Washington State JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY
Powered by Jewish Federation of Greater Seattle

Recording Date: June 12, 2025
Last Edited: July 10, 2026

Jim Carroll

SUMMARY

Jim Carroll played Lazar Wolf in the Whidbey Island Center for the Arts' production of "Fiddler On The Roof". He explores the themes of tradition and change in his own life and family, and shares his experiences working with the cast and crew on this production.

Ruth Kodish-Eskind: Would you state your name for me? First and last name?

Jim Carroll: Jim Carroll.

Ruth Kodish-Eskind: Thank you. Okay. May I have your consent to record this interview?

Jim Carroll: Yes.

Ruth Kodish-Eskind: Um, okay. So what's your connection to the Jewish community or to Fiddler on the roof?

Jim Carroll: Wow. Well, um, like most people, I have Jewish friends. Um, and I've had the experience of being invited to seders and Hanukkah parties. But I really have never, um, I've never been to a synagogue, I've never been deeply involved in the in the Jewish faith. Um, but I appreciate that those families that I've known and have been friends with, um, it's obviously a very important part of their lives, whether it's their current religious practice or whether it's their family history and their sense of their place in the world. Um, and Fiddler has been, it's been my favorite musical for 50 years. I think I saw the movie in 1971 and I said, before I die, I want to play Tevya. And I came that close. But James got the role and did a beautiful job with it. And I have four daughters, so I also have two sons. So, um. The way things change over time, the way traditions change over time, and that conflict between progress and tradition, I think is just that's a part of many, many, many stories. I just think this one is particularly beautifully told.

Ruth Kodish-Eskind: Yeah.

Jim Carroll: So I've always wanted to be in the show.

Ruth Kodish-Eskind: Thanks so much. Would you just share who you did play?

Jim Carroll: I played Lazar Wolf, the butcher. I am the jilted, should have been husband of Tzeitel Tevye's oldest daughter. Um, which was the first, um, chink in the armor of how things are done in the tradition. In the marriages were arranged by the papa and the matchmaker and Tevya and my yenta, who happens to be my wife in real life, um, arranged a marriage for me with Tzeitel and Tzeitel, in all honesty, didn't want to marry a man who was 50 years older than her, and, um, had a very different outlook on life. She was in love with Motl, and she had the courage to stand up to the tradition and question her father's role in it, and whether he cared more about the tradition than her, which had to be gut wrenching. Well, clearly was gut wrenching for him, and in the end, he chose his daughter's desire and faith and love over his belief in the traditions. So which was the first of several steps to where, you know, finally Tevya found out the bridge that he could not cross. And, um, we all have all those lines somewhere, you know, you find out, you know, maybe I cheat on my taxes, but I wouldn't steal my neighbor's car. You know, those lines exist all over in our experience. So it's about that too.

Ruth Kodish-Eskind: Yeah. Great. You mentioned you have daughters.

Jim Carroll: By the way. I don't cheat on my taxes. I just want to be clear [Laughs].

Ruth Kodish-Eskind: This is a recording so [Laghs]. Um, do you, did the themes of like, yeah, being a parent and having your beliefs challenged, does that resonate with you?

Jim Carroll: Sure, yeah, as I said, I have four daughters and two sons, so I have some experience as a parent. And, um, you know, if they don't challenge you, if they don't push back, if they don't, you know, take the genetic material that you've given them and then mold it into something that is uniquely them, you have failed. And so, you know, you're going to be challenged. Um, obviously, I always say that I always wanted my children to have, um, child like freedoms and adult responsibilities, and they always wanted to have child like responsibilities and adult freedoms. And that's that's the tug of war. Right. And, um, it's a constant struggle and hopefully it's not too uncomfortable, but it but it can be at times. Most families know that if you've had a 13 year old, you know that.

Ruth Kodish-Eskind: Thanks so much for that. Is there anything you want to share about this show?

Jim Carroll: I have been in a lot of shows. Um, and I've been in some great casts, and every cast is like a family. And like most families, there's, there's a, there's a range, you know, they go from nearly perfect to, you know, absurdly dysfunctional, you know, and this has been one of the most loving, supportive, um, genuinely caring casts I've ever been a part of. I'm going to miss it terribly.

Ruth Kodish-Eskind: Wow. I was curious watching it. Um, if anyone had trained you all on your, uh, Jewish accents [Laughs]. Well, Eastern European Jewish accents.

Jim Carroll: We do have three Jewish actors in the cast, which, you know, that's pretty good for South Whidbey, right? Um, and especially given the specificity of the roles in the musical ability and all that. So, um, those actors were called on to advise us. And I'm sure there were things happening at the director producer level that I'm not aware of, like the involvement of your organization. So, um, for me, that was kind of off to the edge, I think, um, I think we decided that we weren't going to try to lean heavily on dialect and, and either get it wrong or sound like caricatures. I think Yenta was encouraged to be the most, um, out there, um, which kind of fits her character's role. But I think the underlying, um, uh, theme was respect for the story. Let's focus on the characters and their relationships and what they're trying to teach us. And so, you know, if I ended up sounding like an Irish kid, that's okay, as long as I got the story across, right? Yeah.

Ruth Kodish-Eskind: Thanks so much.

Jim Carroll: Yeah. Thank you.