

Taiga Lipson

Interview by Christina Ritchie

At the time of this interview, December 1999, Taiga Lipson, granddaughter of Toronto art dealer Olga Korper, was eleven-years-old and attending Leo Baeck Day School, in the sixth grade.

Christina Ritchie: Is there anything special about your school?

Taiga Lipson: Well, it's a Hebrew school so it does Hebrew and it gives a good period of time for that, and it does French, but there's not much special about it.

CR: Do you have a favourite subject?

TL: I'd say drama. It's the first year that we got it and I really like it a lot.

CR: What do you like about it?

TL: Well, it's fun and it's creative and we can do skits or "ensembles," as my teacher says. It lets us relax. Instead of, "oh my god I have to study for this, this and this," it's just like, "oh yeah, I can have fun in this class."

CR: Do you get to make up the plays or the skits, or do you work from scripts?

TL: They give us plays. They give us plays from the Torah and we act them out and we do all these exercises that loosen our muscles and it's really fun.

CR: Do you make costumes and stuff like that too?

TL: No we haven't yet.

CR: Is discipline an issue; is that something you have to think about very much?

TL: Yeah, like we can't go too insane. Our teachers like us to have fun, they don't like us to be petrified and sheepishly hiding in the corner, but they like us to relax and be able to feel comfortable with them.

CR: So your drama class is a good way of doing that?

TL: Yeah. The school really helps you build confidence and show you what's right, what's wrong, even though your parents do a lot of that. It really helps you move along in terms of being mature or knowing when to just relax.

CR: Skits from the Torah are a religious and moral education too, right?

TL: Yeah, but we don't take it that seriously. It's just kind of fun. They're short, so it's the easiest in terms of exercises.

CR: Does it change the way that you deal with your classmates?

TL: No, because in our school there's not too many classes of each grade. In my grade there's only one class since SK [senior kindergarten] so I've been with the same people since the beginning of school.

CR: Really?

TL: Yeah. The same people. And it's really great 'cause we treat each other like brothers and sisters. It's a lot better. The sad thing is that next year, since our school doesn't go up to seven, our whole class will split up. And we'll just have to take a chance of never seeing each other again.

CR: Then you'll have to try to keep in touch with them. Do you think you'll do that?

TL: Yeah.

CR: What kind of things do you do after school?

TL: Uhm, I don't really do that much stuff. I used to but it's really hard since we get a lot of homework. My brother takes karate and sometimes he does soccer, or softball, or baseball, or any of the little league things that the school happens to pick up, and in our school there's a lot of after school activities. And there's "Mad Science" where all these teachers come in and you can make little rockets that, if you put some batteries in, they'll work. There's also arts and crafts, they do better things.

CR: So do you do that stuff or just your brother?

TL: I used to, but my brother does it mostly now. I'm just like too heavily set with all the homework.

CR: What about in your free time when you don't have homework, what do you like to do?

TL: I like to read a lot so I read a lot of books.

CR: Do you have a favourite writer or a favourite book?

TL: At the moment, J.K. Rowling, who wrote Harry Potter, is one of my favourites. We had a field trip yesterday to go and see an author and she asked "who..."—there's forty kids—"...who has read all of the Harry Potter books?" and I was the only one who raised my hand and it was like kind of embarrassing.

CR: Had some of the other kids read some of them?

TL: Yeah, like one or two but not three!

CR: Did you find out about the Harry Potter books through school?

TL: Well, we have this "Scholastic" thing where we can order books and there was one Harry Potter in it. I read it with my mom, cause we like to read, and it was really, really, really, good. My mom bought the second book for my birthday and I read that and that was good too. Then I borrowed the third book from a grade five girl and it was one of the best. It's kind of weird because we can't read so often, we only get half an hour done every night, so I had finished the second book and the third book before we finished the first. It was really strange like that thing happened in the third book, the other thing happened in the first book. Because we were reading them at the same time it was kind of confusing, but they're some of the best books.

CR: Do you think about the environment?

TL: Yes. We had a field trip last year that went to a recycling plant for styrofoam. We thought that it was really unfair that the styrofoam was getting thrown out when it could get recycled but the government wouldn't allow it to be put in the recycling bin. I've heard lately about a new recycling agenda that there would be a certain amount of recycling bins, like a purple bin or something, so you could separate the styrofoam and it

would be a lot easier and better for the environment. I was pretty happy about that.

CR: What is your biggest worry about the quality of the environment?

TL: If we trash our air and we trash our water we're not going to live that long.

CR: Do you do anything about it?

TL: I like to not waste, use as little water as possible, so that it's relatively clean and, with the air, I can't do much about that. I really don't know what I can do.

CR: Do you think that as a child people listen to your views and respect them?

TL: Sometimes the adults don't listen, especially one teacher that we had, though I don't like to be taking sides or anything 'cause that's kind of rude. But, uhm, sometimes they just don't hear us out. They say, "ok, ok, ok," but they never listen. But kids listen to kids, kids hear kids, kids understand kids, sometimes adults just don't understand kids. And vice versa.

CR: I feel in some ways as an adult that it's hard for me to remember what it was like to be a kid and this is kind of about reminding me of what it was like. I don't know if people really paid too much attention to what kids said. Is that a problem for you?

TL: I don't find it a problem.

CR: Do you get respect from your family?

TL: Yeah. My brothers listen to me, my friends listen to me, I listen to my friends, and they don't not understand me too much. Except for when I'm babbling on and on. Sometimes just "I want, I want, I want," is the one they ignore most.

CR: If people are listening to you does that mean you have a responsibility to them?

TL: It's a bit hard to explain. I might have to think about that. I suppose it's kind of like a leadership thing. If you're with someone younger and

you express an opinion to them, like: “don’t do drugs,” I suppose you have to really give them a reason to see that. Back in the fifties or whatever it was like: “oh, ok, sure, fine, whatever,” and they go and smoke, ’cause they really didn’t understand the reason, with all of this stuff in the air and things like that. The way they’ve been analyzing it, it’s sickening what they put into cigarettes and how it works out with your body, in the end making you a complete idiot, or giving you mental damage, or making you disabled, or something like that.

CR: Where do you find out about that stuff?

TL: Well, you hear it. You hear it on commercials, on the radio, you hear it in school, you hear it from your parents, and you see it too. I have seen in my family some people smoking. And I see what it does to them, like they start coughing because it’s bad for their lungs. I saw on TV a movie how this guy was doing some kind of drug, the one where you sniff, I forget what it’s called —

CR: Cocaine?

TL: Yeah. It was making him a complete idiot. He was just like mental damage galore.

CR: When you see adults doing that kind of stuff how does it make you feel?

TL: Well uhm, I realize that there’s not much that I can do about it because it’s their opinion of what they want to do with their lives. I know that I’m not going to smoke because I know that it’s bad for me and if somehow, though quite doubtedly, I end up starting to smoke, I will do my best to try and stop myself immediately. But trying to convince people how it’s bad and they just say: “yes, I know but I’m doing it anyway” — there’s really not much you can do about their opinion.

CR: You just had a new baby sister. How’s that?

TL: Well it’s not much different from the fact that I had two brothers, one’s six and one’s three. Except the sister’s quite a bit calmer than the boys who were screaming at the age of one and climbing cabinets and looking through glass cupboards and playing with these cups. Oh my god, it was so much of a relief to have a sister because after two brothers it’s so hard with them around. It’s a very big change.

CR: So you like it?

TL: Yeah.

CR: Do you help your mom to look after her?

TL: I carry her around and I play with her when mom is like working, or in the shower, or just can't really take hold of her. And I made her laugh for the very first time.

CR: What's the downside of having a new baby?

TL: I don't get... I'm not like...

CR: The centre of attention?

TL: Yeah. Since I was born I've always been the centre of attention and when my parents split up and my brother Jack was born, and then David, it was kind of easy and quite relaxing to be the centre of attention at one house and still have siblings at the other 'cause it's fun having siblings. But you don't get that much attention. So that means at my mom's house I was getting stuff done for me instead of doing it myself, my mom was reading to me, but now I'm reading to her most of the time 'cause she's feeding the baby or changing the baby or trying to calm the baby down when it starts to scream. But I do spend a lot of time at my father's house during the day on weekends or holidays. We go on skiing trips up to the cottage and I really love those times because I get skiing lessons and then we ski together. It's so much fun racing my dad, my dad racing my brother and watching who will win, seeing my brother going down the hill. So it's good to have the balance with siblings. But now it's like whoa, it's kind of wonky 'cause suddenly I'm not the centre of attention anymore.

CR: Does that make you feel more grown up?

TL: In some ways. In some ways it does. It's a lot of fun taking care of myself. It makes my parents think that I'm more mature and therefore I can get a raise in my allowance, or they can trust me with staying home alone for a bit while they go out shopping. They don't really do that, but I wish they did because I really hate when they drag me out to see antique shops while I'm trying to watch TV.

CR: What do you watch on TV?

TL: Cartoons, things that give my parents the opinion of, “Oh, that’s really really stupid. How about watching golf?” I really really don’t like when my dad does that but we have two TV’s so I just rush down to the basement and then it’s like “haha, I’m free.”

CR: Do you think about becoming a grown-up?

TL: Yeah.

CR: And how does that make you feel?

TL: Well, I guess not much different. I dunno. I feel that the way parents sometimes forget about how they were when they were a kid, that I’m going to promise myself that I’m not, so that I won’t give my kids that kind of, “oh what a stupid show” when I remember how my parents told me what stupid shows I watched, even though I think they’re cool.

CR: So when you grow up you expect to have kids.

TL: Oh yeah.

CR: What else? Will you have a job?

TL: Yes. I may work at home, like how my mom does on the computer, talking and doing this really cool stuff—but other than that, I do want to work, I don’t want to be like one of those, “oh I’m not going to work because my husband works so he can take of the whole family.” You know, in some ways I find that kind of weird, that he earns the money and then you take some money from him to spend on your own things when you can quite easily be earning that money in a job you like and buy your own things instead of being stuck at home all day.

CR: What kind of job do you think you would do?

TL: I think I might work here, in the gallery, because this is what I’ve known all my life and I really like it here. It gives me a peaceful attitude toward life because I really love the art and I really love seeing all the people coming in and out and my grandmother pointing at things and explaining, all the new clients and people who come in here. And I love going through all my grandmother’s junk upstairs to see what cool toys I can find, but that’s irrelevant.

CR: What do you think is the most important thing in your life right now?

TL: My family and my friends. I could not function without them because they're the biggest part. And I'm sure I'm speaking for a lot of other kids too.

CR: Is there anything that you're afraid of?

TL: My house setting fire and whether I could get out and save all my pets or not. I have two rats and I'm very very fond of them and they're very, very, very sweet, not sewer rats! Sorry, its just I tell everyone that and they're like, "oh my god, how disgusting." But they're really, really nice and they don't scratch and they don't bite, and they're like pet animals. I have two cats too, so every night I'm arranging if my house sets on fire, mom can take Kiran, my sister, I'll take my rats, and Gregory (he's my stepfather) can grab the cats.

CR: So you've got it all sorted out.

TL: Yeah cause I just don't want... I have this horrible fear of seeing animals trapped in a building that's on fire. It's horrible.

....

CR: Do you like to travel?

TL: Yes.

CR: And what's the favourite place that you've been?

TL: I went to the Bahamas with my mom one time but that was when I was really young so I don't remember it that much. Every year I go to Florida, me and my dad, and my two brothers, and my stepmom. We love it there, we stay for two or three weeks, my grandparents are there. There's the beach and my aunt comes up, my aunt Jennifer from Victoria. She's my favourite aunt in the whole world. We can go on walks for a mile down the beach and talk and talk or go swim out far into the ocean. She's an artist and a teacher and she is so much fun.

CR: What do you think it means to be a child?

TL: Well, being a child is just part of growing up so there's really not much you can say about that.

CR: But do you think children have any special aptitude?

TL: Children like being children while they're children. When you see someone and they say, "oh grow up," it is probably the most horrifying sentence.

CR: So you're in no rush to do that, huh?

TL: No. You like being a kid, you like having people pamper you and doing your shopping for you. It's like, oh, paying taxes and owning your own house and having to look after your own things, oh my God! We like playing, we like getting dirty. We like doing what's fun when it's fun. And we have to grow up, I suppose it's just a very boring part of life.

CR: Well, maybe there are different things you'll learn to enjoy. I like being a grown up.

TL: Well I'm sure it will be fun, but for the old and sad people who grow up and they get all crabby, and they don't remember what their childhood was like, and how they had fun once, and how now they snap at people every time they see you skip rope or playing with chalk, or drawing or being creative in any way, and they get all uptight and snappy and stuff. It's... I find it horrible.

CR: Do you think this is a good time to be born?

TL: Yeah. The sixties, now I wish I could have lived in the sixties.

CR: Oh yeah?

TL: They were a fun time, as my parents and grandparents tell me. But they didn't really know much about like birth control and drugs and stuff like that, and even though they were against war and we still are today, they were—I hate to say it—lunatics.

CR: If you could change anything in the world, what would you change?

TL: Homelessness. Poverty. If everyone could be as lucky as me and as lucky as my friends, just be able to go school and learn, and have enough food, and have enough water and have a home. That would be one of my greatest achievements if I could make that happen. That would be the greatest thing.