Havana. That was a memory.

I remember going to ... There was, I believe it was a Morrison's Cafeteria, but I don't remember if was Morrison's or another one. I remember that the only place we could afford to go out to eat was that cafeteria. We would go, sometimes, on a weekend. I remember there being just a blanket of wistfulness, and sadness in my family, as would be expected, which as a child, you just perceive as a tone over your entire existence. I went to a park school, at Flamingo Park. They had park school there. A lot of friends of my parents lived in the same building, or in the vicinity, and the kids all knew each other. Shortly thereafter, we moved to North Beach, to 79th Terrace, which is very near a park, called Crespi Park, in the '70s. That area that's near Stillwater Island, and that whole area in Biscayne Point, where we eventually moved.

Kathy Hersh: You were about six years old by then?

Rosa Lowinger: Oh, by the time we moved?

Kathy Hersh: Mm-hmm.

Rosa Lowinger: I think about six, but I actually have ... If you want to hear more about the first portion—

Kathy Hersh: Oh, yes, uh-huh.

Rosa Lowinger: Yes, I remember a couple of things. I remember Lincoln Road as this kind of charming little place with the tram. Remember the tram on Lincoln Road? There used to be a tram. I remember going with my mother, and one of her friends, and their daughter, who was a dear friend of mine, and continues to be. I remember there was that Saks Fifth Avenue on Lincoln Road that had a little valve that spewed perfume out onto the entryway, so you would be walking on Lincoln Road, and then suddenly, you would get this whiff of some, you know, Chanel No. 5 or Shalimar, or whatever. It was coming out of a little valve that just wafted perfume out of the entrance to Saks Fifth Avenue. We would go there, and smell the perfume, and go into Saks, of course. Saks was completely outside of our possibility. Burdines was everything was ...

We loved Lincoln Road. My grandmother, when she came ... My maternal grandmother came a few years later, and she used to love to ride the tram on Lincoln Road. She actually had a job in a, it was like a little novelty store on the bottom of the Di Lido Hotel on Collins, and whatever that is, 17th? Use to be the old Di Lido Hotel. They had a novelty shop there that sold potholders with orange blossoms, and alligator key chains, that kind of thing.

My grandmother worked there, my grandmother, who'd spoke not a

word of English, spoke Spanish and Yiddish, and she worked there, I would say, for 25-30 years, because the store was purchased by her brother, and she was his employee. We used to go there. That was another place we went.

I remember the Danish basket at Wolfie's the little prune and cheese Danishes in those little shapes, and the rolls. All those Jewish delis, Wolfie's, Junior's, Pumpernick's, we loved them. I was heartbroken when they closed. It just felt like a big piece of history lost. Flamingo Park, I remember very distinctly as a destination that we would go to.

Kathy Hersh: Were you involved, at all, with the Cuban-Hebrew congregation?

Rosa Lowinger: We were, we were. My parents weren't members of the Cuban-Hebrew congregation, because when we moved to the North Beach area, we became members of Temple Menorah. Rabbi Abramowitz was extremely welcoming to the Cuban Jews, tried to make Temple Menorah their home, and that's where we belonged. We did go to the Cuban-Hebrew congregation. We knew everybody there. We knew the rabbi, and there were events of the community that we attended there, numerous times.

Kathy Hersh: We spoke to someone who's now the president there, and he was telling about how they really wanted to help Jews coming from Cuba adapt, and have a support system.

Rosa Lowinger: They did. They absolutely did, and so did Temple Menorah. You had a great amount of support for the Cuban Jewish community. As you know, I'm sure, the Cuban Jewish community settled in Miami Beach. They did not move to Little Havana, or southwest. It was a fascinating thing to me that the Cuban Jews, when they left Cuba, they moved to Jewish areas. They didn't move to Cuban areas. They moved to Jewish areas, and created these Cuban Jewish enclaves on the Beach. The Cuban-Hebrew congregation, and Temple Menorah were the two endpoints of that.

Kathy Hersh: That sounds like the identity was more identifying with the Jewish community, than necessarily Cuban community.

Rosa Lowinger: Absolutely, absolutely, but it was kind of this limbo existence, because you didn't quite identify with regular American-Jews, but you didn't quite identify with Cuban non-Jews. It was a sort of in between thing. In a way, you can look at it glass half empty/glass half full. It's you identified with everybody, and you identified with nobody.

Kathy Hersh: I'm sure that was a common experience.

Rosa Lowinger: Absolutely.

Kathy Hersh: How about your friends? Did they feel the same way? You said you're still friends with some of those people today.

Rosa Lowinger: Oh, absolutely. I'm very close, still, with a brother and sister named Israel, and Rosalyn Sands, who were the children of my parents' best friends at the time, and grew up on Miami Beach with me. Israel still lives in the area. We all had similar feelings about things. We were part of this small community, and there were lots of us. A lot of us wound up going to the Hebrew Academy, weirdly. I think it might've been because, in Cuba, schooling was not public in the pre-revolution days. You'd go to the school that had to do with your particular affiliation, so a lot of us knew each other. The parents knew each other, and they would go to events together at the Cuban-Hebrew congregation, or at Temple Menorah. By the time everybody was having bar mitzvahs, everybody was attending the same events.

Kathy Hersh: Did you have a bat mitzvah?

Rosa Lowinger: I did. I had a bat mitzvah at Temple Menorah, in November ... I can't remember the year, exactly. It would've been whatever ... '69? November of '69.

Kathy Hersh: Did they make as big a deal in those days as they do now? What was it like?

Rosa Lowinger: Not for a bat mitzvah. It was still a big deal. We had a Friday-night service, where I did the thing. Normally, nowadays, you don't divide the girls into Friday night, unless ... The Orthodox do, but ... There was services Friday night, with a little reception, and then there was a ... Did we have a lunch on Saturday? No, we had a full-blown party on Saturday night. Full-blown Saturday night party.

Actually, this is a memory that I have that I enjoy very much. In Cuba, people used to have their clothes made. You had your good clothes made, and a lot of those dressmakers moved here, and moved to Little Havana. We couldn't afford to go to good stores and buy ready-made clothes, but it was very reasonable to buy the fabric, and go and have clothes made at these dressmakers. It was far cheaper to do that.

We would do that all the time. For bar mitzvahs, bat mitzvahs ... You'd copy a design. You'd look at a design that you liked from some designer, and you would take it over to the dressmaker, and she would do a drawing, and you'd bring her the fabric, and that was it. All those photos of the early bat mitzvahs, and the early bar mitzvahs, are all in clothing that we had made for us. In fact, if you didn't have it made, if you bought it in a store, that was considered much more upscale.

Kathy Hersh: That's so interesting. What about the food? You said you liked Pumpernick's, and Wolfie's, and stuff, but was there some Cuban kosher food that—

Rosa Lowinger: It wasn't kosher. None of our families kept kosher, because that was not something that people really did in Cuba. People didn't keep



kosher. You were Jews because you were Jews. You didn't go to synagogue on Saturdays, you went three times a year, on Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, and that was it. The food that we ate was a kind of amalgam of Jewish and Cuban food. I remember — actually this is a distinct memory that I have — when I left for college, and moved in with other people, the idea of having lots of vegetables was an unusual thing. I don't think I've ever ate a cooked vegetable in my house, prior to then. We would have whatever, steak or chicken, white rice, plantains, and then depending ... If it was a Jewish holiday, you'd have a Jewish version of that. You'd have a kugel, and a roast turkey, or you might have some of those items, as well.

Kathy Hersh: Interesting.

Rosa Lowinger: My family was absolutely not religious. In fact, when I started attending the Hebrew Academy, because I have some ... Actually, I have a great, funny story about this ... I started attending the Hebrew Academy at a certain point. I think I entered in the second grade. There was a lot of chaos in my family, mainly because it was hard. Exile was hard. My mother had been raised in a very poor circumstance in Old Havana. She had been not orphaned, but her mother died when she was born, and that was very traumatic. She was poor. When she married my father, who had a much better life, because my paternal grandfather did well in business, it was a great moment of relief for her. When you're poor, poverty is crushing, and when you leave poverty, and enter a state of financial comfort, if not wealth, it's very liberating. It gives you a lot of relief.

To have that yanked away suddenly, and unexpectedly, and profoundly was devastating to her. She was very unhappy, very upset. She's a fighter, and she worked hard. She didn't lay down and get depressed, or anything like that, but it rankled, is that the word, her? She was mad a lot. She was angry. It was tough as a kid because you couldn't fix that. You have your own impressions, but as a child, you got Miami Beach. We had the Beach. We'd go ... Oh, that's the other thing. We'd go to the beach every weekend. You had the beach. You had your friends. You had your family. It didn't matter if we were here. It kind of mattered a little bit that you couldn't buy this, or you couldn't do that, but kids don't care as much about that as they do about love, and health, and calm. My house wasn't calm.

When I went to the Hebrew Academy, I would go to these houses for Friday night dinner with my girlfriends. I'd go home with them for the weekend, and there was this utter sense that Friday night rolled around, and everything else stopped. If there was a problem, if there was an argument, there was a bill collector, something was going wrong, the car broke down ... It ended. The idea that there was a construct in life that could put an end to strife, even for 24 hours, was extremely appealing to me, and I started to become more observant as a Jew, and my parents were not pleased. That was too much for them. They wanted you to be Jewish, but to the level that was

understanding to them as okay.

Kathy Hersh: Convenient, also.

Rosa Lowinger: Convenient, right. They wanted to keep you Jewish within the community, but they didn't want you observing, and believing, and insisting on things that were not what they believed. That became a source of real tension for me when I was a young adolescent, like 12. At 12, that was really a problem.

Kathy Hersh: Did you insist on the bat mitzvah?

Rosa Lowinger: No, the bat mitzvah was okay, because the thing is, you see, it was all community-driven the Cuban-Jewish community is a community of extreme conformism, even to this day. Everybody else was having a bat mitzvah, everybody else was having a bar mitzvah. It was what you did, and you did it. I didn't have to convince ... I would've had to convince them not to have one. However, to say I'm gonna keep kosher, that was a level ... That was beyond what was acceptable. That was already moving outside the fold, and I don't think that's an uncommon thing. When kids move outside the fold of what their parents think is alright. It goes the other way, too. When people are religious Catholics, and their kids want to leave the church, it's the same phenomenon. Here, in my case, it was a source of enormous comfort. I went to the Hebrew academy through high school. I left in ninth grade. I went to Beach High, and I didn't like it. I went back to the Hebrew Academy, and graduated from there. I regret that, by the way. I regret making that decision. I wish I had gone to Beach High.

Kathy Hersh: Why?

Rosa Lowinger: In the years since college, grad school, whatever, I've moved very much into a very pluralistic world, where I deal with lots of different people. I think I would have expanded creatively, much more so, at Beach High. Hebrew Academy just kept me in my shell. My parents, for all that they resisted certain aspects of me, they also allowed me to do things that many other parents didn't. For example, I went away to college. I went to Boston for college, and a lot of my friends weren't allowed to do that. They could go as far as Gainesville, and that was it. I credit them with that, because it was not within the script of who they were.

Kathy Hersh: It sounds like maybe they did some adjustments, some changes, if they allowed you to do that.

Rosa Lowinger: Yeah, they did. They did. I forgot stories of the early years on Drexel Avenue. The only entertainment we had was that we went to the beach, or we'd go to a movie, or something like that. I remember several ... This is I'm maybe five, or six years old at this point. My little girlfriend and I went to the movies alone. Imagine letting a six-year-old go to the movies alone. We'd go to Lincoln Road to see something. I remember three distinct movies that I saw on Lincoln Road. I saw



Breakfast at Tiffany's, Bye Bye Birdie, and I saw one of the first showings of Cleopatra. Imagine, like seven years old, seeing Cleopatra.

I had no idea what it was about. I can't remember what year it came out, but it was right around then. I remember at Breakfast at Tiffany's, my parents tell the story that is great, which is we went ... They sent the two of us, two young girls, to go see Breakfast at Tiffany's, completely incomprehensible. We came back, they asked us, "What was the movie about?" We said, "It's about a cat." Remember there's a cat at the end of the story?

The thing that we did as a family is we went to the beach. We would go, like you see so many families now, you get the cooler, and the umbrellas, and the chairs, and the tent. You get there at 9:30 or 10:00 in the morning, and you spend the entire day there. people swim in the ocean, and they eat food. If it rains, you huddle under the umbrellas. That was the day. That was the day.

Kathy Hersh: That must've been some balm to your mother, to be by the ocean, and have that experience of ...

Rosa Lowinger: I'm not sure. I'm not sure, because you know how with certain individuals, the balm can actually be more of a trigger of the disappointment? You know, like the equivalent of, "Oh, it's a great beach, but it's not like the beach we left behind." There are people that see the world that way—

Kathy Hersh: I hear that a lot.

Rosa Lowinger: There are people that look at the world that way. Most of us, I think, look at the world that way. The lucky ones are those of us that don't, and that can take some work.

Kathy Hersh: That think the grass is perfectly green right here.

Rosa Lowinger: Sure, or green enough, you know? It's not perfectly green, but it's green.

Kathy Hersh: You went away to college, to Boston—

Rosa Lowinger: I did.

Kathy Hersh: - and you came back to Miami Beach?

Rosa Lowinger: In high school, I went to the Hebrew Academy. By then, we were living on Biscayne Point. My parents bought a house in Biscayne Point. I can't say exactly when. I think it was 1970, '69, something like that. We were living there. I was still attending the Hebrew Academy. My grandmother was living in the little building down the street by Crespi Park, taking the K bus down to the novelty store by the Di Lido Hotel. I graduated from the Hebrew Academy. During those high school years, when we were living at that house, Biscayne Point is not that far from



the ocean. It's about six blocks, I would say. Eight blocks, at most. That was what I did. I was a brooding teenager. The brooding teenager who knew that Miami Beach was not for me, and I wasn't going to stay here because there's no culture.

I would go to the beach, and sit at that beach. I'd go straight out 77th Street, and 77th Street is still a pretty nice beach, because there's no buildings in that area. I would sit there every afternoon, after school, and I would write in a notebook. I would swim in the ocean. I would brood. The idea, right now, of a 15-year-old girl alone on the beach in the afternoon, in a slightly desolate beach is just ... That's what I did.

I went away to college. I went away to college really intending that that was it, because one of the most difficult parts for me about growing up here was that very early on, I knew that I was interested in the visual arts. There was nothing here. There was nothing. The Lowe Museum at the University of Miami, but that was Coral Gables. It might as well have been Tampa. There was The Bass, but at the time, The Bass was just a museum full of all these weird collections, half of which were considered to be fake. There was nothing there. My intention of going to college was just to go, and leave, and live in the Northeast, live in New York, live in Boston, or something like that.

I came home after my first year of college, and worked in the area. Year two, I really started staying up in the Northeast. I just stayed. I always came back to Miami two or three times a year to see my parents. I had a little brother. My brother, actually, you should interview my brother ... I had a little brother. My brother was born when I was 13. I always wanted to see him, as well. Then I made my life in, first, New York, then in Philadelphia, then in Charleston, South Carolina, and then Los Angeles. Although I came back all the time, I had no root here. I remember, actually, coming back one year after I graduated from conservation school. I went to college in Boston. I went to NYU for graduate school, and I became a conservator. I got a graduate degree in art history, and conservation.

I came back here ... I remember trying to volunteer or get some work at Vizcaya, and at the time, Vizcaya management wasn't what it is today. They had this restorer who wasn't particularly open to interns, or people who had American training, so nothing came of it. I literally dismissed the whole thing. I do remember when I was in grad school at NYU, this is like the late '70s, or 1980, I would say. 1980. Coming down, walking around South Beach, and in South Beach, when we were going ... When I was going to the Hebrew Academy, and the South Beach hotels were all kind of convalescent homes, or retirement homes for elderly Jews ... Many of them had no families. The school did a lot to bring packages of food to people there—

Kathy Hersh: The Hebrew Academy did?

Rosa Lowinger: The Hebrew Academy had whole programs around Jewish holidays of taking baskets of food to old people in those buildings. I just remember the ones that were in those rocking chairs, facing the

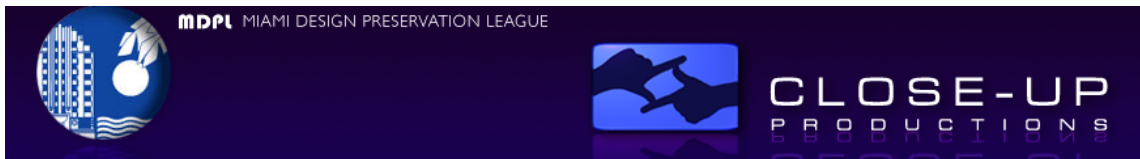
ocean, and then others that didn't have the ocean view. It was a source of real poignancy to me. It made me sad, but something that you felt like was important to do to help people.

Anyway, I remember, I guess it was 1980 when I was back from college, walking around there. By then, I had a real consciousness of the visual arts, and buildings, and whatever. I looked around, and I went, "Oh my god, this is gonna be discovered one day. somebody's gonna figure out what we got here." I was like, "How do you buy one of these buildings now?" I was like 20. I didn't have two nickels to rub together. I remember, my friends from the Hebrew Academy ... A friend of mine from the Hebrew Academy, her parents had owned the Kent Hotel, and they basically served an Orthodox Jewish population from New York, but they were selling it for \$300,000, I think it was. Maybe even less. Who had money like that? Nothing ... I saw that before Tony Goldman saw it, before any of those guys saw it, I saw it, but I was a teenager. I had no way of making an impact. I had just discovered architecture. I remember watching that all unfold, and thinking, "Of course, this makes total perfect sense."

Kathy Hersh: You were aware of Barbara Kapman at the time, and what she was doing?

Rosa Lowinger: I wasn't. I wasn't, because I was living somewhere else. I had no idea. I just saw it, and I had no idea anyone was involved. I was too not connected to Miami Beach at the time. Had I been living here, I would've absolutely become involved, and connected, but I was ... My life, at the time, was in Boston, and New York, and I wasn't focused. My lens wasn't on Miami Beach. I had been coming back to Miami, continually. My family's here. My parents, my brother, my niece, and nephew. I would come to town ... Oh, and my son, who ... I had a son in the midst of all that. He was born in 1984. Of course, my parents wanted him whenever they could get him, so literally, I would fly in from California, drop him off, and then go somewhere — New York, Paris, wherever. They were happy to take care of him. My tie to the area never ended. Eventually, my parents left the Beach. They sold the house, moved up to Aventura. Sorry, I just had to say it that way. I can't help it.

I kept coming back. This is where the rediscovery of Miami Beach actually takes place. Let's see, well, of course, I knew about Art Basel. I never loved art fairs. I was doing a lot of ... Actually, wait. Let me go back. Let me back up. Let me back up. In 1994, '92, '94, '92 ... In 1992, I was in Los Angeles, in my studio. I had tried a number of times to go back to Cuba, and I couldn't get a visa from the Cubans. In 1992, I was sitting in my studio. This was before emails. I got a fax, one of those faxes that would come in on the dot-matrix thing ... It was an invitation from the Cuban National Preservation Committee to come to Havana to attend a conference on historic preservation, and conservation. I was like, "Okay, I'm going." I went to the conference, and I rediscovered Cuba. I've written about this. I have a couple



published pieces on going back to Havana for the first time.

It was amazing. It was like being in a dream that you've dreamt once before. Getting off of a bus to go and see our old apartment building, and without any knowledge of how to get there, just getting there, just walking the streets, and my feet taking me directly to where I needed to go ... I went into Old Havana, where my mother grew up, and I saw for the first time, the Cathedral of Havana, which no one had ever told me about. In my parents' world, that cathedral was irrelevant, it was not a ... It was a church. As Rosa, the art conservator, and architectural conservator, saw a Baroque cathedral in a quite different light.

I started going back to Cuba all the time. I went for the first time for that conference. I think it was in March, '92. I went in August, '92. I kept going, and I kept going to historic cities. I was dumbfounded, because no one, in my experience, had ever told me anything about this place. I continued trying to make inroads with the preservation community there. I taught a bunch of courses. I taught a course on contemporary modern art conservation, on conservation of cemetery architecture, so I—

Kathy Hersh: In Cuba?

Rosa Lowinger: Mm-hmm. In Cuba. Two-week workshops. Obviously, I couldn't get paid. There was no means for paying me, but it didn't matter. I needed to be there, and I wanted to bring the knowledge that I had gleaned from my great American education to Cuba. They were doing a pretty good job of it themselves. They just weren't up to speed with materials, and techniques. I taught a course on ethnographic materials in this very dramatic way. There was a huge snowstorm in 1993. It was called the storm of the century, la tormenta del siglo. It was a giant nor'easter in New York that dumped 45 inches of snow on New York City. In Havana, it brought the water in over the malecón, and it flooded the collection at Casa de las Américas, which was an ethnographic collection of pieces from Latin America. I did the triage with their team — just swoony, spectacular stuff.

I was coming back and forth, and I started to write about Cuba. By then, I was living in Charleston. No, I'm sorry, when I was living in Charleston in the mid-'80s, and I wanted to write about Cuba, I felt that I had to go back. That's when I started applying for visas, and being rejected. '92, they give me the visa. '92 to '94, I start going, and I keep going, I keep going, and never stopped, really. In '98, I wrote a cover story for Preservation Magazine, the National Trust for History Preservation, on Old Havana. I started to write about Cuba. I started working on a novel. Worked on this novel for, oh gosh, six years. I got an agent, big agent, loved the book. They couldn't sell it.



It was highly disappointing.

Then I had one of these experiences that is magical, almost, where I was in Havana, sitting in a café, thinking about what was my next move. I was having lunch with a Cuban film director, who was a dear friend of mine. His name is Humberto Solás. He passed way about eight years ago. He was a brilliant guy.

One of the great filmmakers of the period of the revolution. We were just chatting. "What's your next move? What are you gonna do next?" I thought, "You know, I think I'd like to work on something having to do with the Tropicana, but I don't know what, exactly." I literally thought I was going to write a novel about the Tropicana. He turned to me, and he says, "Oh, that's funny, because you see that guy over there. His great aunt was married to the owner." We went, and we talked to the guy. He was kind of a distasteful guy. He immediately glommed on to me, wanting to write a TV show, and sell it to HBO. He was all about the money, and the thing ... When he gave me his great aunt's phone number, her area code, 323, is my area code in Los Angeles, because you know, I was living in LA at the time. I met this woman. She was 80 years old at the time. Her name was Ophelia Fox, who was the widow of Tropicana's owner. Together, we wrote a book about the night club, called *Tropicana Nights – the Life and Times of the Legendary Cuban Night Club*. It was published in 2005, by Harcourt.

I had been going back and forth to Cuba, but I started coming back to Miami in the course of writing that book more than just to see my family, because I had a research interest then. I was trying to find everybody who had anything to do with Tropicana. I interviewed Olga [inaudible 36:57], I interviewed dancers, I interviewed the guy who was the makeup artist. A lot of these people are no longer alive. I started to have a creative connection to Miami, and Miami Beach again, rather than just I'm coming to see my family. The book was published. We had a spectacular reading at Books & Books, 300 people. It was wonderful. I did a big program ... Temple Menorah invited me to do a program. I started to once again have a professional, creative relationship with this city.

Then what happened is this. I got the Rome Prize from the American Academy in Rome. I was awarded the fellowship in historic preservation, and conservation to go to Rome, 2008-2009. I left in the fall. Sometime before then, right at the time I was awarded the prize — they awarded in March — I got a phone call from Remko Jansonius at Vizcaya, who was the collections manager. I think that was his title back then. They needed a survey done of the outdoor sculpture collection, because they had a big grant that had been awarded to them for restoration of a lot of sculptures, but they needed ... In order to receive the grant, and award it, they needed a survey of the collection done. None of the companies that they had been working with prior had interest in doing that survey, because then they couldn't apply for the project.



Long story short, I had missed the fact that Vizcaya had changed management in the early 2000s because I was so focused on Cuba, and Tropicana nights, I didn't have a conservation focus here. I did the survey for Vizcaya in 2008. Spectacularly enjoyable process. I love working with those people. Then I went off to Rome for a year. In the course of that year, that was 2008, the election ... Obama was elected for the first time. The crisis happened. Remember the, you know ...

When I was in Rome, working on this project on the history of vandalism, because that was my ... When you get the fellowship at the American Academy in Rome, when you are awarded the Rome Prize, you have to go in with a project that you're going to work on for six months, or 11 months, whatever they give you. My project was to research the history of vandalism. Not aware, at all, about graffiti in Miami, or any of that. This was just my thing, because in our field of conservation, particularly outdoor sculpture that I work on so much, we spent a lot of time thinking about vandalism, so I wanted to deconstruct that in some way.

When I'm in Italy on this Prize, and the crisis happens, I come back, and I think to myself, "What am I gonna do when I get back? There's not gonna be any work." I came back, and realized there was more work in Miami, at Vizcaya, at other places. I decided to move my private practice from Los Angeles to Miami, and I opened this firm, which was then, first, Rosa Lowinger and Associates, and now is RLA Conservation. It wasn't practical, or economically feasible to locate it on the beach. I located it here, on this side, Buena Vista, this studio where we're sitting. I first went to Wynwood, and then to Buena Vista. It was literally like the floodgate opened. The minute I established myself here, we started just getting a huge amount of work.

As these things go, because of this, then I started getting a ton of work in Los Angeles. Suddenly, I had these two practices. My husband's a film director, so an LA connection is important for us, and for him. That's been our existence, where we have this dual life — LA/Miami — but I'm here much more these days. My connection to the Beach is I go to the Beach, because I live on this side now. In the Miami area, I find the Beach a little congested for my taste right now, and also ridiculously overpriced. Also, since I need to get to many places, because my job requires going to Coral Gables, to Palm Beach, to Fort Lauderdale, to Westin, to Sarasota, just saving that extra 20 minutes that it takes to get from the Beach to here is really important, but I have a lot of clients on the Beach.

Kathy Hersh: What about the art scene on the Beach? You saw the architectural hidden gem there. Then it started being discovered by other people. What can you say now about how Miami Beach has evolved, suddenly, as one of the top art spots in the world? It's a real hot spot.

Rosa Lowinger: Yes. Well, it is ... Okay.

Kathy Hersh: Did it surprise you that that happened?

Rosa Lowinger: No, it didn't surprise me at all. It didn't surprise me in the slightest. It seems perfectly logical. Why not? It's a beautiful place, beautiful buildings, fresh, young thinking, modern young city. It's totally logical. I think that ... Let's see. I have to be diplomatic here. I think it's great. Obviously, it's undoubtedly a great thing. Undoubtedly a great thing for the community, for our presence in the world. The thing is that what has put us on the map is an art fair, which is led by commerce, so the art fair itself definitely brings a certain quality of interaction. To me, what's most interesting about Miami, quite separate from the art fair, is the local talent that we have discovered here in our artists, and our gallerists. There are some darned good galleries in this city that really are doing interesting programming. They're not mostly on Miami Beach. They're mostly not—

Kathy Hersh: What are some of those?

Rosa Lowinger: Fred Snitzer, Spinello, Nina Johnson, Mindy Solomon ... I'm not getting everybody, I'm sure. I'm going to miss somebody that's going to be mad, but those are the ones that immediately come ... [Diet 44:06], what's their name, again? Oh, god, I'm blanking on this one. They just moved, as well. I'll think of it. I'll think of it. Oh, it's going to drive me nuts that I'm not thinking of it, but they're Pan-American projects ... A lot of those started in Wynwood, and have now moved to Little River, or started in other parts of the city. I didn't know anything about what the Cernuda family was doing. They're not a hip, young gallery. They do a lot of secondary market, but their program is very good. This is great. Then I think the art schools are incredible, and they're producing good artists. Like many cities, Miami tends to ignore some of its local talent for big-name superstars from out of town, but that goes with the territory. I think it goes with the territory.

To me, the most interesting thing are programs like Dimensions Variable, which is ... These artists run spaces, Dimensions Variable, Cannonball, the Locust Projects. When we're in LA, we don't go to half the art events that we do in Miami, and we find that very interesting, because LA is clearly higher up on the serious art—

Kathy Hersh: The food chain?

Rosa Lowinger: Food chain. It's impressive. I think that in Miami, people still have a ... Miami, Miami Beach, there's still this tendency of looking to New York as the answer to all questions. Rusty and I both see this in conservation, where some of our high-end clients are surprised that there are people of our caliber here, because Rusty has had a New York reputation for decades. I've had an LA reputation for decades. People here will sometimes look at us as the local people, and go to New York for anything that's seriously in need, even though the prices are four times as much, but that's changing, also. That's also changing. We, of course, our two firms are ... We're handling some of the top collections in the city with almost no exception, and that's a big deal.

Actually, let me back up, because I forgot one piece of this puzzle. When I was living in Los Angeles, and coming to Miami to see my family, and whatnot, I did get one phenomenal gig, I think, in the late '90s, or early 2000s. That was to do the first collection survey for the Wolfsonian. I did some restoration of a few pieces, and I helped with the installation, and cleaning of the glazed terra cotta theater decoration that's in the lobby, and with the escutcheons that are on the façade. That was one of my first inklings that there was definitely more here than meets the eye.

Contemporary galleries, a lot of cities are beefing up their contemporary art program, and that's not a hard thing to do, because it's happening now. All it means is just committing to that. But to have a collection like the Wolfsonian's, that is another matter. I am, to this day, mind-boggled by the Wolfsonian.

Kathy Hersh: That's our favorite museum.

Rosa Lowinger: It's my favorite museum. It's my favorite museum.

Kathy Hersh: It is mind-boggling.

Rosa Lowinger: As a firm, we do favors for the museums all the time. You go and examine artwork, you give them a proposal, you give them a cost estimate. We are always willing to work with their existing budget. We give them a discount to begin with, but we work with their existing budgets. We do it for Vizcaya, we do it for the Wolfsonian, for The Bass. We try, and you try to make it work ... The Rubells ... The Wolfsonian is ... If you have to say what's your ... I only have one child, and people say that they don't prefer any of their children, but I find that hard to believe. The Wolfsonian's our favorite child. They allowed me to curate that amazing show with Frank Luca on Cuba. The reason I got that gig is because of the Tropicana book.

Kathy Hersh: You met Micky?

Rosa Lowinger: I've met Micky a couple of times, a number of times. Micky recognizes me by face. We live near each other now. I live next ... I live in the little building next to the Palm Bay Club. I can see Miami Beach. It's nicer to see it, than actually be on it, at the moment.

Kathy Hersh: I was going to ask you your impressions of Micky, but we can save that, unless you think that's ... Okay, he's unique.

Rosa Lowinger: I don't know him very well, but I am bowled over by his vision. That's a singular vision, and it's a vision that has nothing to do with glamor, or self-importance, because it's not ... What he's doing is not trendy. None of that stuff is trendy.

Kathy Hersh: He calls himself a hunter-gatherer.

Rosa Lowinger: Yeah. He is. I've heard other people call him a hoarder with taste and

money. That's not my thing. His taste is incredible. He really knows where to gather.

Kathy Hersh: Carl, is there anything that you want to touch on?

Carl: Well, I was thinking of ... You talked about the barren art scene when you were growing up, and now we have ... Bass is in renovation, you have the Jewish Museum, which is ... There's a whole bunch of alternatives on the mainland, whether it's the [Paris 50:17] ... It's just that the scene must ...

It must be mind-boggling for you to see that difference from what you saw when you were growing up to what's here now.

Kathy Hersh: It's like the difference between what was there ... It's literally a 180. It couldn't be more different from then to now. When I was growing up here, there was nothing. There was maybe a gallery, but there was no art community. There was no scene, certainly, and there was no sense that this city produced anything worth exporting. It was all about what would we be taking from somewhere else? Now it's like an embarrassment of riches. As cities evolve, and they grow, and the strengthen, their best stuff rises to the top.

I have a lot of hopes for that Jewish Museum. I think it could be very interesting. How could the Jewish Museum of Miami Beach not be interesting? It's just that they haven't gotten their game on entirely, yet, but I think it's going to be great. That whole corridor with the Wolfsonian, and the Jewish Museum, and the Frank Gehry thing, what is that called? New World Symphony. It's great. Lincoln Road's a little bit ... It tipped over too far.

These things have a rhythm. They start off as funky, and unknown, and then the artists move in. Then the artists give it coolness, and quality, and then it starts to top off, and then the developers move in, and the money comes in, and then it just mushrooms up, and it starts to wane, and the best stuff stays, and the other stuff goes away. I see that we're in that area right now. I hope. You saw, for example, Wynwood. Wynwood started, started, started, and then the galleries moved out, because the developers just got too greedy. They just jacked up the prices. The prices are so high, considering what you get there. There's no trees. It's not ... It ain't SoHo, as much as they like to think it is. They've all moved up.

Kathy Hersh: To the Design District?

Rosa Lowinger: No, they're further— [crosstalk 52:46]

Kathy Hersh: When you say up—

Rosa Lowinger: They're in Little River. A lot of the good galleries are now ... Either they're up in Little River, or they're further down, towards downtown. It's downtown Little River is where it's happening. I think Wynwood



just ... They overshot the mark a little bit.

Kathy Hersh: Yeah, you go there on a weekend, and you can barely move.

Rosa Lowinger: Wynwood?

Kathy Hersh: Mm-hmm.

Rosa Lowinger: But it's like—

Kathy Hersh: In season.

Rosa Lowinger: Exactly, but it's like what they call in New York, the bridge and tunnel crowd. The people that go for the scene, and not to actually see any art. Nobody in the serious art world goes there on a weekend.

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