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**Skirball Cultural Center announces the opening of
“I’LL HAVE WHAT SHE’S HAVING”:
THE JEWISH DELI
April 14–September 4, 2022**

Exhibition offers tasty bite into American Jewish immigration history and culture

LOS ANGELES, CA—The Skirball Cultural Center presents *“I’ll Have What She’s Having”: The Jewish Deli*, an exhibition that explores how American Jews imported traditions, adapted culture, and built community through the experience of food. In addition to showing how Jewish deli forged an entirely new, quintessentially American cuisine by combining Central and Eastern European dishes with ingredients abundantly available in the United States, the exhibition traces the larger arc of the Jewish experience in the US during the twentieth century. On view will be neon signs, menus, advertisements, fixtures, historical footage, film and television clips, and artifacts that illuminate how delicatessens evolved from specialty stores catering to immigrant populations into the beloved national institutions they are today. *“I’ll Have What She’s Having”: The Jewish Deli* will be on view at the Skirball from April 14 to September 4, 2022.

“This exhibition exemplifies the Skirball Cultural Center’s twenty-five-year tradition of sharing distinctly Jewish histories that represent quintessentially American experiences. The deli was a place of gathering and familiarity for immigrant Jews, maintaining connection to the tastes and customs of the kitchens they left behind and paving the way forward into new communities and identity,” said Skirball President and CEO Jessie Kornberg. “More broadly, the deli has since become a touchstone of American culture, born in New York, but integral to countless communities nationwide, including Los Angeles, home of some of the country’s and cuisine’s most enduring and iconic institutions. It’s a joy to be able to reflect on this chapter of Jewish American immigrant history.”

“I’ll Have What She’s Having”: The Jewish Deli was organized by the Skirball Cultural Center, and co-curated by Skirball curators Cate Thurston and Laura Mart, and Lara Rabinovitch, renowned writer and producer, and specialist in immigrant food cultures.

The exhibition is organized into the following sections:

Food of Immigration—“The story of the Jewish delicatessen is as much about immigration as it is about food,” remarked Thurston, “so we open the exhibition with a close look at how the influx of Jewish immigrants to New York City in the mid-nineteenth century meant that regional Central and European foods such as pickles, knishes, gefilte fish, borscht, and rugelach came to be served under one roof. This created an appetite for the mixed cuisine that we now know and love as Jewish deli.” Meanwhile, an

increase in America's beef consumption was a modern dietary development that opened up market opportunities for Jewish entrepreneurs. On view in this first section are artifacts from the Skirball Museum collection, such as candlesticks, knives, suitcases, passports, and textiles that were brought by Jews at the turn of the twentieth century with their hopes, dreams, and foodways.

The Food—From sky-high sandwiches to hot matzo ball soup to rich chopped liver on rye, Jewish deli is a fusion cuisine. In this section, a colorful display of food imagery, props, and helpful definitions of terms will give visitors clarity on what makes a bagel a bagel, why herring was a mainstay of the Eastern European Jewish diet, and what distinguishes pastrami from corned beef, among many fun food facts. Visitors will enjoy the section's glossary of "Yiddishisms" — from chutzpah to nosh to verklempt—in honor of Yiddish, the mother tongue of newcomers from Central and Eastern Europe that subsequently emerged as the language of deli.

Mid-Century Heyday—This section focuses on the mid-twentieth century, a period of unparalleled growth for the American Jewish community and, by extension, its delis. Although New York remained the epicenter of Jewish deli culture, a plethora of delis opened around the country. It was during this heyday that Jewish food classics entered the mainstream, delis began to attract a wider clientele, and deli menus began to include local favorites, such as cinnamon rolls and rice and beans. On view in this section are mid-century menus from the landmark Carnegie Delicatessen and Lindy's Restaurant in New York's Theater District—which speak to deli's role as a hub for Broadway types and theater patrons—and mid-century matchbooks from LA's now-closed Junior's Restaurant in Westwood and Solley's Restaurant and Delicatessen in the San Fernando Valley.

No Substitutions — This section looks at the people who own and work at delis. Vintage uniforms and implements from classic LA delis Factor's, Canter's, and Nate n' Al's, alongside photographs and video interviews help tell the stories of the people behind the food. Nearby, visitors are invited to tap into their own experiences by writing down their go-to deli food or favorite deli memory and pinning it up on a restaurant-style order line.

Who's at the Table?— Although delis have come to symbolize Jewish culture, or a certain characterization of Jewish culture, they never existed in isolation. This section reflects on how immigrant-owned delis and their foods were woven into the urban American landscape. On view are several posters from the famous advertising campaign "You Don't Have to Be Jewish to Love Levy's Real Jewish Rye," which underscore how the deli was embraced by Jews and non-Jews alike, but also reveal how ideas of Jewishness in the United States during the 20th century were rooted in Central and Eastern European Ashkenazi Jewish culture, leaving out Jews from other parts of the global Jewish diaspora as well as multiethnic Jews. Visitors can also view snapshots of political candidates from across the aisle stopping at delis on the campaign trail, including Senator Ted Cruz at Shapiro's Delicatessen in Indianapolis and President Barack Obama at LA's Canter's Deli.

Survivor Communities—For many of the four hundred thousand Holocaust survivors and refugees who rebuilt their lives in the United States, delis were a lifeline as they acclimated to a new country. Laura Mart explains, "Delicatessens provided a livelihood and a purpose for the immigrants who became owners, waiters, cooks, and customers. One such business was Drexler's Deli in North Hollywood, which was owned and operated by Rena Drexler, a survivor of Auschwitz, and her husband, Harry. For them, the deli was a place to give sustenance and a sense of togetherness to the Orthodox Jewish community that grew up around it. We are honored to display the stunning original neon sign that brightened the entrance to their much-beloved deli."

Pop Culture on Rye— Why has the Jewish deli inspired generations of creatives in the entertainment business? Perhaps this is because of the fascinating characters that inhabit delis, their popularity as late-night nosh spots for showbiz folks, or the fact that delis are the most visibly Jewish secular spaces in the American landscape. This section features artifacts and photographs that explore deli nightlife as well as a viewing station where visitors can savor footage from TV hits such as *Curb Your Enthusiasm*, *Seinfeld*, and *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel*, and film classics like *When Harry Met Sally* (1989) and *At War with the Army* (1950).

Shifting Landscapes—The final section considers how delis have had to revise their menus, move locations, or close because of health trends, real estate prices, family issues, or business woes. “Memory is a consistent theme in deli, but so is change,” explains Lara Rabinovitch. “At the end of the twentieth century, ethnic diversity began to serve as a point of celebration in food and new, artisanal Jewish delis have opened across North America and Europe. Young entrepreneurs are reviving the pre-industrial techniques of their forebears and developing homemade ingredients like schmaltz or new takes on old-school cuisine.” This section contains menus from eateries around the country that reflect the ways delis have changed in recent years, including incorporating influences from Sephardic and Israeli Jewish cuisine, focusing on justice in running their businesses, and adapting to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Related Programs—In celebration of “*I’ll Have What She’s Having*”: *The Jewish Deli*, the Skirball will present a variety of exhibition-related programming, including Late Night! The Jewish Deli, on Friday, May 20, with exclusive after-hours access to the exhibition, deli food trucks, and interactive photo opportunities across the Skirball campus. On Friday, July 15, at 8:30pm, the Skirball will present an outdoor screening of the classic romantic comedy *When Harry Met Sally*, featuring the memorable scene in New York’s Katz’s Delicatessen that concludes with the hilarious line and exhibition title namesake “I’ll have what she’s having.”

After its debut at the Skirball, “*I’ll Have What She’s Having*”: *The Jewish Deli* will tour the country. The exhibition will be on view at the New York Historical Society from November 11, 2022 through April 2, 2023, then to the Holocaust Museum, Houston, Texas, from May 4 through August 13, 2023, and the Illinois Holocaust Museum & Education Center in Skokie, Illinois, from October 22, 2023 through April 14, 2024.

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About the Skirball Cultural Center

The Skirball Cultural Center is a place of meeting guided by the Jewish tradition of welcoming the stranger and inspired by the American democratic ideals of freedom and equality. We welcome people of all communities and generations to participate in cultural experiences that celebrate discovery and hope, foster human connections, and call upon us to help build a more just society.

Visiting the Skirball Cultural Center

The Skirball is located at 2701 N. Sepulveda Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90049. Museum hours: Tuesday–Friday 12:00–5:00 pm; Saturday–Sunday 10:00 am–5:00 pm; closed Mondays and holidays. Admission to *“I’ll Have What She’s Having”: The Jewish Deli* and most exhibitions: \$18 General; \$15 Seniors, Full-Time Students, and Children over 12; \$13 Children 2– 12. Exhibitions are always FREE to Skirball Members and Children under 2. Advance timed-entry reservations are required. For general information, the public may call (310) 440-4500 or visit skirball.org.