

**JEWISH LATIN PRINCESS
GENIE MILGROM, CRYPTO-JEWISH EXPERT,
GENEALOGIST AND AUTHOR OF PYRE TO FIRE
EPISODE 75**

This episode is brought to you by Mockas, premium quality loafer shoes for father and son. Find matching pairs of stylish, high quality shoes for the special man and boys in your life at www.mockas.com/Yael. Mockas is spelled M O C K A S. You'll love the father and son combos at www.mockas.com/Yael.

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: How hard is it to get governments like Spain, Portugal, Mexico to agree to digitize their inquisition records, records that retell a history that has been buried in vaults and unspoken about for hundreds of years? Why do it? And why would any Jewish woman in her right mind take on the task to try to negotiate with these countries to get this done. You're listening to Jewish Latin Princess, I'm Yael Trusch, your host, welcome to the show.

Today I'm back with Genie Milgrom. Genie was with me in Episode number 12, one of my most downloaded episodes, so if you're new to Jewish Latin Princess Podcast and you haven't heard that one, it is definitely a must and it will give you a lot of context for our conversation today. Let's just say that today's interview is part two of that episode.

Today, Genie updates us on the progress she's made since she was here last particularly regarding getting inquisition records restored and digitized.

She talks about DNA testing, how it works and why it is important to do if you're on the search for your family's history. Genie was recently awarded the prestigious, Medal of the Four Sephardic Synagogues from Jerusalem and she has a new book out, *Pyre to Fire*, a historical novel which traces the lives of two women, one in Spain living as a Jew in hiding back in the days of the Inquisition and one, a Cuban American Roman Catholic in Miami. It may be a historical fiction but it's really 85% reality according to Genie, the reality of her family and her own.

And soon her new cookbook will be out. What's in the cookbook? Adaptations of the recipes that her Grandmother's passed down throughout the generations, replete with the rich but unspoken about family history, always fascinating and inspiring years Genie Milgrom. And please do yourself a favor, if you haven't heard of Episode number 12, make sure you download it because you will understand much of what we talk about today as Genie shared with us then how she was able to trace her unbroken maternal Jewish lineage back to 1405 to pre-Inquisition Spain and Portugal. Here's the fascinating, Genie Milgrom.

[Theme Music]

Yael Trusch: Genie Milgrom, welcome back to Jewish Latin Princess! How are you?

Genie Milgrom: I'm doing great, Yael! Thank you so much for having me on again.

Yael Trusch: So much has happened since you were here last back in episode, I don't know, 12. It's a long time but it actually isn't such a long time. It's a little over a year yet you've published another book, *Pyre to Fire*, congratulations!

Genie Milgrom: Thank you so much. It's in English, *Pyre to Fire*, and in Spanish *De la Pira al Fuego*.

Yael Trusch: Amazing! I can't wait to delve into your new work, but before we even go there, I know on top of that, there's also been amazing updates in your work. This summer in particular, you were very active.

When you were last year you told us that you were almost at the cusp of closing a deal to get funding for the digitization process of the Inquisition records in countries like Spain, Mexico, Portugal, Peru, et cetera. And I think that that has progressed significantly. Tell us about what's happened?

GENIE MILGROM: That absolutely has progressed. We partnered up with a firm in Israel, MyHeritage, who is a firm that does the work online of having records available for people searching for their lineages and they are funding the digitization of the records and this summer I was once again at the Madrid, the Lisbon as well as for the first time at the Canary Island Isles. In the Canary Islands it's the last kid on the block, so for the Canary Islands they're going to meet at the end of September, I believe next week, and they will let us know if they're on board to let us digitize their records. You know, it's not simple. This has been hidden for 500 years or more and nobody wants to be the person that says, oh, under so and so, the records were digitized. They're not seeing it as a... as an honor, let's say they're just seeing it like, oh, my gosh! How am I going to go down in history? And –

Yael Trusch: Aha! So it's not like a... it's not let's just say, they don't see it as a positive undertaking.

GENIE MILGROM: No, no – which is why it's been so difficult, I mean, we've been going in there now for about three years to some of these archives and you know we had change of directors of the archives and they keep shuffling out to the new director and no one wants to be that person that goes down in having done it. However, in Madrid, we have received the contract for digitizing. They are currently in Israel, they're being reviewed so we have made –

Yael Trusch: Wow!

GENIE MILGROM: Incredible strides with Madrid.

Yael Trusch: Mazel Tov!

GENIE MILGROM: Which we could say, you know they are the ground zero.

Yael Trusch: Right.

Genie Milgrom: They really are.

Yael Trusch: Right, right.

Genie Milgrom: Now as far as Lisbon is concerned, they are all onboard to get this done because the only thing they have digitized is Lisbon and those were available on the Torre do Tombo website but that's such a scant amount compared to the thousands that are available, so basically with Lisbon, the records were in tatters and we have had a pre, let's say, a pre-approval from the government of Norway who needs to preserve some history in the EU countries to get funding to restore these records before they get digitized, so hopefully that will come through very soon.

Yael Trusch: That is incredible! So wait, the Government of Norway is going to support you in getting funding for the restoration of the documents of the pre-Inquisition Portugal?

Genie Milgrom: Yes, yes.

Yael Trusch: Is this Hashem tend or what?

Genie Milgrom: Yeah, that is like so weird, but, you know, we're very excited about that and also I plan in December to go to Goa, India, where the long hand of the Portuguese Inquisition was present for 300 years.

Yael Trusch: Yeah, many people are not aware of that though.

Genie Milgrom: Right, so we have about 17000 cases in Goa, so right now I'm like all set to go and I'm just waiting for confirmation that A: somebody will talk to me because it's very hard to get through the first time so I'm actually waiting to have somebody say okay, you know, come and I'll talk to you. It's very far away. So you know Mexico, we are... everything is a green light except the government changed so the director changes, it's an appointed position so we're waiting until October when the new director get so each one has it's... each one has it's a little thing we have to get

around but basically we're good to go with a lot of these countries and we've got the right players onboard and we've got the right team onboard.

Yael Trusch: Who – tell us a little bit how does this conversation go? Like what did or play it for us, let's say Madrid, you finally convinced them and now there's a contract in place. What was that... what are those conversations like?

Genie Milgrom: Well, those conversations are not easy, those conversations are generally up to now the three times I've been in Madrid, it's a roomful of people and you know when you're in a room full of people you never really know who you have in the room. You know some of them, maybe the director gave you his card and maybe somebody else but you don't really know who's sitting in the room. So, we have to –

Yael Trusch: So it's them and you.

Genie Milgrom: And it's them and me and well my husband will go to –

Yael Trusch: Telling them about their not such nice history.

Genie Milgrom: Right, so my husband, Michael, always goes with me but there's always an expert. There's always someone at those teams knows how many records, where are they, what state they're in, you know, and they know exactly what is going on. What is interesting to me is that in Spain, they're owned by the government, the Archivo Histórico Nacional.

In Portugal, they're owned by the government, by the Arquivo Torre do Tombo, as well as by the Catholic church. They're owned by the Mayor of each city that had an Inquisition Tribunal.

Yael Trusch: Oh.

Genie Milgrom: So in that meeting, I had to sit with the church, the mayors, the government, the Cultural Minister, the Minister of Education and kind of talked to them of this and it worked. And in the Canary Island, they're privately owned by 300 people or 400 hundred people that bought them back from the British a couple of hundred years ago.

Yael Trusch: Why would these people buy them back? They were historians? Like what was their interest?

Genie Milgrom: They were the members of the Archive in Gran Palma and you know they... these are positions that belong to the different families in Gran Palma and they just decided to bring their history back.

Yael Trusch: So when you –

Genie Milgrom: So in Mexico, they're owned by the government.

Yael Trusch: So Genie, when you convinced them, what is the most compelling part of your conversation or of your argument or presentation to them, is it from a political angle? Is, you know, that this would be something, like what do you think of everything that you've told them, what do you think that makes them finally click and kind of turn around and you see the resistance melting?

Genie Milgrom: It depends on the on the particular government but like anything else, once you've got one onboard, the other ones don't want to be left behind of this global let's say this global work that's being done. So they don't want to be what is it now in popular fear of missing out so they don't want to miss out.

Yael Trusch: FOMO.

Genie Milgrom: Right, so the minute that you say, okay, like I had to with Portugal, I've got nothing else to talk about. I start like walking away, it's like, wait, wait, wait, come back. So I think now that we have so many others onboard and it's gotten to the point where... it's gotten to the point where it's going forward then you can't miss out, so the other ones, some of them are making money by having these records online so like Canary Island. So they wanted to be assured that they would still be able to charge people to access them. And some of them like Spain wants to make sure that nobody gets charged, so it's kind of like –

Yael Trusch: Hmm, interesting.

GENIE MILGROM: You have to see what they want and then go with what they need and what they want.

Yael Trusch: And the first one that you secured was Madrid, is that correct?

GENIE MILGROM: Yeah, that's the first contract that we've gotten. It's being reviewed and those contracts should be signed after the holidays, yes.

Yael Trusch: Amazing, amazing. And I understand that MyHeritage is among others, one of the companies who does DNA testing and I heard you once say that it is very important for people who are suspicious of their lineages or curious that they might have some ancestry connected to pre-Inquisition Spain or Portugal to do DNA testing.

GENIE MILGROM: Absolutely.

Yael Trusch: What does that entail?

GENIE MILGROM: And I do, yeah, I do recommend a lot my heritage. There's a new kid on the block, but by, as far as not as far as doing records online, but there's a new kid on the block with the DNA and the reason that I think that right now they are the best thing going is because being the new kid on the block, they have the latest technology. As a matter of fact, they are the only company that breaks down the Jewish lineage into Sephardic, Mizrahi, Ashkenazi, Ethiopian, so, they have the ability to break up the Jewish DNA and they have millions of users so I really think that it's a great way to start and then once you do your DNA with them, then you are able to upload it to a whole series of other websites like GEDmatch or DNA Land which is a free upload and compare your DNA to all the other companies, but I like starting with MyHeritage because it's, I find that it's very state of the art, it's the latest.

Yael Trusch: And Genie, is the... is this in lieu of trying to shape a family tree or is this supposed to complement that process?

GENIE MILGROM: It... a lot of people are trying to do it instead of but the only way to compare is to do it in addition to, because what happens with families that intermarry like mine, converse of families that intermarry or Jewish families or Royal families, those families that intermarry, the relationships that are given to you by any of this testing companies appear closer than they really are.

So for example I'll get a match that'll say it's my second cousin when it could really be my fifth or sixth. So you have to match this up to paperwork and that's the hard part. People don't like to do the paperwork and it's expensive which is one of the reasons that we're doing this whole thing we're trying to get those Inquisition documents up online because—

Yael Trusch: Did you —

GENIE MILGROM: There are a lot of books just before you and I were talking. This, Sefaradi de Sobrenomes, it's the number one book that has Sephardic surnames in there, but what it's not showing are the names of the converses it's showing the names of the people that left Spain, not the people... right.

Yael Trusch: Right, you told me that in our last interview set that that's why you can't really do it by the names, you can't say, oh, I have a Jewish last name, that's not really so accurate, right?

GENIE MILGROM: Correct and or a name used by converso's like —

Yael Trusch: Perez or —

GENIE MILGROM: Right. Perez, Montaña, or those topographical names that we know were used by the conversals, but, you know, they were changing their names so much so we're hoping that we will be able to track the diaspora of the Crypto-Jews. We are hoping that we will come up with this new slate of names so to speak as soon as we can digitize all of this.

Yael Trusch: In fact, when you were doing your lineage, if I remember correctly, your last names, both from your mother and father side they would have gotten you nowhere, right?

GENIE MILGROM: Both of them were very common. My dad is Medina, my mom is Ramos, Ramos, and super common.

Yael Trusch: Right.

GENIE MILGROM: And both conversal style names but you know, where do you go with that? You have to match it up to a Jew from the 1400 to be able to go with that. Now, what DNA does for example, you're going to get your DNA back when you order it, you get it back and then it will tell you if you start seeing things like you're matching Jews in Morocco, you're matching Jews in Algeria, you're matching Jews in Israel, then obviously whether you find your lineage or not by paper, you know that there's a Jewish lineage in there.

Yael Trusch: Mm-hmm. Interesting, so did you do one? When we were talking awhile ago about your work that you wrote about in your, My 15 Grandmothers, in your first book, had you done the DNA during that process, the DNA testing?

GENIE MILGROM: Yes, I had done the DNA and people like me, we find very few matches. Just a couple of nights ago, I went into DNA Land and my husband who's an Ashkenazi Jew for the last 500 years, he had 10,000 matches and I put my mom's in there, no matches found. I put me there, and no matches found, and my dad, no matches found. It's like give me a break because why? Because normally, if you're Hispanic and you're sitting in a church somewhere you're not thinking this isn't in your head –

Yael Trusch: Ahh.

GENIE MILGROM: Oh, let me do my DNA. You're doing it when you're searching for something but there's a random person that might be searching but in general it's not like the Jews, people are searching through the holocaust, you know, they're searching...

Yael Trusch: Right.

GENIE MILGROM: Right, people like me are searching but in general you're Cuban, or Puerto Rican, Hispanic they're not thinking about this, so, hence, they haven't tested and there's no matches.

Yael Trusch: Right, right. Match –

GENIE MILGROM: So the Pyre to Fire, the book is very interesting because the information that I found in the all the files, when I found the family, that's the information that was used to write Pyre to Fire so I followed closely the movement of my family, I followed them with their occupations even though it's historical fiction because I had to embellish a little bit but it's about 85% accurate how I followed the family, what they did for a living, what village to village and also in the book, it keeps going back and forth to me in Miami as a little girl and that is taking what happened in history how it affected that little girl growing up Catholic in Miami, so it goes back in forth, so that's why about 85% of the book is correct. It's non-fiction but I had to make it historical fiction.

Yael Trusch: Wow, so would it be fair to say that the fire, we're not talking about the fire of the stake but the fire of the soul of that girl who was searching?

GENIE MILGROM: Correct, correct.

Yael Trusch: Amazing, amazing! Now I have to get my hands on this book.

GENIE MILGROM: And I'm glad you got that because normally I don't explain it and I just hope people get it.

Yael Trusch: Okay, so we said, fire was the fire of the soul, it's making reference to the fire of the soul, what about pyre? I had to GOOGLE that and just what does it mean? Share with listeners.

GENIE MILGROM: Well, the pyre is the stake that the people were being burned at in the Inquisition, when you were being burned at the stake that is also known as a pyre. So it's pyre to fire, now interestingly enough, sometimes and this is a little gruesome but you know that is our history so I

will share it nonetheless. If at the last minute, you didn't want to go through the agonizing fire, you could chose to convert and say that yes, you did believe in the Catholic beliefs at the last minute, then they would cut off your head and then burn you.

Yael Trusch: Huh!

Genie Milgrom: Yes, so as gruesome as it is, it was they thought, the Inquisitors thought it was a merciful way to be able to burn you without the pain, so that was where the pyres and then the fire in the soul.

Yael Trusch: Wow! How many descendants do they estimate, descendants of Jews are there in Latin America? Do they think?

Genie Milgrom: Well, in the world, Doctor Sergio Della Pergola, who is the top demographer in the world right now, he lives in Israel, and he recently went out there with the number of 50 million. Five zero.

Yael Trusch: That is an incredible number.

Genie Milgrom: Yeah, it was an incredible number and I was surprised because he is very well-known, he's a very serious person and professor in his field and I was blown away. That doesn't mean that 50 million people want to comeback –

Yael Trusch: Right.

Genie Milgrom: That just means that 50 people – 50 million have these roots.

Yael Trusch: Amazing, amazing and it's important... it's important that we tie in this into the work that you're doing, exposing this reality to the world because there might be people who want to know, even if they don't want to become Jewish, correct? Do you ever find that?

Genie Milgrom: Correct and I think that Israel needs friends and we needs friends who's Jews surround the world so if somebody in Ecuador or in Lima or in Bolivia feels that they're connected to the Jewish people by an ancestry, even if they remain Catholic, that's how we would want because

then they would be a friend of the Jew because they come from Jews. So we would want people to acknowledge their ancestry and a lot of the work that I do which is speaking constantly, just writing and speaking and writing and speaking is give awareness so that people will say, okay, I'm descendant or I've got the name of a conversal or I've got the name of the Jew and then they bring us closer to them and to the Jewish people.

Yael Trusch: Right, right. And back to, Pyre to Fire, your new book, was this... did you just write this or am I correct in suspecting that you had been working on this for a while?

Genie Milgrom: This was my first book actually.

Yael Trusch: Aha!

Genie Milgrom: Yeah, this was my first original book and it had a working title of, Who will Fetch Shiva For Me, and yes, and what happened is after a while, I was like compelled to write the story of, The 15 Grandmothers and that one came out and then how I found so kind of time took up with me with how I found my 15 grandmothers. I was back to, Pyre to Fire with its working title and my adult children were very upset with me and I try to explain that sitting Shiva is a Jewish – because they are not practicing Jews today.

Yael Trusch: Right.

Genie Milgrom: So I try to explain that sitting Shiva is a Jewish ritual and that chances are, they would not be doing this ritual but they were very upset because they took it to me going out into the world and saying that they would not mourn for me, so then came Pyre to Fire. So yes it was not the original that I tried to do who would say Kaddish for me that's so under the same line, so, we had a departure so my kids really got upset, so that's why we went this route.

Yael Trusch: You know, this speaks to the reality that I think you mentioned this once but it's important to re-say it, of how hard it is for people who have gone through a conversion, it's not all roses, its very emotional and it's a very lonely road even if it doesn't seem like it, even if

you have family and even if you have a community, it can be very, very lonely –

GENIE MILGROM: It is!

Yael Trusch: Especially at times like that.

GENIE MILGROM: Super lonely, it's lonely on Rosh Hashanah, it's lonely in Pesach, it's lonely, it's you know. Yesterday, when I finished the fast of Yom Kippur, I said to my husband, this is the 30th time I've done this and I have been Jewish almost equally the same time that I was growing up Catholic. So right now, at I'm at a 50:50 stage and of course, since my younger years were catholic, on my adult thinking years are mostly been Jewish so it's very difficult. It was difficult to do, it was difficult to transition, it was difficult to come over and to continue to have a great big old Catholic family like I do. And I lived a traditional lifestyle so everything in my home, every holiday, all the food it's very hard for people to do this. It's even hard if you're not going the full monty Orthodox let's say, it's still hard on the family, it's very difficult so it's not for the faint of heart but if your soul is burning then there's no other alternative, honestly.

[Theme Music]

My sons love dressing up like their father, does that ever happen in your household? Clothing in the same style and colors has been a little bit easier to find. The hard part has always been looking for shoes until Mockas came along. Mockas is a premium loafer shoe brand offering matching pairs for fathers and sons. How fun is that? Mockas are not only comfortable and super stylish, but they're designed and made with kids in mind, that means durability. How's that for a perfect shoe? Every pair of Mockas is handmade with beautiful high quality leather and flexible soles striking the perfect balance between the look of a loafer and the comfort of a moccasin.

I love the idea of the men in my life wearing beautifully designed, comfortable, durable shoes that are also affordable. Oh, and if this wasn't enough, Mockas is committed to transparency, ensuring ethical manufacturing practices and fair trade with the workers who helped bring

this beautiful shoe to market. The company will donate a portion of Mockas profits to, Soles for Souls.

Mockas are available in four beautiful colors. I'm partial to the gorgeous blue with red sole but there's also a striking ruby red limited edition available through Mockas kick starter campaign. You can choose Mockas for the men and boys in your life at www.mockas.com/Yael and take advantage of the early bird discount on its kick starter campaign. Mockas is spelled M O C K A S.

Whether it's a pair for one of the men in your life or all the men in your life, choose quality, style, and comfort at www.mockas.com/Yael.

YAEL TRUSCH: Well, on a lighter note, I want to congratulate you because also this summer you were awarded the very prestigious, Medal of the Four Sephardic Synagogues from Jerusalem. This is unbelievable!

GENIE MILGROM: Oh, my, gosh! That's what floored me. I was giving the keynote speech in Zamora which is the region of my family and all of a sudden the president of Sephardic Council of Jerusalem got up and he starts talking about awarding the medal and I was still sitting on the dais and I thought this has nothing to do with me. I didn't – I didn't imagine –

YAEL TRUSCH: Oh, you're so cute.

GENIE MILGROM: I have wanted it for years but I just did not imagine to be honest that anyone anywhere was really... you know, I worked so hard on this, I didn't think anyone was paying attention.

YAEL TRUSCH: Paying attention, right. Well, they were!

GENIE MILGROM: So that was of the biggest accolades – truly, truly so exciting to be awarded the medal and you know now, shortly, I'm having a cookbook that's being published I guess will be publishing in Israel and it will be the cookbook of the 15 Grandmothers and these are recipes that I found in the luggage and things in my mother's house that came from way back so all of these recipes are being... are being... they were compiled,

put together and they will be put together in a cookbook published by Gefen Publishing.

Yael Trusch: Amazing and I'm proud to say that I had a little bit of my grain of salt in the book.

Genie Milgrom: You did, you read one of the recipes for me and I had women around the world making the recipes so I'm very excited and must tell you this –

Yael Trusch: I am excited.

Genie Milgrom: There was another company in the United States, Jewish, very well-known, that I had sent the book to and they wanted me to take out the references to the Christmas tree and all of these things which is my past and my families present and as big and important a publisher, I was not able do that and I think that Gefen was wonderful and understanding the importance of all of this in a family like mine.

Yael Trusch: Mm-hmm, wow! That's incredible, that's very powerful to hear because, yeah, it's very sensitive and I could see from one side why one publishing company would want it out but I could see why it's important to the narrative of how these recipes came about.

Genie Milgrom: Right, well, if my grandmother used to make a particular recipe and put it in tins and put it under the Christmas tree every year for years and how mother did the same thing, then I cannot dishonor –

Yael Trusch: Correct.

Genie Milgrom: My family that way.

Yael Trusch: Correct! Wow, Genie, amazing.

Genie Milgrom: But I'm very excited about this book.

Yael Trusch: When does it come out?

Genie Milgrom: They told me about eight months, so I'm really... right now it's also being translated. I generally have my books translated in

Costa Rica and so it's being translated so I'm going to try to have the Spanish and English at the same time.

Yael Trusch: Very, very, very cool. Now, Genie, you've walked the streets that your ancestors walked several times I believe since you first went on that –

Genie Milgrom: Yes.

Yael Trusch: Life changing trip back to Fermoselle, Spain which you recount in your first book, My 15 Grandmothers. You even recently took a tour, took some people in a tour of this... yeah? Right? Over there?

Genie Milgrom: Yes, I did. I took about 50 people.

Yael Trusch: And you know for a fact, this has been verified historical records you have that 40 members of your family were tried by the Inquisitions including many women who died at the stake for practicing Judaism in hiding.

Genie Milgrom: Correct.

Yael Trusch: When you walk in these towns like Fermoselle and other areas of Spain and Portugal, and you asked these questions and you look around the town, what... what do you feel from the people? What is the feeling that you get, is it apathy? Is it cooperation? Is it... is there hatred? Like what is your feeling when you're in these places and you're looking and they're either sharing openly? Are they being like – give us an insight of what it's like.

Genie Milgrom: So initially, and I started travelling there maybe ten, fifteen years ago, initially it was a total closed book. It was they didn't know what you're talking about, there were never any Jews here and if there were Jews, then they were made Christian and so they were only Christian. So even the Head of the Library and the Archives in Zamora, he shut the door in my face because he told me there were never any Jews there.

Yael Trusch: What!

GENIE MILGROM: And I said, it's historically, he said they were made Christians and after that they were Catholics so there were never any Jews here, and he shut the door in my face. And it didn't matter. A couple of years later I was very happy, he was fired and my genealogist went in there many times and so in the beginning it was very, very difficult. Then, as I started going again and again, and the mayor let me hold a whole conference in one of the big historical monuments there and I told them about their history.

Now, when I go, they're always showing me something like a stove in their home and they're showing me a coin or they're showing me a mark in their basement and they want now to verify and a lot of these are on my Facebook page, and they're now very much embracing this past. And wanting me to verify that their coin, like one had a coin with a Star of David, and it ended up that it was a Moroccan coin but he was sure it was a Jewish coin and they're getting all excited. In Portugal, they are with the program. In Portugal, these little villages have all been visited and you see the little old lady sitting on their stool pointing to the signs of where synagogues were, so I think that the villages were starting to get with the program, at least in the West, near the river.

Yael Trusch: Amazing. Why do you think – why the difference? Why, what do you think that is?

GENIE MILGROM: You mean in the West, by the river?

Yael Trusch: And the attitudes between Portugal, the small towns in Portugal's and west of Spain?

GENIE MILGROM: Because I think that the small towns have... they haven't been changed much so the stones are still there and the homes are still there, I have the address of the grandmother number 13 and her home is still there, so basically, I think that there haven't been those changes that they were like let's say in Barcelona or Madrid or in the bigger, huge cities here, people are still in touch with their past every day when they open their door because it hasn't changed.

And when I walk to the villages, not to sound strange, but I feel – I feel the presence, I feel the stones. I can touch the stone, they're either hot or cold, they're warm they're almost like talking to me and I can... and I don't talk about this too much and I realize I'm saying it very publicly, but I feel vibrations where there may have been sold. Let's say that I feel something and then I'll go research it and generally something did happen there.

Yael Trusch: Yes. If I recall, if I remember correctly there was an incident where you and Michael were at a place and you both felt this very strange energy, and lo and behold, it was a place where people were being burned, right?

Genie Milgrom: Right. No, it was a place in Coimbra where they had taken bodies from the Inquisition prison, anybody that was dying in the prison before they got to be burned and they were throwing them over the fence and I didn't know the history of the place when Michael and I got there and we always take like a prayer book with us to say the prayers of the dead, the Kaddish, if we happen to come across a place that we feel, so we both were and also the girl friend also from Israel and we all felt so we started saying Kaddish in that place and later we learned that it was a place where bodies had been thrown over the fence into the trash for centuries during the Inquisition.

Yael Trusch: Wow.

Genie Milgrom: And obviously Jewish bodies.

Yael Trusch: Wow. So now that you see, I saw on Facebook that you saw your book in Feroselle, in your town, where your Jewish ancestors lived, I think for something like 500 years, correct?

Genie Milgrom: Five hundred and twenty three years they lived there. My grandfather was born there and my mom lived there for nine years.

Yael Trusch: Amazing, all in hiding, practicing Judaism in hiding. Now that you –

GENIE MILGROM: Well, remember they were practicing and hiding but we didn't really know it for the last couple of hundred years because for all intents and purposes, they were Catholic.

Yael Trusch: Right, right. They were... they just had like a few little things here and there that they knew came from somewhere.

GENIE MILGROM: Right, a few little things, but when I saw that book in the window, it was –

Yael Trusch: Yeah, how did you feel?

GENIE MILGROM: Oh, my, gosh! It was like, oh, my, gosh! Look at this, over here! Like you can never... you know, and I remember in my head I was saying to the grandmother, I hope this make you proud.

Yael Trusch: Oh.

GENIE MILGROM: And I certainly was proud and you know I'm proud for my family and I'm proud I have been able to do this. It's a... it has been an incredible journey and it's by no means over, there's still so much to do and so much awareness to raise on this topic and just let people understand when they meet somebody that claims to have these roots in their synagogue and whether they have them or whether they don't have them, just by claiming it, they're kind of come closer to you and to Judaism and to the Jewish people so it's not like, well, let me see your papers – no! I think they should all be embraced just for trying to get closer.

Yael Trusch: Genie, you were blessed or rather your children actually through your work in terms of finding out that they are Jewish and you know at anytime they could embrace that, that's just the reality that they have and you know that it is what it is, but not many or for many who will undergo this process of looking into their lineage and tracing it back and so on and so forth, I suspect many will not be as lucky and as blessed as you were to find an unbroken lineage. I mean, they'll find out that they had, they have, that they are the descendants of Crypto-Jews that there was Jewish history in their ancestry, but at some point, that gets all muffled and broken which would eventually require a conversation on to Judaism by Jewish law

on their part, right? Does that ever come up in your conversations with people, that reality that maybe might be one hard... a little bit hard to accept?

GENIE MILGROM: Yes, it definitely is and the Sephardic Rabbis believe... do not believe in conversion at all so if you are coming to a Sephardic Rabbi with certain amounts of proof and you know the in Sephardic communities and they will accept your proof even though it may not be like I had to do direct-direct-direct... they will not accept you to convert but they may accept you into the fold. That doesn't mean that if your children are going to want to marry a Jew they may not subscribe to that particular belief or maybe Ashkenaz or you want to move to Israel, you're going to need the full pledge thing so I wish that they were norms established for this because it would save people a lot of heartache if they go someplace and a rabbi says, sure it's not a problem but then it might be a problem for their children or grandchildren.

Yael Trusch: Right, down the road.

GENIE MILGROM: I mean, I know in my case, yeah, my kid didn't want to take on a yoke of both Judaism but they know that they are Jewish so according to the rabbi that had written the return for me in Israel, he said that they would have to do one Mitzvah to be accepted to return and the Mitzvah could be as small as lighting candles on a Friday night but they had to take it on, in other words they didn't have to do a conversion but they had to make an overt act to bring it into their lives.

Yael Trusch: Right, but that's because of the fact that they have been recognized as Jewish people because your lineage was not broken ever.

GENIE MILGROM: Correct, then yes, you are correct that it's very difficult so with the work that I'm trying to do with the Inquisition files, I'm hoping that this will make all of this so much easier that people will be able to just come to this knowledge without having to hire somebody for years and years to dig it up in boxes because the minute the rabbi's insist that you connect yourself to a Jew and you can't connect yourself to a Jewish cemetery, they don't exist.

Yael Trusch: Right.

Genie Milgrom: You can't connect yourself to anything but the Inquisition unless maybe you're in the Southwest where there are certain graves that are marked but still in all, you know, in general traditional rabbis will require that you connect yourself to a Jew so this Inquisition that's all we've got. That's all, really, really, that's all we have so yes I think they in the future, when we manage to get all these uploaded, it'll be so much easier for people to do what I have done but then, you have to take all of that and go to a beth din or Jewish court in Israel, and they have to accept you as Jewish and write a return.

Yael Trusch: Right. And listen –

Genie Milgrom: So, you have to be able to follow that road all the way to the end. You have to have a lot of perseverance to get this done.

Yael Trusch: Right, right. But even if a person at the end needs to for whatever reason convert because at some point they don't recognize, either they say the lineage was broken and you just have to –

Genie Milgrom: Right. Right, right.

Yael Trusch: At least having the peace of mind that I'm not crazy, I was never crazy. You know a little bit like you've told me before –

Genie Milgrom: Right.

Yael Trusch: You know, that my yearning that came from somewhere, it wasn't just like I was losing my mind.

Genie Milgrom: Exactly, so yes, so it's... the verification is always good and I know people that are in the process of conversion and right now I have several people that are writing me, some are from Seattle and another one that's in North Florida and there... another one in New York and they're in the process of conversion and at the same time they're in the process of finding that Jew in the tree. Because that validates what they're doing. Like you said and like I said, so we all need that validity, we all want to find that Jew in the tree and it can be found, you don't have to go all the

way like I did but if you're in a conversion process and you just want that validity, it can come.

Yael Trusch: Genie, we know that your message is to the Jewish world regarding those who want to get close to Judaism, want to embrace of empathy and understanding but in addition to that, what would you, Genie Milgrom, a woman who is passionate about her Judaism, who loves it and treasures it, not just because of your family's history but really regardless of it.

Genie Milgrom: Right.

Yael Trusch: What would you say to the Jews out there who are not yet as you know as open about their Judaism in terms of embracing it so much or maybe they show up here and there, once or twice a year, it's like an afterthought. They don't find it relevant necessarily, you who have seen the pain of your ancestors and you've gone through your own pain, what would you say to inspire those people who still need a little bit off inspiration when it comes to their heritage?

Genie Milgrom: Well, I think that and by the way, this is a question that a lot of different people ask me and I think that the inspiration many times comes not from something that I say to a person specifically, but, when I speak and I speak to crowds and they hear how someone is just clawing, clawing at dirt for something that was just they take for granted and was given to them... and was given to them you know at birth without their even asking for it and I think that in and out of itself is an inspiration, but I also, the big message would be, don't take this for granted. There are some of us that really had to work very hard for this and you should not take this for granted at all, and, you know, who knows? They may lose their heritage because if they only go at least try Jews, that only wake up on Rosh Hashanah, and were only go one time a year, so if you really, really want to have the continuity of the Jewish people going forward to the generations of your grandchildren, great grandchildren... you have to do something to keep that flame alive now so that by the time it gets to your great grandchildren at least they'll have you know a birthday candle size worth of

a spark so they have to work at it, absolutely for their grandchildren or their great grandchildren.

YAEL TRUSCH: Beautiful. Don't take your Judaism for granted. Genie Milgrom, it's amazing. I am so proud of your work and I can't wait to hear what is coming next because I am sure it's going to be tremendous and were going to keep having a lot to talk about. Much, much success to you in the New Year. We can get the book, the new book in – on Amazon, correct?

GENIE MILGROM: Correct, all my books are available on Amazon.

YAEL TRUSCH: And you're going to let us know when the cookbook is out and we're going to keep updated –

GENIE MILGROM: Absolutely.

YAEL TRUSCH: On Facebook, you'll keep us updated about everything that's happening. I forgot to mention that now that you've taken this brawl and you're working with solid funding, you're the Director of the Converso Genealogy Project, right? Officially?

GENIE MILGROM: Correct, yes.

YAEL TRUSCH: So, I... just before we wrap it up, I understand that people reach out to you all the time with questions on this, how are you managing that? Cause that could get a little overwhelming.

GENIE MILGROM: It is overwhelming but a couple of years ago, I gave a talk at a Chabad in Point Beach, and after the Sabbath I sat down, I stayed at the rabbi's house and he had... he said to me, your work is exhausting and you can't continue doing this on your own, you need to do this the Chabad way. And I said, what do you mean? It's like I don't know.

YAEL TRUSCH: What's a Chabad way?

GENIE MILGROM: He said you need to appoint people in different places and train them to do what you're doing and I've done that. So I've got a gentleman like in upstate New York, I've got somebody down in Costa

Rica. I've got another gentleman at Panama who have returned, who come from these roots, so when they come to me from those places, I will generally sent them to this other... let's choose the word, Shaliach which is what Chabad uses.

Yael Trusch: Yeah.

Genie Milgrom: And I am not a Chabad person but he was so why and the next day I started.

Yael Trusch: Very smart. Very smart, so now you have your team in place and that way you're able to help a lot more people.

Genie Milgrom: Correct! Correct because I'm able to deflect a lot and I just stay with the more problematic one.

Yael Trusch: Amazing. Genie, thank you so much. Everybody the book is Pyre to Fire available on Amazon and also in Spanish and she is on Facebook @geniemilgrom. Thank you so much, Genie.

Genie Milgrom: Thank you, Yael! Thank you so much, it was a pleasure.

Yael Trusch: Thanks again to Genie Milgrom for stopping by. The name of her new book is, Pyre to Fire. You can find it on Amazon as well on as her previews book. And of course if you want to learn more about Genie, you can visit her website, www.geniemilgrom.com or follow her on Facebook, at www.geniemilgrom.com.

Thanks for tuning in everyone, we're checking off for the last of the Tishrei Holidays and culminating of course with Simcha Torah so I hope everybody has a wonderful, joyous, festive, holiday. I'll see you here next time.

[Theme Music]

Thanks for listening to Jewish Latin Princess Podcast. If you enjoyed this episode, please subscribe on iTunes. Leave a rating and share the podcast with the Jewish women you love. To access today's show notes, ask Yael a question, or suggest a uniquely talented Jewish

woman to be featured on the show, visit www.jewishlatinprincess.com.

[00:47:18]

End of Audio Transcription