

### *The Love Family, Part 3: Constance & Composure*

*SAM: Hello everybody, Sam here. Before we begin, I just want to let you know that you're about to listen to the finale of our mini series on the Love Family. But Season 2 of Family Ghosts has only just begun. We'll have a new story for you next week, and every week for the next 7 weeks. Make sure you stay tuned after the credits of this episode to hear a sneak preview of next week's show, and thank you for listening.*

SAM: Hello, Ghost Family. Welcome to *Family Ghosts*.

*[music in - FG Theme]*

I first found about the Love Israel Family in May of last year, from a woman named Posey Gruener.

*POSEY: Hey, hi.*

*SAM: Hi, is this Posey?*

*POSEY: This is Posey, is this Sam?*

*SAM: It is, how are you?*

*POSEY: Good, I'm walking my dog I hope you don't mind.*

*SAM: [fading] I do not mind at all, I do not mind at all. Thank you for uh talking to me this early...*

Posey told me that her parents had both been members of this commune, the Love Israel Family, in the seventies and early 80's. She was the first one to tell me that part of the deal when you joined was that you gave up your old name and were given a new one, which the group called "virtue names."

*POSEY: Mine was Composure, my mom's was Constance, my sister's was Plenty, and my dad's was Richness.*

If you've listened to the first two episodes of this season - and this episode will definitely make a lot more sense if you have - you've already met Richness. He

was one of the key players in the rise and fall of the Love Family, which is the story we told in those first two episodes. In 1983, the Love Family went through what they call the Great Divorce, and it was Posey's dad, Richness, who sued the founder - Love Israel - to get his money back, leaving the few people who stayed with the group scrambling to make ends meet.

*[music in]*

But Posey wasn't around for any of that. Because about a year before it all happened, her mom, Constance, decided she'd had enough of life in the Love Family. And so, one day, she left.

*POSEY: My mom just put her kids in a stroller and literally walked away.*

Constance, went back to using her birth name, Judy, and her daughters went through the process in reverse - their Love Family names were erased, and replaced with new ones. Judy's oldest daughter, Plenty, became Penny, and Composure, who was only two years old, became Posey. Judy moved her daughters in with their grandmother, Judy's mom, for a little while. She separated from Richness, and then they moved to Florida. It was supposed to be a fresh start - but it didn't work out that way.

*POSEY: My mom was schizophrenic, and I'm not sure when her schizophrenia manifested. I've never really known that.*

What Posey *does* know is that before long, her mom's situation began to deteriorate.

*POSEY: ...she kind of slowly became less and less capable of taking care of herself or allowing others to take care of her, and around 1990 she became homeless, and she stayed that way until 2013, so over 20 years, and then in 2013, I was living in New York at the time, I got a phone call that she had had a seizure on the floor of the shelter that she was living at, and they took her to the hospital, and she had a stage 4 brain tumor. So that's actually what killed her.*

*[music out]*

Whenever someone suffers from mental illness, it's tempting to want there to be a reason. And in Judy's case, having spent as much time as she did living in a commune where drug abuse, food shortages, and poor hygiene were rampant, it's even more tempting to assume that the Love Family was that reason.

But as you might expect, Posey's spent a lot of time researching schizophrenia, and she knows that's not how it works - it would be a convenient explanation for a complex mental health issue. And yet - Posey does have questions about the relationship between her mom's mental illness and her time in the Love Family.

*POSEY: it just kind of makes sense, right? Like, "Oh, okay. There's this one big weird thing that happened, and then it's got to be connected to this other big weird thing that happened".*

Posey has wondered about all this for a long time - and the answers haven't been easy to come by. But there's a couple things that have happened since Judy's death that make Posey's questions feel more pressing than ever.

*POSEY: on my 25th birthday I felt such a sense of relief, and I didn't know where it was coming from, and that's when I realized that I didn't want to start my life until I knew for certain that I wasn't going to become schizophrenic like my mother... I was sort of dimly aware that schizophrenia manifests itself when you're in your mid-twenties, and so that's when I started thinking, well what was happening when my mom was in her mid-twenties? Who was around that might have noticed what was going on with her?*

Posey's in her thirties now, and she's about to start a family of her own.

*POSEY: So I know, you know, didn't know much about the rest of the family. You know, most of my interactions would be like, sorry--I'm pregnant so like I don't have a lot of breath, and my dog is a fast walker so I really apologize for all the breathiness.*

*S: Oh, that's okay.*

As Posey prepares to become a mother herself, it's time to track down the people that knew her mom around the time she joined the Family - and see if they're finally willing to talk.

*POSEY: ...my theory is that she kind of started feeling different from other people, and finding the Love Family was a way for her to be in a place where it was okay to have visions, it was okay to act strange.*

*[music]*

Today on *Family Ghosts*, we close out our three-part miniseries on the Love Family, with the story of Posey and her mom. We'll try to help Posey find out if her theory is correct - that Judy was drawn to the intense, surreal experience of life in the Love Family, because it helped her find comfort from the early stages of schizophrenia, and what the connection might be between, as Posey put it, these two big weird things.

From Spoke Media, and WALT, you're listening to *Family Ghosts*. I'm Sam Dingman, and this is episode ten - *The Love Family, Part Three: Constance and Composure*. We'll be right back.

**[AD BREAK 1]**

*POSEY: I remember coming downstairs and seeing her painting, and she just had this beautiful, beautiful long strawberry blonde braid, um, I think that's my actual first memory of my mom.*

Most of Posey's early memories of her mom don't really have anything to do with the Love Family. They're from a little while after that fateful night when Judy put Posey and her sister in a stroller, and walked away from the Family, to start a new life.

*POSEY: I remember her as a good mom, somebody who was interested in being a mom, and I felt loved, and she would do little things to let us feel it.*

Posey remembers trips to the zoo, art projects, and birthday parties.

*POSEY: She would take one present, one small present, and then wrap it in sort of an undetermined number of boxes, each of which were individually wrapped, um, and it was like every kid at the party sat down in a chair and it was musical, musical gift, right, you would move the gift from person to person to person and when the music stopped a kid would unwrap.*

It was the mid-80's, and Judy had married a man named Stephen, who used to hang around the Love Family, but had never formally joined. They had a son together- Posey's half-brother Kyle, and they all moved to Florida to start a new life.

*POSEY: My step-dad promised me that it doesn't rain there, there's no hills, and we're really close to Disney World. And when I got there, it was raining, there was hill in our backyard, and Disney World was like hours and hours away, and like, I felt very cheated.*

Posey doesn't have strong memories of her early childhood in Seattle, but she does remember having a strong sense that Florida was different - and that lots of things were starting to change.

*[music in]*

*POSEY: We moved actually every single year, so we lived in probably six different suburbs. Because, um, my mom would just get nervous, she would get nervous about a neighbor, and think that our neighborhood was unsafe, and so decide to move us. Or she would, um--yeah, she would just come up with some reason why we couldn't live in that place anymore, and then we would move.*

Between moves, Posey and her sister flew back to Washington State in the summers to spend time with their dad, Richness - or Daniel, as he was now known.

*POSEY: That was probably one of the greatest parts of my childhood. Just sort of getting up, getting off the plane and seeing my dad there. And he's just this like huge guy, he's six five and he's got, he's so skinny, and he's just got like these big tan muscles and his veins*

*popping out, and he was always so happy to see us, and, you know, he'd pick my sister up underneath one arm and me underneath another arm and he'd just carry like we were luggage through the airport.*

Life with Daniel was a far cry from the subdivisions of Palm Beach. After he settled the lawsuit with the Love Family, Daniel moved to forty acres of undeveloped land in eastern Washington, near a tiny town called Northport. For weeks every summer, Posey and her sister Penny went from Judy's preoccupation with safety to a carefree life with Daniel, who was building a house from scratch in the wilderness.

*POSEY: And he had a barn, and I remember, you know, we would play in the barn for hours and hours and hours, and we would jump from the hayloft to the pile of hay, I mean, which is super dangerous! Like, stacks of hay, like they are not stacked evenly, and there are canyons in there, and you could fall through, but we did that, and...then you know, we had a treehouse that we built, which is really just a pallet that we hoisted into a tree. And, yeah we just kind of, we just kind of ran wild.*

And then, at the end of the summer, they'd go back to Florida, and try to adjust to life in their latest new house. And as Posey got older, she began to notice a shift in Judy's demeanor. It wasn't just the neighborhood that wasn't safe - Judy saw danger everywhere she went.

*POSEY: We would go through the drive-through at McDonald's and she would look at the teller and the teller would like look at her dollar bill to see if you know it was counterfeit or whatever like they do. And then we would drive away and she would spend the next 20 minutes speculating out loud about whether or not it really was a counterfeit bill and who could have possibly given it to her, and you know was it my step dad's associate who gave it to her, and is he laundering money, and just like spinning out.*

*[music out]*

Posey was still a kid at the time - maybe seven or eight years old - and her mom had told her lots of what Posey called "mom lies" in her youth. Judy would say things like "the crust of your sandwich is made out of cookie crumbs, so you'd better eat it," or "you should never ever take a sip of beer, because everyone in our

family is allergic.” But confiding in her daughter about an imaginary money-laundering scheme was in a different category - and Posey knew it.

*POSEY: I could tell that that didn't make a lot of sense, and it just didn't square with the way that I saw a reality...and how are you gonna disagree with your mom about the facts of life, like the basis of reality? That's the person who supposed to tell you what the basis of reality is.*

Between Judy's episodes, the constant moving, and being whisked away to a parallel universe with Daniel every summer, it was a lot for Posey to take.

*POSEY: I think it sort of created a feeling in me that like, everybody else had a normal life, and um, I was just somebody who moved through it, um...and so I think I was, I was always trying to become friends with people who I thought were normal and had really stable lives, and then convince them that I was like them, and um, I was always afraid that they would find out that I wasn't.*

And then, one night, when Posey was ten, everything changed - again.

*[music in]*

*POSEY: ...one night my mom just came to my sister and my little brother Kyle and I and said, um, you can pack one thing that you really really love, I packed the rest of your clothes, just grab one thing that you really love, and you can call one friend to say goodbye, we're leaving. And, so, I packed my one thing and I called my one friend, and then my mom put us in the car, station wagon, and we all drove to the airport and got on a plane and flew to Seattle. Um, and that was the end of our life in Florida, I mean after, 5, 6 years, it was over in like 24 hours.*

Judy took the kids to her mother's house, where Posey says they all slept on cots in the living room. None of them knew what was going on - and neither did their step-dad, Stephen. Judy had moved his whole family across the country without telling him. Eventually Stephen figured out where they'd gone, and flew out to Seattle to bring Kyle - the son he and Judy had had together - home. Posey's dad caught wind of the situation too.

*POSEY: and he came to Seattle and started to, um, sue for custody basically, because I think it was, it was clear to all of the dads that my mom had kind of lost it. it wasn't really clear to us kids but it was clear to them, and so I was probably 9 or 10 at this time, and my mom was going to court a lot, and so was my dad, and I talked actually years later to a social worker who knew my mom at this time who is helping her when she was going to court and she said, it just breaks my heart but, she said that she had never seen anyone fight so hard to keep her children. And she would just show up at court every day in just like really like proper attire and um, try to just be super respectful of everyone in the court. And show that she could handle it and show that she could handle her children. But she couldn't. Because she was sick.*

As much as she loved her kids, the courts sided with Daniel. For a while, Judy lived with her mother - but at some point, there was an incident, and her mom called the police. The mom got a restraining order against Judy, who suddenly found herself not only battling mental illness, but also with no place to live.

*POSEY: I honestly don't know where she was staying, she may have been sleeping on the street or something, she may have been in active delusion, but what happened is she got arrested because she--somebody found her fully clothed in their backyard sitting in their hot tub.*

*[music out]*

The cops came again, and this time they had Judy committed - she was sent to a mental health facility, where she was formally diagnosed with schizophrenia. Posey says things went downhill quickly after that - she and her sister were living with Daniel, splitting time between Northport and Idaho, and their connection with Judy was hard to maintain.

By the time Posey was in high school, she was living with her dad in Northport full-time - eight hours northeast of Seattle by car, and though she still spoke to her mom on the phone sometimes, Posey describes her life during this period as an exercise in compartmentalizing.

*POSEY: You know you put your life in boxes and there's this box where you're in high school and you play volleyball and it's the summer and you're driving your Volvo down*



*the road, you know. And then there's this other box where you have a schizophrenic mom who lives in Seattle who you force yourself to see sometimes, and those are not supposed to be connected.*

But in spite of her illness, Judy was determined to stay connected to Posey.

*[music in]*

*POSEY: I remember I was driving down the road to my dad's house one day after school, and I saw this woman walking on the side of the road, and this is not a road that like anybody walks down the side of, like you have a car if you're going down this road. And, just the way that she walked it looks like my mom, and so I turned around and it was my mom, and we put her in the back seat and we drove home with her and we found out that she had gotten on a Greyhound bus and gotten halfway across the state and gotten all the way to Northport just so that she could see us, and it was, I can't describe to you how horrifying it was to think of her putting herself and that position at that time, I mean I was probably 16, 17, and she was really actively mentally ill, I'm surprised she was able to actually functionally buy the tickets and go in the right direction. And her feet, her feet were bloody because she didn't have good shoes and she did a lot of walking. And it just hurt my heart because she just wanted to get to us.*

*[music out]*

When Daniel called the mental health social workers in the next town to tell them someone with schizophrenia had somehow made her way across the state unsupervised, the social workers just bought Judy a bus ticket back to Seattle, and sent her back on her own.

Meanwhile, Posey was stuck between trying to carve out something resembling a stable life in the wake of her tumultuous childhood, and trying to maintain her relationship with a clinically unstable mother, while she adjusted to life in a new place with her father.

*POSEY: My dad's way was, we don't have to subject ourselves to painful things. So sometimes he would see me on the phone and, my mom would hang up on me a lot which was really painful, she would start yelling and then just hang up. And then, you know I'd*

*be this 14 year old girl who just got hung up on by her mother who was screaming at her, and I would just sit there with the phone in my hand and just cry, and you know my dad would see this and I remember one time he came to me and said, you know, if it hurts that much to talk to her you don't have to talk to her. And so I gave myself permission for a while to just not talk to her when she calls and not call her.*

After high school, Posey went to college in Iowa, and ended up in New York, where she started producing radio, thousands of miles away from all the chaos of her childhood. She started to have some success - her pieces aired on NPR, and won awards. But then word reached Posey that Judy was sick with a brain tumor, and Posey picked up her life and moved back to Seattle to be with her mom in her final days. After enduring years of systemic neglect, in the end, Judy caught one final stroke of good fortune. Posey's sister was able to persuade a local religious hospital - the Columbia Lutheran Home - to care for Judy in the throes of her final decline.

*POSEY: And so they took her on just as an exercise in compassion. They're like this is what we do, it would be a privilege to take care of her. Which was amazing because it gave us the opportunity, that was a ten minute walk from my sister's house, so we could see her every single day, we could go up in the morning and just give her a hug before I went to work, and then we could go there at night and braid her hair and put her to bed, and we did that for two years, and we didn't, we never paid them a single penny, and they made it possible for us to have a relationship with my mom at the end of her life.*

Thanks to Columbia Lutheran, Judy was spared a death on the street, and instead passed away in the care of the daughters she'd spent decades fighting her way back to.

But something inside Posey still felt unresolved. She knew how schizophrenia had affected the end of her mom's life - but as she reflected on those memories from childhood - the mom lies, the drive-through - she realized she wasn't sure when the signs first started to appear. And then Posey remembered that sense of relief she'd felt when she turned twenty-five.

*POSEY (ct'd): ...I was sort of dimly aware that schizophrenia manifests itself when you're in your mid-twenties, and so that's when I started thinking, well what was happening when my mom was in her mid-twenties?*

By Posey's calculations, Judy's mid-twenties are right around the time she would've joined the Love Israel Family.

*POSEY: ...So, I started thinking...you know, were there, were there things that happened in my mom's life that flipped a switch?*

After the break, we'll meet the people who knew Posey's mom in those days, and try to figure out what flipped the switch.

*JANEL: There were a few young ladies that were fragile. And Judy was one of them.*

We'll be right back.

## **[AD BREAK 2]**

We're sitting in Richness - aka Daniel's backyard in Northport.

*POSEY: She's actually kind of like, chill with you*

*DANIEL: Good, huh? that's good stuff.*

*POSEY: Dad, but she's really not actually supposed to.*

*DANIEL: she gonna throw up?*

*POSEY: she's not really eating things. right now. from the world.*

*DANIEL: that's good isn't it. that's good, don't you listen to your mother*

Daniel is meeting Oza, Posey's five-week old, for the first time, and against Posey's wishes, he's feeding Oza ginger ale from the tip of his finger.

*POSEY: (laughs) this is my dad*

Daniel lives in a sort of compound of sprawling wooden structures he built himself - a couple cabins and a barn. His front yard is full of vehicles in various stages of repair - a rusted-out mobile home, a battered pick-up, a speedboat mounted on cinderblocks, a Porsche coupe, and several motorcycles. As we pulled into the

driveway, we were greeted by Sadie, the largest dog I've ever seen - her head came up to my ribs. Daniel looks exactly like the kind of dad who would gleefully scoop up his daughters and carry them like luggage through a crowded airport - he's tall, with a thin, sinewy frame, and a long goatee. He's in his early seventies, but his hair is still thick and dark - he wears it in a loose ponytail. He greeted us with ginger ale as producer Jennifer Lai set up our mics at a picnic table out back, and Sadie did her best to keep the area free from intruders.

*(barking)*

*POSEY: Oh God. is it a deer?*

*JENNIFER: it's whatever they saw earlier*

*DANIEL: Could be anything. Could be a cougar, could be a bear, could be a turkey. Could be ravens. could be vultures.*

*[music in]*

We spent a couple hours talking to Daniel, who has lots of very specific memories from his time in the Love Family...

*[montage]*

*DANIEL: So Serious and I went back to Ohio and went to the trust company and grabbed the cash, or told them where to send the stock certificates or whatever....*

*DANIEL: this one guy Fred Prior, he had, I don't know how many tons of potatoes he'd grow every year. But we worked with him and helped him and it wasn't really about pay, you know...*

*DANIEL: We also got busted for swimming naked on that trip. some little podunk lake in the middle of Kentucky or someplace.*

But much to Posey's dismay, Daniel didn't have a lot to say about Judy.

*POSEY: Do you remember when you met her? Or like, the first time you saw her?*

*DANIEL: Not exactly. I don't know if I can, I mean, lots of beautiful blonde hair. You know, not really. uh, out front. but comfortable in her skin, I thought.*

*POSEY: What do you mean not really out front?*

*DANIEL: Well, you know a lot of people are like, all about like engaging you in conversation and you know, and I don't think she was, she wasn't that extroverted, really. But she was normal, I'd say.*

Every time Posey tried to get her dad to talk about his memories of Judy, he'd quickly pivot into talking about the Love Family.

*POSEY: So what was your sort of, I mean it seems like you just gave your sort of general impression of her. But what was she like then? like, if you can see her in your mind's eye.*

*DANIEL: Well, you know we all stayed busy doing our little simple manual tasks that we had to do, so we, you know it was a simple life, you know, certain amount of bible study, we weren't really bible beaters, you know...*

Even when it came to basic, physical memories - what she looked like, besides the blonde hair, Daniel seemed to come up empty.

*POSEY: Uh, what was she like then? picture in your mind's eye?*

*DANIEL: Mind you it was a different milieu, or whatever the word is. We lived like, if we had a house this big, there'd be 15 of us livin in there, you know...it was like a break from your past, you know. The deal was you write your parents a letter saying....*

Eventually, after a lot of prodding, a few vague recollections of trips to visit Daniel's mom made their way to the surface, but not much else. And while Daniel did seem to be doing his best, it was clear that when it comes to his biological family, details aren't his strong suit.

*DANIEL: You know it's just a little difficult for me right now to come up with specific things. because a) it was what, how old are you, 36?*

*POSEY: 37.*

*DANIEL: pretty close though, huh Po?*

*POSEY: (laughs) not bad.*

*DANIEL: Pretty close. uh, I mean, you know.*

*POSEY: yeah.*

*D: But yeah, keep asking questions and maybe I'll come up with something better. Let me think think think. Um...*

And even if he can't quite recall the date, Daniel does remember at least one thing about Posey's birth.

*DANIEL: Your mother loved marijuana for childbirth. Did you try it when you were birthing?*

*POSEY: I did not. No.*

*DANIEL: Oh yeah, that worked well for your mom.*

*[music in]*

But in terms of Posey's hope that Daniel might be able to clarify how Judy found

her way to the Family, and whether she was showing any symptoms of schizophrenia at the time...the conversation was a dead end.

*DANIEL: You know you don't want to say it's five bucks an hour. and sign in and check in, and it wasn't like that. it was like, when we sell the milk, we'll make a milkshake, or whatever.*

*POSEY: I have to say like, I'm a little bit sad right now, because it seems like I'm asking questions specifically about mom and it seems like you just don't even remember her.*

*DANIEL: (breathes) well that's not the only thing my memory's bad on, Posey.*

*POSEY: (laughs)*

*DANIEL: Sorry.*

*POSEY: I know, I know. but like, I was just kind of hoping, that I just you know, I miss her, and I'm trying to figure out some things about her that I never really knew and I was hoping that you would have some clearer memories*

*DANIEL: I know, it's a bit of a climb.*

*POSEY: It's a little bit frustrating, because she was such like, she was such an unreliable narrator about her own life. And then, you know, you don't remember. So who are we supposed to ask?*

*[music out]*

Once again, Jael, one of the Love Family's midwives, who kept the secret birth record we told you about in our last episode, came to the rescue.

*POSEY: God there's so many babies. Ok 1980. Oh look there's 12-2-80. There's me.*

*JAEL: Look at that. Constance Richness.*

Jael was the midwife who delivered Posey - but that's not the only reason Jael remembers Judy. It turns out they spent a lot of time together in the Love Family at a place called "Fat Camp."

*JAEL: One woman from every household was sent to the fat ladies area of the barn, and this was just an experiment is the way it was put to me.*

The barn was on a ranch the Family owned about an hour north of Seattle. Jael told us that Love and his elders felt that all the women in the Family should all look a certain way.

*JAEL: They liked bone.*

Posey pointed out that neither her mom or Jael was particularly heavy, but Jael said that didn't matter. They were served meager rations of rice and vegetables in an attempt to make them fit Love's vision for a woman's appearance. And, on top of being subjected to a dangerous and misogynist "experiment," Judy, Jael and the other women had to sleep in bales of hay, and were expected to tend to the chickens, cows, and horses on the ranch in midst of all this.

After a couple months, a sympathetic Love Family elder came to visit Jael at the ranch and told her she could leave if she wanted to. But Jael wasn't sure that was a good idea.

*Jael: I did not go home right away because there were two ladies that I felt like were fragile, were people who just needed somebody that was positive and not upset or anything. You know that's me. And uh.*

*POSEY: And who were those ladies?*

*Jael: Adia and your mama.*

In the wake of the Fat Barn, Jael could tell the Love Family experience was starting to wear on Judy.

*Jael: She'd get really skinny sometimes, really skinny...she probably carried a lot of guilt.*

*POSEY: What makes you think that she would have, like what makes you use the word "guilt"?*

*Jael: Guilt? Because she said "I'm sorry" a lot. She apologized for herself a lot.*

*POSEY: To who?*

*Jael: Well just to you know, if anything was out of place and somebody commented on it, you know, "Oh, I'm sorry,"*

It's awful to hear about Judy feeling like she had anything to feel guilty about, especially when it was clearly a daily struggle just to get enough to eat. It was one of many surreal - and unhealthy - parts of life in Love Family.

*Penny: When I was born, there hep-some form of hepatitis was making its way through the Love Family and there were no doctors consulted. You know nobody went to the hospital but they tried to quarantine everybody into what they called the yellow tents.*

Earlier in this series, we talked about Love Israel's refusal to allow members of the Love Family to visit doctors. As Posey's sister Penny told us, this policy led to some pretty bizarre incidents.

*PENNY: And my mom had it and when I was born I was totally jaundiced and apparently they like lifted me up and and said oh it's a golden baby! And Jael the Midwife was like give me that baby she needs you know she's sick. It's not that she's a golden baby.*

And that's all part of Posey's question: how did this surreal - and often barbaric - experience affect her mom, who would later become consumed by delusional hallucinations?

*POSEY: Yeah like what is the weird, like, swim of experience that she was in, then? She was probably taking psychedelics, and the the Love Family was just such a strange experience to begin with. So like what was going on in her mind, in her twenties?*

This confluence of factors - the drugs, the starvation, the vicious misogyny - all of that is what made Posey want to ask these questions in the first place. She told Jael about it during our visit.

*POSEY: Yeah cause that's kind of what's confusing, right? Like you know and I know that schizophrenia usually manifests in like your early twenties probably. And if you hit mid-twenties and you haven't developed schizophrenia you're probably not going to.*

*JAEL: Right.*

*POSEY: But it seems like what happened with my mom is that she hit her mid-thirties and just like suddenly lost it and wasn't really capable of taking care of us anymore or really functioning. But that's really late for it to happen.*

*JAEL: Right.*

*POSEY: Plus, she joined the Love Family and she had visions, and part of me thinks, well maybe she wasn't totally clear on what was happening in her head, and you know she met these people who said they were having visions, and was like oh maybe that's what's going on with me, and--*

*JAEL: Yeah. I.*

*POSEY: What do you think about that idea?*

*JAEL: I didn't, I didn't see any real going off or you know particular things that, that happened with her. [...] You know she never had any, any issues. I just remember her dancing. Just by herself. You know we women just danced in circles with our arms up and stuff like that. And she was beautiful.*



In fact, everyone Posey asked about her mom's time in the Family told us they didn't remember anything seeming off about Judy.

*POSEY: Did you ever at the time think, this borders on, or maybe even is, mental illness?*

*N: No, it all seemed normal in a way.*

*DANIEL: nothing unusual, no strange behavior.*

*LOGIC: ...she didn't seem mentally ill when I knew her. You know I never had that thought at all.*

*UNDERSTANDING: your mom was totally normal all the time she lived in the family.*

That last voice is Understanding Israel.

*UNDERSTANDING: I even looked up "constance" in the thesaurus it says, uh, steady, fixed, loyal, you know, and when I knew Judy that's what she was. She was so steady and so fixed, and that's why the family gave her that name, Constance.*

Understanding knew Judy better than many of the people we talked to - they worked together at what the Love Family called "the kid's house" - a house within the Family's compound where parents could drop their children off during the day to be looked after. Understanding says Judy seemed happy to be a part of the Family, at least at first.

*UNDERSTANDING: ...she said, "Now I can really trust men, I've had a lot of men in my life I can't trust, but I really feel I can trust men now."*

But that changed a few years after Posey and her sister Penny were born.

*UNDERSTANDING: And your dad was like this really big-hearted, really generous, uncapitalistic, totally suggestible, you know, giving, just a giant heart. But he was a playboy.*

*NANCI: It wasn't like your dad had an affair. It was like we were all married to each other.*

That's Nanci, who was also working in the kid's house with Judy and Understanding. And one day Posey's dad, Richness, approached Nanci - presumably while Judy wasn't around.

*NANCI: I think it was like, you're gonna come with me, you know, kind of a....it was more of a flirtation, kind of like, hey, you should come be with me for a while. You know how he could be.*

Soon after, Nanci became another one of Daniel's partners. And Judy wasn't happy

about it. She knew about the Love Family's belief that they were all part of one big group marriage. But that doesn't mean she liked it. Understanding told us that initially, Judy tried not to focus on Richness's new relationship.

*UNDERSTANDING: She didn't have a mental breakdown. She didn't cry, cause we had people crying all the time at the kids house. You know, oh, "He's gone with another Lady!" Judy just stoic, took it up, and she said that's not what I'm gonna do. I'll just focus on my kids, you know.*

But behind the scenes, it was a different story. Nanci remembers that little by little, Judy started to withdraw from life in the Family.

*NANCI: I think she was more at her mom's and grandma's house than she was in the family. Because I remember once she told me she really didn't want to be in the family without Dan. Because I think she felt like Dan took care of her. Which he did.*

Understanding could tell Judy was at a crossroads.

*UNDERSTANDING: And the last time I saw Judy was we all decided to hike up to King Lake cause you could be naked at King Lake, and Judy was sitting on a rock, and she was very, uh, um... not happy. Meditative, quiet. And, I clearly remember people putting pressure on her when we were up there, "Hey, here's this guy Steve. And you know, he's kinda your best bet right now."*

Stephen was a lawyer who'd started hanging around the group in the late seventies. He never formally joined, but Understanding says everybody there that day knew him well enough to try and convince Judy that Stephen was her ticket out.

*UNDERSTANDING: And I could see that Judy was kinda lost. And they were sellin' him, sellin' him, "Come on Judy, you know, get on the program here, and he'll take you, like far away"*

*[music in]*

*STEPHEN: So I go into the house, and then it was obvious that there was a different plan than taking Kyle to t-ball.*

After the break, Judy does get far away.

*STEPHEN: So maybe a week or two went by, and then it was obvious nobody was coming back.*

We'll be right back.

**[AD BREAK 3]**

By the time we spoke to Stephen, we'd been tracing the history of Judy's time in the Love Family for a few months. We'd heard countless stories about how extreme the conditions of life in the group were for her, and about how fragile she seemed to the relatively small group of people who were close to her.

But when it came to Posey's original question - whether Judy was already beginning to show symptoms of schizophrenia when she joined the Family, and how her life in the group might have affected her experience of the illness - most of what we'd heard was kind of surprising. Everyone we talked to who knew Judy during her time in the Family didn't recall anything out of the ordinary about her. In fact, as Understanding Israel put it:

*UNDERSTANDING: She was more normal than 90% of all the, maybe 99% of all the women. She didn't run after men, she didn't do drugs, she just stayed focused on the kids.*

But it was during her mom's marriage to Stephen that Posey first started to realize something was wrong, when she was just a kid growing up in Florida. But Posey had never talked to Stephen about his memories from those days. And whenever she's wondered about this period in her mom's life, Posey's always had the same thought:

*POSEY: "Well she must have been pretty sort of together at that point because Stephen agreed to marry her."*

And, it turns out, she was right.

*STEPHEN: Exactly. The path towards the breaks. I'm just going to call them reality breaks or snaps were not evident. If they were baked in they certainly hadn't emerged.*

*[music in]*

In the midst of the collapse of her relationship with Richness, Posey's dad, Judy went shopping one day at the local food co-op in the Queen Anne Hill neighborhood of Seattle. And that's where Stephen saw her - wearing the flowing, handmade dress that was customary for the women in the Love Family. He went over and introduced himself.

*STEPHEN: "Hi how are you? Oh, you're Constance?" And "Oh, yeah, okay. I'm me," And so yeah, that would've been sort of an introduction that stuck so to speak.*

Stephen knew that Judy was Richness's partner, and that they had two young daughters. But they saw each other from time to time at Love Family events, and slowly got to know each other.

And then, in 1984, Stephen's mom got sick, and he had to make an unexpected trip to Florida. He wasn't sure how long he'd be gone.

*STEPHEN: And so, I'm on the airplane wondering to myself "What am I doing? I'm flying cross country. What am I going to do in Florida?"*

It's a little unclear when exactly Judy went hiking with Understanding, and got the hard sell on Stephen. But about a week in to his visit home, Stephen got a call from Judy.

*STEPHEN: She asked me how we're doing and everything. During that phone call, we decided "Well, why don't we get married?" So it was a long distance proposal, so to speak. I would say ... well within a week, I think the invitations were getting printed...*

The ceremony was held in Lake Tahoe, California. Stephen called it a "typical dream wedding" - Judy and her daughters wore flower crowns, and the ceremony was held right on the lake. After the wedding, they moved to Florida, where everything about their life together was a big change from Judy's time with the Love Family life. Not long after the move, she and Stephen had a son, Posey's half-brother Kyle.

*STEPHEN: Kyle was the first ... he was a hospital birth. She said, "Oh my gosh. I'm actually going to have a baby in a hospital." That was a big deal like dinner in a nice restaurant.*

In Florida, Judy and Stephen carved out a much more recognizable version of American family life - birthday parties, swimming, and occasional vacations back to the West coast.

*STEPHEN: We went waterskiing. She was a water skier. Not me. I tried water skiing in Tahoe. I got to drink a lot of Lake Tahoe involuntarily, but that's okay.*

*[music out]*

And then, on one of those Lake Tahoe vacations, the family rented bikes - there was a bike path that ran along the Truckee River, and Stephen thought it was too crowded, so he took the kids to a different part of the path.

But Judy stayed behind to ride along the river.

*STEPHEN: ...and on the back path alongside the river some people were biking. A person was practicing for his aerobics for I guess his downhill skiing or something. So he was riding really, really fast and he ran into mom from behind and it threw her off the bike. And what happened after that she was airlifted helicopter evaced out south Lake Tahoe to Reno, the nearest major city, for evaluation at the hospital.*

Stephen had no idea what had happened until he got back to the vacation house and found a message from doctors at Reno General Hospital. He rushed over as soon as he heard it.

*STEPHEN: They thought maybe she'd experience suffered a Trans Ischemic attack. It's below a stroke, but where there a diminished blood flow to part of the brain. They kept her for I'm not sure for even how long. It wasn't really long, but when they said, "Okay. You're okay to go home." So we went back to Tahoe and then we flew home.*

They got Judy home, and flew back to Florida.

*STEPHEN: That's when things had started to gradually to shift into a darker place...*

*[music in]*

The first thing Stephen noticed was Judy getting angry without warning - it seemed like she was having outsized reactions to things.

*STEPHEN: Yelling. And way out of proportion to what would be a normal response.*

Not long afterwards, Stephen and Judy were driving home from a dinner party, and they got rear-ended.

*STEPHEN: And mom was a slender reed physically, emotionally. And it get bent, it bends you know. And it gets bent a little bit to far, after that things just got stranger and stranger and stranger. And a little scary at times.*

*POSEY: What was strange about it? What kind of things happened?*

*STEPHEN: I mean I don't want to hurt anybody's feelings, but it was pretty*

*POSEY: You're not going to hurt anybody's feelings.*

*STEPHEN: Well, mom started believing that she was the love child of Marilyn Monroe and John F. Kennedy. That's one.*

*POSEY: Yeah. Do you remember the first time that she said something to you that you were like, wow, no you're not connected to reality right now?*

*STEPHEN: Mom was having a rant, a fit, yelling and screaming and I'm not sure even now what it was about or what precipitated it. But I knew this wasn't right. We all went into the bedroom and I locked us in and I said to you girls, this isn't normal. This isn't how it's supposed to be. Don't look at this as a permanent or something. I was just trying to calm myself down by saying things that I thought would help...So that was one memorable event. So yeah, you just walking on eggs.*

*[music out]*

Posey had told us about that night when her mom came into her room and told her to to pack one thing she really loved, and to call one friend and say goodbye - the impromptu trip to Seattle. It's one of her worst memories. But she'd never heard Stephen's side of the story before. He was at work one morning, and got a call from Judy saying she'd meet up with him later on at their son Kyle's tee-ball game. And something about her voice just didn't sound right.

*STEPHEN: That sort of made me wonder well what's going on, so I'll just come on home. So I did and when I got home the car was gone, but the box in the trunk, I call the trouble box. If you have any car trouble, so that's in the middle of the driveway. So I'm thinking thats, now why would you need to take that out? So I go into the house and then it was obvious that there was a different plan than taking Kyle to t-ball.*

Stephen doesn't remember how he figured out Judy must've gone to Seattle. But when he did, he suspected she was staying with her mom. And when he called, Judy told him the trip was just a little vacation.

*STEPHEN: So I figured, let me just play it out. I said well here look, it's just sort of a surprise, I wasn't expecting this, but ...Have a good trip and see you when you get back. I don't think, maybe a week or so or two went by and it was obvious nobody was coming back.*

When Stephen realized what was happening, he flew to Seattle to get Kyle and bring him back to Florida. Daniel took over custody of Posey and her sister.

*STEPHEN: I said, look we just have to do what we got to do when these things, when they don't go down the happily ever after pathway.*

*POSEY: Yeah. Oh Stephen. I mean what happened to mom happened to all of us. And it definitely happened to you. Um, what has been the effect of, of her illness on your life?*

*STEPHEN: Well, I wouldn't even so much as the illness, but just the experience of falling*

*in love and being married and then having to separate and go back in, as I said it was my one true love. My one and only. And I'll probably for sure at this point never be getting married again. Um, I don't revisit the bad or the negative that often. You either go with the flow or you drown. I decided we were just going to go with the flow, and we just flowed downstream.*

*POSEY: You said she was, I don't know why it affects me, but I mean of course you guys loved each other right? You said that you loved her and you called her your one true love. I wonder, just if you can sort of remember back to that time, what was lovable about her?*

*STEPHEN: Well, she was very gentle and kind. She had a love of nature and she loved you girls, and Kyle when Kyle was born. I mean she was a very loving and nurturing person. And you know, and that was our connection. Whatever happened, whatever turned the switch - and I think it was the physical injuries she suffered pushed her into that world.*

*[music out]*

*POSEY: I am. I-I really wish that you could see me right now because I've got ... So I've got my headphones on, I've got the microphone in front of my face and then on my left shoulder I have a baby just chewing on my shoulder and on my right shoulder I'm like cradling the phone.*

After months of interviews, and finally having the answers she's wanted for so long, Posey's coming to terms with the realization that the connection between her mom's mental illness and her time in the Love Family isn't what Posey thought it was.

*POSEY: I never blamed the family for what happened to her. I don't think there was ever any part of me that was like, "Oh, they made her do LSD and that's why she has schizophrenia." So I think, I did think that she joined the family because of her mental illness. I think I always put the two together in my mind, as like oh, your brain is doing strange things, and this is a place where other people are saying that they're having visions. And other people don't quite fit into society. And so that makes sense. And so I think that was a tidy story. ...I think what it changes is just realizing that like my mom may have just been a mixed-up kid who joined a culty commune whereas before, I thought of her as a person who was mentally ill, and so therefore, found a home in a culty commune for a while.*

Even though Posey never thought Judy's time in the Love Family directly caused her schizophrenia, it was tempting to make a connection between the two big weird things. But it turns out it's much more likely that it was the bike accident which helped unlock whatever door Judy's illness was hiding behind. And that means that, in a way, the story of Judy's mental illness is even harder to process than it

was before.

*POSEY: It's just so much sadder in a way. If that's the answer. It's just so much more sad, because she had sort of like cleared the trajectory of her young life, you know? She'd figured out what she was going to do, and she had settled into this nice little life where her kids were taken care of, and she had another baby. Everything was good. Then she got into a bike accident.*

*[music out]*

But in the end, Posey, who's now a mom herself, is grateful to finally know the truth about her mom's past.

*POSEY: She was always an enigma to me, because I lost her so many times, in so many different ways. And I just never had the chance to ask her about her own life. So I think to be able to talk to other people about it, just made her more alive to me and in some small way the world is different because she was in it.*

*OZA: [makes baby sounds into the mic]*

*POSEY: What do you think Oza! Do you have something you want to say?*

*OZA: [makes a few more baby sounds]*

*POSEY: I love you so much, kid.*

*[music fades]*

*[FG Theme]*

*Family Ghosts* is hosted and produced by me, Sam Dingman, with Odelia Rubin, Jennifer Lai, Jacob Smith, Lindsey Kratochwill, Jenna Hannum, and Janielle Kastner. Our story editor is Micaela Blei. This episode was mixed by Evan Arnett, and featured original music by Jesse Brenneman. Our theme music is by Luis Guerra. Executive producers for season two are myself, along with Keith Reynolds and Alia Tavakolian at Spoke Media. Special thanks to Posey Gruener - and also to Daniel Gruener, who passed away between the time of our interview and the publication of this episode. Thanks also to Hannah Palin at the University of Washington Special Collections Film Archives, Penny Gruener, Sarah Viars, Oza Faye Viars, and Debbie Becker. Our story is by no means the definitive story of the Love Israel Family. To read, watch, and learn more about the Family, please visit our website, where you can find links to Rachel Israel's memoir, *Counterculture Crossover*, and Eric Johannsen's documentary, *It Takes a Cult*. For all of that and more, please visit familyghosts podcast dot com, where you can also sign up for our email list, the Ghost Post. If you'd like to follow our show on Twitter and



Instagram, you find us at famghoshow - that's f-a-m-g-h-o-show. We'll be back with an all-new story next week - featuring a mystical notebook containing a decades-old scandal. Stay tuned after the credits for a sneak preview - and thank you for listening to to *Family Ghosts* - where every house is haunted.

Next time on *Family Ghosts* - Meara's great-uncle leaves the world behind.

*MEARA: He quietly sat down on the couch, put his palms together in a prayer position, raised them over his head, and closed his eyes. That was his death. So graceful and simple.*

But he also leaves behind some clues to a mysterious scandal that's anything but simple...

*INDRA: The brothers of the girl came knocking at the door with knives in their hands, saying they're going to take him....*

*PATI: They're going to kill him!*

That's coming up next week, when season two of *Family Ghosts* continues.