

JEWISH LATIN PRINCESS

LENORE SKENAZY, AUTHOR OF FREE RANGE KIDS AND
FOUNDER OF LETGROW.ORG

EPISODE 41

You're listening to Jewish Latin Princess Podcast by Yael. Every week get your dose of inspiration from the world's most uniquely talented Jewish women and from Yael herself. Seeking profound and practical ways to live a joyful, richer Jewish life? Welcome to Jewish Latin Princess Podcast.

And now, Jewish lifestyle expert and bilingual blogger at www.jewishlatinprincess.com, your host, Yael.

Yael Trusch: Are you an over protective mother? Do you allow your children to do age appropriate things independently despite the risks that might be involved? What is age appropriate? As a society we don't know anymore. Do you let the fear of some terrible thing happening, well, my guest calls, worst first thinking, overcome you? Welcome to Jewish Latin Princess, I'm Yael Trusch, your host. I have Lenore Skenazy on the show and I'm so excited! Lenore has been called America's worst mother. How about that? A title that propelled her to revolutionized parenting and create a much needed cultural shift. Perhaps we need to get back to a place where we trust our kids to do and act independently as opposed to treating them like porcelain figurines. Sounds like the way I grew up, in fact, Lenore claims that the world is much safer now than it was then.

So what are we so afraid of? Lenore is the author of, Free-Range Kids, How to Raise Safe, Self-Reliant Children (Without Going Nuts with Worry). She's a Discovery Life TV host and the creator of www.letgrow.org. Lenore is a sought after speaker and a leader on issues ranging from parenting in America to public policy. If you haven't read Lenore's book or blog, you will find this interview extremely eye opening and I invite you to find out more about how you can ease up on your parenting and help create the cultural shifts that we need in order to get our kids back to our neighborhood playgrounds and walking to a friend's houses, cooking dinner? Yes, becoming independent, self-reliant human beings who do not need us to watch their every move. Here's Lenore Skenazy.

[Theme Music]

Yael Trusch: Lenore Skenazy, welcome to Jewish Latin Princess.

Lenore Skenazy: Well, thank you so much! It's nice to be here!

Yael Trusch: It's a pleasure to have you on the show. You are a lot of things, Lenore. First of all, you're America's worst mom.

Lenore Skenazy: You said it. Ask them... number one!

Yael Trusch: That's—

Lenore Skenazy: Numero uno! Yeah.

Yael Trusch: I know what got you where you are today. Thankfully, I mean, God knows parents across America needed you. You are the creator of the Free-Range Kids movement. You're the author of Free-Range Kids. You're a Discovery Life TV host, and through all these—you're writing, you're speaking, you've really become a thought leader on issues ranging from parenting in American culture to public policy. You're basically revolutionizing parenting and as a result that's really changing the world.

Lenore Skenazy: They're changing the mind. This is pretty great, yeah! Revolutionizing parenting, I love that. People should know that now I am head of a non-profit called, Let Grow, which is trying to make the Free Range Kid idea into actual, practical reality that really does change our culture.

Yael Trusch: Amazing. Yes, I do want to talk about Let Grow and how much you are helping teachers and incorporate things in the classroom and so on. But I want you to take first... you to take us back to 2008 when you were called America's worst mom after you let your 9 year old son take the New York subway by himself.

Lenore Skenazy: Yes. That was it! The exciting incident.

Yael Trusch: Tell us the whole story?

Lenore Skenazy: Yes indeed! So to kind of admit that back then at literally 10 years ago, he's 19 now, our son, our younger son, our older son had nothing to do with this, our older son calls himself a control group. Our younger son said that can we take him someplace he's never been before and let him find his own way home by the subway and this is something we had to discuss. My husband and I, and when we did we thought it makes sense. You know, he speaks the language, we're always on the subway, that's how we get around. Six million people take it every single day and so I believe there's safety in numbers so one sunny Sunday, I took him to Bloomingdales,

and I left him in the handbag department after explaining that that was the day. It's not like he was looking around, "Where's mom? Where did she go?" It was the day.

Yael Trusch: Right.

Lenore Skenazy: And then he had to go through the purse department. It's right above the subway entrance and he's figured out I guess, when I thought again, then go down stairs and he took the subway down the 34th street which is the same street as the Miracle on 34th Street and then he took a bus across town, we live across town and when he came into the apartment he was like levitating, basically, because he had done something that he values, that he feels he was right, for we trusted him to do it. He got to be an adult and we knew that he was growing up and I can't write about it immediately because it wasn't that big a deal. Eventually, it was that big a deal. It's just something that he wanted to do but I'm a newspaper columnist and now, a month or two later, when there's nothing to worry about it I wrote about that.

And two days after, "Why I let my 9 year old ride the subway alone", I was on the Today show, MSNBC, FoxNews, and MTR defending myself. And that's when I realized that I am a free-range mom and I started Free-Range Kids that weekend as a blog to say that we the Jewish mom had a reputation to uphold. We are nervous, we are worried, that's how we are portrayed for a reason so it's not like I'm a daredevil mom or anything like that.

It's just I keep wondering about it, I feel like I'm not particularly a courageous person and I don't necessarily want my kids to do things like skateboard or snowboard or anything like that but getting around town and trusting people and trusting my kids, that seems like just a normal thing to do and that's why I've been shocked, ever since, at how we backed off on the idea that our kids can do almost anything on their own. We don't believe that anymore. And it's such an enormous cultural shift that I wake up every day ready to think about it again in ten years.

Yael Trusch: What happened Lenore? I mean how did we get to be called a society that doesn't trust their kids anymore? What happened in the last 20 years?

Lenore Skenazy: You know, I look at my four five points that I always make but I have to say before I have it ready, a letter to a guy who's writing a column about letting his 12 year old take an airplane as an unaccompanied minor, with nobody helping her.

Yael Trusch: Okay.

Lenore Skenazy: And he's nervous but he's feeling like he can do it and I realized that the thing that's different about today is that to think that a 12 year old can't look up at the sign that said you're going to La Guardia, you have to go to Gate G10, and then

look at the number which are really large. So G1, G2, G3, and figure out how to get to G10 or ask somebody to assist that's—if you can't expect your kids to do that it's almost like not expecting them to be human. Anybody can do that.

Yael Trusch: Yes!

Lenore Skenazy: Especially anybody who's grown up in that area that they're familiar with airplanes and airports which I assumed this kid is. And so how did we get to the point where we think that we have to be transporting them all the time? That we have to be with them? And it reminded me of—I gave a speech at Rochester years ago.

Yael Trusch: Uh-huh.

Lenore Skenazy: But one of the comments there just stuck with me. A mom raised her hand and she said, almost hoping for affirmation but worrying that she'll be blamed and changed, that she had been at their local library recently and with her five year old daughter and she wanted, she, the mom, wanted to check out a book upstairs. And so she said to the librarian—she said to the kid first of all, you want to come with me upstairs or do you want to wait here and look at a picture book?

Yael Trusch: Right.

Lenore Skenazy: While I go get my book. And the kid said I want to stay here, and so the mom, I thought responsibly, told the librarian, and it was only the librarian, that lady and the kid who will going to be at the children's room and she said, I'm going to run upstairs and get my book and I'll be right back. And the librarian said to her fine, but you should recognize the dangers of the world do not stop at the library door.

Yael: What?!

Lenore Skenazy: And so... yeah, I know! Thank you for that. And what's so interesting to me so I read a little piece about that. And there were fourteen hundred comments and most of them we're, how dare that mother leave that child? That poor innocent child, anything could have happened. The library... you know the librarian was worrying her. First of all, it assumed that the librarian is going to do something horrible in three minutes. It assumes that maybe somebody's outside watching the library for years, decades on end with slip second timing hoping that someday somebody would leave a kid in the library and they could like chloroform the Librarian and get to the kid in the three minutes to take hostage. Take and check out a Michael Lewis book. But what really tells me is that people kept writing the equivalent of why you'd leave a million dollars on the table, why would you leave your daughter who is clearly more precious, and it's like, I agree, children are clearly more precious than a million dollars, that's pretty obvious. But a million dollars is something that everybody wants and they could

slip on their pocket and we forget that children are people and personal motives people would want your kid but technically, the kid will say go away or spit on them or kick them —

Yael Trusch: That's true.

Lenore Skenazy: And there's this new way of looking at children as if they are possessions.

Yael Trusch: Yes we are.

Lenore Skenazy: Sort of like figurines of children.

Yael Trusch: Yes.

Lenore Skenazy: That you have to transport and you have to take care of and you can't expect them to do anything on their own because they are not people they're figurines, they are valuable figurines. That's the thing that's just puzzling me the most lately. How did we go from the kid that would help out in the farm or help you make dinner, set the table; to kids who are not expected to do anything except be transported by us to places they're supposed to be where they will be supervised by some other adult who acts as a guard.

Yael Trusch: We're hurting them along the way because it's part of normal development to allow people to let go, to have their independence, to learn through their own mistakes, to fall and trip, to figure out how to handle an airport when you're twelve, you know? It's not that rocket science, you know?

Lenore Skenazy: It's not! It's nice being the pilot and the passenger. So it's insulting to the kid and it's enslaving to the parents because you've been turned from somebody raising somebody who's going to be competent or at least did have increase in competency to your brace guard. And you better be with them all the time or else it's going to be stolen. I mean, that's really, it's a perfect analogy. You must watch them all the time or they will be stolen. It is something valuable that will be stolen from you, and that's why we get these weird things like one of the stories that I still puzzle over... my neighbor, which happened at Costco she was there her little kids and some lady behind her said, would you watch my son for a second, you know, she's going to go get something that she forgot. And my neighbor agreed to do this as would anybody because we're nice people for the most part.

Yael Trusch: Yes.

LENORE SKENAZY: But she said, what a crazy mom. I could have taken her kid. And I'm like, it's not crazy to trust another mom with two children and a giant cartful of jumbo sized Ragu Pasta Sauce and cake fudge—

Yael Trusch: Right.

LENORE SKENAZY: ... waiting in line in Costco who also watch your own kid for a few minutes but if you think of every... if your kid is this diamond that's about to be stolen in every moment then I guess it is dangerous to trust anybody, anytime except yourself. And so that means that we are always driving our kids, we are always watching our kids. We can't talk them out of soccer, we have to watch from the stand because first of all they have to know we're there and then the coach has to know we're there so they don't try anything and it just becomes a real full time job, and I think of this, helicopter parenting mandate, as a sort of backdoor to keeping women down. Nobody said, you can't work or you know, don't take on that extra project, you're a woman. They say, well, if you do that, who's going to be with the kids? You know what you're going to do, you don't want your kid alone, you don't want to risk your kid, you don't want to leave, and so suddenly all your free time is chasing, supervising kids and if you remember your own childhood, you don't want to be supervised 24/7! Nobody likes being micromanaged, and yet we're saying that kids need to do this, and we need to it for the kids and so, everybody is losing.

Yael Trusch: Everybody's losing, and honestly, I don't want to be supervising my four kids all the time. They're pretty good on their own, they play together and take care of each other and then it works for me.

LENORE SKENAZY: Right!

Yael Trusch: Because it gives me my sanity back.

LENORE SKENAZY: Right! Now I mean, you know, Jenifer King wrote in that book, all joy and no fun? You know your joy is that you have your children but no fun.

Yael Trusch: Exactly.

LENORE SKENAZY: There are--know we believe it or not there are cultures around the world where parents... if a parent... if they thought parents on the ground, you know, playing Barbie, rolling the ball or doing flash cards with their kids they would go like, why is the parents on the ground?

Yael Trusch: Wow.

LENORE SKENAZY: This is strange! Just like, you know, it's like having your dog sit at the dinner table and eat off the table. It's something that doesn't happen. Why is the

parent on the ground acting like a child? Because not everybody thinks that the only way to stimulate a child is by having a loving adult dote on them 24/7 and make everything into a “teachable moment”.

Yael Trusch: Right, right! And is that also a lot—does this have a lot to do with the media and the proliferation of information and how much we hear as real cases of, you know, abduction. I just—

Lenore Skenazy: Yes, completely. I mean, if we’re going to just go through the four or five reasons that I think we are so much more afraid than our parents we’re?

Yael Trusch: Uh-huh.

Lenore Skenazy: For us, parents who generally let us walk to school at least they’re way outside a little. The first would be the media because the media loves nothing more than the tale of stranger danger and abduction, and these are so rare that some people still remember the story of Maddy McCann, who was the little girl taken from her hotel room in Portugal, remember that story?

Yael Trusch: I don’t.

Lenore Skenazy: Both her parents are doctors, you do or don’t?

Yael Trusch: I don’t, I don’t.

Lenore Skenazy: Okay,

Yael Trusch: That’s why—

Lenore Skenazy: It was a big story at the time and the girl was British. Anyway, the point is that, we went and cover that story, from America, when we wouldn’t cover anything else in Portugal and possibly Europe. I mean, you know?

Yael Trusch: Yeah.

Lenore Skenazy: America is not usually thinking beyond its border that much, but when there was one story of one white upper middle class girl, English speaking girl, taken from her hotel room in Portugal, suddenly we have all our camera crews going over there because it’s such a rare crime and yet it’s so valuable to the media that they’re willing to go over and cover it, so it’s like gold, right? It’s a rare thing that case, you know just pays it up a lot in eyeball because we watch that story. And that’s what the media want. So somebody once said to me that the media is not very informed, the media is there to make money.

Yael Trusch: Of course.

LENORE SKENAZY: You had to say no to the story. What story makes the most money? The story that people watch the most intensely and an abduction by a stranger of an innocent child preferably white, preferably upper middle class. It is one that does get our attention and so the media finds it and they just keep shouting about it and they repeated on all the, you know, Law and Order, and CSI and all the scary shows that they can, because you want to go for the jugular and that's it. So the media has made us more afraid and obviously the other two reasons are we are living on a religious society and you start picking like lawyers, lawyers imagine how anything bad could happen and how they could go in court and prove that somebody was negligent and we'll start thinking about all the things that are dangerous and all the ways that we could be blamed and it paralyzes us to hear. Everything starts looking like a law suit in the making and a law suit in the making means that something terrible happens. So we're always getting used to what I call worst for picking; picking up the worst case scenario. First, I kick the ball of that plane and proceeding as it really happen. In fact, swing has been banned. It's drawn out of the playground in Richmond, Washington and also at Spokane, Washington because somebody started thinking about them a little too hard. And I realize, oh my god, we can't have swings for my child to get here.

Yael Trusch: Are you serious?

LENORE SKENAZY: So, wow! Yeah, I am serious. Yeah, yeah! And also, I don't know about Israel but... or Latin America, but in the United States it's hard to find a playground that has a merry-go-round now or a regular all titter tot. And I think that all has to with litigiousness as well.

Yael Trusch: Wow!

LENORE SKENAZY: So, I forgot! I was interviewing somebody yesterday about recess and I asked in Facebook if anybody has recess taken away and this one mom member, okay yeah, my son has recess taken away. So I started talking to her and she said, it's not like recess is still great to begin with it like explaining it to me. She said, well, the kids are out in the playground with one play structure but they're not allowed to run ahead and they're not allowed to jump of it and they're not allowed to play tag and they're not supposed to play chasing games like cops and robbers.

Yael Trusch: And what are they supposed to do?

LENORE SKENAZY: So she said that her son said that all they did at recess, was they would sit under the play structure, the boys with the girls and play restaurant.

Yael Trusch: Ohhh...

LENORE SKENAZY: That was it! And I have a follow up to that story which is, she said that one day, there was one tree on the playground and they chopped it down because they've worried that their children will go and climb it. So the day they were chopping down the tree, believe it or not, they let the kids go play on the black shop which is forbidden territory on any other recess day. And that's the day they gave kids balls and jump ropes before otherwise forbidden. And she said her kids got on the car that day and said mom, you won't believe it today, it was so fun at recess. We have ball, we got to throw them, and we had jump ropes and it was so great! And that was the one day. They learn to take to play with balls at recess so it could. So I don't know if it's litigiousness or not, but in any event it's a weird way of looking at childhood and taking, oh they could get hurt, let's just take all opportunities for anything bad to happen out of their lives and we'll keep them safe, that's really our only goal. Wild, right?

Yael Trusch: It's wild! It's absolutely wild!

LENORE SKENAZY: Yeah, yeah! Actually, as a reporter, I really love that story, sort of summed up what I wanted to write.

Yael Trusch: Yes.

LENORE SKENAZY: So there's the media, there's litigious society, there's we put an extra culture which are always telling you, you're doing it wrong, you're eating the wrong food, you're not saying enough words, you missed what—you know like, the neuroscience tells us that you have to rock them for three and a half minutes every... you know, whatever it is.

Yael Trusch: Yes.

LENORE SKENAZY: It becomes a laundry list of things that you're supposed to do and not do, to boost your child's genius potentials and also keep them safe from the smallest prey. And then we also live in a capitalist culture which I'm happy about, but the easiest way to get any money from anyone is to tell parents that their kid is in danger. And that you have a way to keep them safe. And so now there are apps that do everything from, you know, when you're healthy, new born is in the crib, it breathes out, there's a little device for the kid and it reads out their temperature and their movement level and also their blood oxygen level.

Yael Trusch: Wow!

LENORE SKENAZY: What's your blood oxygen level? While we're at it?

Yael Trusch: Hm.

LENORE SKENAZY: I bet you don't know, right?

Yael Trusch: Right. No, have no idea and it's all good.

Lenore Skenazy: Yeah. I mean I'm breathing, right? And actually, they changed their website which is too bad. Because originally their website had the most outrageous sentence I've ever read which was, just because your little ones chest is moving up and down doesn't mean you're getting enough oxygen.

Yael Trusch: Oh, my goodness! Oh!

Lenore Skenazy: It ain't boring and what's interesting to me is that if you can scare parents to the point where even if they're looking at their healthy baby in a crib, breathing and sleeping peacefully, and you can say, even that is not enough evidence that your child is fine. You know? They're in an enclosed place, you're watching them, they're breathing. That's not safe enough. That's what's in our culture. We've been told literally nothing is safe enough for our kids unless we do something, buy something, read something, get something and enroll at something, watch something, you know, measure something... that nobody in the history of the world has ever considered important before.

Yael Trusch: You know we've atrophied our ability to trust our intuition as parents.

Lenore Skenazy: Correct. Yes.

Yael Trusch: We have as parent... we have an innate intuition as to what is age appropriate for our children, what is right when they look healthy, when there's... we... there's so much of our inner voice that can guide us but we just like to bypass that completely.

Lenore Skenazy: Right. It's like they cauterized them. And sometime people say so I like, there is... all I'm saying is that, let grow equal common sense. And I'm like, it hard to talk about commonsense when we're growing up in a culture that has taken away swings and told us to measure our children's oxygen level and says that if you leave your child for three minutes in a public place with another adult they're not safe. I mean, it's very hard to have thought of a concept. Common sense comes from a culture and you know what we really have to do and what I'm trying to do now is renormalize giving kids some independence so that we can get our common sense back because I'm sure you realize and try to see with your own eyes that, hey, my kids can run an errand. Hey, my kids can play outside for half an hour without me playing with them. Hey, my kids can you know, can do something. My kid got lost on their way home and they found their way home. And try to see this with your own eyes, all you have is the opposite, you know? To grow you and your confidence as a parent, all you have is, you know, girl snatched from bus stop, and you know child found dead and look at this horrible story and people pestering you on Facebook. So common sense is not only

innate. It's partially created by your culture and if your culture is only creating fear it's really hard to have what I would probably call it your common sense.

YAEL TRUSCH: Hmm... I see, I see. So what can parents and teachers be doing better to do this shifts because I mean—

LENORE SKENAZY: Yeah.

YAEL TRUSCH: The school that you gave me the example like I would not want my child go to such a school!

LENORE SKENAZY: No, I know! I know. Actually the mom I said took her kid out. But you know, if you can't, you don't have the money or the time to home school like what she's doing then you're stuck, right? So what Let Grow is trying to do two things in the school and one thing in community.

YAEL TRUSCH: Okay.

LENORE SKENAZY: In schools we're trying to get schools to do something, I'm calling it after school free play that what it is. It's after school free play. We believe that kids really learn a lot when they're playing with each other. I mean, talk about teachable moment; they have to learn to get along, to get to focus, they have to be creative, they have to decide as well as to get out, comprise, the social skills, who's going to have a team, how they can make them equal or not. All that stuff kicks in, all those special skills that we want our kids have kick in when their playing, but they don't kick in when they are playing little league for something supervised by adults because adults supply all those things. So for kids to get any experience almost negotiating with their peers.

YAEL TRUSCH: Yes.

LENORE SKENAZY: And having fun and learning how to make things happen and pivoting as they say in Silicone Valley, kick ball is great, but we just kicked the ball into the, you know neighbor and now we can't get it, so what are we going to do now? So if you got kids... I want you to check free play but I worry that when they come home and they're like my kids, they'll look outside, there are no kids outside and so don't go outside and they end up in electronics Well, now they're older. But if you have after school free play, it's not running around in the woods, which is a little sad, but it is making up their own games and solving their own disputes so long you have the teacher or whoever is supervising, acting like a lifeguard as opposed to a coach, right? And the best thing about the after school free play is that there's critical mass of kids which are currently at school and they have time and the parents know they're at some place safe and so it's like win, win, win, win; and if you given them three hours after school maybe a day a week, two days a week, all five days a week you can sign your

kid up, well then they have a little bit of an old fashioned childhood albeit on the playground as opposed in the woods or down on the *cul de sac*. So trying to get school to do after school free play is sort of easy with for re normalizing childhood. The other program that we are starting in school, we have seven schools or actually eight. That's eight. It's something called Let's Grow project and it's free! It takes no class time. It's so simple. What it is is the teacher tells the children, okay, today I want you to go home and ask your parents that you could do something that you feel you're ready to do, that for one reason or another they haven't just done yet. It could be walk the dog, make dinner, rake the leaves, something... Something that kids know that their parents we're doing at their age. And because it's recommended by the school, and because it's a one shot deal and because all the other kids and parents in the class or the school are doing it, parents usually say yes, I mean it's not mandatory but they usually do. And then when the kids come home with the bread that they got from the store you know or they make dinner you know, they make spaghetti and they actually boiled the spaghetti and they served it, the parents are so outrageously proud that it changes them as much as when they see their kids start paddling at their crawling, you know? It's like your heartbeat's up and you can't believe it. And you don't say after seeing them kick those first step for you with their arms are open wide and say that so great, that so great that so great! Now go back to crawling. So, it's just a make or break moment for the parents, and when you see them write about this, you know, we've done some survey, it's like, wow! I had no idea. Oh, my god this is great. Now we're doing all kinds of other micro project, now my kids can get haircut by themselves, now my kid is helping me with the dishes, now my kids, now my kids; and then the school that we just started this among others? We started this like two months ago, the seven schools were doing it and when I went up to witness it and actually make a video, the principal of one of the schools showed me a Facebook post by another lady who is bragging about the project that her kid was doing, the Let Grow project. And I said okay, great. She said no, you don't understand. This is not our school district. So what's happening, is that parents from the school district doing the Let Grow project are posting pictures, bragging, in Facebook, what? My kids do the dishes. What? My kids are ready to leave. What? My kid ran an errand. And the parents in the other school district they say, how come my kid isn't showing that?

Yael Trusch: Yes.

Lenore Skenazy: So they go ahead and demand it I guess at the local principal and so that school had started doing it too, and I think that once we get a few more school of doing this in different parts of the country or world, it's going to become a normal part of any school. I really think that in 10 years we'll be talking again, you'll have millions upon millions of listeners, and I'll be retired and we'll be saying like "wow, did you ever believe the Let Grow project would become like this" and I'll say "yeah,"

this is just ten years, because why wouldn't you do this? The kid ends up proud and happy, the parents are proud and happy, you didn't waste any school time, it didn't take any time away from the curriculum, you end up with more competent and self resourceful kids who are willing to do things on their own and so that to me is such a slam dunk and yet again, so far in the seven schools, and then the one who virtually that copy them, I would really urge our listeners to go to letgrow.org and click on the thing that says programs, and under the thing that say program then click Let Grow project, and just try to get your school to do it because it's free and fast and it changes so much.

Yael Trusch: I will love it. It's so important and the truth is when they do these little things, like I send my—sometimes, we'll need some few things from the store, so I'll drive to the store and I'll give the money to my 11 year old and my 9 year old daughter and they'll go off on their own inside and they just have to get four things and, you know, it's a small store, it's pretty much in our neighborhood, I'm right out there on the fire line with my blinking lights, like I'm right there.

Lenore Skenazy: Uh-huh.

Yael Trusch: They saved me the hassle of going with the other kids, the other younger kids and they're so bright they can do it. They can actually get the stuff, sometimes they don't know where it is, they have to ask somebody and they come over and they'll tell me that they asked and he forget to check the change, and they gave me the change wrong, like you know a lot of this little things.

Lenore Skenazy: Right.

Yael Trusch: So important.

Lenore Skenazy: Right! They are part of the world. Kids always want a part of the world. Why can't you, look at Tom Hanks' movie Big. Kids want to be big and we keep treating them like they are babies, that they need to be held and carried and nothing to be expected of them and that's—it's insulting and that's why it's so thrilling when the opposite happens, when my parents finally trust me. Fine, I got to take the subway. Fine, I got to go get the key ingredients for dinner. It's not only great for them and it gets them used to being part of the world, but sometimes when I gave lectures, if I have extra time, I'll have people close their eyes and they have to think for like three minutes about somebody that made them feel terrible, ugly or stupid, unlovable, blah, blah, blah. And I hate that time because I don't like making people feel bad, but it goes by and then I'll ask people okay open your eyes where did you feel that misery? That jerk. Oh, it's heavy in my chest, my stomach hurts, I felt this weight on my shoulders and I'll be like okay. Now close your eyes and think of somebody who believes in you,

maybe before you believed in yourself, somebody who thought you can do it. You know, you're smart, knock them dead. Go kick them.

Yael Trusch: Yes.

Lenore Skenazy: And so they think about it and they opened their eyes and sometimes they're crying. I was when I first did it, I stole this idea from somebody else. And now I say okay so it's so important, this person who believed in you, some people who say it, it's my basketball coach, it was my uncle, my grandma, dad, whatever. I tell don't you want to be that person to your kid? So when they did close their eyes and they see you because you believed in them? And then everybody start, and so do I. It's like, well, you can't be if you're doing everything with your kid or for your kid because they get the message that you desperately love them which is great, but they don't get the message that you trust them at all, right? And people say, it's not because I don't trust my kid, I don't trust the world. Well, you know, it's the same thing, you have to trust your kid in the world.

Yael Trusch: Yes.

Lenore Skenazy: You have to teach them to cross the road safely, look both ways, don't get in the car with anybody, but you do have to gradually let them go for them, not to be a part of the world but for them to see that you don't think that you're the only person that they have to be with you all the time to be okay, because that's not trusting them. That's trusting yourself.

Yael Trusch: Yeah, that's not trusting, that's trusting yourself That's so true. Unless you want your kid forever sleeping in your own home, you have to let go.

Lenore Skenazy: Yeah, like, close your eyes and think of someone who believes in you, not mom!

Yael Trusch: Speaking of believing in you and this is the perfect segue to my question. Lenore, you took a very bold move and I don't mean by letting your son take the subway at 9 year old but rather by coming full force with this. What gave you the strength and the motivation to say, I don't care about the opposition, there is opposition and there will be an opposition. This is for the greater good and I'm going to be the one who's going to go out there and communicate this to the world, and just do it. What gives you the strength when time gets tough?

Lenore Skenazy: You're coming much more valor on my card. Really, you know, what I really hate is stop change, I don't like prejudice, I don't like thinking the worst of people. I became a reporter because I just wanted to meet people all the time, and what I really came out about was not me, undertaking the points and arrows of the

opposition, I just want to say that, I like strangers, I really like meeting people, I'm glad I'm on earth, I'm glad there is all these other people around. I mean I don't think I would become a reporter if I didn't like meeting other people. The idea that other people automatically equals danger as opposed to other people automatically equals strength in numbers. A lot of people who are going to help when something goes wrong, that was really my motivation. Not just to say, let's not think the worst of people, which turns out to be because my agent who's also a Jew told me that it's a Talmudic idea.

Yael Trusch: Yes?

Lenore Skenazy: Which is that, we are obligated to give people the benefit of the doubt.

Yael Trusch: Benefit of the doubt!

Lenore Skenazy: Yeah! And so in my mind, if I had another name for whatever I'm doing, I would just call it the benefit of the doubt movement, because to think of all strangers as out to get my kids, and everybody is nefarious or so unconcerned that they wouldn't help a child in need is not only a untrue view of the world. It's a wrong view of the world, and I think it's a non-Jewish view of the world.

Lenore Skenazy: So that's it I mean, I wasn't coming out saying I'm going to have to take on something gigantic when I wrote my piece, it's just that I really trusted my son, that should he needed some help in the subway that other people would help him as opposed to hurt him.

Yael Trusch: Right. It's even... It's giving other people the benefit of the doubt and it's building, the Jewish concept of believing in the innate good and worthiness of other human beings in this world.

Lenore Skenazy: You're right! Right.

Yael Trusch: The world is a good place. Yes, there are... things that are wrong with it and we're going to fix them but...

Lenore Skenazy: Right. Right.

Yael Trusch: We are good human beings. All right, Lenore let's just wrap it up with a few Jewish questions that I always ask my guest and these are a few statements that are open ended, and I'll let you finish them with whatever comes to mind, okay?

Lenore Skenazy: Sure!

Yael Trusch: I'm Lenore Skenazy and I feel most spiritual when?

LENORE SKENAZY: Oh my god! I'm sorry, I never feel spiritual, I'm so sorry. I wish I did, I tried. I spent a year in Israel, I've taken Talmud classes, I go to shul, I never feel one ounce of spirit ever and I'm sorry to say that.

Yael TRUSCH: I love the honesty to you because I think it's so real, because it is so hard. We are physical human beings living in a physical world. That's the bottom line.

LENORE SKENAZY: Right.

Yael TRUSCH: My favorite mitzvah or one I feel most connected to?

LENORE SKENAZY: Oh! My favorite mitzvah. Well, I like the candles on Friday night.

Yael TRUSCH: Oh.

LENORE SKENAZY: And I like that, so I feel that connected to it. I think grow up even lighting the candles.

Yael TRUSCH: Oh!

LENORE SKENAZY: It feels a little added on for me, but I like doing it. And I like the fact that my kids grew up with the candles being lit so for them it's the norm, as opposed to me it was, look how Jewish I am. That sort of thing.

Yael TRUSCH: No, that's beautiful. How did you even think? After your boys were born? That you decided to adapt this kind of custom?

LENORE SKENAZY: No, actually we've been doing this before they were born. I guess, maybe when I was married, my husband grew up a little more religious than me. His grandfather was a rabbi and I don't know. We just started doing it together and then I'm just happy that my kids grew seeing that.

Yael TRUSCH: Beautiful. My fondest, sweetest Jewish memory is?

LENORE SKENAZY: Oh! Well, I guess it was taking my kids to Yom Kippur services one year where the Rabbi at some point, the gates of prayer we're closing—

Yael TRUSCH: Yeah?

LENORE SKENAZY: He was singing on his guitar, it makes me sound like such hippy hippy person knock, knock, knock, knocking on heaven's door.

Yael TRUSCH: Huh?!

LENORE SKENAZY: And I'm like, oh my god! That's what we're doing and that was like the glimmer of—maybe that's my spiritual moment. I am knocking on heaven's door, so that was a very sweet Jewish moment for me.

Yael Trusch: That is so sweet, I love it. Something I wish I had learned about Judaism growing up is?

LENORE SKENAZY: Oh, I wish I learned about it. I guessed I didn't know much about Shabbat growing up. And I'm such a driven person often. I feel so guilty if I'm not doing work that it would have been nice to know that God gave you a free pass on Saturday.

Yael Trusch: Yes.

LENORE SKENAZY: So I didn't really be like that growing up, and now I'm happy to take Saturday's off.

Yael Trusch: I like that. Free pass on Saturday. Ohhh I love—

LENORE SKENAZY: Right! Right. Like give back to yourself .

Yael Trusch: Yeah! Yeah. When I give Tzedakah, charity, I like to give to?

LENORE SKENAZY: Oh, strangely enough, I like to give to things that help this people out of prison and particularly feel that the sex offender registry treats people as if they become unhuman, once they're on it. And I feel like as a Jew, I know sort of what it means to be considered as the other, an absolutely unworthy of any kind of humanity anymore and so that's an issue that affects me a lot. I'm not in favor of child molesting or anything like that but everybody else who has served their time for a crime, even murderers when they're out, they're not on the registry and sex offenders are the assumptions is that because they are incorrigible rapists but very, very few of them are. The rate is very, very low and yet they have to keep having the stigma on them. And some things you can never get off the registry and now you're going to have, it's the first time we're going to mark people's passport, is the passport of anyone convicted of sex offense are going to have that written on their passport. So that sort of resonates with me almost because I'm a Jew.

Yael Trusch: Yes.

LENORE SKENAZY: And I recognize what it means to be labeled as something heinous and horrible that should always be shamed and also officially changed. So weirdly enough I give to organizations that are trying to make more rational sex offender laws. That will keep children safe without leaving no redemption for people who have committed a crime.

Yael Trusch: I feel like eventually we're going to have to sit down and have a whole conversation about this. There's so much here, you know, right? I'm so intrigued by them.

Lenore Skenazy: It's a weird message to end on but yeah, where do I give my money, that's the way I want to give to.

Yael Trusch: No, I think there's a lot here and I think we're going to have to [00:38:15] at some point because I feel like eventually you'll be involved in that. So, anyway, finally, I'm Lenore Skenazy and today I'm most grateful for?

Lenore Skenazy: I'm grateful for I think it's luck, but my family past, present. I feel grateful strangely enough for growing up Jewish. I still like it was... just lucky. It just gave me that perspective that I feel like [00:38:41] Jewish eye all the time. So that makes me better but I feel like it has given me a certain sensitivity and curiosity that I'm very grateful for.

Yael Trusch: Yes. Beautiful. Lenore, thank you so much for your time. Everybody the website is letgrow.org. I really encourage everybody to visit it and see in what ways you could get your schools involved and Lenore has a ton of information there, you can learn a lot about. Thank you so much for your time, Lenore.

Lenore Skenazy: Oh, thank you. And off the record, one second. Just to make sure that it sounds like letgrow and not letgo, Because before it sounded like letgo.

Yael Trusch: Oh, sorry about that.

Lenore Skenazy: And everybody thinks letgo because of—

Lenore Skenazy: Yes, letgo. Don't want to let go. We want to let them grow.

Lenore Skenazy: Let grow! Eventually we're going to call it Let go and let grow, and we realized people we're afraid to let go are who we're aiming it. So, to say let go, doesn't get anybody on board because it sounded like forget it.

Yael Trusch: Yes.

Lenore Skenazy: But everybody wants their kids to grow so, let grow.

Yael Trusch: Yes. Exactly. I hope ten years down the line we're actually sitting down and discussing all the positive changes that resulted from your work. And we'll be following up—

Lenore Skenazy: Wouldn't that would be really cool?

Yael Trusch: Yeah. That would be amazing. Lenore, thank you so much. Have a happy Chanukah and thank you so much.

Lenore Skenazy: Okay, you too. Toda Rabah

Yael Trusch: Thank you.

[Theme Music]

Yael Trusch: Thanks, Lenore Skenazy for stopping by. Her website again is letgrow.org. It used to be free-rangekids.com. And her book is Free-Range Kids, How to Raise Safe, Self-Reliant Children without Going Nuts with Worry. Lenore is on Twitter at @free-rangekids. It's my oldest son's birthday party this week so Mazal Tov to him turning twelve. How apropos to today's interview. Thanks for tuning in everyone and I hope you all have a great week.

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