

Episode 217: My mom shares her crazy life story (young Russi...

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SPEAKERS

Elena Hartz, Kathrin Zenkina, Brennan O'Keefe

K Kathrin Zenkina 00:14
Welcome to The Manifestation Babe podcast. My name is Kathrin Zenkina and I'm a manifestation expert, Master mindset coach, and multiple seven-figure entrepreneur. I'm obsessed with helping you achieve everything that you once thought was impossible. If you're looking to massively uplevel your life, your finances, your relationships, your productivity, and success, then you have come to the right place. My goal on this podcast is to help you see the infinite potential within yourself to be, do, and have anything that your heart desires. Think of this podcast as your weekly dose of mindset development to help you maximize who you are and where you're going. Leave it to me to provide you with the tools, the resources, the strategies, and teachings that you need to manifest a reality wilder than your wildest dreams. I know we're about to have so much fun together, so thank you so much for pushing play today. And now let's begin.

K Kathrin Zenkina 01:16
Hello, my beautiful souls and welcome back to The Manifestation Babe podcast. As you've already seen in the title, today's episode is a super special one that I am so excited about. It is one that is near and dear to my heart because my beautiful Mama, my mom is being interviewed today. So this interview has actually been a long, long time coming. But I feel like it finally unfolded in such a perfect divine timing, because a lot of the things that my

mom shares about, you know, her life and our life together can be hard to hear, especially when you have such an emotional connection to that person. And being like, Oh my god, I can't believe that happened to somebody that I love so much and you know, my mom has never publicly shared anything that she's shared in this episode until today. So today is the day. So it all unfolded perfectly. It's all in aligned, divine timing. Some of you may know bits and pieces of my story. Like, for example, I'm a Russian immigrant who was brought here by my family from Ukraine right at the fall of the Soviet Union. And we grew up here in the United States, below the poverty line for at least the first eight years or so. And by grow up, I mean me. And actually, my parents too, they were extremely young as well. And, you know, I've shared before that I grew up with an abusive father, I've witnessed domestic violence, and I watched my parents really struggle and sacrifice and of course, you know, trying to make it in this country while also screaming and shouting and fighting through it all. It's been a wild journey to get to where I am today, but I obviously don't remember so much of it just because I was so young. So who better to share the full story, or at least as full as we could get into today's episode than my mom herself.

K

Kathrin Zenkina 03:22

So this episode is obviously a long one. I promise it's a really good one. It's definitely a memorable episode. And you know in the beginning, I figured that I would chop it up in like part one, part two, part three, kind of leave it off a cliffhanger. And I thought about whether or not I wanted to chop it up in several parts, and I just decided to keep it in one single episode so that the whole story at least as much as my mom told lives in one single place. In this episode, my mom goes super deep and shares her whole life story with you. And I will let you know right off the bat that we do talk about some triggering topics like domestic violence, living with an abusive partner, people getting killed, going missing like there are bits and pieces like that that might be triggering for some of you. So please proceed at your own discretion. And of course, as always, we leave you in an inspired place here at manifestation babe which is mainly why I didn't want to cut the story and leave you on some depressing cliffhanger and make you wait a whole week to get, you know the happy ending at the end. I want to make sure that you leave this episode feeling inspired. And yeah.

K

Kathrin Zenkina 04:35

So if this episode inspired you in any way, shape or form please, of course, let my beautiful mom know and also share this episode so that I can reach as many people as possible. I know it took a lot for her to get to this place to finally publicly share her story and any feedback whatsoever would be so appreciated. Her Instagram handle is at hearts h a r t z underscore Elena e l e n a. I will also link her handle in the show notes, so if you can't spell

or I did a bad job spelling, you'll be able to find her Instagram handle. And of course, also tag me if you do share this episode in your stories and share your takeaway moments, aha moments, all that stuff. I would love to see how her episode impacted you as well. So without any more blabbering for me, let's go ahead and dive into today's episode.

K Kathrin Zenkina 05:30
All right you guys. We finally made it. I got my beautiful mom into the podcast studio. Mama, Welcome to the show.

E Elena Hartz 05:38
Good morning children.

K Kathrin Zenkina 05:41
Good morning children and all the other people listening. So I actually have three people today with me. Myself. I have Brennan, who is going to help me interview my mom because he knows a lot of her story, and he's going to help me pull some really juicy questions. And then, of course, we have my mom. We recently kicked out Laya. This is our second time trying to record this. She was making way too many sports and grunts. So if at any point in this episode you hear some sports and grunts because we brought her back in, just know it's not my mom, it's not me, it's not Brennan, it is Laya. So, Mama, this is your first time on a podcast officially. Right?

E Elena Hartz 05:58
Yes, it is. I'm excited.

K Kathrin Zenkina 06:17
So you're not living some secret life where you've already been interviewed a ton of times?

E Elena Hartz 06:21
Not yet. But I expect that in the near future, yes.

K Kathrin Zenkina 06:24
I expect you to write a book. Okay, I'll hold you accountable to that but this is going to be

your first time sharing your story publicly which is so exciting for me because I've heard bits and pieces as I grew older of course, and could handle certain bits and pieces and I just want to let you know that you are a freaking superwoman. You are my hero. I, you know did not know what a badass you were my whole life until very recently as you know an adult now. And I know that your story is going to help so many women heal through whatever it is that they've gone through. Through whatever it is that they're going based on the story that you share. I'm really excited to hear all the lessons that you've learned up until this point. But in order to get to the lessons, we have to get to the background. And I posted a q&a on my Instagram of you know what questions people have for you. And of course, they all want to hear the immigrant story, the mafia story, they want to hear how you came to the US a 20-year-old with a baby, not knowing a word of English, putting yourself through college. I mean I can't even guys. I can't even imagine doing that now. Like that's so insane to me. But before we go into that, we need even more of a background. So let's go back and talk a little bit about you know, obviously, we're not American born. We are from another country. Can you first share where you're from and a little bit about what your childhood was like?

E

Elena Hartz 06:31

So I have a complex answer to a very simple question. Because usually when people ask where you're from, you say, Well, I'm from Russia, and from Ukraine and from Armenia, whatever it is. So former Soviet Union was, well, for me. I'm Russian. But I was born and raised in Ukraine because my father was in the military. And at the time, both my Russian parents were stationed in Ukraine. So that's where I was born. So why it's significant? Because when the Soviet Union started falling apart, there was this pool because Ukrainians did not really want Russians in Ukraine, and Russians didn't want me because I wasn't born in Russia. And even my mom, who is Russian, she was born in this biggest time because she was in the back creation during the war. So it's a very complex structure. So simple question where I was born? In Ukraine. Am I Ukrainian? No, I'm Russian. But you know, and so you are as well.

K

Kathrin Zenkina 08:52

Yeah. Do I have any Ukrainian in me?

E

Elena Hartz 08:54

I do believe those like water are less of that.

K Kathrin Zenkina 08:57

Okay. Interesting. So a lot of people know that you, at some point, were in Algeria. You grew up in Algeria, which blows my mind because it's such a unique thing for, you know, a Russian to also grow up in Algeria. So how did that happen?

E Elena Hartz 09:11

So it was in the 1970s. It's when Algeria used to be a French colony. So once they liberated them obviously the Soviet Union wanted to use air quotation, help our brothers to build socialism and the air quotes. So immediately the Soviet Union decided that they need the Russian military in there. And what's the best way just saying, well, we're going to teach you how to fly helicopters. So they sent a small group of helicopter pilots. It's literally what I think 20 families. It was all young men with young children and young wives, to make sure that no one escapes. So there is an anchor that is always holding, you know, men from running away, women and children. And we were one of those families who were blessed. It was the first in history when there was a capitalist country and Russian soldiers entered that, you know, invited. So my first memories of my life were actually from Algeria. My brightest memories of my life. This very impressionist child would take all the colors of the Mediterranean and its beautiful culture an music and flavors and colors and weather and the sky. And, you know, to this day I absolutely love Arabic music.

K Kathrin Zenkina 10:44

My mom loves belly dancing, Arabic music.

E Elena Hartz 10:47

And I think that's where I got it from. Yeah, love for me. Because as a child, we have first memories usually with peace and with surrounded warm. So yes, I still want to go back.

K Kathrin Zenkina 11:01

My mom is asking you want to go to Algeria? Sure, why not! So I remember you telling me how you spoke Arabic, French, Russian, and English all at the same time as a kid.

E Elena Hartz 11:11

Yes. And the reason being is because Boba, as I mentioned there was only 20 families. And my father, just like other officers of the Soviet Army, we were supposed to, you know,

interact with Arabs who spoke French because we're just colonies. So whatever language they spoke in, I held on to memory. But I do remember clearly that they had friends, you know, who were locals because we lived in the building with the local people. We did not have a base like an army base. You know, it's like in Japan or other countries we were a part of a culture. So for us, the most natural children, what do you do? you play. How do you play? Well, you learn the language. Some Arabic kids learned Russian with me. It was not an advanced level. But it was enough to interact and have a child play and eat and visit the childhood. So yeah, I did speak French, Arabic, and a mixture of that. Unfortunately, you know, I forgot all of that. Once we came back to the Soviet Union.

K

Kathrin Zenkina 12:20

Listen, I took three years of French. Do I remember very much? No. And that was high school. So I completely understand. One of my favorite memories was last year in I think it was October of 2020 us taking you to Dubai and the Maldives. And we went to old Dubai because it, you know, resembles more of the Arabic culture than the modern Dubai. Modern Dubai looks like any city except you have great Arabic food. And of course, you have the Arabic people, the Emirates, and it's really, really beautiful. But I so enjoyed seeing your face and old Dubai because you're like, Oh my god, it's Algeria. And that was really fun for me. I want to talk a little bit about, you know, the USSR, the Soviet Union, because I don't think a lot of Americans understand what life was like in the Soviet Union. And even I know, I was born shortly after it fell. So, like even I wasn't part of the Soviet Union. But what was life like in the Soviet Union? And is that part of why you were determined to move to the US? Like, what was your motivation to move to the US? Is it because of the conditions in the USSR? Or was it some other reason it just so happened? That we moved about a year after it fell?

E

Elena Hartz 13:32

Well, you know, the reason why I am in United States is because of you. Because actually, I wasn't planning on immigrating. My parents were in the process of applications since 1988. Because my grandpa has family here, right? Is that why? He has a family that was immigrated in 1973 or something like that. So he visited in 1988 and he applied for immigration for refugee status when he was here in the United States and then he came back to the Soviet Union still. So the application was in the process. But do you remember your cell phone when you were like 16, 17, and 18 and you know everything about life? Yeah, that was for me. So in my mind, you know, we had money we had status, we had respect, we had an apartment, we had furniture, we had the car. So in my simple mind with a child for all the purposes. I was like why would I want to move anywhere? My work, my parents moved there, they're going to send me money and I'm going to live here

wonderful life. So in my mind, I didn't want to move. I have a beautiful life out there because you know, being protective, you know, and so for us, unfortunately, took many years to get the permission to enter the United States. In fact, we were denied the entrance to the United States. It's in two years, I think it was in early 1991, we had a rejection from a government that said, No, we're not going to grant you. I think it was refugee status. So we actually had to reapply, again to, you know, to appeal the decision, because we really wanted to. You have to understand that the time especially at the end of the 80s, it was still united, the Soviet Union, very strong country, you know, with all of the political strains and all of that, it was actually quite dangerous to apply for asylum to escape because it's behind the curtains. So once you do that, once you submit the papers, because you have to do paperwork that your student or your work here, and you know, you, once you submit, start going to places and get all the paperwork in order, you immediately put the scarlet letter on your arm, marking yourself as an enemy of the Motherland.

K Kathrin Zenkina 15:59
Oh my god.

E Elena Hartz 16:00
So which means that you could lose your job, you can lose your career, when people done that, you know, people would be fired. I was actually. And a little bit later, when I was already in college, I was actually expelled from university because I was a traitor to motherland.

K Kathrin Zenkina 16:18
And just to confirm, the college that my mom is talking about is in Ukraine, not in the US, in Ukraine.

E Elena Hartz 16:23
Yes, yeah. Because I was called into the chair's office, and he told me that I have to go, and I couldn't figure out why. And I'm asking he's like, well, you're a bad student, you know, you cannot say I said, Well, I have, you know, As Bs I mean, and he said I'm not going to let you finish you have to go. You can, you know, do it yourself or we can have a big process and I'm going to kick you out publicly. And when I asked why he said well, you're about to betray our country. Why would we want to teach you anything?

K Kathrin Zenkina 16:58
Oh, my God.

E Elena Hartz 16:59
So I quit by submitting papers. And I said You know what? I mean, I don't really have a choice. So I was expelled. But anyway, going back to why I decided to move, because while we were in the process to apply for immigration, and I secretly hope that my parents would support my lavish lifestyle union by working hard in the United States because he and others were selfish children too, right? Yeah. I got married, and unexpectedly, I got pregnant. It was not planned. I got pregnant with you and they realized that at the time, it was the beginning of the end of the Soviet Union was to start, you know, and they realize me as myself here, invincible, you know, teenager because I was a teenager and was 18 when I was pregnant, so I wasn't a sensible teenager, and that's, you know, and I realized that it's not me anymore. I have a child and there is no way my child will survive and I will raise a normal child in this environment. And thank goodness there was an option. The application and the process that finally got approved. It took us five years. But you are the reason why I am in the United States and the reason why I'm succeeding in my life.

B Brennan O'Keefe 18:23
It still blows my mind. It's like a different world. When you describe it, it's hard to fathom. But you said something I'd love to just touch on which is, so like, my understanding, you know, and I think kind of society's general understanding of socialism or communism in general, it means everything's split and equal and shared but you said some things interesting, like my lavish lifestyle, and I had money and we had power and status. Can you kind of elaborate like what enabled that in your experience, where clearly some people had less and others had more? What was that experience for you growing up? And how did that impact your view of the way things developed?

E Elena Hartz 19:03
Well, it is obviously complex to answer. I mean, you have to go into geopolitics and, you know, all of that, then the explanation of socialism of capitalism what communism is. But the simple way, humans always will be humans and will always want to get something better for ourselves. We want to make sure that us, or my family or my child has a little easier, a little better, a little more wonderful than the rest of us. Even if we divide everything else. Even if he lives in the same cookie-cutter of a house or an apartment. You want to bring something, you know sparkly, you know, wonderful to your place to make it

better than your neighbor. Even though the same absolute the furniture was sold. You know, like three different sets of furniture were sold in the furniture store. You have ABC choice. So every apartment has furniture A, furniture and B or furniture, C. But sometimes, if you knew people, and you knew someone who worked in the different furniture store that was in a different place or had a different supplier because there are socialist countries that had an exchange of goods, you had an access to furniture D. However, everyone would want to get furniture D because that would be an exclusive right to be sunshiny in your apartment. So, in order to get furniture D, I mean, you will still pay the price for what was listed. But you had to be thankful and appreciate the person who gave you access. For bribes.

K

Kathrin Zenkina 20:48

Amen.

E

Elena Hartz 20:50

And that's what you know, and it's simple, you know, it's not necessarily that sometimes you pay a little more, you know, like \$100 or it can be a box of chocolates or an expensive bottle of wine, or in exchange for access to furniture D. What if you have an access to meat, you know, but not A, B, C to D. So you're all of a sudden, you have the barter system. Yeah, you give me access to furniture D, I'll give you access to Candy D. So when you need it for holidays, there is a door for you. You'll pay the nominal price, but it was something in exchange. It's human nature to do that for yourself. So when we talk about money, your access to resources is what mattered. It was always connections, and not necessarily how much money you have. Even though in my family, because of my father, he was hired in the military at a young age. Let me give you an example. For example, an average salary monthly for a physician, or a teacher, or an engineer it was \$120 per month. And it was through both and a different, but just to get the picture clear. It was 120. So if you have a family of two doctors, it was \$240. Right? So that was, and that's max, you know, maybe \$10, more or \$10 less. Well, because my father was in the military, and he was an officer and he was young. And he had a very promising career. He had a brilliant mind and one of the brightest stars at his age, you know, he actually made per month, and I asked my mom recently because as a child, you don't understand that. He was actually making about 700 800 each month. Oh, wow. He worked hard. Yeah, he'd fly and, you know, blah, blah, all the missions and all of that. It wasn't easy money. But that was how much, legally without even exchanging, my father brought to a table, so my mom never even had to work. We had more money than two doctors working full time. We had triple that. So that's where the access to money comes, you know. And then my mom divorced then she married my stepfather, my wonderful stepfather.

K Kathrin Zenkina 23:29
Who I know as my grandpa, by the way.

E Elena Hartz 23:31
Yeah, grandpa. Yes, he's an amazing man. And I'm so grateful that, you know, he is in my life and I mean he's in yours, you know, he's had access to resources. For example, he used to work. He's a mechanical engineer. So he worked on cars. He had work, called Volga. It was very exclusive. All the top government officials would have a government cars Volga. And he was working on spare parts. So all the officials in the government, you know, they would go to him because he was the only source in the region to get the parts. So guess what, it's an access. He wasn't selling them, he was just fixing the cars at the faster rate. And that's a connection that means he can have a foundation GC and everything else because these government officials have an access to it. Just like politicians, you know? They have more access than we do and that's what it was for Soviet Union socialism.

K Kathrin Zenkina 23:42
When? You were gonna ask something?

B Brennan O'Keefe 24:53
I was just gonna say really quickly that's an amazing story. And I've heard eager tell it before and it just it still blows my mind because really, everyone starts at the bottom and through opportunism and luck and chance and connections and talent, if you're connected to the right people, it's how people have, you know, incredible wealth in Russia and in like an odd or oligopoly in an oligarch context is because people had connections after the fall of Soviet Union, they consolidate power and all these pieces, right? But I just want to say there's a story, Linda, that's so incredible that Katherine and I have told before and we just intuitively understand, but it ties so directly to eager having access because his position changed over time. I'm just wondering if you could kind of tell us the story about when Kathrin was born, what it required, because I think for people on the podcast, like understanding that money is energy but that that energy of exchange can change is so fast.

K Kathrin Zenkina 25:51
There's always going to be an energy exchange whether it's money or a meat truck, or caviar, or car parts, like, that's what I learned. That's why I'm so thankful for my

background because I really got to understand that money is just energy. It doesn't matter what kind of face it has, it doesn't matter what format it's in, energy is energy and we have to master the art of energy exchange to be able to manifest what we want. But it's just so interesting to hear like, you know, I grew up like the memories that I have is obviously in America, like, to hear the stories of. For example, what had to happen in order for you to get the right ob-gyn for my birth?

E

Elena Hartz 26:33

Well, it took actually a van full of meat.

K

Kathrin Zenkina 26:39

And where did you get this meat?

E

Elena Hartz 26:43

Well, it's the time of your birth, my stepfather changed jobs and I can definitely tell you what it was in Russian his position exact but let me just compare to what you guys understand that the culture in the United States we all know, for example, Italian Mafia, we all know even from the movies, meatpacking. Yeah. Okay. So, we had a meat pack and processing plant in our city for the region. My father was, my stepfather, eager, your grandfather, he became the Vice President for that meatpacking processing plant and he was in charge of security. The security of the plant. So nothing left the plant or came into it without him knowing. So, at the time, I was already married at this level. So your father, by connections. So my stepfather brought your father into the fold then he was the one that would be distributing. He had an area he had the distribution he had a huge car or truck he had the driver and he was in charge of the distributing for me to move you know to the stores. So me, something we had as a furniture dealer you know, you can have steak, you can have filet mignon, or you can have the lower grade. So obviously, you've had an access to the best of the best the freshest with the legacy. It is like you can have a Cavalier you can have a black cavalry you can have red or you don't have to have a camp you know you just that kind of access. So you know as difficult the story of the pregnancy of your birth was, I, you know, live doctor but had to thank him, you know and then using air quotes, that was my appreciation for giving the best care, you know, and delivering safely and use of aesthetics if possible, you know that you had to be appreciative and a van full of meat was something that expressed my appreciation at that moment.

K

Kathrin Zenkina 29:06

I want to go into, you know, my birth, pregnancy, of course, my dad and all that stuff, but can we just talk about where this whole concept of, you know, the mafia giving death threats and you having to have guns in my crib? Like how did that evolve? Like, how did we get there? I need to know this is happening.

E

Elena Hartz 29:29

Well, as I said, you were born in 1982. The Soviet Union has started falling apart. What that means is, all of a sudden there is no real government. There is no law enforcement. Sometimes the perpetrators in the crime were the law enforcement. So who do you call if the police are doing the crime? People start to disappear because people want it to survive you know, you want to make sure your family thrives. So you know If there are no jobs, there is no government and there is a mess and you don't have the money. You don't know, even if you have a currency because all of a sudden, you know, former Soviet Union, republics have to have their own. So do you have money? Or don't you have money, for example, dollars, all of a sudden, you know, the United States dollars, you weren't allowed to have foreign currency because as long as the Soviet Union was in charge, we were not allowed to hold US dollars. If you had currency in your possession, and you were discovered, you'd be put in jail, executed or prosecuted and sent to jail for having a foreign currency on your hands. So all of a sudden, you know, the curtain fell. And we were exposed, and we had no legal system. We had no banks, we didn't even know what we had or we didn't have. So it was a complete disarray, the criminal enterprise grew our best live in fear because whoever had an access to more resources was the king. You know, if your resource was the power, you had an opportunity to kidnap someone else's child and get the money. And it was quite often that people would disappear into this day, they cannot be found. We're not talking about random one or two, we're saying like every day you hear this disappeared, and that one is gone, they cannot find this one and someone stole. In fact, the driver just mentioned, your father's driver for the distribution, he was kidnapped. When he was kidnapped and held for ransom. And we, his family and us included because you know, your father and him were close they worked for a few years now. We have to collect money to pay the ransom. And luckily, in his case, he was let go. Most of the time people would not release the hostage but get the money. And then again, who do you call? I mean, for all the no police was doing with kidnappings.

K

Kathrin Zenkina 32:16

Oh my god.

E

Elena Hartz 32:17

So you know, and obviously when you have money, which we did because you know, yeah, yeah, exactly. Because of the access to meat and money and all of that and different resources. We didn't have money but had lots of money at the time. So the easiest way to get for people to get to our money is to threaten wife and a child. Right? So we would start getting phone calls threatening that you know, we know who you are. We know where you work, you know where you live, we know you have money. So we're going if you don't pay us we're going to kidnap and kill and torture your wife and you know and your child. And you are scared you don't know what to call because again, for all I know that the police calling because they had they never have money.

B

Brennan O'Keefe 33:11

And they have no paycheck now either.

E

Elena Hartz 33:13

Exactly. All right, exactly. So it's everyone for themselves. So at that point, but what do you do? You have to survive, you have to leave right? I mean you can't just hide in the hole. I mean, we have to walk you because you know, for access to fresh air is baby. So that's where, you know, it was scary to actually go to a park with you. I was afraid, you know, I'm sure I was, you know, again, there's like I was still young. So my mind was processing a little bit differently. But at that time, my stepfather, he brought his Mongol to God. I think it was, you know.

K

Kathrin Zenkina 33:54

I'm not surprised at all knowing my grandpa. He's the most resourceful mofo I've ever met.

B

Brennan O'Keefe 34:01

This day. He's like, how he is almost 65? 68. 68? He's 68 and I always joke I mean, you guys, you know me on Catherine's Instagram, but like, I'm a pretty imposing guy, not in my energy necessarily, but like, I'm 6'3 to 6'0 I played rugby. I'm pretty strong. Like, you know, I'm an imposing figure. He's the guy I would always to my death I would call to clean stuff up. Because it's kind of like, eager we got a problem. Sure. I'll see you in 10.

E

Elena Hartz 34:34

So yeah, he brought, you know, he brought the gun and they actually, I think we still have some leftover from my father because he's in the military. But, you know, I mean, what's the choice did he have? So I remember I would be put in, you know, going into a park for an hour or two, you know, fresh air and etc for a baby. Then we're off to a doctor's visit. You know, because with a stroller you go in and we put the gun under the blanket. I mean, I don't think I could. I knew how to use it. But you know, because you couldn't really go and practice, right? Because you're not legal for the citizens, only violent criminals had access and police and you don't know if there was the same guy see your deal, right? So it's not like he could go and practice in the park somewhere. I mean, you know, I don't know if I would be shocked if something you know, I don't know if it would be useful, someone attacked me. But at least it gave me some kind of, you know, sense of security that I can go through the park without, you know, freaking out at every bush.

B

Brennan O'Keefe 35:43

Seeking comfort wherever you can kind of in this massive uncertainty. And

K

Kathrin Zenkina 35:47

So I know, like, I want to get into the whole escaping in the middle of the night story. But there's like so many layers that I want you guys to know about my mom, is that that is just one layer of stress that she was dealing with at this time, there's a whole nother layer of stress that she was dealing with. Can you talk a little bit about before we go into you know, more of the mafia escaping like getting to the US like there's so much build-up here. But can you just talk a little bit about you know, your journey, getting married, how you met my dad? pregnancy, and basically how that evolves where you realize, I think I married the wrong guy.

E

Elena Hartz 36:28

So how many podcasts is going to be four or five?

K

Kathrin Zenkina 36:33

We can go as long as humanely possible, and then I can chop it up in like parts for people.

B

Brennan O'Keefe 36:39

Well, I wanted to say if you're sitting on the edge of your chair right now, maybe put two hands because this is gonna keep going on please don't fall over.

E Elena Hartz 36:48
So a story of me and my, your father and pregnancy and birth and, it's not an easy story. It's, you know, it's difficult story and something that they hid for a very long time from my family. You know, many people.

K Kathrin Zenkina 37:04
I didn't know until I was like, 22.

E Elena Hartz 37:06
Yes, many people do not know even inside the family, we extend. And my friends I recently spoke and they were in shock. They could not believe that they knew me through all those years and actually faced me every day during, you know, abuse going on and they had no idea, you know, the closest friends of mine. But anyway, let's when it's all began. I started college. And the boom math in college.

K Kathrin Zenkina 37:34
Again, this is in Ukraine. Yeah. There's two college experiences my mom had.

E Elena Hartz 37:39
More than two. But yeah. Yeah, it was in college. And in Ukraine. I was newly new in college and with my girlfriend. Yeah. And I was a new life. And we're still teenagers. And the, by the way, it's worth mentioning that educational system in Russia was quite different. We went to school for 10 years. So when I graduated from high school, and entered the college, I was 16, 17, you know because I was born in July, so it will be 16, 17. I mean, you guys in united states don't even come out until you're 18, 19. Yeah. So it's two years younger. Remember yourself when you're 16? Yeah. And you have to make the decisions?

K Kathrin Zenkina 37:50
I'm sure you remember me at 16.

E Elena Hartz 38:27
Yeah, the Why? Yeah. So we'll get back to that part too, right. So, when I met your father, I

was 17, just turned 17. And it was in college. He was an older by two years or so in the different department.

K

Kathrin Zenkina 38:46

But age-wise, he was much older.

E

Elena Hartz 38:48

Age-wise as well and there's something else you have to notice about Soviet Union. They have mandatory draft for men. So every man at 18 were drafted into the army.

K

Kathrin Zenkina 38:58

Oh, yeah. He was a Navy.

E

Elena Hartz 39:00

Exactly. A Navy. If it was for regular army, it would be two years for the Navy, it would be three years. So he was drafted 18 plus three years, when he graduates from high school, literally, you know, within a year, he will be drafted for three years means that we came back with Star College at 21 versus 17. So when I met him, he was just a few just a junior-senior, you know, just a few years older in college, but he was by seven years, eight years older than me in age. So I was 18. And he was 24, 25. So there's like older men for you right there. Right? And you're a teenager, you're 17 years older man. And he was, and I didn't know if he still is, he was actually tall, dark, and handsome. I mean, you have already pictures. You know, there's like he was quite striking he was six feet two, I believe.

K

Kathrin Zenkina 40:03

Six foot. Six foot? I measured him at some point.

E

Elena Hartz 40:07

Probably or he lost two inches because he was definitely taller than six so he was six-two when I met him. Quite dashing gentlemen. And there is equality in him that, if you remember correctly, I did not want to move to United States. I wanted to live the lavish lifestyle young Soviet Union haha on my parents' hard work in United States. And as you know, your father had he always I think the word I'm looking is hustle. He's a hustler. He was a hustler. And what he did you know he would resell goods in from brought illegally

from foreign countries and he always had money and he actually had the house he purchased the house with his own money there's some current for young guy you know, it was very difficult to buy a house. The haunted house? The hunted house it's a different story out there. But and he had friends who can you know, he was from affluent families the well and he had the car and the for 25-year-old to own the car. It was unheard of you know people would save for like 25 years to buy basic model whatever was sold in the market. So he was definitely knew how to make money and that played right into my hand I mean, tall, dark, and handsome and, you know, and he knows how to make money what else you need in life, right? I mean, older gentleman interested in me. And it wasn't an easy relationship on demand. We were broke off and the break came back and there's a lot of undercurrents and behind the curtain plays that I was not aware at the time. But what was learned from the probably a friend of ours that we were in the process of getting immigration to United States and apparently it was his dream. Well it was a dream for every one of us. Yeah. It was an unattainable dream for every one of us unless you were Jewish person and then we'll go into immigration rules and etc. So let's not go there. Yeah. But he was definitely interested in me not as a person but the opportunity to immigrate, which he obviously did not tell me. So he kept it for private, you know, so we broke up, we got back together, you know, it took us a year and a half to get married. Finally married. And we got married. And I didn't want to you know, and during the morning of the wanting, that was actually quite sad. I did not want to get married, but it was too late to, you know, again, were child still a 17, 18. And so everything is paid for and your parents finally, you know, they didn't want me to get to marry because he was already made previously marriage. So he was a diversity to begin with. So there's you know, there are smart people that

K

Kathrin Zenkina 43:18

Babushka has her opinions about everyone I can already imagine.

E

Elena Hartz 43:21

Exactly. So you know, it took a huge fight to get the approval of my parents. So we get married and I don't know if I told you, but Boba bribed the physician that gave him an official-looking paperwork stating that he is sterile, he cannot have a child. So he lied to me about that one, as well. Because he, you know, he told me we don't have to use the protection. There is no way he can have children. And it played into my hands because I didn't want to have a child. I wanted a lavish life.

K

Kathrin Zenkina 43:59

So you never wanted to have children?

E

Elena Hartz 44:01

That's not true. I wanted to, just not that minute that. Yeah. I was getting ready for Paris I was 17, 18. Yeah. Are you kidding me? So in the story goes, I got pregnant very fast. I mean, you were born at 42 weeks. So the due date was October 1, you were born October 15. And we got married December 28. The previous I mean, it was like nine months to a point, to a day. So I get pregnant very fast, and once he learned that I'm pregnant, he changed. It was an overnight change of a personality because he realized he got me. And I still I didn't know I couldn't figure out what's going on because I married that guy and within a week or two or three or five, all of a sudden is completely different person, there's a monster out there. So we start fighting. And the first time as you know hit me I was four months pregnant with you. That's the first time. Yeah but it wasn't far from the last. And that actually explains all the complication with my pregnancy as you know. I spent three and a half months in the hospital bedrest because every time they discharged me home, I will show up the next day in the emergency room with preterm labor. So they'd have to pump medications into me to stop from delivering you because, at the time in the 90s, the medicine was not as advanced. There is no way you would be saved six months or so, you know, if you know, so, there's no ambiguity. No, well, that was but you know, even here it, you know, every day will learns like early and early, you know, delivery can survive before that. If you're not seven months, I mean for over purposes, you would probably not live. And it was about, I think it was what was birthday when I was still pregnant. I was so what, five months pregnant at the time that his parents, his mom, and his sister came to visit us his birthday's in May. And we had our argument me and Boba because that's what we did on a daily basis. And I remember I left the room crying and then went to the bedroom. And his mom, my mother-in-law, followed me to the bedroom. And as I was sitting sobbing there because the hormones, in addition to everything else, you know for pregnant woman. And I remember she looked at me and she kind of sneered and said, well, there is nothing. There is nothing good in you. The only reason he married so he can get a green card. And that was the first time I learned about that. And I was shocked and speechless in that moment. Boba came into the bedroom. And he overheard that his mom said and I looked at him because I could not believe that could be true. And his head similar sneer in his face. Yeah. I mean, why would I ever marry you if not for that? So as you can imagine, that was a very big heartache. I mean it broke my heart. Besides everything else. Now I realized that I cannot leave him even if I wanted to. And I wanted to because my love for him died the minute he hit me that first time when I was four months pregnant. So it was already a few months later after that. But he played his Cards well because by law, in Soviet, I think they have similar law in the United States here. They cannot take your child without permission of other parents.

K Kathrin Zenkina 47:49
Both parents have to go.

E Elena Hartz 47:50
And live in a different state than the United States without their permission. And it was very similar in the Soviet Union. If you know he had the child with me, I could not take you out without his permission. And there is no way Boba would ever give a permission.

K Kathrin Zenkina 48:07
Of course.

E Elena Hartz 48:08
So, and that's how I was stuck in the loveless, abusive marriage.

K Kathrin Zenkina 48:14
And just to add another layer when I was born, what happened?

E Elena Hartz 48:19
Because of all the complications during the pregnancy, over medications and everything, you were born at 42 weeks. They start working to trigger the labor. They start giving medications like two weeks before you're supposed to be born. Yeah. And it was not working. And the reason when medications were not working because this mess they're doing what they do is the contract for muscle of a uterus to expel the child. Right? The contraction and that part they did. But because of all the medications that was given, I ended up with more amniotic fluid. It's like three times more than necessary. So basically you swam like a mermaid in there. Yeah, and

K Kathrin Zenkina 49:05
That's why I love swimming so much apparently.

E Elena Hartz 49:09
So what it was doing it just when uterus would squeeze, but you just kick or hit you know

with your leg and then you know swim to another corner of the uterus you know. There is no way it could have started labor. So all the medications I was given through pregnancy, all the complications or triggering the labored because for two weeks, it was already starting to get late. Because as you know vampiric fluid this has a lifetime it can go bad and complications. So it was about saving you now. So when it was finally I was given like a cocktail of most powerful drugs to put me into labor, and that was on active labor for many hours for 18 hours and they couldn't figure out why we're not delivering.

K

Kathrin Zenkina 50:04

And this is with the meat truck. You guys imagine what would happen if there was no meat truck involved.

E

Elena Hartz 50:09

And unfortunately, Soviet medicine is not something to be admiring. For example, when I was in labor, even though we paid for Doctor physician who would be coming in to deliver you, the labor itself took 18 hours, there is no way doctor would sit by me no matter how much you pay her. Yeah. So there are nurses that were very humiliating. They would actually scream at me to shut up because when I was going to labor, and have contractions and start screaming, there were no drugs, there is no epidural. So for eighteen hours, I was I would be hoarse in my throat because that would be screaming nonstop. I couldn't sleep, I couldn't eat, I couldn't do anything because the drugs were working. But were working to do a contraction, not labor. So by probably hour five or six, they got tired of me screaming constantly because you know, they're busy doing their own stuff. So they're screaming at me to shut up. And I was like, it was not the very kind environment in Russia family would not be allowed into the delivery room. So it would be only me and the nurses who yelled at me because I was screaming in pain. So finally, I think by the hour 16 or 18, the physician that was supposed to deliver with the truck of meat showed up to see why no one's calling him. When he showed up well, she's not dilated. And there's been you know, I was exhausting because we were in danger of being in labor for so long final muscle starts to fail you exhausted you cannot even push the baby out when it's time. So she decided to break the water. And that's where everyone was shocked because it's like a fountain out there at the minute she did it. I immediately went into active labor and you were delivered, but because when nurses first off, do their idea at me, they really didn't care anymore. They just wanted to get rid of me. So the doctor when your I don't know what they did to you, they but you ended up with infection in your brain. It's the staphylococcus. Which we didn't discover three months later. So you ended up with infection. I was torn apart through the labor because it was so fast at the time. When it was time I was dilated from zero to 10 I was like 10 seconds probably. And I torn

apart they didn't even bother to give me medication payments, they just cheese for still holding me down my body, you know, on the table and stitching the up roll. And you know, I just went through the labor and they're sewing me without medications because they're so pissed at me. They didn't want to give me the Meds. But you know, the numbing, whatever it was, they gave it to the lady before delivery, but after but not to me. So they didn't treat you in a nice. I don't know what they did to you. Honestly. We were on the same room but I don't know how you got infection. Somehow you did. And we discovered three months later that you had an infection in your brain. And that was only thankful to my mom, your grandmother,

K Kathrin Zenkina 53:39
who's neurotic.

E Elena Hartz 53:42
Very special case, but all love her. But we all know my mom.

K Kathrin Zenkina 53:47
she examines a lot of things very closely. So she would notice these kinds of things. But sometimes she overly notices things. That's why we are laughing because sometimes you can get really annoying but yeah, she did save my life though. So

B Brennan O'Keefe 54:00
she'll get the positive test. She'll also get the 10,000 false-positive tests before that too.

E Elena Hartz 54:06
Yes, but you have to credit your grandma. That she discovered that there is something wrong with you. That you were turning your hand to one side only over time or you're in the small signs. Again, I was 18, 19, you know, it's like my first time Mother 19 I mean an abusive relationship when, you know, dealing with so much. And finally, my mom insisted that you know what, let's see because you were not gain weight even though we were feeding you, you were something wrong with you. And we discovered that there is an infection active infection in your brain. And I remember when our neurologist came to our home because they were doing house calls in Russia. And he examined you and he said yeah there is a problem. There is a problem, neurological problem with your child. And I was devastated. Because what does it mean? And he said that your physical development

is behind on one side. So infection in the brain affected one side like a stroke, you know, when a person has a stroke, one side is affected. So your left side? I think it's your Yes, your left side was behind on development than the right. And obviously, we were devastated like what can we do I mean, clicking mistakes he said the right treatment. If you do everything and you're lucky, if you can recover, if you can heal her while one year old, she will be fine as well. What happens if it don't? He said well, it's a handicap child. She will have to be in the chair for the rest of her life. That's not the news any mother wants to hear. It's not the news that you know, in the unloving relationship mother wants to hear. By the time it was clear, Boba didn't care much about you. He wouldn't even talk to you for days, you know, even you were small, little baby just even a few weeks old. He didn't care. So as a result sitting across from me, right now we did everything possible. Because when you were one year old, we had last appointment with the same neurologist and he was amazed, you know, how well you recovered and he congratulated. Then a week later, we flew on the, you know, out of the Soviet Union. But it was not an easy road. Because I was forbidden from buying any prepared foods. So starting three months, I had to cook every meal from scratch every day I would go to the market and thankful that had money. But I would go to the market that would buy the freshest ingredients. And I would cook for you for the day. And next day I had to do it again. Nothing would stay overnight or even a few hours because it had to be cooked. It had to be given because we were afraid of another infection. Yeah. Because you're in very complex medication regimen. So we had to do that. And we did drive you. Eager and my mom and me would take turns driving you to physiotherapy that was not an official physiotherapy, but we had to actually bribe someone to do that. And there is a healer in the narrow village so we were driving around and doing that. And every day we'd do the exercises, you know, that was prescribed and it was difficult road. It was not easy.

K

Kathrin Zenkina 57:43

If you guys are curious why I'm an only child, you can see that there is a very good reason behind it. Is my mom has clearly went through a lot and oh, man, I've been fighting back tears this whole time. So we're just gonna keep moving on because I might break down. So let's keep going. Oh, no, no, because you know, I just really want to paint the picture that there's so many different layers going on. It's not just, you know, there's domestic violence, domestic abuse, you have a sick child, the Soviet Union fell apart and you don't know who to trust. There's people disappearing. I mean, when my mom initially told me this, and like, how in the frick are you a sane person today? Because I just can't imagine going through that. I want to get to I just have a quick question. And well, it's not a quick question you can take as long as you want. But just when you, you know, had me and you were with Boba, which was my dad's name for anyone who hasn't caught on. Did you like think that you were stuck with him for the rest of your life? Or did you start planning your escape at

some point? Was it before you immigrated? After you emigrated? Like did you have a plan? Or did you think that that's just how the light life was going to go for you? You know, from that point forward.

E

Elena Hartz 58:59

Well, I did have a plan, eventual plan leaving him.

K

Kathrin Zenkina 59:04

Yes.

E

Elena Hartz 59:05

You know, to have you and me separate, you know, for as fast as we can. The circumstances I had to work with were unknown because we were about to immigrate. As you know, we arrived to United States when you were exactly one year and one week old. So you know, it's been only a year or so year and a half of the abusive relationship but there are so many unknowns because I knew I could not leave him at that time but I did not know whether we will be arriving to the United States. It's not like I could say well, when I get to United States and we're out of an apartment, I will leave him and I will go and live in this place. We had no idea where we were going. We had no clue. We were flying into the unknown. Yeah, so did I have a big plan? Yes, I had the goal in my life and that was safe life for you and me that did not involve Boba. Little did I know, it would take eight years. Yeah.

B

Brennan O'Keefe 1:00:04

Well, I was just gonna say, the next part of the story that I want to get to is like one of my favorite because it's so like, Special Operations Forces, like, you know, everyone's heard Katherine story by now, if you haven't heard this, I mean, it's something she's talked about many times, but, you know, fleeing the mafia under cover of darkness on a plane to new country like all these, can you tell a little bit about that story?

K

Kathrin Zenkina 1:00:29

That moment because I think it took a couple of weeks, right? For the operation to go through? Because, yes, it just tell from your own words, because we can only you know, tell it from our perspective which Brendan obviously wasn't there and I don't remember a thing.

B Brennan O'Keefe 1:00:42
How did you leave the USSR or the former USSR? What did that take? What was the journey like? And then, you know, what were your expectations coming to the United States? And what was the reality of that?

E Elena Hartz 1:00:54
Well, it's different. That's not a simple question because they already have figured it out. Nothing simple seems to be simple right now. So as I told you we were falling apart at Soviet Union. We were always under the threat that someone will want to extort the money we did not have much money by American standards. I mean, it's not like we've had dozens hundreds of 1000s of dollars.

K Kathrin Zenkina 1:01:20
you guys had 900 for five people when you immigrated. When you got on the plane.

E Elena Hartz 1:01:25
for three people. But yes,

K Kathrin Zenkina 1:01:27
what about Babushka and Diadushka?

E Elena Hartz 1:01:28
well they have a few hundreds too. Got it got it. Okay. But let's not jump to that.

K Kathrin Zenkina 1:01:34
Yeah. Okay.

E Elena Hartz 1:01:34
So by Russian standards, we were wealthy. By American standards we were below poverty in many ways. But when we decided to move, when all the communication came through, and the God's approval that, you know, we went through interviews and we won you know, for all of that we bought tickets. We bought tickets to fly. Everyone knew everyone

had connections. Don't forget that people who had put the final stamp on our papers out there had probably the connection of violent criminals that you know, they would crew them, okay? This people got approval, you can go and rob them because what we're going to do is that welcome to apartment take everything. I mean, who do you go to? You have a flight tomorrow out of United States. I mean, you call the police and do what and stay for another three years for investigation? No, you cut your losses short and you escape. So basically, immigrants at the time were the easiest prey to the point that we had to take a train to go from our city to Moscow. That's where we flew out.

K

Kathrin Zenkina 1:02:43

So from here so on, which is Kherson? Kherson. to Moscow. And how long was that train?

E

Elena Hartz 1:02:50

I think the train itself took two days.

K

Kathrin Zenkina 1:02:53

Oh, my God, okay.

E

Elena Hartz 1:02:55

We, you know, it was quite common for immigrants like us, because you take all your possessions all your valuable possessions with you there. I was like, What is it the limit? 45 pounds per suitcase?

K

Kathrin Zenkina 1:03:09

Right? Like 50. For person? Yeah.

E

Elena Hartz 1:03:12

And when you have a child, that doesn't count. But for family of three, we had four suitcases so what do you pack in there? Your pack room was valuable, right, what you need for your life, because there is nothing else. I mean, it was very easy to take the suitcases away and run away, and you leave people standing by the train with a child in the hand and nothing else. And we have a ticket to leave, you know, the next day from the Moscow so you're not going to chase the bad guy. So it was quite common for immigrants to get robbed at the train station as they're loading into the train. Because they were easy

prey and opportunity to get the most concentrated wealth and this suitcase. Does it make sense?

K Kathrin Zenkina 1:03:59
Yeah.

E Elena Hartz 1:04:00
And no, no one is going to prosecute. No one is going to even find out because no one's going to file a report because people be on the on the plane out of the country in the morning, you know, or a day or two. So that's where it came, you know, we're night and hiding, etc. So we have to confuse people who knew we're leaving, so they don't know what train we're going to be on. So we had to leave our apartment because my parents sold the apartment again. Sold the apartment doesn't mean they got 1000s of dollars, it was a measly amount of money. But we had to live apartment with before our train. So people will think that will be on a train station at any moment. So we'll be confused so they don't know when we're going to show up on a train. And the fact that you never stayed at the friend's house, summer house, the closest friend that, you know, are checked by, you know, time my mom, I think at the time knew them for like 20 years now. So we stayed at their place in the summer house. We were not talking to any people to any of my friends, they did not know where I am when I'm leaving, you know. The same with Boba's. Even his parents didn't know exact date. So when it was time to leave on a train to Moscow, the like in the cars was like, you know, action movies. We're driving in the shoes, shoving our suitcases around till in train, and the cars would leave and we would stay in the train and they close the doors, you know, and we'll hope no one will show up and rob us. And the same was in Moscow but had relatives that lived far away from Moscow and outside outskirts. So they would meet us on, you know, when the cars they would arrive at the train station with suitcases and will drive like crazy way to their summer house. And we would stay there for a few days. So in the same day, same time, I mean, the same thing is with airport when the plane was you know, we had tickets we had to show up. We had a few cars have actually had a few cars to confuse with people at what cars we were going to be. And it was a mess. Because again, on the way to the airport, you can be stopped by criminals. And they can rob you they can kill you. Well, I mean, no one cared. Families were killed in the way to an airport and robbed and they found bodies but you know.

B Brennan O'Keefe 1:06:35
There's no police? There's no government?



Elena Hartz 1:06:36

No, and no one cared because we were traitors that are escaping.



Kathrin Zenkina 1:06:41

Well, you successfully obviously got on the plane. Yes, we did. So what was that journey like? Your first first days in America.



Elena Hartz 1:06:49

with journey itself, we flew from Russia from Moscow. We landed in Alaska, to refuel and then we landed in San Francisco and change the planes, and then to Los Angeles. Flying with a one-year-old child for 14 hours on the plane. At one point, I wanted to just open the door and walk out on the cloud, you know, just because you did not sleep for a single minute. You were screaming your little heart out. It just nothing could be done. You didn't want to eat you didn't want to drink you only wanted to scream. And it was not an easy flight. I feel bad for all the passengers. I mean, if you're out there, and you saw me and you saw our family, please forgive us. Because you did not sleep either. Because of my child. And I remember the landed in Alaska for a layover. And it was our first American land, you know, we actually exhale because there is no way they could turn the airplane around and put us back into Moscow. Because until you cross the airspace, you can still be arrested. That's when you cross the airspace into different country, people exhale.



Kathrin Zenkina 1:08:22

And Russia is a long country.



Elena Hartz 1:08:24

Russia is a big country. So when we landed in Alaska, and they told us, you know, this, it was before 911. So the rules were different. So they told us we can come out and we can walk. We just leave our belongings in the plane. It was, I think it was Aeroflot. Aeroflot the airline for Russia. So we took you out finally out the airplane and you finally shut up because you know, you probably stopped hurting or something. And we walked in the terminal. And we were amazed how clean and beautiful it was. Because, well, you went to Russia. I mean, it's, there you go. I was trying to be



Kathrin Zenkina 1:09:10

People asked if we went back. I haven't been back to Ukraine. You haven't either since you left, but we have been back to Russia because again, like my mom said, we have Russian family. Because we are Russian and so especially my grandma's side of the family. They're all still in Russia. So yeah, it was very insightful for me to go back when I was 16 and just see what life could have been and I am so incredibly grateful that we emigrated.

E

Elena Hartz 1:09:35

So we explored the Alaskan terminal, like a museum. I mean, we had, there was a toilet paper in the restroom.

B

Brennan O'Keefe 1:09:44

for free.

E

Elena Hartz 1:09:46

It was clean. I mean, when I went, you went to the restroom and I remember coming out and going to my family's. They have toilet paper in every in every stall.

K

Kathrin Zenkina 1:09:57

Oh my god. By Little things, we don't realize.

E

Elena Hartz 1:10:01

clean restaurants. And it was we were, you know, we were not the only immigrant family on the plane. I think most of our people were immigrants. I mean, it was like a tour in the museum, we would go and we would look at clean toilets. And that was for place, not in a toilet. But the terminal in Alaska was a place where you took your first steps of your life. You saw huge Alaskan, both in a stuffed animal. And you got so excited that you're entered. So you first say,

K

Kathrin Zenkina 1:10:36

well, do I see animals and I start running?

E

Elena Hartz 1:10:39

Yep. So your first steps in your life you took on American soil. Wow. we still talk to that about that to this day. So we came to Los Angeles, eventually and family matters here.

K

Kathrin Zenkina 1:10:54

It was mostly my grandpa's family on only my grandpa. Yeah.

E

Elena Hartz 1:11:00

So as a result, you, me and Boba, we had four suitcases. And they just thought that that yesterday, when you showed me pictures, or a few days ago, send in pictures, you probably did not realize, but most of why I don't have many pictures of me as a child, because we did not have space in our suitcases, but had to leave them and throw away some of them, you know, for memories. So for ancestors and me as a child, it was either baby clothes, or, you know, albums.

K

Kathrin Zenkina 1:11:35

I shared this on my YouTube channel. But this is exactly why I started my YouTube channel is because I don't have much insight into what life was like before me. Through pictures and videos. Like I know, you know, Brandon has a ton of baby photos. And I have very little and I have seen a few pictures of like my grandma young and my mom young but not as many as like I see my, you know, American friends share like, Oh, look at my mom and dad when they were dating in college. Like I have none of that evidence. So I was like, You know what, let me make a YouTube channel so that our kids can see what our life was like before they were born and after they were born, so is a big motivation for me.

E

Elena Hartz 1:12:16

And you're doing absolutely the right thing. And that's one of the reasons that I started writing, you know, my memories down. Not for myself, if I publish it eventually, you know, I will and it's someone can use it. And you know, as an inspiration would be wonderful, but mostly for your children, for you and your grandchildren and your great grandchildren. Because I do know to this day, I wonder who my ancestors are. I wonder what they did and what the names are and where they lived and what they did on the daily life. Because it's such an important part of who we are today. I would want to know. So I admire people who have a family tree going to 1700.

K Kathrin Zenkina 1:12:59
I'm always impressed by that.

E Elena Hartz 1:13:01
Yeah, and no matter no matter how much research I'm doing and have done in the past, so far it led nowhere. I cannot find any roads because war, you know, you're the Soviet Union falling apart. So I don't even know

K Kathrin Zenkina 1:13:15
Yeah, lots of records got lost, like anything that counted in the Soviet Union no longer counted, like birth certificates would get messed up and crazy stuff. So you landed in LA.

E Elena Hartz 1:13:28
In Los Angeles family of three, you know, we flew in both my parents, but for all purposes, you know, there's a different family. So for a family of three, it was you, me and Boba we had four suitcases. And we have \$983 but didn't speak language. None of us spoke English. We had no promises of employment. We had no guarantees of success, we had nothing. We just walked into the life with the sole opportunity to live the American dream. That's all we had. Nothing else. An idea, an opportunity really that, you know, here's a chance. You want it? Here it is. And we did.

K Kathrin Zenkina 1:14:14
Just to show like, you know how little you knew the language there's a milk story that still makes me cry to this day. There are certain things I think about you guys at the grocery store and I just I break down crying this is I think why it took me so long to finally interview My mom is because these stories still make me so emotional. But I think it's very important to share. You know, you went out to go buy milk for your child in the United States and what was that experience like?

E Elena Hartz 1:14:41
It was within actually a few days, you know, I've had to feed you, you know, so it was literally the first few weeks that I mentioned to the store. You know, we had this \$983 your event the \$6 that we had \$300 for fed to pay for the room. All right, it was \$683. So every penny counted doubtlessly and the biggest we still had no employment. I had no idea

what we're doing. But I had to cook for you. Because if you remember, I could not buy food ready to

K Kathrin Zenkina 1:15:16
I was still healing.

E Elena Hartz 1:15:17
Yeah, exactly. Well, exactly. And maybe you weren't, but I didn't know what to buy if

K Kathrin Zenkina 1:15:22
you didn't want to risk it. Yeah.

E Elena Hartz 1:15:24
So I went to a store to buy milk. So I looked up, you know, milk, how it spelled, you know, you go to buy milk. So I went to the store, and I don't remember who were with me in the store, but most likely you were, you know, because it was walking distance to the store, and then remember to walk into the store to buy milk, and I go, and they find the aisle, you know, cooler and up, and I'm standing there. And because there is so much milk. And milk is the only word I know. And there's others the different colorful brands, let's not forget that each brand has three different four different kinds of milk

K Kathrin Zenkina 1:16:03
0% 1% 2%,

E Elena Hartz 1:16:06
you know, and then there is the vitamin D without vitamin D, and now to soy milk. Soy milk or whatever. So I stood there is like 45 milks in front of me. And I don't know which one to buy, because we're on the work I know is milk. And I know how they all say milk and they all say milk, and that's only one I can read. I don't know what whole is I don't know what you know, skim does not put words in my vocabulary. And they did not have you know, vocabulary with me. And there's not there's no phones on Google. So and I remember I stood there for a long time, because I could not even ask for help. Because I didn't know how. So I just stood there alone. And I did start crying a little but then I decided you know what I have to buy. So I found milk. I don't know how I selected milk. And they brought it

home and for you all with milk. Every time I would use milk and cooking I had to boil it first to make sure that any bacteria was killed, no matter even if it's brought from the store, you know, and pasteurized and all of that because of your infection. It was very strict instructions. I had to boil it first and then I could cook of that which I did I printed the milk it looked strange and I start boiling it and that's it turned it's clumped up because it wasn't the cow's milk, it was something else. And I just wasted \$3 on the milk which I didn't have. And you know I think it was compounding everything I remember I sat on the floor in the kitchen and that just cried because I had to go and spend another \$3 and try again and try again the hopes that I will select the right milk that time. I did take my dictionary with me that, you know, next time I went and I spent probably an hour translating you know what whole mean and skim and understood one skim blue. And there is another skim that it's great

K Kathrin Zenkina 1:18:12
organic and non organic and

E Elena Hartz 1:18:14
soy milk and all of those extra Milk flavored coconut or soy milk. I didn't buy cow's milk.

K Kathrin Zenkina 1:18:21
Wow. Did you the earthquake came before you enrolled in community college. Okay, so we were living with some family members at the time even though we're paying them rent and everything. And then there was the 1994 earthquake which was what four months after we arrived? It was in January, right? Yeah. And we arrived in like October October 23. Okay, so what happened? The earthquake came on software became we got a nice warm welcome from California Earthquake.

E Elena Hartz 1:18:54
Exactly. So we were living in an apartment, you know, and then see the you know, by apartment we were living in. There are three parent families there's us, me and three of us there are my parents. You know, stepfather and my mom. And there's my aunt. Yeah, three people two bedroom and a dam. So there's like apartment consists of two bedrooms you know within the room. The dam that was not completely underground. This is the half of that there is a Windows but the basement beyond half base. That's what that was our room. Yes, that was our room. It was dam Yeah, legally but it had Bathroom and it was in the you know, downstairs. So it was given to family with a small child our so

when you scream no one else can hear. And then the earthquake happened. And it was our third month in United States. It was in the middle of a night. I mean, it was I think it's like four o'clock or five o'clock in the morning. Yeah, all of a sudden. You know, it's hard to explain what you experienced was shaking rumbling of Earth. All of a sudden all the cars outside, the sirens were blaring, but it was still dark outside. So I think I don't remember what your father I think your father grabbed you from the bed and I remember someone screaming from upstairs, I don't remember who, but one member of family get in the doors you know get between the doors because it's the safest place in the house. Yeah, no, no, no.

K

Kathrin Zenkina 1:20:36

took me a while to learn that. After experiencing earthquakes on the ninth floor, I'm like wait, where am I supposed to go? Oh, shoot. After the fact I learned that.

E

Elena Hartz 1:20:46

So and that's where, you know, sit in the doors, so three of us were sitting in the doors and it was pitch black because there is no light look through see it was cut off immediately. The blaring and shaking I remember sitting and covering you with my body in the powder of paint was falling like a clown around us. And we were sitting there for probably about an hour and it was aftershock after aftershock so over, you know, whatever we were wearing, you know, pajamas, and you know, blankets and after an hour, and I will never, never forget one very interesting detail about your father that over sitting three of us in the doorway. It was dark, and at some point he said, Hold her, you know, he gave me you and that was holding you and he disappeared. And you know, in between the aftershocks we'll try to get the pacifier you know, and all of a sudden it starts to shake again. So he disappeared. And he was gone for a few minutes. And all of a sudden he's showing up fully dressed shoes, socks, pants and shirt and the jacket, you know, and he sat next to me and I said what are you doing? He said, Well, I'm ready to go if something happened. And I said, Well, what about us? you and me because I was happening if you were a half naked? He said, Well, you know, at least I can walk outside, you know, I'm fully clothed. So we'll we'll be okay. So as we were sitting and he was fully dressed and ready to go, I was still barefoot holding you, you know, and trying to calm you down because you don't want to scare your child, right? You're trying to protect, you know, with energy. Everything is okay. You know, because you were a year old. You were 14 months you didn't know. Yeah, the blaming of course we're kind of giving it away. Yeah. So that there is trouble. So after an hour, we have heard a knock on our door, front door. And it was the fire department. It was explained to us, mostly with gestures, that we have to leave the house immediately our house shifted and the foundation was, you know, we're fearing that this is going to

collapse at any moment. So they gave us 20 minutes. This clock 20 minutes, you have to leave. So in between the aftershocks, we had to get the stuff we needed. Well, when you holding the baby, what's the stuff you need? It's not your clothes. It's the cause for a baby. It's, you know, formal it's food, it's pacifier, it's diaper, it's the you know, you try to get in. We're obviously panic and good thing. We grabbed paperwork and documents, our immigration papers because we knew most important thing for us allowed. So basically 20 minutes later, again, the fire department, firemen came knocking on our doors, and he would not leave until we all leave. And where do you go? It's still dark outside. We have no phones. There are no cell phones. We don't speak language. We don't have cars. We did not have cars yet. So this show this will sit here on the curb. To this day, every time I drive to the department to look at the curb and that was actually sitting over about six of us or seven of us were sitting on the curb. completely lost. I had you that I had to feed and change diapers and trying to calm you down. And we have no place to go. We were homeless. We were homeless. With

K

Kathrin Zenkina 1:24:42

no language, new country.

E

Elena Hartz 1:24:44

We didn't know what they're saying to us, because none of us really speak English. Some of us, you know, relatives that we shared the apartment with. They came nine months before us, so they knew more than us but still not enough to figure out. And I think like two, three hours later, one of my stepfather's relatives, she just drove by to check on us, because you know, everyone was panicked and she just out of her good gesture. She drove by and she saw us and she brought her to her house. Wow. And we were not allowed back into our house, for at least I think, like a month and a half, or a month. After a month, let us in for 20 minutes to collect more clothes, you know, or something. And then they kicked us out again.

K

Kathrin Zenkina 1:25:35

How did you get the apartment, the one bedroom apartment that we ended up living in.

E

Elena Hartz 1:25:40

So when we were sitting on the curb, waiting for something, or someone I do remember, people were giving fliers away, amazingly enough FEMA flyers because it's already probably been two or three hours since such a big earthquake. You know, FEMA,

thankfully kicked in and Red Cross, immediately people started passing out flyers because everyone, most people were on the streets at that time. Because they didn't, it was the safest place to be. So I remember we had the flyer, that there is a park somewhere near our area, where there is a FEMA, Red Cross, and there is a help. So people should go there and ask for help. And that's how we did their buses started training, I think the next day or so. And our family didn't have a car I don't remember someone's brought us there. So they brought us to the FEMA. And we sat in line in the park and they interviewed us I don't remember how we. But thankfully, we're always thankful for things that take place that, you know, when you look back and you understand it was the blessing. Yeah, because at that time, FEMA gave us a voucher for section eight program, meaning for low income apartment. Because without that flyer, we would never afford the apartment, right? Because we had no welfare and no job we just arrived. So thankful about apartment that cost \$625 will be rented for \$200. Wow. So that's a blessing and we lived there for quite a few years.

K

Kathrin Zenkina 1:27:28

That's the apartment that I remember my childhood. I obviously don't remember the one that, you know, almost crumbled in the earthquake, but I do remember, yeah, that one bedroom apartment. The big question that a lot of people ask is like, How in the world did you decide to go to your local community college and register for classes? I remember you saying you took microbiology or something? Not even speaking a word of English, like where in the timeline was this? And how in the hell did you manage this? Like, what was your thinking?

E

Elena Hartz 1:28:09

It is funny story. Well, but my thinking, what was my thinking? My thinking was in one place, my thinking was to get you safely away from abusive family and myself, you know, myself and you out of abuse and to survive. And I knew that I needed money. In order to make money, I could go and find a job right a way probably somewhere you know, retail or

K

Kathrin Zenkina 1:28:36

we had like Russian stores nearby stuff that my mom, you have worked outside part time to make some money. Yeah.

E

Elena Hartz 1:28:43

So I worked that you know, unloaded groceries, you know, produce trucks and wash toilets, you know, you do what you have to but it was all, you know, cash under the table under the table, you know, which we actually did not understand what's going on to begin with. We just arrived Fresh Off the Boat as they say. So anyway, my goal was very clear. I needed to make money, I needed to get away, I needed a new life. Now for me, it was like, how do you do that? I mean, how do you get money? Well, I know I'm smart. So I figured, well, for me, it's an education, right? I get the education, I get the job, and I can pay for myself and my child, and then I will leave and then we'll have a head the life. So I looked up, actually I stole, a newspaper from one of our neighbors at the time they're delivered newspapers to the doors. So I needed to figure out what I'm going to do in life. So I stole a newspaper. I put it back up there. But I borrowed, borrowed, borrowed Yeah, I guess I borrow because it was early in the morning. They haven't, you know, picked up here. So I opened newspaper and I looked at where Wanted jobs, you know, wanted ads. And I tried to figure out which occupation had the most ads, because that would be the most guarantee work for me.

K

Kathrin Zenkina 1:30:12
Smart.

E

Elena Hartz 1:30:13

So there are two of them that stood out. Because if you remember, I don't know if you remember y2k, you know, surprised programmers were very in demand before 2000. And there are nurses. And I was good with computers, you know, biggest in technology is always my thing. And nursing. And because I always wanted to be a doctor, I decided that that's the route I'm gonna take. I'm going to become a nurse, and then I'm going to go to medical school. However, I said, Well, I need a plan B, because I already start talking to people, you know, when I walk and around other moms and other immigrants, so I kind of got an idea that I have to go to college, I had no idea what it means. But I knew I needed to go to college to get the medical school. I knew rewards that I have to go to medical school. And I decided, Okay, so here's step, Plan B in case I don't make it to medical school, I will become a nurse. So I will have money to pay for me and then I will go and continue. So I decided to take a long tour. I spoke at one of the birthdays at a time in our family. I met with, you know, most of our family, our ages they've been there for a few years before us and seven years. So they knew what's going on. They were successful. So I started asking, Well, you know, I want to go to medical school. How do I do that? I didn't speak English. But you know, that's what I wanted. And I remember one of our younger relatives say, well, you need to go to apply to college. And I said, Well, how do I do that? And she said, You know what, I'm gonna go drive tomorrow to certain place. I know where

community colleges is, I will drop you off if you want tomorrow. I cannot go with you, but I can drive you. And she picked up me the next day or the next Monday, whatever we agreed upon. And she dropped me off Los Angeles Valley College, Community College in the parking lot. And she said, You have to go in Russian, others have a conversation takes place in Russian here, you have to go and find admission. And she made me repeat a few time admission, you know, I need admission. So she dropped me off and she drove away to do her business. And so here I'm standing and I'm in the parking lot. And it's a huge college. I mean, it's a huge community college, right? With parking many buildings ministry, the people running around, and I didn't speak English. I did not. But I knew I needed to find admissions. So I start walking in one direction. And I don't see admissions. I don't even know what that looks like. I don't have a map. I don't I just know I'm on the ground to the community college and I have to be here. So I stopped one student walking by and I did not speak English. But how do you survive when you don't speak English, you explained with your hands and your face. So I kept them in admissions. And then remember who it was for the time guy or a girl and looked at me. And then to get admission?

E

Elena Hartz 1:33:28

And the person start talking to me explaining, which I did not understand, but he was pointing in the direction, you know, it's like this way. So I said thank you because that much I knew. And I walk in that direction, but he pointed there but there is no admissions. I know I'm striving but different buildings and different. So I find another guy. So admissions, and I go in the different directions. So I think it's took four people for me to stop and not say one word admissions, you know, admissions. To make it to admissions, I saw admissions build, and I was very relieved. I walked in and did not speak English. So I go through, you know, next available window that there is a person and they said, admissions? And apparently I was not the first immigrant. So because they knew exactly what I needed. They gave me application.

K

Kathrin Zenkina 1:34:23

Oh, boy.

E

Elena Hartz 1:34:24

They gave me application. It was a catalog with application inside because everything was on paper. And thankfully, I was told to bring in a friend, a relative of mine to bring Social Security with me. So that match I had with me and my passport. So I started completing and that I couldn't figure out what they ask, you know, what they want. I went

back to a window and, you know, I don't know and I don't remember how I completed the application. But somehow I did because they took it from Me and they gave me a piece of paper with three days, or two days that apparently I had to undergo a test. I had to take math, to evaluate an English to evaluate my level what classes I should take. And it went from there. I failed both of those tests. And when I went to take the classes select from catalog, I did not know what prerequisite mean. You know, all I knew I needed to go to medical school and I figured well in medical school what do they need and biology, microbiology, you know, is like history, you know, not history, but sciences, right. So I selected the first course in my microbiology class. So in the fall of 1994, in August, I think it started, I was enrolled into microbiology class.

K Kathrin Zenkina 1:35:53
that's like only one year after coming here, right? Less than a year. My God!

B Brennan O'Keefe 1:35:58
Challenging, to say the least. Relationship with a one year old.

E Elena Hartz 1:36:02
Yes. And with the idea that Boba was against me going to college.

K Kathrin Zenkina 1:36:09
your whole family was

E Elena Hartz 1:36:10
My whole family was against me going to but especially Boba he wanted me to

K Kathrin Zenkina 1:36:14
Because it's not instant money.

E Elena Hartz 1:36:16
He wanted me to go and make money, you know, to work minimum wage or whatever, just to make sure the money's coming in. And I think he knew that once I get education, I will go. I mean, there are no miracles. I mean, he knew what kind of relationship we

already had at the time.

B Brennan O'Keefe 1:36:33
you cycle with and when you would become self sufficient. Exactly. He was providing what you needed at the time.

E Elena Hartz 1:36:40
Yes.

K Kathrin Zenkina 1:36:40
So you took care of microbiology?

E Elena Hartz 1:36:43
I took my microbiology. Yes. Should I tell you microbiology?

K Kathrin Zenkina 1:36:48
No. I mean, like, I can't, I can't. Yeah, it's funny, hilarious. Actually.

E Elena Hartz 1:36:54
It's hilarious and sad at the same time, because I started taking the class, I go to class, you know, I spent a lot of money on the textbook. I mean, anyone knows how much textbooks and college cost. Hundreds. I had to spend that money to buy that book, you know, money I did not have.

K Kathrin Zenkina 1:37:15
And Volvo was working at a kitchen. And the key is like a dishwasher. As a dishwasher. Yeah, so that's how there's some limited money coming in.

E Elena Hartz 1:37:23
Okay. So I had to get the car in order for me to go to college. So we borrowed money from someone, you know, so we got myself a car. Obviously, a cheap one, and an old one. But

it's something that I could drive so I can go to college. I was very persistent I need the car so I can go to college. Boba didn't want to get me a car to make sure that I'm not independent. He wanted to make sure that I'm as dependent on him as possible. So I when I started taking college courses, microbiology, so I'm going to come into class and I sit through a class and they would talk blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. And then they go home. And you know, and I tried to read, but they didn't speak English. I couldn't read English. So I've

K

Kathrin Zenkina 1:38:18

let alone microbiology. Terminology.

E

Elena Hartz 1:38:22

Yes. So I have my dictionary, you know, book dictionary. So what I would say what I would do at home, once you are in bed, I would take open the textbook and I would start translating every word I see with the dictionary. I mean, it would take me hours to translate, you know, half a quarter of a page. And obviously, I wasn't doing very well, you know, but that was determined. Every word. And finally I said okay, every word does not work and how about the verb will start skipping the words you know, how about I will select the longest words in the sentence, and only translate that word and then pick up the meaning. And that's how I learn speed reading, because I would select on the longest ones and look them up, and then try to make sense of them.

B

Brennan O'Keefe 1:39:17

Can I add a funny thing in here? Because guys, I'm like a little toddler parent, I'd love to speak Russian, but I know like absolutely zero Russian, I mean it for all intensive purposes.

K

Kathrin Zenkina 1:39:28

you know like 0.01%.

B

Brennan O'Keefe 1:39:30

I'm improving a lot, beautiful. But, you know, it's interesting, having learned the language, it's really challenging because it doesn't directly translate. So what I used to think of as like the Russian accent, when someone will say something in a certain way I thought that was like just the cultural accent but in reality words don't exist. There's words that just like is, right? And in and. These words don't exist in Russian and so I can only imagine how

challenging it is you're trying to translate things that don't exist.

E

Elena Hartz 1:40:06

Absolutely, yes. So that's why I decided not to waste time on the small boards. I decided big words for my ticket to future. And obviously, as you can imagine, that did not go well for me because there is only so fast you can translate and then figure out and, as you know, in college, they don't tell you to read one page and say, you know, read this paragraph, that paragraph, right. So a few weeks in, you know, I go faithfully to college every day, I listen to blah, blah, blah, I go home, and you know, all over it. And one day, I'm showing up. And apparently it was a test day. Well, I didn't know, you know, because I could not read even the syllabus. So I'm showing up and everyone is sitting in the, you know, the desks, there is nothing on desks. On the green pieces of paper and the pencil, I have no idea what it is. It was Scantron. You know, the scantrons? I'm sure you remember it from college.

K

Kathrin Zenkina 1:41:06

I'll never forget

B

Brennan O'Keefe 1:41:07

probably the last generation that will reuse those,

E

Elena Hartz 1:41:09

If possible is but I had no idea what it was what it is some sitting at my desk. Absolutely. I have on the pencil. That much I had. And then the girl next to me in the next desk she saw that I did not have. So she gave me one of hers. Is there a common pack? So she gave me and I think her and you know made the point to have to return it because I understand money was spent on that. So I'm sitting there and the teacher passes out booklets. Yeah. I have no idea what the Scantron is. I have no idea. The booklet apparently biggest in Russia, we had oral tests. It was never almost never written text. So they get in, she turned around and sat down and everyone started shuffling papers and doing something and you know, drawing and on the green pieces of paper. So I did not make the connection between the booklet of questions and the Scantron. So I will try to circle something on the booklet even though I could not read what it is. And then I would try to you know, fill out the bubbles on the Scantron to make sure they cute and accurate and there is like some kind of a pattern of a wave because I saw other people do waves on the Scantron. To this day, I have a Scantron. To this day, I have that my first Scantron. I mean, you can imagine

the grade they got, right. I mean, I didn't pass obviously, yeah, I didn't. I still have it. Everything was wrong out there, except my last name and first name. That one I got right. But I was forced to drop out of the class, obviously, I was explained by some other Russian student who was probably two months older than, you know, in college, that I can do that. So bad grades is not showing on my record, like a withdrawal. Withdrawal, yeah. So and that's what I did. I actually withdrew from a microbiology before I could fail it, you know, like, official F, but I had to hide it from my family that I failed. So I would go to college, I would drive out in the car to the closest Park and spend an hour or two hours, whoever with would be is, you know, part of my schedule. And I would not tell them that I failed. I would sit in the park every day and hide from my family because I was too ashamed to admit that I failed, you know, the biggest money was spent on, you know, on the course.

K

Kathrin Zenkina 1:43:45

I was gonna ask how did you pay for college?

E

Elena Hartz 1:43:48

You know, I think that a third time Vova would work, you know, he would work a lot and he was always a hard worker. He would make hustler and hustle and

K

Kathrin Zenkina 1:44:01

figure out how to get a green card to get money.

E

Elena Hartz 1:44:04

There you go. You know, I picked that one right. So that way, you know he would work and I think that biggest we could save in an apartment. And I think by that point we even got welfare. I think about seven or eight months in, we finally, you know, bagged government and they gave us all welfare because we did not qualify when we applied for immigration to United States we request the status of refugee. And those people, refugees, immediately qualify for all the social programs because you know, you're saying help me and here government to help you, which is wonderful. However, because Eager was in United States previously, in 1988, they actually, I know it's hard to believe, but during the interview, when they ask us what well, eager, you were here in 1988, you were here three years ago in United States. If the times are so tough and difficult for Jewish people in Russia, what did you come back to Soviet Union? And he said, Well, I had a family, my wife, how can I stay? Well, if it was that bad, you would stay in the United States illegally, and then you would apply for refugee status. Yeah. Because you came back for your

family, you know, things are not that bad. You're kind of flying to us.

K Kathrin Zenkina 1:45:42
Wow. Some miracle we're here.

E Elena Hartz 1:45:46
I know, I know. Because, you know, you take the truthful part and you want to be honest, and you want to do everything by law and actually backfires in our situation, because they eventually gave us a status of parolees. But we had to have a financial sponsor. Someone had to say that I'm taking financial responsibility for this.

K Kathrin Zenkina 1:46:09
and that was his family.

E Elena Hartz 1:46:11
And that will forever we'll be grateful for the family for doing that. Because right now, we all know how difficult it is to find someone, you know, is the case. Why did you sign papers that you take your family of immigrants in the old were responsible? 100% for all financial things, right? It's unimaginable. I mean, how blessed are we? I know it just like I'm grateful. So we're can go back to college I was wondering how

E Elena Hartz 1:46:42
Because of welfare, because Yeah, we did not qualify for any social programs. Yes. So but we applied many times that were denied and finally I think kind of personal, they just say, Listen, you know, maybe just put the checkmark in the right place. And they said you qualify. So we're getting started getting welfare. So that was a very big help.

K Kathrin Zenkina 1:47:05
And you took out student loans through USC but not community college. Or did you start taking out student loans for

E Elena Hartz 1:47:10
Students loans in the USC, when our transfer however, I did qualify for Pell Grants. Yeah,

financial aid in college that you did not have to return. Yes.

K

Kathrin Zenkina 1:47:20

it is, by some miracle, you guys, my mom learned English and started getting straight A's in school, and ended up transferring to USC.

E

Elena Hartz 1:47:29

And there's a special story I can tell about how I started getting all A's and B's. What? I failed the first course right? Yeah. So I go back to college to register for next semester, and I decided to you know what English I should I should learn English. Because I failed the test of admissions that showed that my English is absolutely zero. So I had to take English second language. I enrolled in English second language, and I failed those two. So I got an F in speech, and I think D in English writing or something, whatever they call it. So I already had two semesters that I failed. It was w in microbiology and F and G in English second language. And before I register for summer, I got the letter in the mail that I was placed in academic probation. And what it says is it took me a long time to translate the dictionary. It said that if I don't improve, they give me another chance one more semester, if I don't improve, they have to, you know, exclude me or expel me from the college for lack of success and education. I remember how hard they cried when they finally translated the letter. Because for me, college was the only way for you and me out of a relationship of domestic abuse. And all of a sudden, I realize my dreams are crushing right there. I mean I'm doing my best and it's not good enough, and I'm trying to figure out what else I can do. Because that's my own way out. That's the only way to. Otherwise, I'm going to be stuck in working in minimum wage jobs and facing violence frequent and you and it was bad. I cried. I remember I actually wrote that letter apart so no one can see it. I actually burned it in the sink just to make sure I don't see it ever again and no one sees the failure I am. And I enrolled in the psychology class. I mean, I don't know what that was thinking. Psychology wasn't appropriate probably after you failed semesters. You don't speak English, you know, psychologists seems like a wonderful idea for summer school. Yeah, not even the regular semester, for summer school psychology. So I had one chance. That class was the only chance I had. If I failed that, that would be the end of it because, try to apply to different college and they already expelled you. Right? Yeah. And that was my only chance. It just so happened that a relative of mine, Rafa, he was enrolled in the same class. And I said, stick next to him because, you know, we're kind of family, you know, that lived during the earthquake

K Kathrin Zenkina 1:50:36
was he your age?

E Elena Hartz 1:50:38
He was I think two or three years younger than me.

K Kathrin Zenkina 1:50:41
I remember him. He felt like an uncle/cousin energy.

E Elena Hartz 1:50:45
Yeah, yeah. Wonderful personality. Love him. So it just so happened that I sat next to him. So I was able to ask questions from him, like, Why are you laughing? I mean, what is he saying? In Hebrew, because he spoke Russian, he was able to translate certain things. So I started picking up it's been over a year and, you know, in the United States, the more I started picking up certain things, and I figured out how to read the book faster. So basically, what I told myself, okay, dictionary is not working. It was already a year in the United States. So I already started picking up certain things, you know,

K Kathrin Zenkina 1:51:27
she discovered Jerry Springer.

E Elena Hartz 1:51:29
Yes, yes.

K Kathrin Zenkina 1:51:32
My mom learned a lot from Jerry Springer,

E Elena Hartz 1:51:35
That's how I was learning English in between the college courses. Once you were in bed, you know, Jerry Springer would come in at like 10 o'clock in the evening or something like that. It was for you. You're in bed. It was my time to study, you know, and do work and homework. And I would turn on Jerry Springer with closed caption. And because there is a

lot of beeping going on, when Jerry Springer guests were talking, I was able to process, read, you know, read whatever was said. And because beeping were taking pauses, I was able to figure out what they're saying and what I can read. And because within each level of those guests was not college level. Forget college. I think it's like third grade, but it was just my level what I needed to interpret simple words and put them and make sense of them. So yeah, I will forever grateful to Jerry Springer. He taught me English.

B

Brennan O'Keefe 1:52:39

On a plaque on the wall. I'm grateful that Jerry Springer taught me English.

K

Kathrin Zenkina 1:52:43

send a letter to the show.

E

Elena Hartz 1:52:45

I mean, I have to be honest with you, it took me quite a few shows to go over the shock of what I was seeing. Not even understanding what's going on, but see what's going on. But one thing zoom their personality and it's just so yeah, so the psychology 101 was my ticket to prosperity and out of a probation letter and prove the time able to and I don't know how I did it to this day. I have no idea how I did it. But I got a B in the class.

K

Kathrin Zenkina 1:53:18

You know, it's insane, like speaking of synchronicities, so psychology was like your ticket to prosperity. That is like my whole career now. It's like all based in psychology, even though I'm not like formally trained in college. And what's even crazier guys is that this is just a fun fact, my very first word that I ever spoke, was an English word. And this was in Ukraine. And the very first word wasn't mama Papa or anything like that. It was habit. My very first word was habit, and nobody knew where it came from. And I just think, you know, to this day, like you've shared these stories, this is just another side note, you share these crazy stories of like, how I don't even know how I'm alive today. There's so many moments we could have been killed. I mean, I'm so grateful that you started sharing this information with me. And of course, you know, now the whole world can also take a peek into your life and you know, where we came from. It makes me so grateful that I am, number one alive, but it also gives me such a sense of purpose, especially in those moments. I think back when I was a teenager, and I was bullied and I didn't feel like I mattered or had a purpose. I always think back to oh my god, something, some force in the universe wanted us here. By some grace of God, we are here for a reason. That means we have a purpose to fulfill.

We have a whole life to live, full potential to realize, to actualize it just, it makes me cry, but also really warms my heart because it just brings so much more meaning to our life and why we're here.

E

Elena Hartz 1:54:47

I can tell you another detail that makes even more sense for you right now, because you were meant to be here. Because when we applied for United States, you know, there was only three of us. It was me and my parents. You were not in the picture, Boba was not in the picture, your name and Boba's name were never in any application to the government of the United States. The only reason you were here because of a kind person in a consulate in Moscow that, you know, American guy that worked at the time, because when you were born, my parents flew in Vova. They went to Moscow for an interview.

K

Kathrin Zenkina 1:55:31

Yeah.

E

Elena Hartz 1:55:32

So when they walked into the Embassy of the United States, my parents had the official invitation. Boba did not. You were never in you just born literally a week ago. And I was still at home, I was just discharged from a hospital there. So I was not in attendance in the interview, my name was in the paperwork, but I was not I was with you at home. So my parents walk into a window in the embassy. And Boba stands behind them. And they say, well, we have an appointment for an interview for the immigration, here's our names, here's our passports, here's our IDs, whatever paperwork was needed. So the guy sitting there at the window, and he bride's name that they arrived and he looks at Boba and he said, and who are you? And Boba said, Well, I'm husband of the daughter, and he listened to where's the daughter? Well, funny you should ask a daughter just gave birth to our grandchild, you know, granddaughter, so she could not make it. And my mom said, Look, I kind of, you know, slow down a little bit. And he said, okay, what's the name of the of a granddaughter? So they said the name, because we already named you. So he brought it in the application and he said, What's your name? And he said, Well, my name is such and such. And he brought his name into application. And that's how you came to United States. Wow. If that person did not put your name and his name into the application, you'd have no invitation. Right? What will happen invitation? Well, I wouldn't be allowed in the United States. But yeah, you too. We're all nervous tourists when one, your husband or wife would immigrate and then the wait for yours for a while. Yeah, that would be our future where in our case Boba would never let me leave with you.

K Kathrin Zenkina 1:57:33
Wow. That is so insane.

E Elena Hartz 1:57:36
So if that was the end. Every time we talk about that we all say prayer for that man. We don't know his name. Yeah. But I always say I just hope your family, and you, treated the same way you treated us. You will be blessed and never have trouble not you're not your children, not your grandchildren. Because with the difference he made for our family, I mean, I can tell the story. But for immigrants, no one will believe me.

K Kathrin Zenkina 1:58:05
Yeah. And there are universal laws that are set up to bless him immensely. And I wish him the best too, because I had no idea that is insane. Wow, this is definitely going to be a two parter. I'm probably going to split this up. Because there's, you know, like, there's so much we can go into and of course, like, we're not going to exhaust your full life story in one podcast episode. So I want to start, you know, start finishing it up and tying some loose ends.

E Elena Hartz 1:58:34
So again, I mentioned something. Yeah, I just wanted to put an end to the story of my college because you know, how it started. Yeah, yes. Well, I just would like to let you know that I started college in the fall of 1994. Community College, I graduated USC nursing program in 1999, which is five years, right. I graduated from Lauder. I transferred to USC, I was accepted, but actually was top of my USC class.

K Kathrin Zenkina 1:59:09
Now, as you guys can imagine, I when I entered college, there was some very high expectations for me, because now you know how my mom finished school so of course, I was like, Okay, I am in a very, you know, privileged position now that my family has set up a foundation in the United States. I definitely speak the language. So what is my excuse? Right. So I have to do even better. I'm curious Mama, you know, what is your definition of the American dream? And do you believe you achieved everything that you hoped for when you came to this country?

E

Elena Hartz 1:59:45

The ultimate the American Dream is freedom. Freedom of speech, freedom of exercising your religion, freedom of be whoever and whatever you want to be. This is the American dream and absolutely I liked that. I achieved the ultimate dream. I always joke, it's like there is no point for me to buy a lottery to win jackpot because what I did. I won the jackpot, my family won jackpot, you won jackpot, because we have this amazing opportunity. And we are living we have absolute freedom of traveling and, you know, growing up in Soviet Union but had zero opportunity to travel abroad.

K

Kathrin Zenkina 2:00:24

Yeah, that's not gonna work for me because you guys know how I travel. So, you know, I absolutely loved our trip to Dubai and the Maldives. But we got Italy coming up. Oh, da, why am I forgetting that we're going to Costa Rica literally in two days. But I know it's been my mom's dream to go to Italy. She's been to France a million times, but always wanted to go to Italy. So I'm super excited about that. Mama tying in the lessons, you know, like what people can take away from this and your hardest moments? How did you muster up the strength to keep going? And what advice do you have for people who perhaps are in, you know, abusive relationship? Or, you know, they're struggling getting their citizenship, or they're in the middle of immigration to a country where they don't speak English? Like, what is some advice that you can give them? You know, based on where you were at one point versus where you are now.

E

Elena Hartz 2:01:18

I think it's very hard to give any advice, I can only share my experience. Here's how I did that. Because I given you an advice, it's systems that someone will follow, but every one of us have different situation and one pattern will not fit all of them. Yeah, but only thing is I can say is have a goal in your life. In your mind, what is it? why you're doing it? Why is it important for you to get out of a relationship? It may not necessarily be you, in my case, it was my daughter. You are because I knew I had to break that so you will never have to face the same thing. You were the only one that kept going, you know, made me going through college and everything knowing that you will be safe. And you will never have to call in the corner hiding from the physical boss, and, you know, what emotional abuse or, you know, financial abuse. I did it for you. We all have something very meaningful in our lives. And you know, it can be for me, I'm fiercely independent. So for me, I wanted you to be independent. And even in the darkest of my moments I hear it from everyone that was something of a seed inside of me that hits so deep in my mind and in my heart that I never shared it with anyone. But it was something that I knew it was only mine, and in the darkest times I knew I could look back on that and nurture that seed and make it grow

and it will warm me up because that's the only thing to keep going. I have the dream there is a light there's a seed, there is independence. I have, you know what, I will survive, that will be fine. One day, one day at a time. Don't think big, just one day at a time.

K

Kathrin Zenkina 2:03:11

You know, this is obviously The Manifestation Babe podcast. And I'm curious, do you believe in the power of manifestation?

E

Elena Hartz 2:03:18

Absolutely. I'm living the life exactly as I envisioned, I never envisioned like, there is going to be this room and there is going to be this picture on my wall and there is view. I just knew I will have the most amazing life ever. I will have a house, I will have a beautiful life, I will have a freedom, I will have money to travel, I will have money to buy whatever I want for my family. That kind of a dream that kind of a manifestation. And often it does work for me that they go into detail and I can actually feel and smell and look at but when you go for big dreams, don't slave yourself into smallest vision of this painting on my wall because for all you know you're destined to have a gallery of paintings.

K

Kathrin Zenkina 2:04:04

Is there something better?

E

Elena Hartz 2:04:05

Exactly. What if your future is much bigger and you only concentrate on one painting frame versus the gallery?

K

Kathrin Zenkina 2:04:14

So you are you know, it's so crazy to think that you're only 19 years older than me. So a lot of people don't realize how young you actually are. You're only 47 years old and, you know, recently you've gone through some life changes, recently divorced starting a brand new life in your 40s, you know, what are you most excited about from this this point forward? You know, going through everything that you've gone through, like what have you learned about relationships what you deserve your self worth not settling for less than what you deserve? And what are you most excited about creating?

E

Elena Hartz 2:04:52

It's hard to answer because I'm so excited that the possibilities and open doors are opened in front of me that actually you know At some point, it's like, Well, which one? Do I take? them? Can't take all of them, I mean, I have to select one to go through. But the possibilities are exciting, you know, difficult times, I'm still going through a lot of healing.

K

Kathrin Zenkina 2:05:11

Oh, yeah, I'm still going through I sent my mom to ayahuasca retreats for a reason.

E

Elena Hartz 2:05:16

Absolutely and I just wanted to mention that the during my first visit to ayahuasca, I actually learn the meaning of forgiveness. Because as you know, when you go into a ceremony to say, well, you have to forgive unforgivable. Before I went to ayahuasca, and I learned the lesson that I'm going to tell right now. I would be saying to myself this that bad things happened to me but you know what forgive these people, you know, what karma will get them goddess, you know, or universe or whatever the day where you know, you believe and it will punish them. Because there is no person couldn't get away with that unpunished. You know, I forgive you, you know, let God sort you out, you know, like people say in this, but I strongly believe that karma will get you. And when I went into one of his my ceremonies that ayahuasca, and this like a number of laying there and said, well forget it, you're forgiven, forgive unforgivable, and all of a sudden, I realized that it was not the forgiveness. I think that for forgiveness is just letting go without the condition of punishment. Expectation, because in my mind, some people get you, you know, something on my behalf, reenact and you will be punished. But that's not the forgiveness. No, it just you put the condition as like, you're fooling yourself. So unless you can say is, as I say, the ultimate indifference, I guess, if you can say, Well, you know what, I will not be happy when something bad happens to the person. And I will not be sad when something good happens to the person. When I absolutely can hear something about the person that did bad to me, and not to react one way or the other just an observer. Yes. And listen to statement without any emotion good or bad. Yeah. Because you want to be, you know, happy when they, you know, trip over and fall on the floor and the car getting you. You know if I can do that, that's forgiveness. Yeah. So that's, you know, that's one of the most important lessons I learned, and it's hard. It's hard because it's not fair.

B

Brennan O'Keefe 2:07:39

But that's because true forgiveness, deep forgiveness is true freedom for yourself. It's not

about someone else. True deep forgiveness is about freeing yourself and releasing any expectations of what happens next. And it's, it's hard for people to get there. But this story, your story, Katherine's story they've always been so inspiring to me, because it's like, in the face of, of hell on earth, in the face of all the cards stacked against, in the face of abuse and poverty and like just, I can name a million things that I respect you for and you know that, but in the face of all of that, you're able to forgive for yourself, and allow the vacuum that can bring in the magic of life.

E

Elena Hartz 2:08:31

Absolutely. Yeah, absolutely correct.

K

Kathrin Zenkina 2:08:34

The last question that people have for you, at least for now, because I'm sure people are gonna want more from you. Are you upset that I'm not in medical school right now? That I didn't go to medical school?

E

Elena Hartz 2:08:51

You and I were both talked about that, you know? No, I'm very happy that you did not listen to me. I'm very happy. You weren't happy A few years ago. I was not. I was not. And you know, and I'm not ashamed to accept that and admit that because I've seen people. I've seen the path I took. And I've seen the path that people didn't, you know, different paths people took, and most often for me as an immigrant and in the country, you know, the only path I know, you know, you either a successful business owner or you have a wonderful education and you go and become, there's like medical school, lawyer, you know, traditional high paying job.

K

Kathrin Zenkina 2:09:32

Immigrant options are medical school or law school.

E

Elena Hartz 2:09:35

Absolutely. So you know, and you always want best for your child. And you always make judgments from what we know. In life was conditioned to one thing, and in my mind, that would be worse. I mean, I still believe you would make a wonderful surgeon. I mean, don't blame me, but I'm glad you didn't, you know, and it's one of the few times I think, you know, I'm so proud for, one of few times that did not accept to admit that I was wrong.

B

Brennan O'Keefe 2:10:04

You know, and I just want to say something from a relatively impartial and neutral perspective, despite the ring on my finger next to my wife, which is I think, sometimes this immigrant mentality gets misconstrued as being very exacting, or like, overbearing on children or, you know, really challenging and tough or superficial, or, you know, we have these examples where we characterize, stereotype, you know, Indian people wanting to have you know, their doctor or their accountant or, you know, different Asians that there's all these different stereotypes that society implants. And to me, being around your family has been so beautiful, because I realize those stereotypes only exists because when people come from their experience, they want to impart lessons in a better life for their children opportunities, and they don't always necessarily know what's best, that will make them happy, but they're not focusing will make you happy. They want to give you the absolute maximum opportunity for success to live a better life, in their filters in their eyes than they lived. And that honestly is honorable, I don't care what anyone says about that, to me, the honorable element of wanting better for your family and your children. You may have the wrong vehicle, the wrong methods, but you when you want better for someone else that has power, and that is honorable to the end of time.

E

Elena Hartz 2:11:37

Absolutely. And, you know, that's probably why immigrant parents began pushing because those opportunities we did not have.

K

Kathrin Zenkina 2:11:46

you don't know what you have.

E

Elena Hartz 2:11:48

Exactly, so for us, it's like yes, go get the profession, go to college, go succeed, go get money, go travel, because we did not have that. We had no opportunity to make that much money as successful attorneys and we always admire those people because we hard work, you know, work hard and want to be enjoying our money. So that's why we want you guys I mean, meaning, you know, immigrant parents, as a representative of

K

Kathrin Zenkina 2:11:50

all immigrants, yeah,

E

Elena Hartz 2:12:17

because we left that behind, so you have an opportunity. So for us, we fear that you will miss the opportunity to do that. That's probably one of the biggest fears, you know, because he will just have fun and do party and all of that and missing opportunity to make money and travel and be successful and buy houses and live in this beautiful building and dress this and drive this car that you only could dream of, we only saw in the movies and the dreams. Can you imagine that you can just drive that car Mercedes? or live in the New York high rise and see, you know, can you imagine not to have scheduled water because, you know, that hot water will be cut out between four and five, you know, just or the rations, and electricity.

K

Kathrin Zenkina 2:13:04

I can't imagine. Mama, I'm so grateful for you. Thank you so much for coming on here. We've been officially talking for two and a half hours. So thank you so much for sharing your time, your wisdom, your energy with us. Your stories, I know, many of these stories were not easy to tell, especially in this new way of you know, speaking into a microphone on your daughter's podcast, I can only imagine. And I just want to thank you so much for giving birth to me and raising me and you know, everything that you have gone through, accomplished, overcome to make me, and you and our relationship what it is today, like I am forever grateful for you.

B

Brennan O'Keefe 2:13:46

And I would just like to say as well as you know, I'm not your daughter. But I'm your son these days. Close enough. Yeah, no, he is. I think you know, this. We are both two very opinionated, loud, thoughtful, smart people. But the mutual respect that I feel with you is unlike anything I really have ever felt. I mean, I you know, deep in your soul that I see what you have been through, what you have committed to and like, just everything that you've done for your family. You have prioritized everyone else your whole life. And I think that when I say you deserve to have everything you want and to bring in the things that matter to you. You know, I mean it. It's been an absolute honor to be even witness to this conversation.

E

Elena Hartz 2:14:48

Thank you and I just want to make sure that you get the credit where credit is due because it was not until I met you, you know, in my life that I'm you First, and probably the only person that encouraged me to speak my story to tell my story, because I remember we

would be talking in the beginning of our relationship, because we met practically within a few months. Weeks. Yes, a few weeks and I remember that, you know, your eyes when we would say some story, you know, that was so normal to us. And then remember your huge eyes. And you were so shocked. And you know when you live in it, you don't see it, you were an outsider. And I remember you're saying, you have to tell your story, you have to write, you have to write down your memories. It's amazing. You're the one who actually encouraged me. And that's why I'm sitting here today, because a few years back even you were one who were always strong that every time we for me, there's like, you have to tell us, you have to tell the story. So thank you Brennan, and I love you. You're my son. And for both of you, I just hope you can. I don't think you can even imagine how proud I am of both of you. I don't say it enough. And you know, it's kind of get lost because we talk a lot and see each other often, you know, compared to other families, you know, we're a close family. And we don't say it enough, but it's hard to put in words how proud I am that you know, you're my children and the dreams you're achieve and is indescribable. I don't know. I think it's like another jackpot I want to live besides, you know, like your American dream. It's the dream of you guys. And you living your life to the fullest and enjoying beautiful people, beautiful places. Everything you ever wanted. Thank you so much.

K

Kathrin Zenkina 2:16:53

Okay, everyone who thinks that my mom should be writing a book, starting her own podcast, you know, creating her own brand helping you know beautiful souls all over the world transform their life, let her know encourage her because we've been encouraging her for a while and that's something that she definitely wants to do. So if you guys can take a screenshot of this episode right now. Do you want to be tagged mom or no? Sure, why not. Okay, share your Instagram and I'll also link it in the show notes as well. What's your Instagram handle? I think it's @hartz_elena

E

Elena Hartz 2:17:27

I think so. Okay, I will actually, right now I made my Instagram account private but that will make it public again. Since all the paperwork went through of divorce and I'm now free woman.

K

Kathrin Zenkina 2:17:39

Yeah. Okay. So I will link my mom's Instagram handle in the show notes. So it's at hearts hARTz underscore e l e n a you guys know my handle at manifestation babe, just let us know what your biggest breakthrough moment was, aha moment what your takeaway moment was. Send my mom lots of love and encouragement. I know the strength it took

for her to come here and share her story. She's nervous before coming on here but now I know that this is going to be a regular thing for her. And to the rest of you. I will catch you all in the next episode.



Kathrin Zenkina 2:18:15

Muah. Bye bye.



Kathrin Zenkina 2:18:17

Thank you so much for tuning in to today's episode. If you absolutely loved what you heard today, be sure to share it with me by leaving a review on iTunes so that I can keep the good stuff coming your way. If you aren't already following me on social media, come soak up the extra inspiration on Instagram by following @manifestationbabe or visiting my website at manifestationbabe.com. I love and adore you so much and can't wait to connect with you in the next episode. In the meantime, go out there and manifest some magic.