My partner and I were hanging out with my mom. She’d just got back from Mexico.

Yeah, the markets were WONDERFUL! So much great stuff... and so cheap.

The artists make it all. And can you believe it? This friend I was with was trying to Jew them down when things were so cheap already!

MOM--- Did you say JEW down?
Yes -

You know:

She was trying to get the artist to lower the price...

Mom:

I know what it means!

But I'm shocked, I can't believe you'd use that expression, it's racist!

What do you mean? I'm not a racist!

It's just part of the language.

I was just talking. It's just a word.

for god's sake!

Phyllis.

It is racist, you're using the word "jew" in a derogatory way. You're making a stereotype about a whole group of people.
Well you both can't tell me how to talk! I have a right to express myself the way I want to -

And other people use that expression.

I'm taking the dog for a walk.

Well that went well...
**Back in Brooklyn...**

It wasn't ok what she said.

No, but I wish I'd talked about it differently with her.

**Several days later**

Hi, Mom. It's me.
You're still mad, huh?

Yes, what you did.

It wasn't nice—

You'd really like some understanding—that you were just telling a story?

Yes! And you have no right to call me a racist!

I'd just used a word... you'd think I'd murdered someone!
So you think our response was too strong for the situation—-it didn’t make sense to you?

Yes. Exactly!

And I don’t want to be watching every word—-I like there’s some kind of police, monitoring me.

Uh-huh. You want freedom to express yourself and be able to relax—-especially when you’re talking with family. People you’d like to trust that they know who you are.

Sure. Of course I would you are my daughter.

No, that’s good. I think you got it. It’s just hard. Sometimes I don’t know what to say around you.

Hmmm...

Is there anything else you want to tell me about what happened?

And how to connect with me?

You don’t understand what’s going on for me—-why I respond the way I do—-?

Yeah.

Can I tell you about it—-why it matters to me?

ok.
Well, I get nervous when I hear Jews being lumped together.

For the Nazis, if you were 1/10 Jewish, you were Jewish. And even though dad was raised as a Protestant.

most of his family is still Jewish—so I'm Jewish too.

You think of yourself as Jewish? You were raised Protestant!

Yes, but it's part of my family history. Remember that article I wrote on the Jews of Ireland?
There's another piece I'd like you to hear about... are you willing?

OK.

There are so many people in my life who identify as Jewish who've been so supportive and generous.

Well, even if I didn't identify as part Jewish, I'd feel really sad hearing that expression.

That expression doesn't match my experience, or honor the people I know.

Who do you know who's Jewish?
Geez, where do I begin?! My best friends Lindsey and Sarah from high school.

David and Marty, on the board of the non-profit I started.

And you know those trainers I've worked with in California? They're from Israel...

The friend in Boston, Gail, who's been advising me, pro bono...

My writing buddy, Lisa.

Wow. I had no idea. And all those people have helped you so much!

You know, I don't know any Jews. So I never thought about it, what that expression means. I didn't think about it as actual people--just a word.

Yes.
You don't know any Jews?! I find that hard to believe! You live on the East Coast, and you're from New York City!

Yes, but I haven't lived there for a long time. And I go to church up here. I guess I'm isolated.

It's so different. Where I live in Brooklyn, there are several kinds of churches---English and Latino, synagogues, a Buddhist Zendo, and a mosque. On Fridays, I can hear the prayers being called.

I'm glad we talked. I understand now what was going on for you—and I got to learn more about you, and your friends.

Me too.
later...

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Look what I found...

—for you...

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...and I even got them to go down on the price!