

**THE WILLIAM BREMAN JEWISH HERITAGE MUSEUM
ESTHER AND HERBERT TAYLOR
JEWISH ORAL HISTORY PROJECT OF ATLANTA
ALABAMA JEWISH HISTORY PROJECT**

MEMOIRIST: ALAN WEIL
INTERVIEWER: SANDRA BERMAN
DATE: MARCH 29, 2011
LOCATION: MONTGOMERY, ALABAMA
TRANSCRIBER: RUTHANNE WARNICK

INTERVIEW BEGINS

<Begin Disk 1>

<Note: There is the sound of a dog barking and people moving around in the background throughout this interview, especially at the beginning>

Sandra: Today is March 29, 2011, and I am in Montgomery, Alabama with Alan Weil, who has agreed to participate in the Esther and Herbert Taylor Oral History Project of the William Breman Jewish Heritage Museum. I am so pleased that you agreed to be interviewed. I would like to begin by asking you to tell me a little bit about your own background, when you were born, and how your family ended up in Montgomery.

Alan: My family lived in Montgomery all of my life. My grandfather, Abe [Abraham] Weil, originally had a store of some sort . . . I think it was wholesale dry goods,¹ maybe . . . in Montgomery, and he died when my father was nine years old. My father went through public school here [and] went on to Auburn [University—Auburn, Alabama] right about the time of the First World War.² I think he spent possibly one year at Auburn and then came back to Montgomery and went to work for my mother's father, who was in the wholesale dry goods business. It was called 'Scheuer Brothers,' which was down on Commerce Street.

Sandra: Can you tell me their names, all of these individuals' names?

Alan: My grandfather on my mother's side was Nathan Scheuer, and he was married to Ettie Scheuer, who originally came from . . . Let me think. I'll think of it in a minute. [Note: Eufaula,

¹ Dry goods are products such as textiles, clothing, personal care, and toiletry items. In U.S. retailing, a dry-goods store carries consumer goods that are distinct from those carried by hardware stores and grocery stores.

² World War I, also called First World War or Great War, was an international conflict that in 1914–1918 embroiled most of the nations of Europe along with Russia, the United States, the Middle East, and other regions. The war pitted the Central Powers—mainly Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Turkey—against the Allies—mainly France, Great Britain, Russia, Italy, Japan, and, from 1917, the United States. It ended with the defeat of the Central Powers.

Alabama.] My grandfather was Abe Weil, who died when my dad was about nine years old. He was one of six children. My grandmother's name was Pauline [Steiner] Weil, and they lived on South Court Street. My dad, after graduating from school, went to work for Scheuer Brothers in the wholesale business.

Sandra: His name?

Alan: My father's name was Sigmund Weil, who incidentally was president of the Temple [Temple Beth Or]³ here at one time. In fact, I'm the only one who never was president of the Temple in my family, but I was on the board [of directors] for several years. My son is now past president of the Temple here, too. My dad worked for my grandfather Scheuer for many years. Then he fell in love with his wife, who was named Edith, and they married. He left my grandfather and went into business with his brother, Henry Weil. They opened a store on Monroe Street in October of 1924. Would you believe the store is still there today and probably the only retail store in downtown Montgomery.

Sandra: Do you still own the store?

Alan: I don't own it. My son does.

Sandra: That's fantastic.

Alan: We went through a number of changes from what the store was originally. It was a general type of store, selling everything from thread to rubber boots to outerwear. You name it, we sold it. It was a junior type of department store. When I came into the operation in 1950, of course I thought I knew more about the retail business than anybody in the world. I found out real quickly I didn't know anything. To make a long story short, my uncle and my dad taught me an awful lot. [They] took me to market with them. I never will forget getting on the train here, the Crescent Limited, in the morning about five o'clock, spending the whole day and the night, getting up the next morning as we pulled into Pennsylvania Station in New York. We would stay up there about a week or ten days, shop the market up there, and then do the same thing all over coming home. I hated to ride the train. I was very happy when we finally started flying. They taught me everything that I knew about the retail business. I think the main thing

³ A Reform congregation in Montgomery, AL. The congregation was formally formed in 1852 and was known as Kahl Montgomery. In 1862, they completed a temple in downtown Montgomery and later changed the name to Temple *Beth Or* [Hebrew: House of Light]. It is listed in the National Registry of Historic Places and still stands today serving as a church. Due to the increasing Jewish population, a new house of worship was built in 1902 and again in 1961, which is the location of Temple Beth Or today.

they taught me was to treat people the way I would like to be treated, and that's the way we built our business. We have fifth and sixth generations still coming into our store, which is quite unusual [in] this day and time. We went from a general type of department store to a specialty type store catering to men and boys, doing high fashion young men type of business. It just made it a lot simpler. I started with the one store. Over a period of years I increased to 13 stores, the first store being in Uniontown, Alabama, which was owned by a friend of my father's and mine, a man by the name of Abe Cohen. Abe had been very ill and was in the hospital here, and we had both given him blood. We became very close. We did a little buying together. One day, he called me. He said, "Would you like to buy my store?" He said, "Juanita," who was his wife, "and I would like to retire, because we don't really have any time to spend with each other." At that time, my father and mother were on a trip out of the country somewhere. I called him, and I said, "Dad, I think you better come on home. I think we're getting ready to buy a store." He said, "What?", and I said, "Yes. Abe wants to sell the store, and I think we need to go down there and talk to him." They came home, and my dad and I went down there. It was the first time I had ever been in the store. I walked in the store and looked around. I couldn't believe what I saw, because Uniontown was a town of about 1800 people, and he had enough merchandise in there to sell for the next 22 years. To make a long story short, he decided not retire, but he would take six months a year off if I would come down there and run the store. I was the only person he trusted, so that was the deal. I would go down there, and when they were gone I would run the store. He was probably gone maybe two months a year, but he couldn't stay away. He loved it, and he couldn't stay away from it. That was a successful operation. There was a young man that had started working for Abe when he was in high school, a young guy by the name of Russell Stockman. Russell came back from [military] service and went to work in the store. Russell and I decided maybe we ought to try to expand out a little bit, and, in the meantime, Abe did retire. Russell ran that store, and I went down there every week and spent a day down there. One day he called me and said, "Alan, I think we need to open a store in Linden [Alabama]." I said, "I'll come on down, and we'll look at it." We went down, and we looked at Linden. We opened a store in Linden, and then we went from Linden to Greensboro [Alabama], and from Greensboro we went to York [Alabama], and from York we went to Macon, Mississippi. To make a long story short, we ended up with 13 stores. I spent my every Wednesday on the road. I would go to five stores one week and six stores the next week. I tried

to keep my finger in the pie [stay involved] and know what was happening where. Those were before we went on computer. Then later on my son, who is a CPA [Certified Public Accountant], decided first that he wanted to practice accounting and then he worked for an accountant, a CPA, in Birmingham [Alabama]. His wife at that time was in nursing school at UAB [University of Alabama at Birmingham]. When she graduated, they moved back to Montgomery, and then he went to work for a CPA in Montgomery. He and I have always been very, very close, as has the rest of my family. We always went to lunch on Wednesdays, and one day we were at lunch, and he said, "Dad, you know what? I decided I want to go into retail business." That was the happiest day of my life.

Sandra: It's amazing, because you are in the true minority. Most of that next generation didn't go back into the business. How many stores are left?

Alan: There are still 13.

Sandra: Still 13.

Alan: Still 13.

Sandra: They are called what?

Alan: In Montgomery, we're called Weil's [Clothing]. There are three stores in Montgomery. Originally, in west Alabama, they were called the Economy Stores, but if we changed our operation from a general type store to a fashion business, we didn't think the name suited. We changed the stores in west Alabama, and they're called A J's. Somebody said, "How did you come up with the name A J's". I said, "Alan Junior." It worked, and that's what they're called. He's still running the stores. There is a young man who lives in Greensboro that's working with him like Russell worked with me, and he has a young man in Birmingham that's working with him. They more or less take care of the physical running of the stores. He does all the buying and stays on the computer and stays in touch with everything that is happening down there by way of the computer and the telephone. They're still running. Right now retail is tough, and his business is tough, but he can handle it. They're keeping their heads above the water.

Sandra: That's good. I want to get back into your childhood a little bit. What kind of neighborhood did you grow up in?

Alan: I grew up in basically east Montgomery. It was early on. It was in the Cloverdale area. Early on, my parents bought a house on **Glen Grattan [Drive]**, and that's where I lived

most of my life. I went to grammar school at Cloverdale, and then also junior high at Cloverdale, and then high school I went to Sidney Lanier. I was involved in athletics at Lanier, and that's where I met my wife. She was a cheerleader. We started dating my senior year. When I graduated, I went to the university, and she went to the university.

Sandra: The University of Alabama [Tuscaloosa, AL]?

Alan: Yes. I was a fair student, and she was an excellent student. She was [a member of the] Phi Beta Kappa [Society],⁴ everything.

Sandra: Your wife's name before we forget.

Alan: My wife's name was Nellie. Her maiden name was Cobb. C-O-B-B. She was not Jewish, but she ended up being more Jewish than I am. She served 18 years on the Board of Education here in Montgomery. She was also the president of the Alabama School Boards Association [Alabama Association of School Boards], as well as the National School Boards Association. She was quite an outstanding person.

Sandra: Was your neighborhood close to the Temple? Was it a Jewish neighborhood?

Alan: No, it was not a Jewish neighborhood. I had many friends in Montgomery, but I had one or two friends who were Jewish. Mostly I ran around with people who were non-Jewish. They didn't know the difference between a Jew or a gentile. It was just, if you ran around in a neighborhood, everybody liked each other. Everything was fine. I never encountered any antisemitism in Montgomery my younger years. The first time I ever ran into antisemitism was when my wife pledged a sorority⁵ at the University of Alabama, and the president of her sorority told her she would have to stop dating me because I was Jewish. That was the first time I ever ran into anything like that. She finally told them they could make up their mind whether they wanted her to stay in the sorority or not, but she wasn't going to stop dating me, and she didn't. The particular girl, we tried to befriend her, but I don't think she ever cared for me. She graduated, and we never had any other trouble after that. I have never run into any real antisemitism in Montgomery.

Sandra: Was the Temple an important part of your growing up?

⁴ The Phi Beta Kappa Society celebrates and advocates excellence in the liberal arts and sciences. Its campus chapters invite for induction the most outstanding arts and sciences students at American's leading colleges and universities. The Society sponsors activities to advance these studies – the humanities, the social sciences, and the natural sciences – in higher education and in society at large.

⁵ A social organization of female students at a college or university; usually identified by Greek letters

Alan: It was part of my growing up because my grandmother and my father and my uncle were very involved with the Temple. When I was younger, it didn't really mean that much to me. I went to Temple every Friday night because on Friday nights we ate supper with my grandmother and then went to Temple. I went to Temple . . . I went to Sunday school and then every Sunday after Sunday school I walked from the Temple to my grandmother's house and I had Sunday dinner with my grandmother. Temple was an important part of my life as we grew up. It's still an important part of my life today.

Sandra: Any specific recollections about some of the rabbis who have . . . ?

Alan: I go all the way back to Dr. **Erenwright**, which a lot of people don't remember, but he was a friend of my grandmother. When I was about eight years old I went to a camp that he ran up in Wisconsin where I really got to know 'Doc' and Mrs. **Erenwright** well. They always sort of favored me because I was from Montgomery. All the rest of the rabbis that I remember . . . Rabbi [Eugene] Blachschleger⁶ and my parents were very close friends. They used to . . .

Sandra: What was he like?

Alan: He was a great guy. Sweet, nice, friendly. His wife was lovely. He and my folks played poker together. They had a poker crowd. The funny part about him . . . he used to laugh about it . . . when he first came to Montgomery, he told his wife . . . his wife's name was Bernice . . . he said, "Bernice, we have a poor child in our Sunday school class. His parents can't afford shoes. He comes to class barefooted." That was me because I hated to wear shoes. He laughed about that with me for years and years and years. Of course, [Rabbi] David Baylinson⁷ was a very close friend of mine and my wife's.

Sandra: We have interviewed him.

Alan: He was in Montgomery over the weekend, and I was thrilled to see David and Janice. They are just wonderful, wonderful people.

Sandra: You never felt like an outsider because of your religion.

Alan: No.

Sandra: That's what we hear from most people here.

⁶ Rabbi Eugene Blachschleger was elected as spiritual leader of Temple Beth Or in Montgomery, AL in 1933 and served until his untimely death in January 1965.

⁷ Rabbi David A. Baylinson served Temple Beth Or in Montgomery, AL from 1965 until his retirement in 1994.

Alan: Even living in this neighborhood, which is a fairly new neighborhood, I have a deacon in the Church of Christ living on one side of me, and on the other side I have a . . . I think he's a Methodist or Baptist or something. We joke about it every year when everybody has a Christmas tree, and I tell him I'm going to put a Star of David⁸ out in the front yard. In this particular neighborhood, they like you for what you are. They don't care what religion you are. They look at you and say, "If he's a good fellow, I accept him," and that's the way it should be.

Sandra: I want to get into a little bit later, into the 1950's and early 1960's. If you could talk a little bit about what it was like here during that tumultuous Civil Rights Era.⁹

Alan: The whole area was uneasy. The whites didn't particularly like the blacks, and the blacks, of course, didn't like the whites, because mostly they'd been suppressed. Being brought up, because our business was probably ninety percent black, I had lots of black friends. Even during the boycott . . . A lot of them stopped coming in the store. They were scared to come in the store, because of the other blacks. Still, our business did alright. We really never had too much trouble, other than at one time there were a few black leaders who were trying to make a little money out of being a leader. They would threaten us and say, "If you don't pay us off, we're going to tell the blacks not to come trade in your store." I always told them, "If that's what you want to do, do it, but I'm not going to pay you." We have always run an operation where we were color blind. We treat the blacks the way we treat the whites, and if that's not enough that's fine with me.

Sandra: During segregation, did you have separate dressing rooms in the store?

Alan: No, we never had separate dressing rooms. Thank goodness we didn't serve food, so we didn't worry about that. At that particular time, I think I had possibly one black person working for me. I know I had a guy working that was more or less a janitor or a handyman type of guy. He did stock work, sales work, etc. Then one day, out of a clear blue sky, a really high class young black lady walked in the store. I never will forget it. She walked in, and she had on

⁸ The *Magen David* [Hebrew: Shield of David], or as it is more commonly known, the Star of David, is the symbol most commonly associated with Judaism today.

⁹ The American Civil Rights Movement encompasses social movements in the United States whose goal was to end racial segregation and discrimination against black Americans and enforce constitutional voting rights to them. The movement was characterized by major campaigns of civil resistance. Between 1955 and 1968, acts of nonviolent protest and civil disobedience produced crisis situations between activists and government authorities. Noted legislative achievements during this phase of the Civil Rights Movement were passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, the Immigration and Nationality Services Act of 1965, and the Fair Housing Act of 1968.

a black suit, which was fur trimmed around the collar. She walked in, and she said, “I’d like to see Mr. Weil.” I said, “I’m Mr. Weil,” and, of course, I was dressed as I am now [casual business attire]. She said, “I would like to apply for a job.” I took her back in the office, and we talked for a long time. I hired her right there on the spot, and after I hired her I wondered, “What’s going to be the result of this with my other employees?” I had one lady who had been there ever since I was born. She lived out in Chisholm, which is in north Montgomery, which is sort of a mill-type village. She was very biased. She didn’t like the blacks, and she let it be known that she didn’t like it. I was totally worried about that. As it turned out, they turned out to be the closest friends of anybody I had to work with. Elizabeth worked with me until I retired, and after I retired Alan opened another store and made her manager. She just retired about a year ago, and she still calls me up three or four times a year. We go out and eat lunch together and stay in touch.

Sandra: What’s her surname, her full name?

Alan: I’m trying to think of what her last . . . She lost her husband. His last name was Irving, and her name is Elizabeth Irving.

Sandra: You had mentioned a story earlier about whether or not to open the store during the march,¹⁰ I believe.

Alan: During the march, we had National Guard¹¹ on every corner downtown. That morning I had no idea whether I was going to open the store or not. I went to work that morning as usual. I always got there an hour or two before everybody else. When I got to town, there was National Guard on every corner, all armed with automatic weapons. I decided at that point, no, I was not

¹⁰ The Selma to Montgomery marches were three marches in 1965 that marked the political and emotional peak of the American Civil Rights Movement. Selma and Montgomery were the focus of black voter registration drives which were resisted on every front. The marches were to support voting rights for blacks. The first was on March 7, 1965 and came to be known as “Bloody Sunday” when 600 civil rights marchers were attacked by state and local police with billy clubs and tear gas. Several marchers, both black and white, were beaten or murdered over the course of the marches. The second march was on March 9, 1965. Martin Luther King Jr. led 2,500 protestors who were turned back after crossing the Edmund Pettus Bridge. The third march started on March 16. The marchers marched along U.S. Route 80 protected by 2,000 soldiers of the U.S. Army, 1,900 members of the Alabama National Guard under Federal command, FBI agents and Federal Marshals. They arrived in Montgomery on March 24. The marchers in the third march were fed by women volunteers who cooked the food in the kitchen of the Green Street Baptist Church after which it was delivered to the gathering point for the march by truck.

¹¹ The National Guard of the United States, part of the reserve components of the United States Armed Forces, is a reserve military force, composed of National Guard military members or units of each state and the territories of Guam, the Virgin Islands, and Puerto Rico, as well as of the District of Columbia, for a total of 54 separate organizations. National Guard units are under the dual control of the state and the federal government. The majority of National Guard soldiers and airmen hold a civilian job full-time while serving part-time as a National Guard member.

going to open the store, but I did stay down there and watched the march come through Montgomery. I was really surprised at the number of white people that were involved in the march. I would say almost a hundred percent from out of town, not from this particular area. Quite a few rabbis were there. They came from up East, I'm sure. The march was peaceful, and after it was over they had some type of party for the marchers out at St. Jude's.¹² After that, most of them went out there and had a good time. The next day everything was pretty well back to normal. We opened the store and went about our business.

Sandra: How did you and your contemporaries feel about the white people and some of the rabbis coming from other areas and involving themselves?

Alan: I always felt if that's what they wanted to do, that's fine. If they were satisfied with what they were doing in their own heart, then I shouldn't be one to tell them no, don't do it. I think it did have an adverse effect on some of the white people who were here, and some of them who really didn't like the blacks probably said, "Why are these Jews from up East coming down here and siding with the blacks?" I think that probably led to a little antisemitism, but it's like everything else. Times change, and people forget about those things.

Sandra: What about the synagogue? Did any of your friends or did you feel any desire to get involved in the movement?

Alan: No, I didn't. I really didn't. I have always treated people like I thought I wanted to be treated. I didn't want to get involved, and so I didn't. We still try to treat people the way they want to be treated, and I think that's the name of the game.

Sandra: I remember when I interviewed Rabbi Baylinson he mentioned that there were a couple of congregants that were a little passionate about not wanting things to change.

Alan: I think you have that in every congregation. I don't care where you are. Some of them don't like more Hebrew [in the service]. Some want less Hebrew. The way I look at it, you have to do what the young kids coming up want you to do. If they want more Hebrew in the service, and this is what they want and that makes them better Jews, fine. I'll go with it. Older

¹² St. Jude Educational Institute was a private, Roman Catholic high school in Montgomery, Alabama. It was located in the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Mobile, and was built as "the City of St. Jude" by Father Harold Purcell for the advancement of the Negro people. St. Jude was opened in 1946. It offered a full college preparatory program as well as basic skills and trade programs at night for adults. During the Selma to Montgomery marches in 1965, the march camped on the St. Jude campus. The campus was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1990, and is part of the Selma to Montgomery National Historic Trail, created in 1996. It closed after the end of the school year in May 2014.

people can't dictate to the younger people how they should live. Once we get to that point, it's not up to us to tell them what to believe in and what to do. They do what they feel comfortable with.

Sandra: Did you also have black employees in your home?

Alan: Oh, yes.

Sandra: What was that relationship like?

Alan: We loved the black people that worked for us. They were basically like part of the family. When Nellie and I moved into the first house that we built, it was around Christmas. We were both working. We had a young lady working for us, and I said, "The moving van is going to be here at a certain time. They're going to move everything into the new house." I said, "You take care of the kids, and you tell them where to put the furniture. We have to go to work." We went to work, and when we came home that night she was still there, taking care of the children, putting the furniture where it needed to be. She slept there that night, and the next morning I took her home. In those days, you had people who worked for you and loved you like you were family. You didn't really have to say, "I'm going to pay you more to do this." All you had to say was, "Would you mind doing it?" and they would do it. I never will forget. I came home that Christmas Eve, and she had a pan of cornbread sitting on the stove for me to eat because she thought I was hungry and she knew I liked to eat cornbread. Bessie was a part of the family. She raised all of our children. She potty [toilet] trained them and everything else. My kids today will say, "She probably switched [corporal punishment] me more than my mama and dad did. If we did something wrong, she'd go out in the backyard and cut a long switch and tear us up."

Sandra: Is she still living?

Alan: No, she's not. [I] wish she was.

<dog barks; interview pauses, then resumes>

Sandra: I'm sure. We were talking about the relationship with the people in your home. You were in the retail business for so long. Any memorable customers that came through those doors that you could talk about?

Alan: I had so many memorable customers, because we had families that lived out in the country. They would come in every year. When I was a young guy and just working as a clerk, they would bring the kids in and say, "Mr. Weil, fix my kids up with clothes for school." I would go to each one of the kids and fit them up. In those days you would pick out five [or] six

changes of clothes. You would have enough clothes to fill up a shoe carton for each one of them, and at the end of the day it might have amounted to \$100 or so. Some of those kids still come in the store today. A funny thing happened the other day. Actually it was the other night. A friend of mine and I went to an art show out in north Montgomery. It was a bunch of young kids that were putting on this art show. I hadn't been out to north Montgomery in years. They have changed the road out there. North Court Street used to go by this particular stockyard. I didn't know that North Court Street ended. It took us about an hour, and we still never found the place. I stopped at a little shop out there that sold Cokes¹³ and potato chips and stuff like that, like a little 7-Eleven.¹⁴ As I was walking up to the front of it, there was a young black man standing out in the front. I walked up to him, and I said, "Sir, do you happen to know where Furnace Street is?" He looked up, [and] he said, "Mr. Weil, I don't know where Furnace Street is, but I know where Monroe Street is." I just had to laugh, because wherever I go in this town, if there are any blacks around, 99 percent of them know who I am.

Sandra: That's wonderful.

Alan: We had just really great relations with the black community.

Sandra: Did you get involved in community activities. Were you involved in the Elks¹⁵ or the Lions¹⁶ or the Kiwanis?¹⁷

Alan: I was involved in a civic club, but they met on Wednesdays. I had to be out of town on Wednesdays, so I had to back out of that. My wife was the one that was totally involved in everything that there was around Montgomery. I had a business to run and that was basically what I did other than support my kids when they were playing in athletics and things like that.

¹³ Coke is the common name for a soft drink made by The Coca-Cola Company, an American multinational beverage corporation headquartered in Atlanta, Georgia. Its flagship product, Coca-Cola, was invented in 1886 by John Stith Pemberton and was purchased by Asa Griggs Candler in 1889.

¹⁴ 7-Eleven is a convenience store chain with more than 54,200 stores in 16 countries, of which more than 10,400 are in North America. (2014)

¹⁵ The Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks is a community service organization that consists of Elks Lodges in communities throughout the United States. Elks invest in their communities through programs that help children grow up health and drug-free, by undertaking projects that address unmet need, and by honoring the service and sacrifice of military veterans.

¹⁶ Lions Clubs are worldwide with over 46,000 individual clubs and 1.35 million members. They are a service organization that gets involved in community works. One of the major things they are involved in is helping providing children get eyeglasses.

¹⁷ Kiwanis International is an international, coeducational service club founded in 1915. It is a volunteer-led organization dedicated to building better communities, children and youth.

Sandra: Can you describe one of your fondest memories of running that business for all those years?

Alan: Yes, the day I retired.

Sandra: There must be some anecdote about somebody or some story

Alan: Every day was a different day. I loved being with people. I really never had a real problem as far as working was concerned. It was my life. It was something that I learned early. It was something that I was proud of, and I was proud of what we achieved. It was fun. Retail to me was fun. It was like a game. You played the game to win. You bought the merchandise with the idea it's got to sell. I enjoyed the retail business.

Sandra: Going back to your home life a little bit, were the [Jewish] holidays important in the house?

Alan: Yes.

Sandra: Did you have Friday night dinners, or Sabbath . . .

Alan: We had Friday night dinners with my grandmother, and after she passed away, with my aunt and uncle, my folks. My dad and mother and my aunt and uncle changed Friday nights every other time. My wife and I would go there. After we had kids they went there. So Friday night was always a night where we all had supper together. Sundays we always had lunch together. That's something that happened. It was unwritten law that we knew what was happening on Friday nights and Sundays.

Sandra: Who did the cooking?

Alan: At that time, they all had cooks.

Sandra: I was just wondering, like for Passover,¹⁸ did they know how to make the *seder*¹⁹ meal?

Alan: Oh, yes. Actually, in those days we had *seder* at the temple. We never had *seder* at home, but they knew how to make matzo balls and the whole nine yards [everything]. Today,

¹⁸ Hebrew: *Pesach*. The anniversary of Israel's liberation from Egyptian bondage. The holiday lasts for eight days. Unleavened bread, *matzah*, is eaten in memory of the unleavened bread prepared by the Israelite during their hasty flight from Egypt, when they had not time to wait for the dough to rise. On the first two nights of Passover, the *seder*, the central event of the holiday is celebrated. The *seder* service is one of the most colorful and joyous occasions in Jewish life. In addition to eating *matzah* during the *seder*, Jews are prohibited from eating leavened bread during the entire week of Passover. In addition, Jews are also supposed to avoid foods made with wheat, barley, rye, spelt or oats unless those foods are labeled 'kosher for Passover.' Jews traditionally have separate dishes for Passover.

¹⁹ Hebrew for 'order.' The ritual family meal eaten at home on the first and second nights of Passover, accompanied by the retelling of the story of the Israelites' exodus from Egypt.

my daughter who lives here, we have Passover at her house. She cooks everything, she and my granddaughters.

Sandra: Did you ever think about living anywhere other than Montgomery?

Alan: No. Never, ever. If I lived anywhere else, I would probably move up to Lake Martin and stay up there.

Sandra: Tell me why you love Montgomery.

Alan: Montgomery has been good to me. It has been my home for 83, almost 84, years. I've enjoyed living here. I'm accepted for who I am, not because of my religion or anything else. I have a lot of good friends still left. A lot of people who were good friends are not here, and I miss them, but I enjoy living here.

Sandra: What do you see for the future of the Jewish community of Montgomery?

Alan: I see it getting smaller and smaller and smaller. There are no 'mom and pop'²⁰ stores left in Montgomery. There are no businesses for them to come home to, unless they go into a profession, unless they are a lawyer or a doctor or something like that. The days of small businesses [are] gone. I think right now we probably have more young Jewish people living in Atlanta [Georgia] than we have living in Montgomery.

Sandra: I'm sure. What about the relationship between . . . I know that the Sephardic²¹ congregation merged into the Temple. Do you think there will come a time when every . . .

Alan: There has got to be a time when there will be one Jewish community here, one Jewish temple, period. There is not enough left for us to support [the] Temple. I hate to say it. We just don't have the base to draw on. It really disturbs me. I think our congregation, the Reform²² congregation, now would be glad to have the Sephardic or the Conservative²³ congregation come

²⁰ Mom and pop stores are businesses that are privately owned and usually operated by members of a family, rather than being part of a national chain of stores.

²¹ Sephardic Jews are the Jews of Spain, Portugal, North Africa and the Middle East and their descendants. The adjective "Sephardic" and corresponding nouns Sephardi (singular) and Sephardim (plural) are derived from the Hebrew word *Sepharad*, which refers to Spain. Historically, the vernacular language of Sephardic Jews was Ladino, a Romance language derived from Old Spanish, incorporating elements from the old Romance languages of the Iberian Peninsula, Hebrew, Aramaic, and in the lands receiving those who were exiled, Ottoman Turkish, Arabic, Greek, Bulgarian and Serbo-Croatian vocabulary.

²² A division within Judaism especially in North America and the United Kingdom. Historically it began in the nineteenth century. In general, the Reform movement maintains that Judaism and Jewish traditions should be modernized and compatible with participation in Western culture. While the Torah remains the law, in Reform Judaism women are included (mixed seating, *bat mitzvah* and women rabbis), music is allowed in the services and most of the service is in English.

²³ A form of Judaism that seeks to preserve Jewish tradition and ritual but has a more flexible approach to the interpretation of the law than Orthodox Judaism. It attempts to combine a positive attitude toward modern culture,

and join us. I think it can be worked out. There are just not enough people to support two rabbis and two different types of congregations here.

Sandra: Growing up, did you associate much with the synagogue crowd?

<interview pauses; then resumes>

Sandra: I was asking if you had much of a relationship with the synagogue growing up.

Alan: I had several close Jewish friends, people that I had grown up with. We were always close. I didn't feel like I was married to the congregation.

Sandra: I mean, being from the Temple, did you associate much with people from the synagogue²⁴ or from the Sephardic . . .

Alan: Sure. Montgomery was not that large a place. I think today we probably are closer and associate more than we did years ago, because there are fewer of us.

Sandra: Were you a member of the Standard Club?²⁵

Alan: Yes, I was.

Sandra: How did it finally close?

Alan: We just couldn't support it. It was just that simple. We couldn't support a Jewish club here.

Sandra: I thought they opened the membership to non-Jews.

Alan: I think they did, but I don't think it was very successful. The Standard Club was just a wonderful place to go. You would go there, and you felt like you were with most of your friends. Everybody knew each other. The food was good, and you could sit down and all the people who worked out there knew who you were. They knew what you liked. My son-in-law would come up here with his family, and he would sit down. There was a young lady who worked out there. Her name was Christine, and by the time he sat down Christine put a glass of iced tea in front of him, because she knew he liked to drink iced tea. That was the way that the club was. The people who worked out there knew every one of my children by name. They

while preserving a commitment to Jewish observance. They also observe gender equality (mixed seating, women rabbis and *bat mitzvahs*).

²⁴ Typically, 'temple' is used by Reform congregations, and 'synagogue' is used by Conservative congregations. The word '*shul*' [Yiddish: synagogue] is sometimes used by Conservative and Orthodox congregations.

²⁵ The Standard Club was formed in 1871 as a downtown Montgomery social club for Jews during an era when Jews were not admitted to other clubs. The club building was built in 1894 across from the Davis Theater, and members acquired the second lot in February 1913 in order to have a place in the country. The Standard Club maintained the dual properties for over a decade. In 1929, notable architect Frank Lockwood built the current clubhouse. Today (2015), the Standard Club property is a community of residential homes.

knew every one of my grandchildren by name. It was a wonderful association. It's something that I miss tremendously, but I don't think it will ever be again.

Sandra: Can you describe what the building looked like? I have not seen a photograph of it.

Alan: It was a large sort of . . . I guess you would say it was English type of construction. It had a large ballroom downstairs with a balcony that went all around the upstairs, looking down. There was a dining room and a kitchen downstairs, and there was a bar area. There were two patios on either side, and upstairs there were private rooms, card rooms and poker rooms and that type of thing, and living quarters for the manager. It was really a nice, nice place.

Sandra: That's wonderful. Wonderful memories.

Alan: I really miss it. It was just nice to go somewhere where you could sit and relax. You go into a restaurant now, and you get served, and they can't wait to get you out the door. Out there, you could just sit around and talk to your friends. Nobody was ever in a hurry to leave, and it was a lot of fun. It was a great atmosphere.

Sandra: Growing up, did you attend any of the young Jewish parties, like Falcon²⁶ or Ballyhoo?²⁷

Alan: Yes. I went to Falcon. I went to Ballyhoo. I went to the one in . . .

Sandra: Jubilee?²⁸

Alan: Jubilee. I went to all of them.

Sandra: Holly Days?²⁹

Alan: Holly Days, too. I went to all of them.

Sandra: Can you describe those weekends?

Alan: It was where all the young Jewish kids got together, and at these particular weekends we got to know the kids from Birmingham. We got to know the people from Atlanta. We got to know the people from Columbus [Georgia]. There was a group from Nashville [Tennessee] that came down every year. A lot of those people that I met at Falcon and all those other places, the

²⁶ From 1931 to the late 1950s, members of Atlanta's Standard Club sponsored Ballyhoo, an annual courtship weekend attended by college-aged sons and daughters of the Temple community. The event drew Jewish youth from across the South. The weekend included breakfast dates, lunch dates, tea dance dates, early evening dates, late night dates, formal dances, and cocktail parties, giving participants the opportunity to meet a "nice Jewish boy or girl." Similar courtship weekends in southern cities included Montgomery, Alabama's Falcon, Birmingham, Alabama's Jubilee, and Columbus, Georgia's Holly Days.

²⁷ See above.

²⁸ See above.

²⁹ See above.

ones that are left, are still friends of mine today. One thing I really enjoy is we still have a group of guys who went to university together, were in the ZBT³⁰ together, and we meet twice a year and have lunch together. It's so nice to sit down and see old friends. Those are the people that I feel are my closest friends.

Sandra: Were some of those weekends kind of wild?

Alan: Oh yes.

Sandra: Can you tell me a little bit about some of those antics?

Alan: I don't want to. <laughter> It was the type of thing [where] you would have a date to take to an affair, and then when the affair was over you would meet some girl there, and you would have a late date with her. You would take your date home, and then you would pick up the other girl. Sometimes you would take her home and have a late, late date with somebody else. It was the type of thing that went on all day, all night. I always had friends staying in my house. It was great. It was all the young Jewish kids from the South getting together, getting to know each other, and just having good, clean fun. It was nice. It's a shame that they don't have them today.

Sandra: What do you miss from the old days about Montgomery that you knew growing up?

Alan: I think the main thing that I miss is not knowing everybody. I used to [be able to] walk down the street in Montgomery downtown, and I would know everybody that I saw. I could call everybody on the street by first name, and they could call me by first name. It's not that way anymore. You don't know your neighbors. You don't know your customers. It's the difference between a small town feeling and a big town feeling. You go to New York, and you walk down the street, and everybody knocks you off the street. They're going to run over [you], they're going to holler at you, and they're going to scream at you. That's what's happening here. There's not that closeness, because you don't really know the people.

Sandra: Does your son feel that he doesn't really know his customers like you did?

Alan: He knows his customers. He can tell you just about everybody that walks in. He can tell you what their first name is.

³⁰ Founded in 1898 as the world's first Jewish Fraternity, Zeta Beta Tau (ZBT) prides itself on being an inclusive organization welcoming of any college man who understands and appreciates our mission. With more than 140,000 initiated men ZBT's can be found in all aspects of life: business, entertainment, media, politics, and much more. In 1989, ZBT became the first fraternity to abolish pledging from its organization and, in its place, created a brotherhood program that focuses on equal rights, privileges, and responsibilities for all members.

Sandra: That's wonderful. That's a nice tradition that he's carried on from you.

Alan: Actually, he begs me to come down there on Christmas Eve and the day before Easter and things like that. He says, "Dad, you just come down. I don't want you to do anything. You just come in the store." It's funny. Some of the customers come in. They look and they see me, and their face lights up. I'll walk up to them and say, "You thought I was dead, didn't you?" It's good to see the old folks that still come around.

Sandra: Do you have the urge ever to go help out?

Alan: If he wants me to, yes. I still enjoy it. I don't have the stamina to stay on my feet all day long like I used to, but I go down there and work a couple of days a year just to have a little fun.

Sandra: How is retirement?

Alan: I love it. I do what I want to, when I want to. If I want to go to Hattiesburg [Mississippi] to see my daughter down there, I can go to Hattiesburg. If I want to go to California to see my daughter there, I go to California. I've got a great grandchild now, which is quite nice. That's a funny story, too, because my grandson got married and after his wife got pregnant, they didn't know what they were going to name the baby. For some reason, they liked the name **Madeline** [sp], and he was not aware that I had an aunt who was named **Madeline**. He did name the child **Madeline**, and they were surprised to know that there was a **Madeline** Weil. She is named **Madeline** Weil **Sheridan** [sp].

<dog enters; interview pauses, then resumes>

Sandra: I have one final question before we conclude. You told me a little bit of the story. There's another Weil family here in Montgomery.

Alan: There are several other Weil families here.

Sandra: There was the cotton Weil family.

Alan: Yes. The cotton Weil . . .

Sandra: What did your mother say?

Alan: It was not my mother. It was my grandmother, Pauline [Steiner] Weil. She always said that we were the Montgomery Weils. They were the Huntsville [Alabama] Weils, because they had moved here from Huntsville. She was quite a character. She ruled the roost. She had six or seven children. I forget how many. All she had to do was say, "I need for you to come to Montgomery," and wherever they were, they left what they were doing, and they came to

Montgomery. She was the boss. It was amazing. She called them wherever they were, and they came.

Sandra: I think on that note we will conclude. Thank you so much for participating. I have enjoyed it.

Alan: It was a lot of fun.

Sandra: I hope you liked going back down memory lane.

Alan: I do. There are so many good thoughts, and then there are other thoughts you don't like to think about.

Sandra: Sure.

Alan: Life goes on. You have to do what you have to do.

<End Disk 1>

INTERVIEW ENDS

Cuba Family Archives