

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

**MEMOIRIST:** MENDEL ROMM, JR.  
**INTERVIEWER:** MARVIN WEINTRAUB  
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**INTERVIEW BEGINS**

<Begin Tape 1, Side 1>

**Marvin:** This is Marvin Weintraub interviewing Mendel Romm, Jr. at his home in Atlanta, Georgia. Today is April 28, 2003. This is for the Jewish Oral History Project of Atlanta which is co-sponsored by the American Jewish Committee, the Jewish Federation of Greater Atlanta, and the National Council of Jewish Women. First, thank you kindly, Mendel. Our paths crossed somewhere 50 years ago. It's nice to become reacquainted . . . Let's start with your date of birth

**Mendel:** January 11, 1929 . . . four days before Martin Luther King, Jr.'s<sup>1</sup> . . . we were born five blocks from each other.

**Marvin:** You were born five blocks from there?

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<sup>1</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr. (1929-1968) is best known for his role as a leader in the Civil Rights Movement and the advancement of civil rights using nonviolent civil disobedience based on his Christian beliefs. A Baptist minister, King became a civil rights activist early in his career. He led the 1955 Montgomery Bus Boycott and helped found the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) in 1957, serving as its first president. With the SCLC, King led an unsuccessful struggle against segregation in Albany, Georgia, in 1962, and organized nonviolent protests in Birmingham, Alabama, that attracted national attention following television news coverage of the brutal police response. King also helped to organize the 1963 March on Washington, where he delivered his famous "I Have a Dream" speech. On October 14, 1964, King received the Nobel Peace Prize for combating racial inequality through nonviolence. In 1965, he and the SCLC helped to organize the Selma to Montgomery marches and the following year, he took the movement north to Chicago to work on segregated housing. King was assassinated on April 4, 1968 in Memphis, Tennessee. His death was followed by riots in many United States cities. King was posthumously awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom and the Congressional Gold Medal. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day was established as a holiday in numerous cities and states beginning in 1971, and as a United States federal holiday in 1986.

**Mendel:** I was born in Georgia Baptist Hospital.

**Marvin:** That's the reason. Georgia Baptist Hospital doesn't exist anymore, does it?

**Mendel:** No, it's Atlanta Medical Center now.

**Marvin:** Not owned by the Baptist community, I assume?

**Mendel:** I would think they have given it up. There's a doctor's building there now that used to be the maternity ward on that spot. I was told that I was born in the driveway in an ambulance between the hospital and the maternity ward. They didn't know if they were going to let me in the hospital because you had to be born in the hospital to be in the place with the other infants. The doctor kind of forced them to let me be in the hospital.

**Marvin:** That's an interesting sideline . . . what would have happened if they wouldn't have let you in [the hospital]?

**Mendel:** Probably take me home.

**Marvin:** Maybe that was better. Where were your parents living at that time?

**Mendel:** At 934 St. Charles Avenue.

**Marvin:** Describe it.

**Mendel:** A block off of Ponce de Leon [Avenue]. St. Charles runs east across Highland Avenue from St. Charles Place up to Briarcliff [Road].

**Marvin:** Orient us . . . for anyone who doesn't know Atlanta. Place it in relation for what we consider Downtown Atlanta.

**Mendel:** Probably three-and-a-half or four miles east of Downtown. For people who haven't been to the Fox Theatre,<sup>2</sup> Ponce de Leon runs all the way out through Atlanta into DeKalb County.

**Marvin:** That gives us an idea of where you were, about three-and-a-half miles from where people were working at that time. What was your father doing at that time?

**Mendel:** My dad was in the insurance business. In 1911, he went to work for the United States Fidelity and Guaranty Company, known as 'USF&G.' He was 16. He had other jobs at the same time and he was going to night school. By the time he was 21, he was the chief underwriter for southeast for USF&G in their bond department. When I was born, he was in the

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<sup>2</sup> The Fox Theatre is located on Peachtree Street in Midtown Atlanta. The theater was originally planned as part of a large Shrine Temple as evidenced by its Moorish design. The theater was ultimately developed as a lavish movie palace, opening in 1929. The auditorium replicates an Arabian courtyard under a night sky of flickering stars and drifting clouds. The Fox Theatre now hosts cultural and artistic events, and concerts by popular artists.

general insurance business as an agent.

**Marvin:** What year was he born?

**Mendel:** Eighteen ninety-five.

**Marvin:** A long time ago.

**Mendel:** It was . . .

**Marvin:** How about your mother?

**Mendel:** My mother was born in 1899 in Birmingham, Alabama. In fact, they used to claim that her grandparents were the first white people that lived in Birmingham, Alabama.

**Marvin:** How far back does the family go in Birmingham?

**Mendel:** I would imagine the 1870's.

**Marvin:** Interesting. Atlanta wasn't such a booming city either in 1911, I take it.

**Mendel:** It wasn't. Atlanta was amazing. Atlanta had 25,000 people in it right after the War Between the States [American Civil War].<sup>3</sup> It was remarkable that it came back that fast. It must have been 50,000. I haven't looked at the thing, but it couldn't have been a lot of people by 1895.

**Marvin:** Small town. Still a small town, Atlanta?

**Mendel:** Is Atlanta a small town? Far from it. I used to, as part of oral history, take business people in the Fifties. We'd walk down Peachtree [Street]. Every other person would say "hello" to me. We would know each other. If I was standing on a street corner, even just to cross the street, at least two or three cars would stop to see if I needed a ride. People that I knew. These people from out of town said, "How do you know so many people?" I said, "Number one, when I was growing up, Atlanta didn't have but about 200,000 people in the Thirties."<sup>4</sup>

I got into a big fight with a fellow by the name of Pizitz, from Birmingham [Alabama]. Pizitz<sup>5</sup> was a big department store, similar to Rich's.<sup>6</sup> My mother's uncle used to

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<sup>3</sup> The American Civil War, also known as the 'War Between the States,' or simply the 'Civil War' in the United States, was fought from 1861 to 1865, after Southern slave states declared their secession and formed the Confederate States of America. The states that remained in the Union were known as the 'Union' or the 'North.' After four years of bloody combat that left over 600,000 soldiers dead and destroyed much of the South's infrastructure, the Confederacy collapsed, slavery was abolished, and the difficult Reconstruction process of restoring national unity and granting civil rights to freed slaves began.

<sup>4</sup> Atlanta had 270,000 people in 1930 with a total of 715,000 in the metropolitan area. By 1940 it had grown to 300,000 in the city and 820,000 in the metropolitan area.

<sup>5</sup> Pizitz was a major regional department store chain in Alabama, with its flagship store in downtown Birmingham. At its peak it operated 12 other stores, mostly in the Birmingham area with several locations in Huntsville and other Alabama cities. The chain was founded as the Louis Pizitz Dry Goods Co. in 1899 on the site of its flagship building

bring him to the baseball games to see Atlanta play Birmingham. We got into a fight about which was bigger, Birmingham or Atlanta. This was in the middle to late Thirties. It was a knock-down, drag-out fight. I'm very embarrassed to say he was right. Birmingham was bigger than Atlanta.

**Marvin:** When we chatted beforehand, I told you I went into the military. On my first leave when my mother went to the bank downtown, the old Fulton Bank, and I stood outside waiting for her. Just as you said, every other person that came by I could say "hello" to. That's how small of a town Atlanta was in the Fifties.

**Mendel:** I could stand on the street corner now. A hundred million cars could pass by. I wouldn't know anybody.

**Marvin:** . . . is that good or bad on a personal level?

**Mendel:** For me, personally? I would love for it to still be a small town. But for my grandchildren and their children in the future, I think Atlanta being big and the opportunities that they all have for work, [outweighs] whatever discomfort I might have.

**Marvin:** Let's look at where you were. How long did you live on St. Charles?

**Mendel:** Until I went off to [University of] Georgia [Athens—Georgia] in 1946.

**Marvin:** You were there a long time. Through your whole childhood?

**Mendel:** Yes. When I went off to Georgia, I came back and my folks had bought a condo on Briarwood Drive, right off of Briarcliff. An interesting aside as to how that came about. Floyd Brandeis . . . I guess this is very important to have a lot of names in here.

**Marvin:** That's right.

**Mendel:** Floyd Brandeis bought one of the first condominiums that Mr. [Morris] Solloway had built. They were called Solloway Apartments when he built them. Mr. Frank Garson of Lovable

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in downtown Birmingham. It was sold to McRae's in December 1986, and all former Pizitz stores became McRae's. Many of the former Pizitz locations are now closed, but the Pizitz family (via Pizitz Management Group) still owns the buildings of most of its former stores. The Taylor Oral History Collection houses oral histories with the Pizitz brothers and can make them available upon request.

<sup>6</sup> Rich's was a department store retail chain, headquartered in Atlanta that operated in the southern United States from 1867 until 2005. The retailer began in Atlanta as M. Rich & Co. dry goods store and was run by Mauritius Reich (anglicized to Morris Rich), a Hungarian Jewish immigrant. It was renamed M. Rich & Bro. in 1877, when his brother Emanuel was admitted into the partnership, and was again renamed M. Rich & Bros. in 1884 when the third brother Daniel was joined the partnership. In 1929, the company was reorganized and the retail portion of the business became simply, Rich's. Many of the former Rich's stores today form the core of Macy's Central, an Atlanta-based division of Macy's, Inc., which formerly operated as Federated Department Stores, Inc.

[Company]<sup>7</sup> had lent him some money and Mr. Brandeis went broke. Mr. Garson called up my dad and said, “You will buy this unit.” That’s why they moved to Briarwood Drive.

**Marvin:** That would have been in 1946 or 1947?

**Mendel:** Yes.

**Marvin:** What’s at the Solloway Apartments now?

**Mendel:** They’re condos. Briar Hills Condominiums, I guess is the name of it.

**Marvin:** It’s still there?

**Mendel:** Yes. It was the first co-op in Atlanta. Thirty years went by . . . in the 1970’s my dad was president of the co-op. They changed it from a co-op to a condo, because you could not sell your home. You could only sell your stock. It was very hard. People couldn’t finance it. It became a condo so they could borrow money against their individual unit.

**Marvin:** So all these condos that are in Atlanta now owe it to your dad?

**Mendel:** I think we had some more condominiums. There are a lot of things that this town owes to my dad.

**Marvin:** We’ll get to that in a little bit. Tell me what it was like growing up on St. Charles Avenue.

**Mendel:** We never locked a door. We left the windows open. I knew everybody on the street. Everybody knew me. We used to walk to grammar school, Highland Avenue School, which was about six or seven blocks from my house, but we had to cross Ponce de Leon [Avenue]. Ponce de Leon was a major street . . . very little traffic back in the Thirties growing up. We had to worry about the streetcar. It only ran every so often. Somebody from my house would take me to Ponce de Leon, cross me over, and I could walk the rest of the way to school. In the afternoon, somebody would meet me. We’d cross Ponce de Leon, cut through some backyards, and be home.

Atlanta was really a wonderful place. I’ll give you one quick example. When Wiley Post, who was a very famous aviator, got killed in a plane crash with Will Rogers,<sup>8</sup> we were

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<sup>7</sup> Frank Garson (1886-1955) was an Atlanta businessman and philanthropist. He founded the Lovable Company, manufacturing lingerie and brassieres. He was born Frank Gottesman and later changed his name to ‘Garson.’ Garson was active in the United Palestine Appeal, the Jewish National Fund, the Jewish Welfare Board and the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith.

<sup>8</sup> Wiley Hardeman Post (1898-1935) was a famed American aviator during the period known as the Golden Age of Aviation, and was the first pilot to fly solo around the world. Also known for his work in high-altitude flying, Post helped develop one of the first pressure suits and discovered the jet stream. On August 15, 1935, Post and American

sitting on my front porch, some of the kids in the neighborhood. Somebody comes down the street selling extras. [It was the] first time we'd ever seen a newspaper person walking down the street yelling, "Extra, extra." That's the kind of town it was. We were on the outskirts of downtown.

**Marvin:** Suburbs?

**Mendel:** No, not quite.

**Marvin:** In the City of Atlanta, right?

**Mendel:** Right.

**Marvin:** Was St. Charles an all-Jewish street?

**Mendel:** No, but there were some very interesting Jewish affairs there. There was a group of apartments . . . 1050 St. Charles, I believe was the number . . . that doesn't sound right, though. The Wildauer Apartments . . . I don't know how many units, maybe 30 or 40, were 99 percent Jewish. Dr. [Benjamin] Wildauer was a dentist here in Atlanta, whose practice was bought by Dr. Irving Goldstein.

**Marvin:** Are the Wildauer Apartments still there?

**Mendel:** They're condos now. They back up to Druid Hills Presbyterian Church.

**Marvin:** I can't say I'm familiar with it.

**Mendel:** Have you ever heard of Cox Drug Store?

**Marvin:** Yes.

**Mendel:** There's a Cox Drug Store on the corner of St. Charles and [Highland Avenue]. On the opposite side of the street, maybe 400 to 500 feet, are these apartments. They have two red columns and a courtyard.

**Marvin:** I know where it is now, but I never heard the name I don't think. I had friends who lived there.

**Mendel:** The Hollands lived there . . . the Mike Greenblatts lived there . . . the Printzes lived there . . . all of the people that we knew.

**Marvin:** They didn't have block parties, though.

**Mendel:** Didn't know what that was.

**Marvin:** How about brothers and sisters?

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humorist Will Rogers were killed when Post's aircraft crashed on takeoff from a lagoon near Point Barrow in the Territory of Alaska.

**Mendel:** I only had one brother. He died when he was seven. I was five.

**Marvin:** Sisters?

**Mendel:** No. I'm an only child.

**Marvin:** Did you feel neglected as an only child?

**Mendel:** My wife is an only child. We decided we would have at least a half a dozen children.

**Marvin:** How many did you have?

**Mendel:** Four.

**Marvin:** You're missing two.

**Mendel:** We figured four was enough.

**Marvin:** What years were they born? Give me their names.

**Mendel:** Our children . . . our oldest is Lisa. We were married in 1954. She was born in 1955. Tracy, her brother, we wanted originally to name him 'Mendel Romm III,' but we decided not to. So we made Tracy for the three. He's Tracy Mendel Romm. He was born in 1956. Then we had Amy Arogeti, born in 1958. Our baby, Chip, was born on Christmas Day 1960. We call that 'Chipmas Day' for Chip.

**Marvin:** What is his first name?

**Mendel:** Charles, but we called him 'Chip.'

**Marvin:** Just to get the record straight, it's 'Charles' not 'Chip.'

**Mendel:** 'Chip.' He went by 'Chip'.

**Marvin:** But if anybody wanted to look him up, they wouldn't find 'Chip' in the phone book.

**Mendel:** He's passed away. You won't find him anywhere.

**Marvin:** Are all of your [other] children still around?

**Mendel:** Our oldest daughter, Lisa, lives with us. She teaches at Sutton Middle School. Her son, who is our oldest grandson, is a concierge<sup>9</sup> at the Ritz-Carlton<sup>10</sup> downtown. Our son Tracy, who was a teacher, has a doctorate in education. He was a teacher at the [unintelligible: 14:25] International School and then went up to Bloomfield Hills, Michigan as the principal of a very fine private school there. His wife, [Aviva Jill] wanted to come back here and they live near Canton in Cherokee County [Georgia]. They are the executive directors of the [American]

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<sup>9</sup> A concierge is a hotel employee whose job is to assist guests by arranging tours, making theater and restaurant reservations, etc.

<sup>10</sup> Ritz-Carlton Hotel Company is a line of luxury hotels started in Europe and came to North America in 1911. The term 'Ritz-Carlton' or 'Ritz' has come to mean unparalleled luxury.

Herbalists [Guild], headquartered in their home.<sup>11</sup>

**Marvin:** An herbalist society?

**Mendel:** H-E-R-B-A-L-I-S-T.

**Marvin:** I just wanted to be sure . . .

**Mendel:** His wife has written four or five books now. She has changed publishers and is now with one of the big ones [unintelligible: 15:10]. They're usually on alternative medicine. She is now at the age of 36 . . . she graduated from high school when she was 14 . . . she now, at the age of 36, decided to go to medical school. She's probably going to go to Emory [University—Atlanta, Georgia].<sup>12</sup>

**Marvin:** But they don't have an herbalist school at Emory.

**Mendel:** She's changed. At one time she was going to go to acupuncture school . . . She's a midwife.<sup>13</sup> She's delivered a tremendous number of babies and she's well known in that field. Their children . . . it's very interesting . . . have never had any kind of inoculation. We said, "You can't go to school." They said, "Yes, you can. You sign an affidavit that you don't believe in it, because one out of 100,000,000 children could have side effects." They said they didn't have to worry about the school because their children are home schooled. Their oldest, who is 17, is at Kennesaw [State University—Kennesaw, Georgia]. I don't want . . . he hasn't made under a 99 on an exam from being home taught. That's pretty good.

**Marvin:** . . . How about Amy?

**Mendel:** Amy has three children. She's a CPA [Certified Public Accountant], but her license is kind of on hold raising her family. She's married to Robert Arogeti, who is a principal at Habif Arogeti and Wynne, an accounting firm here in Atlanta. Amy's very active in various organizations. She just finished serving this week or this month as co-president of Brandeis

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<sup>11</sup> The American Herbalists Guild was founded in 1989 as a non-profit, educational organization to represent the goals and voices of herbalists specializing in the medicinal use of plants. Their primary goal is to promote a high level of professionalism and education in the study and practice of therapeutic herbalism. Aviva Romm was an early president and the Guild is now located in Asheville, North Carolina.

<sup>12</sup> Aviva Romm did obtain a medical degree from Yale. She and her husband, Tracy, live in West Stockbridge, Massachusetts where Aviva has her own practice in integrative medicine for women and children. Tracy manages the business.

<sup>13</sup> A midwife is a trained health professional who helps healthy women during labor, delivery, and after the birth of their babies. Midwives may deliver babies at birthing centers or at home, but most can also deliver babies at a hospital.

[University National Women's Committee].<sup>14</sup>

**Marvin:** . . . And Chip?

**Mendel:** Chip passed away. He was living in New Zealand. He had married a young lady from New Zealand. After he died, she wanted to go home because her family was there. It's very hard to keep up. They came back to visit once. It's real hard . . . eight years hard.

**Marvin:** Did they have any children?

**Mendel:** They had three. They're all in New Zealand.

**Marvin:** Do you get there?

**Mendel:** We haven't. We are going to go. I don't want to go, but my wife wants to.

**Marvin:** I can understand that. That's an interesting background.

**Mendel:** . . . My background from before is what is interesting. I'm trying to find out about the Romm family. About three months ago, I had a phone call from a man from Rochester, New York who has lived in America for 20 years. He wanted to know if I was Mendel Romm. I said, "Yes." I heard this gasp. He said, "Were you born in 1895?" I said, "Now wait a minute. No, I'm a junior. I'm named after my father." It was kind of strange to him for me to be a junior. I had always thought that . . . my grandfather died when my dad was four years old.

**Marvin:** Here in the United States?

**Mendel:** In Atlanta. It's very hard to really know where he's from, who they were and everything else. We'd always been told that they were from Vilna [Lithuania].<sup>15</sup> Jacob Friend . . . translated at [Georgia Institute of] Tech[nology—Atlanta, Georgia] . . . Russian, scientific stuff. Mr. Friend came here from China. His daughter writes for the *Jewish Georgian*.<sup>16</sup> Her name is Balfoura Friend.

<Interview pauses, then resumes>

**Marvin:** You were talking about how to find out about the Romms from way off.

**Mendel:** This man called me who moved to the United States from Russia 20 years ago. It

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<sup>14</sup> The Brandeis University National Women's Committee is the largest 'friends of a library' group in the world with 48,000 members nationwide. A volunteer fundraising organization, it has contributed more than \$58,000,000 in support of the libraries of Brandeis University, Waltham, Massachusetts. Chapters are located in more than 105 communities nationwide.

<sup>15</sup> Vilna (Lithuanian: Vilnius) is the capital of Lithuania and its largest city. It is located in the southeast part of Lithuania. Vilna was known as the 'Jerusalem of Lithuania,' because during the eighteenth century it was a world center for the study of the *Torah*, and had a large Jewish population.

<sup>16</sup> The *Jewish Georgian* is a bi-monthly publication covering current events, arts and culture, business, education, sports and recreation. Since 1990 the publication has been covering human interest stories impacting Georgia's Jewish communities.

seems that his grandmother was a Romm. His mother asked him to find out about the Romm family, so he'd been doing a lot of research. He knew that there was a Romm here who died at the age of 37 in 1899, and was part of this family. He knew they had a son named 'Mendel,' and that's what he was trying to find out. I've been told by Mr. Friend, who worked at the AA [Ahavath Achim] synagogue,<sup>17</sup> and was a very, very learned man. He had gone from Russia to Shanghai [China] and then came to the [United] States, and was translating Russian scientific things for Georgia Tech and the United States government. He brought some books to my office downtown. He said, "These are your people, they're from Vilna." I said, "That's where I understand we're from." The widow Romm and sons were book publishers of Hebrew text books right after the invention of the printing press. They sent the Romms out, their family, into the paper business all over the world. Just like the Rothschilds had done . . . with money, I wish.

I knew that I had cousins in Philadelphia in the paper business and cousins in New York in the paper business . . . the ones who were left were professors in Brussels [Belgium]. They had been in the paper business in Warsaw [Poland]. But this man tells me I'm all wrong. That we were from a little town near Vilna. . . and Keidan [Lithuania].<sup>18</sup> K-E-I-D-A-N, I believe it is. I've got it written down. We were richer and more important people than the other Romms. He doesn't know if there's any connection. Obviously there was.

**Marvin:** Must have been.

**Mendel:** Back at the same period of time and everything. Our people were in the paper business also. In fact, his grandfather, who was married to Romm, had a paper manufacturing [business] in Warsaw. It's very interesting. I've been corresponding with him and getting some things from the cemetery. My grandfather is buried in Oakland [Cemetery].<sup>19</sup> My great-grandparents are buried here at Oakland. They were Greenblatts . . . G-R-E-E-N-B-L-A-T-T . . . they had

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<sup>17</sup> Ahavath Achim was founded in 1887 in a small room on Gilmer Street. In 1920 they moved to a permanent building at the corner of Piedmont and Gilmer Street. Rabbi Abraham Hirmes was the first rabbi of the then Orthodox congregation. In 1928 Rabbi Harry Epstein became the rabbi and the congregation began to shift to Conservatism, which they joined in 1952. The synagogue is now on Peachtree Battle. Cantor Isaac Goodfriend, a Holocaust survivor, joined the congregation in 1966 and remained until his retirement. Rabbi Epstein retired in 1982, becoming Rabbi Emeritus and Rabbi Arnold Goodman assumed the rabbinic post. He too retired in 2002 and Rabbi Neil Sandler is now (2013) the rabbi.

<sup>18</sup> 'Keidan' is the Yiddish name. In Lithuanian it is 'Kedainai.'

<sup>19</sup> Oakland Cemetery is the oldest cemetery and one of the largest green spaces, in Atlanta. Many notable Georgians are buried at Oakland including Margaret Mitchell, author of *Gone with the Wind*; Dr. Joseph Jacobs, owner of the pharmacy where John Pemberton first sold Coca-Cola as a soft drink; Bobby Jones, the only golfer to win the Grand Slam, the United States Amateur, United States Open, British Amateur and the Open Championship in the same year; as well as former Georgia governors and Atlanta mayors. Oakland is an excellent example of a Victorian-style cemetery and contains numerous monuments and mausoleums that are of great beauty and historical significance.

about 10 or 11 children. I don't know exactly. It was very interesting. The women all remained very devout Jewish women. One was a 'Bach.'

**Marvin:** B-A-C-H?

**Mendel:** B-A-C-H. There was a whole Bach family here. We'll get to that . . . There were Abelsons. There were Silvermans. Let's see if I can remember all of them. My grandmother was Romm, then a Minsk. I'll remember the others. The men all became either very Reform<sup>20</sup> or had very little religion at all. In fact, one of my daddy's uncles became a Baptist elder in Knoxville [Tennessee]. When the Greenblatts first came to the [United States], they stopped in Knoxville. The reason it's connected is that my grandfather Romm married my grandmother in Knoxville. They had one child there, my daddy's older sister, born in 1891.

My uncle, Sol Romm, was born in 1893 in Birmingham. He came to Atlanta because his in-laws were here. He had a fruit store on Walton Street in 1895. He died in 1899. The men, Sam Greenblatt and Mike Greenblatt were in the Spanish-American War.<sup>21</sup> They didn't have middle names. Very few Jewish people at that time had middle names. They didn't want to be 'NMI' ['No Middle Initial'], so Sam became 'Sam R. Greenblatt' and Mike became 'Mike A. Greenblatt.' I asked him what the 'A' stood for. It was 'Angelo.' Michael Angelo Greenblatt. These were by daddy's uncles. Morris Greenblatt moved to Jacksonville [Florida]. Morris must not have only been but about six or seven years older than my dad. In other words, his uncles were youngsters as he was growing up. No father . . . so they became like father figures. It's very interesting, because my dad was the president of Gate City Lodge of B'nai B'rith<sup>22</sup> at an early age. He was the state president of B'nai B'rith. He was a leader in everything he did. I tried to get inspired by him, but I must not have gone for it.

<sup>20</sup> A division within Judaism especially in North America and Western Europe. 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.

<sup>21</sup> The Spanish-American War was a conflict between Spain and the United States that started in 1898. It only lasted 10 weeks. The main issue was Cuban independence, on whose side we were. The flash point was the mysterious sinking of the American battleship *Maine* in the harbor in Havana, Cuba. The resulting uproar ("Remember the *Maine*!") caused President McKinley and Congress to declare war on Spain. The conflict eventually spread to the Philippines. Ten weeks later Spain sued for peace. The United States acquired Cuba, the Philippines, Guam and Puerto Rico as colonies.

<sup>22</sup> B'nai B'rith International (from Hebrew: "Children of the Covenant") is the oldest Jewish service organization in the world. B'nai B'rith states that it is committed to the security and continuity of the Jewish people and the State of Israel and combating antisemitism and bigotry. Its mission is to unite persons of the Jewish faith and to enhance Jewish identity through strengthening Jewish family life, to provide broad-based services for the benefit of senior citizens, and to facilitate advocacy and action on behalf of Jews throughout the world.

**Marvin:** Let's talk about your mother for a moment . . .

**Mendel:** Her family were Weinstains . . . W-E-I-N-S-T-E-I-N. Her mother was just a young child when they moved to Birmingham [Alabama]. I'll have to go back and look at the dates and everything. My mother's father died when she was six years old . . . My grandma and he had a men's clothing store. My grandmother let some people run it for her. She ran a boarding house. She wanted me to know there's a difference between a boarding house and a rooming house. She ran a boarding house.

**Marvin:** She provided food?

**Mendel:** Kosher<sup>23</sup> food. People would come to Birmingham and would go to Mrs. Goldman's for tea. Her sister and brother-in-law and their children . . . moved in with her, in this big house. My mother grew up in Birmingham and she went to Birmingham Southern College [Birmingham, Alabama], I guess it was. By the time she was about 19, she was the head bookkeeper for Pizitz Department Store<sup>24</sup> . . . The old lady Pizitz [Minnie Smolian Pizitz] and my grandmother were best friends. My grandmother's brother had the jewelry and handbag departments at Pizitz. My wife's family, her uncles, both worked for Pizitz. They were from Birmingham.

My grandmother was a remarkable person. Because of her, they had a Jewish congregation in Birmingham. They had a meeting with about 12 or 13 families. They voted seven to six, or six to five, that it was to be Reform. She was a charter member of Temple Emanu-El<sup>25</sup> in Birmingham. Meantime, she helped them form the first Orthodox<sup>26</sup> synagogue there [Temple Beth-El].<sup>27</sup> She's a member of both of them. She was head of the *chevra*

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<sup>23</sup> Kosher/*Kashrut* is the set of Jewish dietary laws. Food that may be consumed according to *halakhah* (Jewish law) is termed 'kosher' in English. Food that is not in accordance with Jewish law is called '*treif*.' The word 'kosher' has become English vernacular, a colloquialism meaning 'proper,' 'legitimate,' 'genuine,' 'fair,' or 'acceptable.'

<sup>24</sup> Pizitz was a major regional department store chain in Alabama, with its flagship store in downtown Birmingham. At its peak it operated 12 other stores, mostly in the Birmingham area with several locations in Huntsville and other Alabama cities. The chain was founded as the Louis Pizitz Dry Goods Co. in 1899 on the site of its flagship building in downtown Birmingham. It was sold to McRae's in December 1986, and all former Pizitz stores became McRae's. Many of the former Pizitz locations are now closed, but the Pizitz family (via Pizitz Management Group) still owns the buildings of most of its former stores.

<sup>25</sup> Temple Emanu-El is a Reform Jewish congregation. The community first held *Rosh Ha-Shanah* and *Yom Kippur* celebrations in 1881. Before the synagogue was built, the community met at the Cumberland Presbyterian Church. Land for the synagogue was purchased in 1884 and the building was inaugurated in 1889.

<sup>26</sup> Orthodox Judaism is a traditional branch of Judaism that strictly follows the Written *Torah* and the Oral Law concerning prayer, dress, food, sex, family relations, social behavior, the Sabbath day, holidays and more.

<sup>27</sup> Temple Beth-El was founded in 1907 and was originally on the Northside of Birmingham and was affiliated with Orthodox Judaism. Today it is affiliated with Conservative Judaism. The current sanctuary was built in 1926 on Highland Avenue on the Southside. Its current rabbi is Rabbi Randall Konigsburg. (2016)

*kadisha*.<sup>28</sup> Is that right word?

**Marvin:** . . . the burial society . . .

**Mendel:** Yes. Real interesting things she did and accomplished. My mother's older sisters . . . one married . . . in the First World War . . . these girls were 18 to 20 something years old . . . the oldest one married a very well-to-do fellow from New York City with a Reform background. His family had been in America for generations. He was gassed during the First World War. His parents, being very well-to-do, signed all the papers to get him out of the VA [Veterans' Administration] Hospital. He lost all of his rights.

By the time the [Great] Depression<sup>29</sup> came he really needed some help. In fact, it was real interesting. My cousin, their son, during the Depression stayed with us a couple of times . . . you talk about going back and forth, came down and stayed with us . . . great guy. He became the Dean of the School of Architecture at [University of] Kansas [Lawrence, Kansas]. He's retired now and [living] in Chapel Hill [North Carolina]. He had all kinds of degrees from the University of North Carolina [Chapel Hill, North Carolina], North Carolina State [University—Raleigh, North Carolina], and Georgia Tech. He was close to being a bigger brother at times when I was a kid.

Another sister married a man by the name of Reed . . . R-E-E-D. They were from Massachusetts. Their claim to fame, other than having lived in this country for a few generations, [was that] their first cousin was a fellow by the name of 'Victor Brenner.' He was the sculptor of the Lincoln head penny. He went to jail, because he put his initials, 'V-B,' on the things which was against the law, I think. [They] must have slapped his hand in addition to that. My cousin's name is Victor Brenner.<sup>30</sup>

**Marvin:** B-R-E-N-N-E-R?

**Mendel:** B-R-E-N-N-E-R. His older brother was very interesting with an Atlanta connection.

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<sup>28</sup> An organization of Jewish men and women who see to it that the bodies of Jews are prepared for burial according to Jewish tradition. The task is considered a laudable as the recipient cannot return the gift. It is referred to as a 'good deed of truth.'

<sup>29</sup> The Great Depression was a severe worldwide economic depression in the decade preceding World War II. The time of the Great Depression varied across nations, but in most countries it started in about 1929 and lasted until the late 1930's or early 1940's. It was the longest, most widespread, and deepest depression of the twentieth century.

<sup>30</sup> Victor David Brenner (1871-1924) was a sculptor, engraver, and medalist known primarily as the designer of the United States Lincoln penny. Brenner was born to Jewish parents in Siauliai, Lithuania. His name at birth was Viktoras Baranauskas, but he changed the name to Victor David Brenner, because this made it easier to obtain American citizenship. Brenner placed his initials "VDB" at the bottom of the reverse between the wheat ear stalks. Widespread criticism of the initials' prominence resulted in their removal midway through 1909, the design's first year of issue. In 1918, Brenner's initials returned as small letters below Lincoln's shoulder, where they remain today.

Solon Chadwick Reed married . . . Sam Rothberg . . . have you ever heard of Sam Rothberg here in Atlanta . . . ?

**Marvin:** Yes.

**Mendel:** . . . married his niece.

**Marvin:** Sam Rothberg's brother had been the assistant attorney general of the state of New Jersey or something like that. Solon had political aspirations. He and his wife joined a church before he ran for Congress. I don't know if he ever ran or not. Their children were raised as Christians. They were shocked when they, already out of their teens, found out about all of their Jewish relatives in the South.

**Marvin:** I know one thing right now, Mendel. I'm glad I don't have to diagram all of this. You're working on it I assume.

**Mendel:** I'm really not. There are so many . . . great stories that go with this oral history . . . My daddy and his cousin, Ben Bach, bought a motorcycle. They used to ride up and down Piedmont [Avenue], because it was a dirt road.

**Marvin:** Give me an approximate year.

**Mendel:** It has to be in the late 1910's, early 1920's, I would have to guess. They blew a tire. They didn't have any money to replace the tire. They swapped the motorcycle for a horse.

**Marvin:** That's an interesting change.

**Mendel:** The horse was blind and they didn't know it. To me, these are great stories about Atlanta. They used to camp out at Stone Mountain.<sup>31</sup> It used to take them all day to get to Stone Mountain from Downtown. They used to go camping out at a lake out near Oglethorpe [University—Atlanta, Georgia] . . .

**Marvin:** Silver Lake?

**Mendel:** Silver Lake. The streetcar stopped at the Fox Theatre. This is before our time. We used to be able to get all the way to Oglethorpe. They had to rent a horse-and-buggy where the Georgian Terrace Hotel<sup>32</sup> is now to be able to go that way. They had to walk . . . there was a park

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<sup>31</sup> At its summit, Stone Mountain's elevation is 1,686 feet. Now the site of Stone Mountain Park, it is well-known not only for its geology, but also for the enormous bas-relief carving on its north face, the largest in the world. The carving depicts three figures of the Confederate States of America: Stonewall Jackson, Robert E. Lee, and Jefferson Davis. Stone Mountain was once used as a rock quarry and was also the site of Ku Klux Klan activities. It was purchased by the State of Georgia in 1958.

<sup>32</sup> The Georgian Terrace Hotel in Midtown Atlanta was designed by architect William Lee Stoddart in a Beaux-Arts style intended to evoke the architecture of Paris. Construction began in 1910 and the hotel opened 1911. A 19-story

where City Hall East is now. There was a Sears, Roebuck building. There was a park across the street. They had to walk from the Fox Theatre down there to go to this park. It became a baseball park . . . it was an amusement park when they were kids. Saying that . . . I lived less than a mile [from there] on St. Charles . . . [which] practically dead ended into the baseball field. When my daddy was a kid, that was just wilderness and country.

**Marvin:** I don't know if you noticed in the newspaper in the past week. There was an article about the tree in the park. Evidently there is still a tree standing in the old Cracker<sup>33</sup> ballpark [Ponce de Leon Ballpark] there.

**Mendel:** That's where Home Depot<sup>34</sup> . . . I don't remember the tree.

**Marvin:** I don't either. I've been to the Cracker . . .

**Mendel:** I used to sit on the railroad tracks up there and watch the ball games sometimes when I couldn't afford to go, so I'm real familiar with it. There used to be a level from the baseball field that went up on a little hill. There could have been a tree right in there, if I remember.

**Marvin:** That's what they talked about. It was on a hill. I didn't remember it either. I'd been to the park only as a kid.

**Mendel:** Did you ever go to Boys' High/<sup>35</sup>Tech High School<sup>36</sup> football games?

**Marvin:** Yes.

**Mendel:** Very exciting.

**Marvin:** I went to Boys' High. You couldn't miss those games.

**Mendel:** I lived across the street on St. Charles from a fellow named Clint Castleberry.<sup>37</sup>

wing was added in 1991 and major renovation was completed in 2009. The Georgian Terrace is a member of Historic Hotel of America the official program of the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

<sup>33</sup> The Atlanta Crackers were minor league baseball teams based in Atlanta between 1901 and 1965. The Crackers were Atlanta's home team until the Atlanta Braves moved from Milwaukee in 1966. The Crackers played in Ponce de Leon Park from 1907 until a fire destroyed the all-wood stadium in 1923. Spiller Field (a stadium later also called 'Ponce de Leon Park'), became their home starting in the 1924 season. The new park was constructed around a magnolia tree that became part of the outfield.

<sup>34</sup> In this instance, Mendel Romm is speaking of the Home Depot store on Ponce de Leon Avenue. The Home Depot was founded in Atlanta in 1978 by Bernie Marcus and Arthur Blank and has grown to be the largest home improvement retailer in the United States. The first two Home Depot stores opened on June 22, 1979, in Atlanta. The Home Depot operates stores in 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands and Guam, all ten provinces of Canada, as well as Mexico. (2014)

<sup>35</sup> Boys' High School was founded in 1924 and is now known as 'Henry W. Grady High School.' It is part of the Atlanta Public School System. It has had many notable alumni, including S. Truett Cathy, the founder of Chick-fil-A. It is located in Midtown Atlanta.

<sup>36</sup> Tech High School was only for boys interested in the applied sciences (electricity, automobiles, aviation, skilled manufacturing, etc.). Tech High and Boys' High merged in 1947 to become coed Grady High School.

<sup>37</sup> Clinton Dillard Castleberry Jr. (1923- ) played football for Georgia Institute of Technology in the early 1940's, where he enjoyed an amazing winning career. Castleberry joined the Army Air Force after Pearl Harbor and

**Marvin:** I know Clint.

**Mendel:** He was probably the greatest football player that ever went to Georgia Tech. [World War II] ended his life.

**Marvin:** That's interesting about the background. One of the things I was going to ask you is how did your father meet your mother or your mother your father, but there's been an inter-relationship between the two families for years it appears.

**Mendel:** I'm sure that . . . my dad had relatives in Birmingham that probably told him about this girl. Two cute stories. My Aunt Lena, who was born in 1891, never married. She was the first female public stenographer in Atlanta. She had an office in the Candler Building. Later on she became manager of the Mayfair Club<sup>38</sup> during [World War II], because the manager had gone off to the service. My Aunt Lena was very protective of her family. My dad had an offer by a law firm that he was a clerk for at the same time [as he was] working for the insurance company. He was also a mail clerk for the Central of Georgia [Railway].<sup>39</sup> He also had a newspaper route before going to school. These people wanted to send him to Harvard Law School [Cambridge, Massachusetts]. My Aunt Lena said, "There's no way. We need your income to support the family." They had four half-sisters and brothers by that time. So my daddy didn't go to Harvard. He went to Georgia Tech night school. My folks got married on April 1, 1924. The reason they got married on April 1 was my mother said that if she changed her mind, she was going to say, "April Fools!" She told me that all of her life. Aunt Lena wrote her a letter, which my mother saved. Lena Romm never had a better friend than my mother. In fact, most people never had a better friend than my mother. Lena Romm wrote her a letter and said, "Tootsie, you're so cute. You've got so much on the ball. You can find somebody else. But we need Mendel to support the family."

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became a pilot of the Martin B-26 Marauder, known as the 'widow maker.' He was stationed in North Africa. On November 7, 1944 Castleberry took off from Liberia in his plane, the 'Dream Girl,' and flew toward Dakar, Senegal. His plane disappeared and Castleberry and the crew were never seen again. He left behind a pregnant wife. He is the only Georgia Tech football player to have their number retired (19).

<sup>38</sup> The Mayfair Club opened in 1938 at 1456 Spring Street in Midtown Atlanta and was a focal point of Jewish life in the city for more than 25 years. The club was founded in 1930 and first met at the Biltmore Hotel. The club was visited by Eleanor Roosevelt, Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir, mayors Ivan Allen and William Berry Hartsfield, senators Herman Talmadge and Richard Russell, and Governor Carl Sanders. Fire destroyed the Mayfair Club on December 4, 1964.

<sup>39</sup> Central of Georgia Railway started as the Central Rail Road and Canal Company in 1833. The railroad ran from Macon, Georgia to Savannah creating a link between Chattanooga, Tennessee to seaports on the Atlantic Ocean. Over the years they steadily acquired other railroads linking Columbus, Augusta, and other cities in Georgia as well as cities in eastern Alabama. Today the Central of Georgia exists only as a paper railroad within Norfolk Southern Railway group.

**Marvin:** They got married anyway.

<End Tape 1, Side 1>

<Begin Tape 2, Side 1>

**Marvin:** We're now on Tape 2. This is still Marvin Weintraub talking to Mendel Romm Junior. Mendel, we were talking about the marriage of your parents and their interaction with Aunt Lena. You mentioned your father and how early he started . . . I know we were talking about your mother and her relationship . . . but let's go to your father again for a moment because at age 16 you said he was working for the insurance. . .

**Mendel:** . . . four jobs.

**Marvin:** Four jobs. Mention them again please.

**Mendel:** He was the mail clerk for the Central of Georgia [Railway]. That work consisted of picking up the mail in the morning and putting it on the *Nancy Hanks*<sup>40</sup> to Savannah and going back in the afternoon and getting the mail from Savannah to take to the office. He also had a newspaper route. There are great stories about that, because during the Race Riot of 1906 or 1907,<sup>41</sup> he was delivering newspapers. He was mail clerk for the USF&G, and he was a law clerk for one of the most prestigious law firms in Atlanta . . .

**Marvin:** . . . all at the age of 16 . . .

**Mendel:** . . . and going to school at night.

**Marvin:** Which school?

**Mendel:** Boys' High.

**Marvin:** Boys' High, at night?

**Mendel:** At night.

**Marvin:** I didn't know Boys' High had a night school.

**Mendel:** Whatever they had for the city of Atlanta for night.

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<sup>40</sup> The *Nancy Hanks* was a popular Central of Georgia Railway passenger train in Georgia running daily between Atlanta and Savannah. It was named after a race horse that was named for Abraham Lincoln's mother. The *Nancy*, as it was affectionately known, operated in 1892 and 1893 and bore the image of the famed race horse.

<sup>41</sup> This was a mass civil disturbance in Atlanta that began the evening of September 22 and lasted until September 26, 1906. An estimated 25 to 40 blacks were murdered and scores more were wounded. Considerable property damage was also done. On September 22, 1906 Atlanta newspapers reported four alleged assaults on local white women by black men in lurid detail. Soon, some 10,000 white men and boys began gathering on Decatur Street in the Five Points area downtown. While the newspaper story was the catalyst, the deeper causes lay in increasing racial tensions between blacks and whites, Jim Crow segregation, and Reconstruction politics. Attempts to calm the mob failed and it turned violent. The militia was summoned and streetcar service suspended in an attempt to drive the rioters from the streets. There was even a gun battle between the militias and armed black men. It took four days for the riot to be brought under control.

**Marvin:** I've interviewed others who attended Boys' High, but no one has ever mentioned a night school. That's interesting.

**Mendel:** I may have made up the night school at Boys' High. He had to go to school somewhere to be able to go to Georgia Tech. It's very interesting. He took a commerce course at Tech, and that commerce division which was at . . .

**Marvin:** Are you talking about the University of Georgia?

**Mendel:** . . . Georgia Institute of Technology.<sup>42</sup>

**Marvin:** Georgia School of Technology at the time.

**Mendel:** Right. They had a night school there which gave a business degree. That became, not too long after my dad graduated as a Tech graduate, it became Georgia State University. So my dad was an alumnus of both Tech and Georgia State.

**Marvin:** The night school at Georgia Tech downtown . . . that met on Luckie Street at that time, as I recall.

**Mendel:** I have no idea.

**Marvin:** I think it met at the Baptist Tabernacle, if I'm not mistaken. Your dad got a degree from Tech. What year?

**Mendel:** [In] 1918. In Commerce?

**Marvin:** Which would be called what today?

**Mendel:** BBA [Bachelor of Business Administration].

**Marvin:** People don't realize names change today . . .

**Mendel:** My dad joined Fulton Lodge of the Masons.<sup>43</sup> This is part of the oral history of the city of Atlanta. I'm having to give it to you second hand. He went through the different degrees and became a Shriner.<sup>44</sup> Back in the 1920's, no Jews could get into the Yaarab Temple.<sup>45</sup> For a

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<sup>42</sup> The Georgia Institute of Technology (commonly referred to as 'Georgia Tech') is a public research university in Atlanta, Georgia, in the United States. It is a part of the University System of Georgia. The educational institution was founded in 1885 as the Georgia School of Technology as part of Reconstruction plans to build an industrial economy in the post-Civil War Southern United States.

<sup>43</sup> Freemasonry is a fraternal organization that traces its origins to the local fraternities of stonemasons in the fourteenth century. It exists in various forms all over the world today. Masons are members of the organization. The degrees of masonry are Apprentice, Journeyman and Master Mason. The basic local organizational unit of freemasonry is the lodge, each of which governs its own jurisdiction.

<sup>44</sup> The Ancient Arabic Order of the Nobles of the Mystic Shrine, commonly known as 'Shriners,' was established in 1870 and is part of the Freemasons. Now called 'Shriners International,' it has nearly 200 chapters around the world. It is best known for the Shriners Hospitals for Children it administers and the red fezzes that the members wear.

period of about six or eight years they didn't take any Jews at the Yaarab Temple. My daddy's friends were opposing people . . . they were blackballed. My dad decided who the people were who were blackballing these fellows. He got a group of people and they went and sat behind the ones they thought were doing the blackballing. Dad said he went over to Mr. 'So and So' and said, "We've been trying to get some of my friends in here. They keep getting blackballed. I want to tell you something. We're sitting here tonight. If these guys get blackballed, there will never be another person to join here at Temple. We'll blackball everybody." The Jewish guys got in that night. They never had any more trouble.

**Marvin:** How did your father get in, in the first place?

**Mendel:** Different . . .

**Marvin:** . . . a different group . . .

**Mendel:** . . . my dad, yes. Times go by pretty fast. My dad grew up by the Atlanta Boys Club.<sup>46</sup> I'm trying to think of who the other Jewish fellow was in it with him. All the rest of the people were Christians . . . 'Scrappy' O'Sullivan [sp],<sup>47</sup> the guy that owned Bailey's Supreme Coffee. Some of them that I remember . . . later on I asked my dad why he wasn't *bar mitzvahed*.<sup>48</sup> His answer was that he was too poor. He didn't have time to stop . . . he must have been selling newspapers . . . whatever he did early on before he was 16. He didn't have time. He had to go out and make a living for his family. My dad was on the Board of Trustees of AA [Ahavath Achim] synagogue for over 50 years. The only reason he joined the Temple,<sup>49</sup> was because my mother was . . .

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<sup>45</sup> The Yaarab Shrine Temple was originally located in what is now the Fox Theatre in Midtown Atlanta. The original location was intended to be the headquarters for a 5,000 member Shriners organization in partnership with movie mogul William Fox, who was building theaters around the country at the time. The theater opened on December 25, 1929 but went bankrupt during the Depression. In the 1930's both William Fox and the Shriners lost their economic interests in the building. The Shriners then built the Yaarab Shrine Temple, which is currently located at 400 Ponce de Leon NE in Atlanta.

<sup>46</sup> Boys & Girls Clubs of America is a national organization of local chapters which provide after-school programs for young people. The organization, which holds a congressional charter under Title 36 of the United States Code, has its headquarters in Atlanta. The first Boys club was founded in 1860, and they joined with other clubs to become a national organization in 1906.

<sup>47</sup> Romm may be talking about Maurice O'Sullivan, who was associated with Southland Coffee Co., Inc.

<sup>48</sup> Hebrew for 'son of commandment.' A rite of passage for Jewish boys aged 13 years and one day. At that time, a Jewish boy is considered a responsible adult for most religious purposes. He is now duty bound to keep the commandments, he puts on *tefillin*, and may be counted to the *minyan* quorum for public worship. He celebrates the *bar mitzvah* by being called up to the reading of the *Torah* in the synagogue, usually on the next available Sabbath after his Hebrew birthday.

<sup>49</sup> The Temple on Peachtree Street in Midtown Atlanta is the city's oldest synagogue, dedicated in 1877. The main sanctuary, constructed in 1931, is on the National Register of Historic Places. The Reformed congregation now totals 1500 families (2014).

**Marvin:** That was after marriage.

**Mendel:** Yes. He belonged . . . back in the Thirties we belonged to three different congregations.

**Marvin:** Outside of the city of Atlanta and a few other places, people don't understand belonging to more than one congregation. It seems to be an Atlanta trait more than most places.

**Mendel:** I think any place in the South, you had some people who were upper middle class, had some money . . . and had a Jewish heart. Some people looked down on others for whatever reason, but people who believed in family and religion and everything else . . . my daddy thought it was very important that there was some support for the other congregations.

**Marvin:** During married life, he supported both AA and the Temple?

**Mendel:** Yes. In fact . . . the only one I always remember . . . I was about going to services . . . my mother and sister were going to the Temple for the holidays. They compromised. They'd go to the Temple for the first day, because we only celebrated one day. They'd go to the synagogue for the second day. Whenever they'd give my dad *aliyah*,<sup>50</sup> they always had to give it to him on the second day because he was not there the first day.

**Marvin:** Let me go back to where we stopped the previous tape. [Your] Aunt Lena had written a letter . . .

**Mendel:** . . . to my mother, which she saved all these years. My mother was so good to Aunt Lena. These little stories are interesting to me and my family. My daddy hated carrots and raisins salad. My Aunt Lena lived with them. When World War II came . . . I was already 10 or 12 years old . . . my dad's secretaries would leave to go get better jobs. My mother became his secretary and bookkeeper. They'd go to work together. Aunt Lena ended up moving in with us. She fixed the meals. This was after she kind of retired. [She made] carrots and raisins every night or apples and raisins . . . two things my daddy didn't like. They'd have them every night.

**Marvin:** I'd say every night's a little too often. Let's go back . . . I just wanted to finish that story that we stopped there . . . your Jewish education . . .

**Mendel:** None.

**Marvin:** None?

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<sup>50</sup> *Aliyah* in Hebrew means 'ascent' or 'going up.' An *aliyah* is the calling of a member of a Jewish congregation to the *bimah* for a segment of reading from the *Torah*. The person who receives the *aliyah* goes up to the *bimah* before the reading and recites a blessing thanking G-d for giving the *Torah* to the Jewish nation. After the reading, the recipient then recites another concluding blessing.

**Mendel:** Very interesting. I learned at the Temple. As I've gotten older, I realized the reason for it. I've justified it. [Rabbi] David Marx<sup>51</sup> wanted us to be good Americans. Most of us were either first generation or second generation Americans, and/or were newcomers in the Thirties from Europe. He wanted us to be good Americans. I learned the Gettysburg Address<sup>52</sup> in Sunday school. I learned the life of George Washington<sup>53</sup> at Sunday school. My classmates at Sunday school, I think half of them married Christians.

**Marvin:** You virtually had no Jewish education.

**Mendel:** The reason I got involved . . . other than my grandmother who used to tell me about how we observed holidays is that my best friend from the first grade on was the son of one of the wealthy Atlanta society people. Our mothers became good friends. Every afternoon during the [Great] Depression, their chauffeur would pick us up at school and either take us to their house or the next day my house to play. When his folks went to the movies, they had to take me. My folks took him.

When we got to Boys' High, I felt a strange . . . it wasn't the same thing that we had all those years. I didn't think anything of it. I was too caught up in going to high school. That Christmas holidays, his dad died . . . my mother went over to pay a condolence call. [His friend's mother] was so upset, mighty upset. Her son had joined a fraternity. I'm trying to think of what the name of it was . . . [Mendel's mother] said, "What's wrong with that?" [His friend's mother] said, "They asked him in September when he started school." The daddy, who was a country guy from West Georgia, asked [my friend], "Did they ask Mendel?" [My friend] said, "No." [So his father said], "If they don't ask Mendel, you can't belong." The day after his daddy died, he joined this group. It really upset me. If he had asked me, "Hey, I've got a chance to . . ." [I would have said], "Go ahead and do it." That's when I joined AZA [Grand Order of

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<sup>51</sup> Rabbi David Marx was a long-time rabbi at the Temple in Atlanta, Georgia. He led the move toward Reform Judaism practices. He served as rabbi from 1895 to 1946, when he retired and Rabbi Jacob Rothschild came to the Temple.

<sup>52</sup> The Gettysburg Address is a speech by President Abraham Lincoln, one of the best-known in American history. It was delivered by Lincoln during the American Civil War, on the afternoon of Thursday, November 19, 1863, at the dedication of the Soldiers' National Cemetery in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, four-and-a-half months after the Union defeated the Confederacy at the Battle of Gettysburg.

<sup>53</sup> George Washington (1732-1799) was the first President of the United States from 1789 to 1797. Washington was the Commander-in-Chief of the Continental Army during the American Revolutionary War, and one of the Founding Fathers of the United States.

the Aleph Zadik Aleph].<sup>54</sup>

**Marvin:** What was your friend's name?

**Mendel:** Quinton Dobbs.

**Marvin:** D-O-B-B-S?

**Mendel:** Yes. The Dobbs family . . . was one of the major owners of the Life Insurance Company of Georgia. We've seen each other a few times since then. He became an alcoholic and had been married two or three times. Everybody else in Atlanta bought Coca-Cola stock. His daddy bought Pepsi-Cola stock. Everybody made fun of him.

**Marvin:** He made money on Pepsi-Cola, too.

**Mendel:** I'm sure they did. But that's how I got interested in learning more about Judaism.

**Marvin:** You did that all on your own then, essentially?

**Mendel:** Yes.

**Marvin:** Through AZA.

**Mendel:** Yes. I went to [University of] Georgia. The reason I loved my fraternity there was [Robert] Bobby Lipshutz<sup>55</sup> and Morris Mason said, "How could I not be a Phi Ep?<sup>56</sup> How could I go home and see all my friends and not be Phi Ep?" My daddy was a founder of the AEPi [Alpha Epsilon Pi]<sup>57</sup> chapter at Georgia Tech, after he graduated, because the other Jewish fraternity was not nice to all the Jewish kids. AEPi was a legacy. I joined the TEPs<sup>58</sup> instead. It's very interesting, because we had a mixture of people, religious wise. People like me with very little religion, very Orthodox people who did *tefillin*.<sup>59</sup> Everybody else chipped in to be

<sup>54</sup> The Grand Order of the Aleph Zadik Aleph (AZA) is an international youth-led fraternal organization for Jewish teenagers, founded in 1924. It currently exists as the male wing of B'nai B'rith Youth Organization, an independent non-profit organization. AZA's sister organization, for teenage girls, is the B'nai B'rith Girls.

<sup>55</sup> Robert Lipshutz (1921-2010) was an American attorney when served as White House Counsel from President Jimmy Carter from 1977 to 1979. He played a back channel role in the negotiations between Egypt and Israel that led to the signing of the Camp David Accords in 1978.

<sup>56</sup> Phi Epsilon Pi (PEP) was a predominantly Jewish fraternity active between 1904 and 1970. At its peak it had at least 48 chapters across the United States and Canada. In 1970 PEP was absorbed by Zeta Beta Tau.

<sup>57</sup> Alpha Epsilon Pi ('AEPi' or 'AEPi') is the global Jewish college fraternity with active chapters in the United States, Canada, United Kingdom, France, and Israel with a membership of over 9,000 undergraduates. Alpha Epsilon Pi is a Jewish fraternity, though non-discriminatory and open to all who are willing to espouse its purpose and values. (2014)

<sup>58</sup> Tau Epsilon Phi (TEΦ, commonly pronounced 'TEP') is a fraternity founded by ten Jewish men at Columbia University in New York in 1910 as a response to the existence of similar organizations which would not admit Jewish members.

<sup>59</sup> *Tefillin* are two small black boxes with black straps attached to them containing scrolls of parchment inscribed with verses from the *Torah*. Observant Jewish men are required to place one box on their head and tie the other one on their arm during weekday morning prayers.

there in the mornings and in the evenings, so they'd have a *minyan*.<sup>60</sup> It was country boys and city boys. It was the way I thought you're supposed to live.

**Marvin:** Little different environment. Talk about Boys' High School while you were there.

**Mendel:** Boys' High School was a great place. Mr. H.O. Smith, the principal, was in his declining years I think when I went there. Mr. Hal Halsey [sp] was the history teacher. His assistant principal was also the disciplinarian. There were some great guys there. The French teacher, Kelly I believe was his name . . . was also the boxing coach. My cousin Milton was on the boxing team. Since this is Jewish history, I've got to give you a little of this. The boxing team went to the Cherokee Nation to fight and have breakfast. My cousin Milton, who came from the same kind of background basically that I did, had bacon and ham. Mr. Kelly said, "Jews aren't supposed to eat that." That evening Milton got knocked out in the first round. When he woke up Mr. Kelly said, "I told you Jews weren't supposed to eat bacon and ham."

Boys' High was very disproportionate Jewish-wise than our status in the community. I doubt if, in Atlanta, one percent of the people were Jewish. Yet at Boys' High School, there were more than ten percent Jewish. The big rival was Tech High School which shared the main building with us on the block. The Tech High kids used to say, <Mendel sings> "Join the Jewish Navy, eats your grits and gravy, fight, fight, fight for Palestine." That was their theme song. They used to go singing up and down the halls.

It was a great place to grow up. It was a good prep school. As Morris Abram had told me one time about public schools, it was the equivalent of a White-Anglo-Saxon Protestant [WASP]<sup>61</sup> private school. The only reason they allowed Jews was Catholics had their own schools. Blacks couldn't go there. The only reason they allowed Jews was because there wasn't enough of us to be able to afford to have another school. It was a great prep school. People at Boys' High School went on to bigger and better things.

**Marvin:** Are you a member of your alumni association?

**Mendel:** Once in a while.

**Marvin:** Do you contribute \$20 a year?

**Mendel:** No, I'm getting ready to join as a life member. I don't know how long. I guess I

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<sup>60</sup> A *minyan* refers to the quorum of 10 Jewish adults required for certain religious obligations. According to many non-Orthodox streams of Judaism adult females count in the *minyan*.

<sup>61</sup> White Anglo-Saxon Protestant (WASP) is an informal, sometimes disparaging term, used to describe a closed circle of high-status and highly influential white Americans of English Protestant ancestry.

might live five more years.

**Marvin:** It was a great school.

**Mendel:** One of my heroes in Atlanta history was Mr. Shorty Doyal.<sup>62</sup> He was the football coach and he was also the track coach. I used to be fast as lightening. In training for the track team, you had to go out and run a couple miles before you'd do your sprint. I'd be worn out. Mr. Doyal used to give us all of these lectures about the kind of people we should be and the kind of moral life we should live. Later on, he got involved in some sex scandals after he became a [Fulton] County Commissioner. I said, "Golly. The guy preached all this stuff to me. He did just what he told me not to do."

**Marvin:** I ran track for Shorty Doyal for two years on the track and cross country teams.

**Mendel:** Did you do the same thing? Run a certain number of laps before . . . what did you run?

**Marvin:** At the time I was running quarter mile.

**Mendel:** The laps were good warm-up. But if you can only run for 11 seconds fast, you don't need to be worn out.

**Marvin:** I'm familiar with Mr. Shorty Doyle. It is an interesting background you're give us so far. Let's talk about your wife for a moment, if you don't mind. Your date of marriage again?

**Mendel:** March 28, 1954.

**Marvin:** Where did you meet her?

**Mendel:** Great story. Anta's dad's first cousin . . .

**Marvin:** Spell her first name.

**Mendel:** A-N-T-A. 'American National Theater Association.' Her name was supposed to be a family name: 'Enta.' E-N-T-A. But when she was in first grade, her "E's" looked like "A's." The teacher just called her 'Anta.' So she became 'Anta.'

**Marvin:** But officially it's an 'E'? What does the birth certificate read?

**Mendel:** It was 'Enta,' but her social security [number],<sup>63</sup> marriage license, everything she's ever done . . . it's been 'Anta.' School degrees and everything else.

<sup>62</sup> R.L. 'Shorty' Doyal was inducted into the Georgia Sports Hall of Fame in 1957. Born in Nashville, Tennessee, Doyal was a legendary coach at Atlanta's Boys High where he compiled a 200-41-12 mark from 1922-1947 winning numerous state crowns. Doyal was a two-year letterman at Georgia Institute of Technology and the founder of the North Georgia Football Coaches Association.

<sup>63</sup> In the United States, a Social Security number (SSN) is a nine-digit number issued to United States' citizens, permanent residents, and temporary working residents. The number is issued to an individual by the Social Security Administration, a government agency.

**Marvin:** A little unusual name.

**Mendel:** She's from a little tiny town in North Florida about 30 miles south of Dothan, Alabama. Her folks were in the retailing business. They moved down there in 1929 right after they got married, and became very, very popular in the town. Anta was . . .

**Marvin:** . . . she's listening. <Speaking to Anta who is in another room> You can come in.

**Mendel:** They had a cousin in Birmingham, Mollie Weinstein Shevinsky. Mollie Weinstein was known as the 'Flamingo Girl.' She had a flamingo shop<sup>64</sup> on Lincoln Road in Miami Beach [Florida]. Her customers were the ladies who belonged to the gangsters who were down in Florida in those days.

**Marvin:** There were a few down there.

**Mendel:** Molly wanted to make a match between the two of us. In June of 1952, we went to a wedding in Chattanooga, Tennessee between Enta Cove . . . C-O-V-E . . . and a Dr. Owen from Memphis [Tennessee], who had come from a little town in Alabama originally. When I saw Anta, I didn't want the date. I swapped dates with my one of my cousins. I took Marcia Cove who is now Marcia Epstein. You know Dr. Jacob Epstein? His wife. As we were riding up the mountain, Anta's in the front seat. I said, "Why did I swap dates? I'm in love with that girl in the front seat." I chased her for a couple years. <Romm speaks to his wife who is in another room.> You can come in, Anta.

**Marvin:** <Talking to Anta> He's telling stories about you.

**Mendel:** That's how we met. <To Anta> I'm talking about you. That's how we got together: the lady made a match and it worked out.

**Marvin:** You got married in what city?

**Mendel:** Dothan, Alabama. The reason we got married in Dothan was Anta's dad was president of the [Temple Emanu-El]<sup>65</sup> there. There was only one other Jewish family in Marianna [Florida] or one-and-a-half Jewish families. Of course, the wedding had to be on a Sunday because

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<sup>64</sup> Flamingos are a large wading bird native to Florida and are iconic to the image of the state. There are six species by the ones in Florida are generally a bright pink in color. There are shops dedicated to the sale of all types of flamingo goods for the tourists.

<sup>65</sup> Temple Emanu-El was founded in 1928 with 14 founding families. Services were held at the Elks Club. Rabbi Edmund Landau led services twice a month and the members of the congregation led services on the High Holy Days. In 1929 the congregation bought a plot of land, however the effects of the Great Depression brought any hope of construction to a full stop. It was resumed in 1940 they started their own building, which has been expanded and renovated many times over the years. Their first full-time rabbi was Rabbi Alfred Wolf. They are Reform. The current rabbi is Rabbi Lynne Goldsmith (2016).

Jackson County, Florida was dry.<sup>66</sup> The wedding had to be on a Sunday because the store had to be open Saturday and Monday. So the wedding was in Dothan. We must have had 1,000 guests because they had to invite half the town. We invited between 200 and 300 people from Atlanta. They all came to the wedding. It was a very big wedding.

**Marvin:** Where did you find that much space to put them up in Dothan overnight?

**Mendel:** The people from Marianna just drove over. I had an uncle, my mother's only brother, who was married to a Sokol . . . S-O-K-O-L . . . from Birmingham. He was busy in the lobby of the hotel telling everybody, "Come on in. Come on in. My nephew's father-in-law's buying. Everything's on him." It was a very big crowd. A fellow by the name of Frank Cloudt was a caterer here in Atlanta . . . we were the first big out of town party he catered. He even bought a truck to bring everything down to Dothan. He always remembered that. He said, "I got my truck so I could cater every everything down there in Dothan."

**Marvin:** Enlarged his business.

**Mendel:** It was smart.

**Marvin:** What were you doing at the time of your marriage?

**Mendel:** Right before I finished [University of] Georgia, my dad had a chance to sell his insurance agency. He said, "Are you going to come into the insurance business with me?" By then I was already a partner. I said, "Of course I am." I knew . . . at least I thought that's what he wanted me to do. When I was in the service, I got to see the rest of the world. I knew maybe there were other things to do besides selling insurance. I came home and I had that obligation to go into the insurance business, so that's what I was doing. I started getting involved in real estate. I thought I was a genius.

**Marvin:** In Atlanta, everyone was a genius at that time selling real estate.

**Mendel:** I wasn't selling. I was developing . . . until I got greedy.

**Marvin:** We'll get to that next week. That's a good background of what Atlanta was like when you were growing up. I've got to go back to the high school for the moment where you were not invited into a fraternity. My assumption is it was because you were Jewish.

**Mendel:** Of course.

**Marvin:** Did Dobbs make that known to you?

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<sup>66</sup> Blue laws may also restrict shopping or ban the sale of certain items on specific days, most often on Sundays in United States.

**Mendel:** No. He never did. His mother told my mother that the reason he hadn't joined was they wouldn't take me in. He told his daddy, "They don't take Jews."

**Marvin:** There are a couple of things that maybe we can explore. One stance there, another instance with your father and the Shriners not taking Jews. What was the climate for Jews?

**Mendel:** Wonderful.

**Marvin:** You say it was wonderful, even though there are two instances in your family. . .

**Mendel:** . . . when I think even today things are . . . as somebody was saying in the background of the AJC [American Jewish Committee],<sup>67</sup> you've got to know that things seemed to be a lot better than they ever were. I heard a Reverend Sawyer on *Israel Today* yesterday. It was wonderful. He even admits the fact that now is the chance for all these antisemites, anti-Israel . . . they can be against the Jews, too. I've always thought if you scratch the best people a little bit, you might find a little antisemitism. One of my daddy's friends was Charlie Isbell [sp]. He worked for USF&G. One time he said . . . he knew my dad all those years . . . my dad's nickname is 'Mark' . . . he said, "Mark, you know things are terrible. All these white girls are dating these black guys. There's only going to be one pure race and that's the Jews." This man loves my daddy. All of a sudden we're different.

**Marvin:** Meanwhile, as you indicate also, so many marry out, so to speak. Even though they weren't blacks, they were non-Jewish.

**Mendel:** Faye Regenstein [sp] went to Agnes Scott [College—Decatur, Georgia]. She joined a church, but their family had been members of the Temple. She joined a sorority at Agnes Scott. When she got married or got engaged . . . to a Jewish guy, she went to her Christian friends . . . and said, "I'm marrying outside the faith." They said, "You're not marrying a Jew?"

**Marvin:** That's right. No matter what, she was still Jewish.

**Mendel:** That's the way it was.

**Marvin:** Was your circle of friends primarily Jewish growing up?

**Mendel:** Other than my family and my extended family, I had very few. My daddy's brother [Sol Romm] was married to Rosalee Mendel Romm. The Mendel family was very big. Dr. Irving Goldstein was married to [Helen] Mendel. You could get all these people in . . . I'd go to

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<sup>67</sup> The American Jewish Committee (AJC) was founded in 1906 to safeguard the welfare and security of Jews worldwide. It is one of the oldest Jewish advocacy organizations in the United States.

a *seder*<sup>68</sup> . . . we'd go to the Mendel family . . . I'd socialize with those kids and a few kids in Sunday school. We didn't even have enough kids in Sunday school to have a party. We invited friends of ours, by the time we got into high school, to come to the party and a few of them wore *yarmulkes*.<sup>69</sup> Dr. [David] Marx had a fit. He said, "Get those infidel things off your head." We didn't have a lot of opportunities to have friends.

**Marvin:** Primarily your associations were with family members,

**Mendel:** That's right. Until I joined AZA.

**Marvin:** You were 14 or 15 at the time?

**Mendel:** About 14 . . . I had a lot of friends from before then from the Mayfair Club. There were only a handful of them and half of those were kin to me.

**Marvin:** We'll get to the clubs and your background next. You keep mentioning 'Mendel.' Your name is 'Mendel.'

**Mendel:** Everybody gets confused. We finally gave up. 'Papa Mendel,' my daddy, was a Mendel here before each Mendel moved to Atlanta, I think.

**Marvin:** No relationship between the two families?

**Mendel:** Only the fact that Sol Romm married Rosalee Mendel.

**Marvin:** I've got to diagram . . .

**Mendel:** . . . it's really simple. My daddy's first name was 'Mendel.' He was named after his grandfather Mendel. His brother fell in love when he was 15 or 16 with a young lady whose last name was 'Mendel.' There are some others with the first name of Mendel. Mendel Boorstein. In fact, Fannie [Spielberger] Boorstein and my Aunt Lena won a house by selling more subscriptions to the *Atlanta Constitution* than anybody else in town. There's Mendel Boorstein, there's Mendel Segal. There were a lot of people with the first name of Mendel.

**Marvin:** We're looking at more than one Mendel family that are no relation, but there is some intermarriage or relationship between them. That's what's confusing to me . . .

**Mendel:** . . . and to everybody else. It's very hard to have to explain. My aunt was a Mendel.

**Marvin:** You went into AZA. You had a group of Jewish friends but except for the Dobbes

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<sup>68</sup> *Seder* (meaning 'order' in Hebrew) is a Jewish ritual feast that marks the beginning of the Jewish holiday of Passover. It is conducted on the evening of the 15<sup>th</sup> day of *Nisan* in the Hebrew calendar throughout the world. Some communities hold *seder* on both the first two nights of Passover. The *seder* incorporates prayers, candle lighting, and traditional foods symbolizing the slavery of the Jews and the exodus from Egypt. It is one of the most colorful and joyous occasions in Jewish life.

<sup>69</sup> Jewish men cover their heads during prayer with a small skull-cap called a '*yarmulke*' or '*kippah*.' Orthodox Jewish men wear it at all times to remind themselves of G-d's presence

early on no non-Jewish friends?

**Mendel:** I had a lot of non-Jewish friends. I was very involved in the Boy Scouts.<sup>70</sup> I was a counselor at Camp Bert Adams [Scout Reservation]<sup>71</sup> for about four years.

**Marvin:** What was Camp Bert Adams?

**Mendel:** Are you familiar with Smyrna and the Overlook? I think that's the name of that big high-rise office building out there as you cross the railroad tracks [on] Paces Ferry [Road] and Smyrna.

**Marvin:** Yes.

**Mendel:** Camp Bert Adams was a tremendous acreage of land that extended all the way back to Cumberland . . .

**Marvin:** Cumberland is a major shopping . . .

**Mendel:** Yes, shopping area and office thing and everything else. Bert Adams was this camp there, and I always thought that the Boy Scouts made a terrible mistake selling the property to some of their financial supporters and buying something further out in the country. I thought it was great to be that close to Atlanta. I had wonderful friends there . . . in scouting. In fact, some of them became very successful people in Atlanta. [H.] Stockton's Men's Store . . . Ed Stockton was at scout camp with me. Julian LeCraw, who is a big builder here in town, we were at camp together at Bert Adams. I could go on with many of them. As I got involved with my Jewish activities, I didn't have time.

**Marvin:** We'll stop here. We ran about 35 or 40 minutes on the tape before we go into the Jewish activities, your background in business and what you did as an adult. Thank you for your time this afternoon.

**Mendel:** I enjoyed it. I enjoy talking.

<End Tape 2, Side 1>

<Begin Tape 3, Side 1>

**Marvin:** This is Marvin Weintraub. This is Tape 3. I'm interviewing Mendel Romm Junior . .

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<sup>70</sup> A youth organization in the United States founded in 1910 to train youth in responsible citizenship, character development, and self-reliance through participation in a wide range of outdoor activities, educational programs and at older age levels, career-oriented programs in partnership with community organizations. They wear a uniform and earn merit badges for achievements in sports, crafts, science, etc. (There is a similar organization for girls: the Girl Scouts.)

<sup>71</sup> Bert Adams Scout Camp was founded in 1928 in Vinings, Georgia and was a Boy Scout reservation. The current camp is outside Covington, Georgia and opened in 1960. It caters to Cub Scouts who get their first taste of scouting and outdoors programs.

. Today is May 20, 2003 . . . We are in Mendel's home and the tape is Jewish Oral History Project of Atlanta, co-sponsored by the American Jewish Committee, the Jewish Federation of Greater Atlanta and the National Council of Jewish Women. As we were chatting just before we turned the tape on, we said we would discuss a few things. One of which is last time you indicated there was no antisemitism. Yet you gave me a very short segment of antisemitism with a friend of yours and his club. As the tape was coming on, you mentioned another one. Would you mind repeating that please, Mendel?

**Mendel:** When I was about ten years old, a family moved [here] from Hawaii. The father was a captain in the army. The son was half-American, half-Hawaiian. He got friendly with the little boys in the neighborhood. One day I went down to play with my friends. He yelled, "We're not playing with you. You're a Jew." They threw rocks at me. I ran home. My mother was playing cards . . . I can tell you who the people were, but it's not important. She said, "Go down and fight your own battles." I went back and stood up to them. I never had any more trouble with them.

There were some things that happened that you really don't think about. There were enough of us around . . . names you might recognize, or they will recognize . . . Harriet Zaban who is now Harriet Eisner . . . her family were in Zaban [Storage and] Transfer Company. Her uncle was Mandle Zaban of Zep Manufacturing. Her cousin was Erwin Zaban. Harriet had a little bit of a funny nose. I don't know how to describe her nose. A girl by the name of Mogeena MacDougal [sp] . . . how I can remember this? It's unbelievable.

**Marvin:** Better than I could remember.

**Mendel:** She told Renee Newman . . . N-E-W-M-A-N . . . a nice Jewish girl who went to Sunday school with me, Harriet went to Sunday school with me, "We can't have anything to do with Harriett Zaban, because she's a Jew and she's got different blood than we have." This was in junior high school. <phone rings, discussion about answering, they agree not to answer and it continues to ring in the background> The two girls were upset. I was the only other Jew in the class. They came to me asking, "What should we do?" I said, "I don't know. Let me ask my dad. He's involved in the Anti-Defamation League<sup>72</sup> and all these other things." I went and told

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<sup>72</sup> The ADL was founded in October 1913 by the Independent Order of B'nai B'rith, a Jewish service organization in the United States. It is an international Jewish non-governmental organization based in the United States. Describing itself as "the nation's premier civil rights/human relations agency," the ADL states that it "fights anti-Semitism and

him. It's very interesting because the local ADL office checked into the people and tried to educate the father. It was very interesting. My classmates that they did the educating were all Christian. We were only three Jewish kids, out of maybe 30.

**Marvin:** What grade again?

**Mendel:** This had to be the seventh or eighth grade. They told this girl in no uncertain terms, that those are our friends and "How dare you even say anything about it." So there was some antisemitism. We grew up in an era, in the Thirties especially, until [Adolf] Hitler came along, there wasn't too much that we heard as kids or one of the neighbors. Our Boy Scout troop was sponsored by the Druid Hills Presbyterian Church. Everything, our whole life, we went . . . as Morris Abram said . . . Morris Abram having been a leader in Jewish affairs . . . he came from Fitzgerald, Georgia. He explained it very well. We went to 'White Anglo-Saxon Protestant' [WASP] public schools. The Catholics were going to schools that their faith would have. The blacks went to separate schools. There were not enough Jews for them to have a separate school system for us. They had to accept us into the public schools. I believe that was what it was.  
<phone begins ringing again and they let it ring>

**Marvin:** However, a recent book<sup>73</sup> was written about not being accepted in the Decatur school system. Have you read that one?

**Mendel:** In the what?

**Marvin:** In Decatur . . . the Decatur Georgia school system did not accept Jews at that point.

**Mendel:** That's amazing. I didn't know that.

**Marvin:** It was written recently by a reporter for the [*Atlanta*] *Journal-Constitution*<sup>74</sup> about two years ago . . . and indicated the way they got around it their school met Tuesday through Saturday.

**Mendel:** They thought Jews couldn't come to school on Saturday.

**Marvin:** That's one reason there were so few Jews in Decatur at the time. But you're saying

all forms of bigotry, defends democratic ideals and protects civil rights for all," doing so through "information, education, legislation, and advocacy."

<sup>73</sup> The book is *Saturday School: How One Town Kept Out "The Jewish" 1902-1932*, by Tom Keating. It tells the story of how one Georgia school system held Jews at bay from 1902 until 1932. The Decatur School System held public school classes from Tuesday through Saturday each week, leaving Sunday and Monday to be student 'weekends.' The purpose of holding classes on Saturday was to keep Jewish students out of the schools since many Jewish families did not wish to have their children attend school on their Sabbath.

<sup>74</sup> The *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* is an Atlanta-based daily paper. In 1982, The *Atlanta Journal* combined staff with The *Atlanta Constitution* to become the *Atlanta-Journal Constitution*. Today, it is Atlanta's only major daily paper.

what was then the City of Atlanta did not have that type of reputation?

**Mendel:** There weren't that many Jews here. I think the total Jewish population in the Thirties when I was growing up was less than 5,000 people.

**Marvin:** How many synagogues do you remember at that time?

**Mendel:** Four.

**Marvin:** Name them.

**Mendel:** Shearith Israel,<sup>75</sup> AA synagogue, the Temple, and a fourth one which I believe became Beth Jacob. It was located . . . it was an Orthodox synagogue, located on Boulevard. The reason I know it is because it was one my daddy belonged to because his mother lived on the corner of Boulevard and Angier [Avenue]. She could attend the synagogue. It was just a small group. I believe it became Beth Jacob.<sup>76</sup>

**Marvin:** No Sephardic synagogue at that time?

**Mendel:** Or VeShalom!<sup>77</sup> Hy Cohen,<sup>78</sup> who was the son of the rabbi [Joseph Cohen], was a fraternity brother of mine in Athens. He changed his name to 'Allan Cohen.' How he could get that I don't know.

**Marvin:** . . . Let's go back to the school where you had that little . . . not problem but discussion. What was the name of that school?

**Mendel:** Bass Junior High School. We had a little antisemitism, but not that you would know it. I think I may have told you the last time that this this fellow that I had become friends with . . . his mother and my mother had become very good friends. They wanted us in the same class. Miss Corrigan [sp], the principal, was Catholic. She saw to it that we were not in the same class all through grammar school . . . junior high school . . . when this took place. We ended up in the same class, because a Jewish lady, Mrs. Goodman [sp], was the secretary of the school. Mother told the story that she saw to it that Quinton [Dobbs] and I were in the same class.

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<sup>75</sup> Founded in 1904, Shearith Israel began as a congregation that met in the homes of congregants until 1906 when they began using a Methodist church on Hunter Street. After World War II, Rabbi Tobias Geffen moved the congregation to University Drive, where it became the first synagogue in DeKalb County. In the 1960's, they removed the barrier between the men's and women's sections in the sanctuary, and officially became affiliated with the Conservative movement in 2002.

<sup>76</sup> Mendel is correct here. Beth Jacob's first location was in a house on Boulevard.

<sup>77</sup> Or VeShalom was established by refugees of the Ottoman Empire, namely from Turkey and the Isle of Rhodes. The Sephardic/Traditional congregation began in 1920 and was based at Central and Woodward Avenues until 1948 when it moved to a larger building on North Highland Road. The current building for Or VeShalom is on North Druid Hills Road.

<sup>78</sup> Allan Herbert Cohen died in 2007. He was a cantor and a member of the Ahavath Achim choir. His brother was Ned Cohen.

**Marvin:** . . . Last time you said you graduated from the University of Georgia. You were a TEP and eventually became president of the national fraternity?

**Mendel:** I was treasurer of the fraternity council at Georgia. I was in some honor societies, the freshman honor society. I was in Phi Kappa Phi.<sup>79</sup> I did very well at Georgia. I made very good grades. I went to school in 1946. It was very hard for youngsters to get into college. All of the veterans were coming home and were getting priority to go to college. My dad wanted me to go to the University of Pennsylvania [Philadelphia, Pennsylvania]. A cousin of his was a district attorney there, and got me in to Pennsylvania . . . but our neighbor . . . that was another thing I was going to tell you . . .

We had some very interesting neighbors upstairs in our duplex. My uncle and his family, then they moved to Fairview Road. His sister-in-law's parents, Eli Josephs, moved upstairs for about seven or eight years while their son, Alvin Josephs, ended up going to Emory Medical School. He became the head of the blood bank<sup>80</sup> for the Red Cross for a number of years after that. When they bought a home on Johnson Road, the Bill Breman [family] moved upstairs. The reason why I wanted to go back is because he's a very important person in the Jewish history here. Their daughter [Carol Breman Nemo] was born on St. Charles. We were very close friends with the Bremans. They were going to have another child, so they bought a home on Springdale [Road] and moved. The place didn't stay vacant two days. Alfred Garber, a CPA here in town, and his wife Gerry [Geraldine Cohen] moved upstairs. They had two of their first two sons there. Then they moved. My mother decided she didn't want to be a landlord. She got too attached . . . too close to the people that lived there and they sold the duplex.

**Marvin:** Let me talk about the Jewish community. You're living on St. Charles . . . Avenue, and you mentioned four synagogues, five synagogues, which were not located anywhere near St. Charles, except the one on Boulevard. Where were they located?

**Mendel:** Probably the closest one was Shearith Israel. It was on Highland Avenue right there at University. The AA was located on Washington Street or Capitol Avenue. I don't remember the name of the street. The Temple . . . in 1931, moved to Peachtree Road. They were also on the south side.

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<sup>79</sup> Phi Kappa Phi (ΦΚΦ) is an honor society established in 1897 to recognize and encourage superior scholarship without restriction as to area of study. It is the third academic society in the United States to be organized around recognizing academic excellence and is the oldest all-discipline honor society.

<sup>80</sup> A blood bank is a center where blood is gathered as a result of blood donation and is stored and preserved for later use in blood transfusions.

**Marvin:** From your recollection, were there two Jewish communities? One on the north side and one on the south side?

**Mendel:** It had more to do . . . and Mrs. Bertha Hirsch told me yesterday. . . she lived on Connally Street . . . and these other people lived on Capitol Avenue. They had already had it made. We lived on the ‘other side of the tracks.’ It was only two or three blocks away. There were no tracks or anything else [but] they did feel that way back in those days. Part of her conversation yesterday, was that newcomers who came to town embarrassed the native-born young people. I’m going back before my birth. Based on what she told me, I can recognize some of it. The feelings that went on . . . they were embarrassing the way they carried on. They had no respect for other people.

**Marvin:** You’ve mentioned a lady that you’ve spoken about for two or three minutes. Who is she?

**Mendel:** Bertha Hirsch is the widow of Leo Hirsch. She’s 96 and she’s the star of radio station 99X.<sup>81</sup> They celebrate all of her birthdays and occasions [on the air]. They call her because she comes up with interesting things. For example, her granddaughter by marriage has a twin sister who lives in Chicago. They were Glazers . . . Jennifer and Michelle Glazer. They called Mrs. Hirsch up to wish her a belated ninety-sixth birthday a few weeks ago. A man gets on the phone and she can’t understand him. She thinks he’s some old Jewish man with an accent. She asks, “What’s your name?” [He answers], “Ozzy Osbourne.”<sup>82</sup> [She asks], “Who are you?”

**Marvin:** She’s not current.

**Mendel:** She’s not current. But it’s really great because [she says], “Your language . . . your accent.” “I’m from the [United Kingdom],” he said. “United Kingdom . . . where’s United Kingdom?” [she asks]. Finally, he says, “I’m from England.” She says, “Welcome to the United States of America!” This is the kind of lady she is.

**Marvin:** You’ve been a member of the Temple and your parents, as well as others . . . which is not unusual in Atlanta to be a member of more than one religious affiliation. You mentioned last time you’ve been with [Rabbi] Marx, and what he did and you’ve been through . . .

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<sup>81</sup> 99X is an FM alternative rock radio station that used to be on the air in Atlanta. Some of the announcers would regularly air phone calls with a variety of Atlantans including Bertha Hirsch.

<sup>82</sup> John Michael ‘Ozzy’ Osbourne (b. 1948) is an English heavy metal vocalist, songwriter, and television personality.

**Mendel:** . . . [Rabbi] Jack Rothschild.<sup>83</sup>

**Marvin:** . . . Jack Rothschild and [Rabbi Alvin] Sugarman.<sup>84</sup> Do you care to compare the changes in that particular community over the years?

**Mendel:** The Reform community?

**Marvin:** Yes.

**Mendel:** I've done a little history of the Temple, trying to find out things. I went to the Atlanta History Center.<sup>85</sup> Dr. Marx kept no records. The Temple put it in boxes and threw things away. The only records he kept were births, marriages, and deaths, which there is a record of still. When Rabbi Rothschild got there, he started keeping better records. Dr. Marx was one of the leaders of the New Reform movement, in the end of the eighteenth century. He did away with *bar mitzvahs* immediately. Most of the services became English. The only person who read the *Torah*<sup>86</sup> as I remember it since I was born, I'm sure it was that way before, was the rabbi. Just short portions. He said the traditional prayers, the *Sh'ma [Yisrael]*<sup>87</sup> and some of the others. That was all. Everything was in English. I think I may have mentioned this the last time. I think I mentioned this last time, as I've gotten older I realize he was making good Americans out of us.

There was talk at one time of even having services on Sunday, which some of the Reform people did in Rochester, New York and some other places. The congregation was against it. They used to make fun. I'm trying to tell you how Reform we were. On *Yom Kippur*<sup>88</sup> we would take a break for lunch. My daddy and I would go Downtown and meet some of the other

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<sup>83</sup> Rabbi Jacob Rothschild was rabbi of the city's oldest Reform congregation, the Temple, in Atlanta, Georgia from 1946 until his death in 1973 from a heart attack. He forged close relationships with the city's Christian clergy and distinguished himself as a charismatic spokesperson for civil rights.

<sup>84</sup> Rabbi Alvin M. Sugarman is the Rabbi emeritus of the Temple in Atlanta and currently serves with life tenure. He began his rabbinate at the Temple in 1971 and in 1974 was named senior rabbi. A native of Atlanta, Rabbi Sugarman received his BBA from Emory University and was ordained by Hebrew Union College. In 1988 he received his PhD in Theological Studies from Emory University.

<sup>85</sup> The Atlanta History Center was founded in 1926 by 14 Atlantans who wanted to preserve the city's history. They called it the 'Atlanta Historical Center.' Today it is the 'Atlanta History Center' and is on a campus that houses the Atlanta History Museum, Centennial Olympic Games Museum, Swan House, Smith Family Farm, six historic gardens, and the Kenan Research Center. It also includes the Margaret Mitchell House, which is located off site.

<sup>86</sup> Hebrew for 'teaching.' '*Torah*' is general term that covers all Jewish law including the vast mass of teachings recorded in the *Talmud* and other rabbinical works. '*Sefer Torah*' refers to the sacred scroll on which the first five books of the *Bible* (the *Pentateuch*) are written.

<sup>87</sup> Literally "Hear, [O] Israel," *Sh'ma Yisrael* is often considered the most important prayer in Judaism. The first verse affirms the monotheistic essence of Judaism: "*Hear, O Israel: The Lord our G-d, the Lord is one.*"

<sup>88</sup> Hebrew for 'Day of Atonement.' The most sacred day of the Jewish year. *Yom Kippur* is a 25-hour fast day. Most of the day is spent in prayer, reciting *yizkor* for deceased relatives, confessing sins, requesting divine forgiveness, and listening to *Torah* readings and sermons. People greet each other with the wish that they may be sealed in the heavenly book for a good year ahead. The day ends with the blowing of the *shofar* (a ram's horn).

men for lunch. My mother would sit in the sanctuary all through the break. It just came to my mind a few weeks ago . . . Dr. Marx did not get up out of his chair on the pulpit. He sat there and prayed. He read prayers to himself the whole time. He did it, meaning that he knew the service was supposed to be continuous, but he tried to make it satisfy his congregants.

When Jack Rothschild came, he started being a little bit more Conservative<sup>89</sup> than Dr. Marx. I think I told you last time, Dr. Marx was known as a ‘fine Christian gentleman.’ He gave the Scottish Rite Masons<sup>90</sup> one or two of his lectures. People still talk about how wonderful it was. He reached out to the general community and he represented us well. Jack Rothschild . . . I’ve got to add this and I’ll do it fast. Dr. Marx was a member of the American Council for Judaism<sup>91</sup> . . . one of the leaders . . . very anti-Zionist . . . very anti-Jewish of certain things in Judaism. I may have mentioned, we even had a social one night. Some people came from the AA synagogue, friends of ours to be part of our social. They had on *yarmulkes*. He screamed and yelled and told them, “Take those infidel caps off.”

When Jack [Rothschild] came he wasn’t that way. But Jack was not a real observant Jew. He went horseback riding on Saturdays. He played golf on Saturdays. In fact, David Marx Junior asked me one time on a golf tee at the Standard Club . . .<sup>92</sup> “Mendel, how are your folks?” I said, “They’re at the office working, so that I can be out here playing golf.” He looked straight at Jack Rothschild and said, “I remember when my father used to work on Saturdays.” I understood. I don’t know if anybody else understood what he was saying.

When Alvin [Sugarman] came . . . Alvin was an assistant rabbi . . . he kind of got pushed into it. If Jack Rothschild had lived another year or two, Alvin would never have been

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<sup>89</sup> 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, while preserving a commitment to Jewish observance. They also observe gender equality (mixed seating, women rabbis and *bat mitzvahs*).

<sup>90</sup> The Scottish Rite is one of several Rites of Freemasonry. It is also known as the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite of Freemasonry. A Rite is a progressive series of degrees conferred by various Masonic organizations, each of which operates under the control of its own central authority. A Master Mason may join Scottish Rite for further exposure to the principles of Freemasonry.

<sup>91</sup> The American Council for Judaism (ACJ) is an organization of American Jews committed to the proposition that Jews are not a nationality but merely a religious group, adhering to the original stated principles of Reform Judaism. The ACJ was founded in June 1942 by a group of Reform rabbis who opposed the direction of their movement, including the issue of Zionism.

<sup>92</sup> The Standard Club is a Jewish country club that started as the Concordia Association in 1866 in Downtown Atlanta. In 1905 it was reorganized as the Standard Club and moved into the former mansion of William C. Sanders near where Turner Field is now located. In the late 1920’s the club moved to Ponce de Leon Avenue in Midtown Atlanta. In 1940, the club opened in what is now the Lenox Park business park and was located there until 1983. In the 1980’s, the club moved to its present location in Johns Creek in Atlanta’s northern suburbs.

our rabbi. He would have been like all assistant rabbis. They go on to a congregation somewhere, or they did in those days. But he grew into it. He was a very fine man. I don't give Alvin credit for it . . . a change in the hearts of members in our congregation at the Temple. They started realizing that they needed more of Judaism than what we had had in the past. Some of the old timers (and I have to put myself in the same vein) really we understand that this is the way of the future. My grandchildren go to Jewish day schools. We're going to be Jews.

**Marvin:** Yes.

**Mendel:** Mr. Hitler told us that a long time ago. You asked a question about the difference of living on the south side and north side. It was more a difference of where you went to synagogue, than in was in where you lived. There was a big difference. The Sephardic congregation [Or VeShalom] . . . [unintelligible: 57:30] "I don't want my son-in-law to think ill of me." There was very little intermingling between the Sephardic community and the general Jewish community. To say the same thing for the ultra-Reform people at the Temple with any Jew, regardless of who they were. We had people in our Sunday school class who became Christians . . . married Christians. It was a different ball game.

**Marvin:** Let me ask this . . . not too long ago there was a play called *The Last Night of Ballyhoo*<sup>93</sup> which dealt with the Temple.

**Mendel:** I used to go to Ballyhoo.

**Marvin:** Was that depiction honest?

**Mendel:** [It was] exaggerated, like most things, but it was pretty close. It was the debutante ball sort of thing for the right Jewish girls. As we expanded we didn't have enough girls left in the Reform part . . . One girl became a Christian. When she went to Agnes Scott, she joined a Christian sorority out there. I'm not going to mention her name. She went and told her girlfriends, "I'm marrying outside the faith." They said, "You're not marrying a Jew?" Here she was a Christian in this sorority. . . and she was marrying a Jew. That was outside of the faith. We had a lot of that.

**Marvin:** Do you think Ballyhoo improved relationships between young men and women and

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<sup>93</sup> *The Last Night of Ballyhoo* was written by award-winning playwright and screenwriter Alfred Uhry that premiered in Atlanta in 1996. *Ballyhoo* later received the Tony Award for Best Play when produced on Broadway. The play is set in Atlanta on the eve of World War II in an upper class German-Jewish community as Adolph Freitag and his sister and nieces look forward to attending Ballyhoo, a lavish cotillion ball sponsored by their country club. *The Last Night of Ballyhoo* was inspired by Atlanta-native Alfred Uhry's childhood memories and is the second of what is known as his "Atlanta Trilogy" of plays. The first is *Driving Miss Daisy* and the third is *Parade*.

kept them in the faith?

**Mendel:** It's sort of similar to the thing that I told you about my friend joining a Christian fraternity. It gave Jewish young people a place to be together, even though it gets back to that same thing. I don't remember anybody from Or VeShalom going there. But that could be a block in my mind. There were a lot of young people from the AA synagogue that came to Ballyhoo. It was another social thing for Jewish kids.

**Marvin:** It was not exclusively Temple and Reform members?

**Mendel:** Not for Ballyhoo. It's the leaders and the people that started it may have been . . . I won't mention names, because there are some people who really were big time involved who definitely were not Reform Jews.

**Marvin:** Let's go a step further. Was there another social club at the Temple at the time?

**Mendel:** At the Temple, no. Wait . . . the girls had an STP Sorority.<sup>94</sup> I think all their members were Temple members. I've got to remember the name of the thing that the Jewish boys from the Temple belonged to. I didn't because after my experience in high school I joined AZA.

**Marvin:** You were one of the few Temple members in AZA then?

**Mendel:** Not one of the few . . . well, I have to make it one of the few . . . yes, in those days.

**Marvin:** Because then all the Jewish boys and girls essentially at the Temple had their own little . . .

**Mendel:** . . . not all because things changed. In 1944 or 1945 we started finding out what Hitler thought of Jews. A lot of barriers that they had before broke down. We were already more . . . 'enlightened' I guess is the right word.

**Marvin:** I'll remind you of the name . . . I think it was called the 'Top Hat Club.'<sup>95</sup>

<phone starts ringing and is ignored>

**Mendel:** That was the Ballyhoo sponsors, originally. My cousin was a member. I was asked to be a member and I didn't. . .

**Marvin:** . . . that was a Temple . . .

**Mendel:** . . . social club for boys.

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<sup>94</sup> Sigma Delta Tau ( $\Sigma\Delta T$ ) is a national sorority and member of the National Panhellenic Conference and was founded March 25, 1917 at Cornell University in Ithaca, New York. The original name, Sigma Delta Phi, was changed after the women discovered a sorority with the same name already existed. Today, Sigma Delta Tau has over 40,000 initiates from 100 chapters around the United States. Sigma Delta Tau was founded by seven Jewish women. There is no religious requirement for membership to the sorority, nor is it affiliated with any one religion.

<sup>95</sup> A social club which hosted elaborate, formal parties during December and the New Year's holidays. It was not specifically Jewish.

**Marvin:** Yes, for boys.

**Mendel:** Basically, in most cases, the Standard Club . . . young men . . . young teenagers.

**Marvin:** We started looking at your college and got far afield. But let's look at this for a minute then . . . the Standard Club. Last session you talked about the [Jewish] Progressive Club,<sup>96</sup> and the Mayfair Club. Now we have a Standard Club, too.

**Mendel:** The Standard Club was the first club. It was the oldest club. I belonged. I don't belong anymore. I belonged to all three of those clubs at one time. The Standard Club was called the 'Concordia Club' originally, and it had served its usefulness after awhile because these people didn't need that for social life. But the golf course part . . . they played golf out at Avondale. There was a golf club out there that people who were members of the Standard Club and remained members became the people that restarted golfing at the Standard Club and were playing golf out at Avondale.

**Marvin:** What was the relationship among these three all-Jewish clubs?

**Mendel:** There are pictures that I'm going to give to the [William] Breman] Jewish Museum.<sup>97</sup> They already have some of them, but they don't know who the people are. That's why I've been trying to find out. Here's some of the breakdown I've got. My dad was the president of the Jewish Progressive Club in the early Twenties when he was just out of his teens or in his early twenties, before he got married. The Jewish Progressive Club actually took the place . . . we didn't have a 'Y' [unintelligible: 1:04:00] . . . it was a social club that provided health club and athletics for the members. Also, card playing and everything else.

**Marvin:** Slot machines?

**Mendel:** That came later. Lyons Joel is a grandson of Simon Selig [Sr.] who owned Selig Chemical.<sup>98</sup> Mr. Selig's son is Simon Junior. His grandson is Steven Selig. I told Lyons one

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<sup>96</sup> The Jewish Progressive Club was a Jewish social organization that was established in 1913 by Russian Jews who felt unwelcome at the Standard Club, where German Jews were predominant. At first the club was located in a rented house until a new club was built on Pryor Street including a swimming pool and a gym. In 1940 the club opened a larger facility at 1050 Techwood Drive in Midtown with three swimming pools, tennis and softball. In 1976 the club moved north to 1160 Moore's Mill Road near Interstate 75. The property was eventually sold as the club faced financial challenges and the Carl E. Sanders Family YMCA at Buckhead opened in 1996.

<sup>97</sup> In 1992, M. William Breman gave the lead gift, ensuring the creation of the William Breman Jewish Heritage Museum. In 1996, the museum opened at the Selig Center on Spring Street in Midtown Atlanta. The Museum features an exhibition about the Holocaust as well as exhibitions about Southern Jewish history and Jewish culture. The Breman Museum also includes the Cuba Family Archives for Southern Jewish History, the Weinberg Center for Holocaust Education, and a library of research materials.

<sup>98</sup> Simon Selig (Sr.) founded Selig Chemical Company in 1896, after working as a sales representative for West Chemical Corporation in New York. Originally Selig Chemicals manufactured and sold home cleaning products

day that my daddy used to play pinochle<sup>99</sup> with his grandfather at the Progressive Club when it was over on Pryor Street. Lyons said, “My grandfather never went into the Progressive Club.” Then he found out from his mother that yes he did. He went over there to play cards. Even way back in the Twenties, there was a co-mingling of the different groups. All of the members of the Mayfair Club were members of the Progressive Club. As this Mrs. Hirsch told me last night, she agreed with what I already knew. Some of the members of the . . . Don’t Worry Club<sup>100</sup> . . . members and some others had started doing very well. They still socialized together. Instead of going to the Progressive Club’s big dances, like Thanksgiving, and New Years’ Eve, they had their own party at their club then, the Biltmore Hotel.<sup>101</sup>

**Marvin:** This is the Don’t Worry Club now.

**Mendel:** Don’t Worry Club plus people that they hooked with up along the way . . . members of the Progressive Club, and probably others. I would think everybody belonged to the Progressive Club back in those days. Anyhow, in the Thirties, again it gets to antisemitism. We had some sporting-type places in town. Mooney’s Lake, which was behind what is now Broadview Lindbergh Shopping Center [Lindbergh City Center] . . . it had a sign “No Jews Allowed.” Mr. Asa Candler<sup>102</sup> built a zoo and swimming facility on his estate on Briarcliff Road, and a sign with “No Blacks and Jews” allowed. The Venetian swimming pool on Scott Boulevard . . . “Christians Only.” Yes, there was antisemitism going back, but we had our own lives. I mean we ignored them. We didn’t feel like we needed them. When Mr. Candler did his bit on Briarcliff, the fathers of people my age, a little older, a little younger, decided the Progressive Club wasn’t an alternative for them. They built their own club on Spring Street called the ‘Mayfair Club.’ I have some books around here on the history of the Mayfair Club.

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(soaps, dispensers, disinfectant, etc.), insecticides and other consumer goods. In 1968 Zep purchased Selig Industries and today it manufactures cleaning products and programs to the industrial and institutional markets.

<sup>99</sup> Pinochle is a trick-taking card game for two to four players using a 48-card deck. It was very popular with American Jews in the first half of the twentieth century.

<sup>100</sup> The Don’t Worry Club was created, along with other organizations, by Eastern European Jews who were excluded from German-Jewish and gentile social clubs.

<sup>101</sup> The Atlanta Biltmore Hotel on West Peachtree Street in Atlanta opened in 1924. The 11-story hotel and the 10-story apartment buildings were located in Midtown. There were towering radio masks on each end of the building, with vertical illuminated letters on them that spell out ‘BILTMORE.’ In 1967 it was sold to Sheraton Hotels and became the Sheraton-Biltmore Hotel. The building has now been renovated and turned into office space and condominiums and is still called the ‘Biltmore.’

<sup>102</sup> Asa Griggs Candler (1851-1929) was an American business tycoon who made his fortune selling Coca-Cola. He started his career as a drugstore clerk and manufacturer of patent medicines. In 1888 he bought the formula for Coca-Cola from its inventor John Pemberton and several other shareholders for \$550. Candler made millions from his investment, allowing him to establish the Central Bank and Trust Corp. and invest in real estate. Candler became a major philanthropist and also served as the 44<sup>th</sup> Mayor of Atlanta from 1916 to 1919.

Most of them, basically, were the original Don't Worry Club people and their friends and relatives.

**Marvin:** Give me a little about the Don't Worry Club.

**Mendel:** Don't Worry Club was founded in 1911. Most of the boys were ages from 15 to 17. They'd grown up together.

**Marvin:** Only boys? A male club?

**Mendel:** Yes. It was politically correct then. It might not be now. They had fun. Growing up, some of my friends and I decided we didn't want to call it 'Don't Worry Club.' We called ours the 'Good Time Club.' We formed our own little pre-AZA, pre-Top Hat, anything else. One of the boy's father took us out to the Chattahoochee [River] to teach us how to shoot guns. It was just a way for a group of people to get together.

**Marvin:** Your affiliation with clubs, sororities and fraternities or whatever else continues to this day?

**Mendel:** No, I don't belong to any clubs. I'm still for life a member of Tau Epsilon Phi. There's a great story about why I'm a member of TEP. When my dad graduated from Georgia Tech in 1918, there was only one Jewish fraternity there. I won't say what it was, but they were a little antisemitic. Some of the Jews weren't good enough for them. A group of people wanted to form a fraternity for the rest of the Jews. It was AEPi. My daddy became a member of AEPi after he graduated from Georgia Tech when they were founding the chapter at Tech. My dad belonged to all kinds of organizations, involved in all kinds of organizations and everything, and always was very loyal to the AEPi's.

When I went to Georgia, I had three choices: Phi Ep [Phi Epsilon Pi], AEPi, or TEP. When you go through a fraternity rush, there are certain people that are either assigned to you, or you gravitate towards. At the Phi Ep house, they only had about a dozen members, if they had that many. Robert Lipshutz and Morris Mason, both of them successful attorneys here in Atlanta, literally told me, "Mendel, you can't go home and face your family and all of your friends and not be a Phi Ep. They're your kind of people." The AEPi's, I knew most of them from high school. There's a big Georgia contingent, a lot of people, good friends of mine even today. Mr. Harry Loef was their advisor, and he said, "Mendel, your daddy is crying because you're not going to go AEPi." I said, "Mr. Loef, you don't have to say anything else to me." I called my dad that night, and my dad said, "Tell that man to go to hell. You do whatever you

want to. I didn't cry. I didn't say anything. I just told him you were going to school there. You do what you want to.”

Meantime, I really got carried away with the TEPs. The man who really inspired me as a person was Judge [Marvin Herman] Shoob.<sup>103</sup> He wasn't a judge then, but he was older. Most of the people that were there were older. There were people who were Reform, Conservative, and Orthodox. There were people from the country and there were people from the city. It was a group that I fit into. I was 'rah, rah' fraternity.

**Marvin:** So much so, that you became president of TEP. National President?

**Mendel:** National Council, right. That's because of people that preceded me: Isadore Heiman, Joe Gerson, Mr. Ginburg [sp] . . . they were all presidents of TEP. I went along with it.

**Marvin:** What do you think of the TEPs today?

**Mendel:** What I read and what I hear from talking to parents, and I met some of them, they seem to be a very nice group of young people. I've outgrown it. My social friends, belonged to all kinds of different college fraternities. When we go to Athens, we don't go to any of the fraternity houses because no one wants to say, "Go to my fraternity house." So we just do our thing. I don't get there very much. I had a lot to do with it in the past.

**Marvin:** Is it any longer a Jewish fraternity?

**Mendel:** No, don't believe so. Even more interesting than that, in 1949 I went to a convention in Chicago [Illinois] representing the TEPs at Georgia. A question came up about integration of the fraternity. We had this kind of smoke-filled room meeting. There were older alumni, youngsters from colleges up East and everywhere else. Some of the colleges were putting pressure on the fraternities to break up the ethnic backgrounds of them. I told them, "Go right ahead and do whatever you want to locally. We can't do it in Athens because half our people live in little towns like Alma, Fitzgerald, Albany [all in Georgia], and all of these little towns down there. They can't be associated with somebody integrating in 1949." Of course, I think the first non-Jew that we took in the TEPs was black. Not in Georgia, but up East. We were for it as individuals, but we didn't think it was the right thing for . . . in fact, in the State of Georgia obviously there were thinking people who were for integration of the races who had to keep their mouths quiet.

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<sup>103</sup> Marvin Herman Shoob is a federal judge for the United States District Court for the Northern District of Georgia. He joined the court in 1979 after being nominated by President Jimmy Carter. He is serving on senior status.

**Marvin:** One of the individuals you mentioned earlier did not keep his mouth quiet: Rabbi Rothschild.

**Mendel:** No. If I didn't, I should have put in there. He went to the white Christian community and the black community, but he went so much further. Dr. Marx didn't want to step on anybody's toes in trying to bring us into the general community. Jack went not only with the Christian ministers, but he went out and really got involved in integration.

**Marvin:** Let me take a different tack. You are in school now. You mentioned some of the things you did. You mentioned also last week being in the military . . . my assumption is ROTC [Reserve Officers' Training Corps]?<sup>104</sup>

**Mendel:** I was ROTC at Georgia. Let me mention something about my high school years . . . being AZA, I was regional *Godoh* of AZA.<sup>105</sup> I was involved. I was asked to be the chairman of a Youth for Democracy Rally here in Atlanta. The guest of honor . . . it was going to be at the stadium . . . was going to a guy by the name of Frank Sinatra,<sup>106</sup> who at the time was working for the ADL, traveling around the country. When I told my dad he said, "It's a great thing, but you can't do it." "Why not?" [I asked him.] "This is open to everybody including blacks. You can't be the chairman of something that's going to be open." He had to make a living. He had to live.

**Marvin:** Interesting. That would have been 1946 or 1947?

**Mendel:** [In] 1945 or 1946. I was 16 or 17 years old.

**Marvin:** Let's go back to ROTC. We have a few minutes on this tape. You were in ROTC at Georgia?

**Mendel:** I had three choices in ROTC at Georgia. This is [unintelligible: 38:45] I could be an infantryman, air force, or army. My cousin, Milton Romm, had been in combat for less than 24 hours when he got shot, machine gunned in the stomach. He was an infantry officer. Back in World War II, the Air Force was part of the Army back then. People that the Air Force didn't want, they sent to the infantry. I made that decision. I didn't want to be an infantry officer. My friends who took Air [Force] ROTC all got desk jobs. They had a good life. I found out being an armored officer wasn't all that I thought it was. It wasn't riding around in tanks.

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<sup>104</sup> The Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) is a college-based program for training commissioned officers of the United States Armed Forces. ROTC officers serve in all branches of the United States armed forces.

<sup>105</sup> The *Aleph Godoh* is the president of AZA.

<sup>106</sup> Francis Albert "Frank" Sinatra (1915-1998) was an American singer and film actor.

**Marvin:** So you went into armor?<sup>107</sup>

**Mendel:** Right. Went on active duty.

**Marvin:** How many years?

**Mendel:** A little over two years. I was called up the week after I graduated from Georgia. That's when the Korean War<sup>108</sup> broke out.

**Marvin:** In 1950.

**Mendel:** [In] 1950. I didn't even know how to put my pins on, my bar, or my armored tank . . . I didn't even know what direction they went or anything else. I had what I'd call a 'basic military training.' I think the summer ROTC we went to was the closest thing to boot camp that you could have. I was very fortunate. A couple of things happened.

<discussion about end of tape nearing, interview resumes>

**Mendel:** I had joined the Masons when I turned 21. In masonry, you don't ask people to join, they have to do it [unintelligible: 40:45] My daddy had been a 32<sup>nd</sup> Degree Scottish Rite Mason. He belonged to it and had friends in it just like all of the other things he did. I knew, since I became 21, I wanted to come home and go through [unintelligible: 41:00]. I rode the bus in from Athens to go to classes and when I got out of school I went into the service. My dad says, "Good opportunity for you. They're going to have a fast class in Scottish Rite. That means they're going to compress months of study into four or five days. You ought to go ahead and do it before you go overseas."

I put in for a leave. Everyone was entitled to leave before they went overseas. I was at Fort Benning [Georgia], which is only 100 miles from here, if it's that far. My Colonel said, "You can't have leave. You live in Atlanta, I'll let you have a couple weekends off, but you . . . everybody else has got to take leave . . . you got to stay here." I'm a little Second Lieutenant that knows nothing. My Lieutenant Colonel had been a graduate class of West Point in 1933. He wanted to be another [General George] Patton,<sup>109</sup> but he was a Lieutenant Colonel in 1941. In 1950 he was still a Lieutenant Colonel. Something happened. I was with him when he took his

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<sup>107</sup> That is, tank warfare.

<sup>108</sup> The Korean War began when North Korean forces invaded South Korea on June 25, 1950. American troops entered the war in defense of the Republic of Korea to the south against the Soviet-backed Democratic People's Republic of Korea to the north. Fighting ended on July 27, 1953, when an armistice agreement was signed maintaining a border between the Koreas near the 38<sup>th</sup> Parallel and creating the Korean Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) between the two Korean nations that still exists today.

<sup>109</sup> George Smith Patton, Jr. (1885-1945) was a United States Army general, best known for his command of the Seventh United States Army, and later the Third United States Army in Europe during World War II.

dirty boots and stuck it on a general's leather couch and shook his pipe, and all his spittle went towards the general. I could understand what happened to him.

But the point I wanted to bring out is that I got a call from the battalion office to go up there. The warrant officer . . . I saw the Colonel pacing inside . . . he said, "Who do you know at division headquarters?" I said, "I don't know anybody." He said, "They demanded you have at least a week. If you want two weeks, you can have two weeks." I said, "No. All I want is four or five days to go home to go through the Scottish Rite." With that, the Colonel came out of his office shaking that pipe and said, "No good masons. Why would you want to have anything to do with them?" He's shaking his pipe at me, and I'm scared to death. I get home and my dad said, "You come on, no problem." So I go home and I'm in the class with General [Courtney Hicks] Hodges [sp].<sup>110</sup> He was a three-star . . .

<End Tape 3, Side 1>

<Begin Tape 4, Side 1>

**Marvin:** We'll pick up where we were a moment ago. This again is Marvin Weintraub and today is still May 20, 2003. I'm still interviewing Mendel Romm Junior. You were talking about General Hodge and the Masons.

**Mendel:** General Hodges was the Commanding General of the Third Army at Fort McPherson [Atlanta, Georgia]. He and his top people were all going through Scottish Rite together. I went to meet them and have my picture taken. I'm the only person in uniform out of these hundreds of people, standing next to the General. He said, "I understand you had a little trouble getting here." I said, "There really wasn't. My Colonel wasn't too excited about it." He says, "I'll have somebody give you my number. If you can't get me on that number, you know who I am and where I am. No matter where you are in the world, if anybody gives you any trouble about masonry, you call me." I thought, "That's pretty good."

**Marvin:** That's not bad, having generals in your ball park, so to speak. Did you spend time in Korea or not?

**Mendel:** No. Interesting. When I got called up, I went to, at the time it was Camp Rucker . . .

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<sup>110</sup> General Courtney Hicks Hodges (1887-1966) ultimately became a four-star general. He was born in Perry, Georgia and served with distinction in World War II in Europe where he commanded the First Army. His troops were the first to reach and liberate the French capital of Paris in large numbers. He was chosen by Douglas MacArthur to lead the attack against Japan. He was present at the surrenders of both Nazi Germany in Rheims, France and of the Japanese Empire at Tokyo Bay.

now it's Fort Rucker<sup>111</sup> in Alabama. I had a Captain and I was a Lieutenant. We were the only officers for the headquarters detachment. We had all the MP's [military police], all the cooks, all the supplies, uniforms, and everything else for all the troops they're bringing . . . the National Guards that were being called up for Korea. One of my jobs, one of many, was to be the mess officer for the officer's mess. We had all of these people from Fort McPherson. None of them are people that I had met earlier. Of course, I met them later. We had to take care of them. I saw to it that we had a really comfortable place for them to relax. I started playing bridge with these people and got friendly. One day when I'd been there maybe a month or so, I get orders to go to Korea as an infantry officer. I told you I didn't want to be an infantry officer.

**Marvin:** Yes, I got that.

**Mendel:** I said, "I guess I'm going to go to Korea as an infantry officer." There was another lieutenant there that had gone to [University of] Georgia with me. He still remains a good friend of mine. We both got put on orders. We were the only two single officers at the time. It gets all the way up to Washington through all the commands and they said, "If you want them to go as infantry officers, send them to Fort Benning. Let them come take an infantry course. My MOS [Military Occupational Specialty] was as a tank officer. I'm playing bridge with these people. We were laughing about the story that it got bounced down. They said, "I'll tell you what. You'd better go put in a request to go to the Fourth Infantry Division . . . which was the Tiger Tank . . . so you can improve your abilities as a tank officer." He says, "Nobody in the world knows, so don't you dare say it. But they're going to get orders within the next six weeks to go to Europe." So I spent two years in Europe.

**Marvin:** You spent your Korea time in Europe. Got out then right after that?

**Mendel:** Got out. While I was in the service, my dad had an opportunity to sell his insurance agency. He had been in the insurance business here since 1911. He wanted to know, did I want to come home. I'd been a partner for about four or five years. I liked the income I was getting, especially when I was in the service. I said, "I'm coming home." I didn't know how much I liked the army. I was an honor graduate of ROTC and I could have become a regular army officer. I was single. They didn't treat single people right. The married people had it much easier. They got fancier quarters and they had servants. This is in Europe. I got all the bad

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<sup>111</sup> Fort Rucker is a United States Army post in Alabama named for a Civil War officer, Confederate General Edmund Rucker. The post is the primary flight training base for Army Aviation and is home to the United States Army Aviation Center of Excellence and the United States Army Aviation Museum.

details and all the holidays. I was the officer of the day [OOD] and everything else. I think they've stopped that in the service now, but at the time it really wasn't fair.

I had put in an application for regular army and started having second thoughts. I went and actually pulled it off the general's desk. It had been approved all the way up and I said, "This isn't right." So I came home and I went to insurance school up in Baltimore [Maryland]. My daddy worked for USF&G. In 1911, he was their mail clerk here in Atlanta. Five years from then, when he was 21, he was the chief underwriter for bonds for the entire southeast of USF&G, which was really something. He'd become an agent and had a very good agency, so I went with him. I go off to this insurance school and came back, and I said, "Daddy, this isn't the same business that I remember as a kid going with you to deliver policies and getting to write policies and everything else. It's a whole new ballgame." He said, "What are you talking about?" I said, "Everybody's going to be a number. They are not going to say is this Mendel Romm's client? They're going to say, 'This is number six, seven, three, eight, two, one. We don't want to do business with six, seven, three, eight, two, one, so . . .'" Daddy said, "No, no, no." I think I was right, because it changed. It became a very impersonal business.

In the meantime, I got involved as an entrepreneur. I got into real estate, developed some properties, and had all kinds of ideas that were 20 or 30 years ahead of [their] time. I had the first licensed limousine company in Atlanta. I bought the franchise for Carey [Limousine Service]. I had part of a radio station with Lou Hertz, WERD.<sup>112</sup> I owned part of a weekly newspaper in West End<sup>113</sup> with a young man from Savannah [Georgia] . . . my father was very involved in one of the big companies down there. I just had all kinds of ideas that were just way ahead of themselves. I went into a deal with a group of people. I don't think any of them are living anymore. Dave Senna [sp], Matt [unintelligible: 7:10], Al Garber . . . Sam Perling of Georgia Shoe Manufacturing. There was a whole group of people.

We bought this big tract of land because one of our partners was the regional vice-

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<sup>112</sup> WERD was the first radio station programmed and owned by blacks. The station at 860 AM was established in Atlanta on October 3, 1949. The station was located on Auburn Avenue in that same building and just above the headquarters of the newly-formed Southern Christian Leadership Conference, led by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Jack Gibson was hired and by 1951 he was the most popular DJ in Atlanta. According to Gibson, Dr. King would tap the ceiling of SCLC office with a broomstick to signal he had an announcement to make. Gibson would then lower a microphone from the studio window to King at the window below.

<sup>113</sup> The West End is a neighborhood in Atlanta. Originally called 'White Hall' in 1835 it was the meeting of important railroad lines. By the mid 1950's and 1960's it was in decline as people fled to the suburbs and black people moved in. Today it is primarily black middle class.

president of A&P.<sup>114</sup> They were looking for a site to build their southeastern headquarters and warehouses on. When we had the closing, I found out all these people . . . I thought there were going to be ten of us . . . all of them took partners in. One had five percent, one had two-and-a-half percent. I had ten percent. I just wasn't smart enough. When the gentlemen from A&P got in some trouble because he owned some A&P retail stores that they didn't know he owned, they kind of forced him to resign or retire. Meantime, we had this piece of property that we had gone to a lot of trouble to get the railroad to cross what was then Gordon Road on the property. We had no idea what we were going to do with it. Meantime, they wouldn't buy any more property, this group. I bought up about eight houses to the west of it out Gordon Road to keep anybody from messing up the big piece of property. All of these people were very well-to-do. Here I am a little *schnook* [Yiddish: a person easily duped, a fool] doing this.

I decided to go for some apartments. I got one of my friends to invest with me. We built the nicest apartments available for African-Americans in Atlanta. It came from having watched Roswell Road develop with apartments early on . . . where the children of people that lived in Tuxedo Park,<sup>115</sup> the Buckhead<sup>116</sup> area, their kids were getting married. They'd get an apartment on Roswell Road fairly close to their family homes. I said, "There's so many wealthy African-Americans around here. Their children are getting married, too. They ought to have a place that they would like." It was very good. I had a waiting list. I kept expanding it. I had tenants like Hank Aaron<sup>117</sup> and Prentiss Yancey.<sup>118</sup> I got Prentiss in with Smith, Cohen, Ringel, Kohler & Martin [now Smith, Gambrell & Russell, LLP]. He was the first black to go into the law firm. I was involved in the thing. In fact, Andy Young's<sup>119</sup> first wife, about six months

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<sup>114</sup> The Great Atlantic & Pacific Tea Company, better known as 'A&P,' is a supermarket and liquor store chain in the United States that was founded in 1859.

<sup>115</sup> Tuxedo Park is a neighborhood in northwest Atlanta.

<sup>116</sup> Buckhead is an area located northwest of Downtown Atlanta with gracious homes, elegant hotels, shopping centers, restaurants, and high-rise condominium and office buildings. Buckhead is a major commercial and financial center of the Southeast, and it is the third-largest business district in Atlanta, behind Downtown and Midtown.

<sup>117</sup> Henry Louis 'Hank' Aaron (1934- ) is a retired professional baseball player. He was a Major League Baseball right fielder from 1954 through 1976. Aaron spent 21 seasons with the Atlanta Braves in the National League before playing for the Milwaukee Brewers of the American League for the final two years of his career. He held Major League Baseball's record for career home runs for 33 years, and he still holds several offensive records. He is the only player to hit 30 or more home runs in a season at least 15 times.

<sup>118</sup> Prentiss Yancey is a lawyer with a degree from Emory University Law School in 1969. He works in mergers and acquisitions.

<sup>119</sup> Andrew 'Andy' Jackson Young (b. 1932) is an American politician, diplomat, activist and pastor from Georgia. He has served as a Congressman from Georgia's 5<sup>th</sup> congressional district, the United States Ambassador to the United Nations, and Mayor of Atlanta. He served as President of the National Council of Churches USA, was a

before she died, saw Anta and I somewhere and said, “You are the first person that really went all out to help Andy get elected to Congress.” I was caught up in it. I had visions of things, of what could happen. <phone rings> I was involved with a fellow named T.M. Alexander and Alexander, Jr.<sup>120</sup> They were in the insurance business, the real estate business. Through them I met the Rockefellers.<sup>121</sup> We were going to change the world. The world changed me, instead.

**Marvin:** That doesn’t sound good, Mendel.

**Mendel:** I got greedy. I was too smart.

**Marvin:** What happened to that piece of property out on Gordon Road?

**Mendel:** I did develop a street called ‘Peyton Place’ and built some very nice low-rise apartments there. I built what’s called ‘Peyton Towers.’ I built a group of apartments called ‘Peyton Place.’ I turned them into condominiums. It was one of the first conversions. I told you, everything I did, I did too early. I sold two-bedroom, first-class units for \$19,000, and three bedrooms for \$21,000. I had to go around and talk to very educated people. They didn’t understand what we were doing. One friend of mine, who died a couple years ago, thanked me every time he saw me . . . what a wonderful thing I did for him.

**Marvin:** This is in the black community?

**Mendel:** You had to go back in Atlanta history as to what it was. This big piece of property we had backed up to a little bit over . . . I’ve got to think of the name of the road . . . Anyhow, we had a ‘Berlin Wall’ out there. I think it’s called the . . . ‘Peyton Wall.’<sup>122</sup> I think Ivan Allen<sup>123</sup>

member of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) during the 1960s Civil Rights Movement, and was a supporter and friend of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

<sup>120</sup> Theodore Martin Alexander, Sr. (1909-2001) was a leader in Atlanta’s insurance industry and civic activities for more than 70 years. He founded Alexander & Company in 1931 with offices in Georgia and Alabama. The company grew to become one of the nation’s oldest and most successful minority-owned full-time independent insurance agencies. His son, T.M. Alexander, Jr., was an investment banker, real estate entrepreneur, and a regional administrator for the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development.

<sup>121</sup> An American industrial, political, and banking family that made one of the world’s largest fortunes in the oil business during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, with John D. Rockefeller and his brother William Rockefeller. They are considered to be one of the most powerful families, if not the most powerful family, in the history of the United States.

<sup>122</sup> In an infamous 1962-1963 episode that came to be called the ‘Peyton Road Affair,’ Atlanta mayor Ivan Allen had barricades erected on Peyton Road and Harlan Road to restrict access to the Cascade Heights neighborhood and prevent black home buyers from getting to the area from Gordon Road (now Martin Luther King Drive). He took the action at the urging of white residents of southwest Atlanta. After the barricades went up the incident drew national attention. The barrier was compared to the Berlin wall and nicknamed the ‘Atlanta Wall.’ The walls were torn down in 1963 when a court ruled them to be unconstitutional. White homeowners fled the neighborhood after the barricades were removed.

<sup>123</sup> Ivan Allen, Jr. (1911-2003), was an American businessman who served two terms as the 552<sup>nd</sup> Mayor of Atlanta during the turbulent civil rights era of the 1960’s.

was mayor. It was to stop the encroachment in Cascade [Heights] of blacks.

**Marvin:** Just for the record, what we're talking about is essentially the division between the black and the white communities until very recently.

**Mendel:** No question. In fact, I told Sam Massell,<sup>124</sup> and he's finally agreed with me. Sam Massell was our mayor at one time. That second term when he ran for office, I told him, "Sam, your constituents aren't in the city anymore." "What are you talking about?" I said, "Ride up to Cascade Heights. In a period of a month, it changed from a white community to a black community." This was right after they got the wall down . . . the 'Peyton Wall.' That was to keep people from being able to go into Cascade from Gordon Road the most direct

**Marvin:** This was a literal wall . . . there was a wall built?

**Mendel:** No, it was barricades and . . .

**Marvin:** . . . there were barricades. . .

**Mendel:** . . . yes . . .

**Marvin:** . . . separating the black and the white communities . . .

**Mendel:** . . . with the idea of slowing down the movement of blacks into a white community. But the whites moved out of there very fast. There are some very nice homes out there in Cascade. That's where Andy Young lives now. A great number of well-to-do blacks live there. A lot of them live north of Gordon Road in Collier Heights.<sup>125</sup> People like . . . it will come to me . . . big homes, I mean mansions, with indoor swimming pools. I was vice-president of the Standard Club at the time. I was asked to speak to a group who were going to form a black country club. One of these professional club people, Club Corporation of America or something, were trying to get these people to . . . Herman Russell was the name I was trying to remember. [They] had the meeting at Herman Russell's . . . Herman Russell<sup>126</sup> is a very prominent . . . one

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<sup>124</sup> Sam Massell is a businessman who served from 1970 to 1974 as the 53<sup>rd</sup> mayor of Atlanta. He was the first Jewish mayor in the city's history. A lifelong Atlanta resident, Massell has had successful careers in real estate brokerage, elected office, tourism, and association management.

<sup>125</sup> Collier Heights is a historic area in Atlanta on the northwest side. The original boundaries were marked to the west by Carroll Road, to the east by Hightower Road, to the north by Bankhead Highway and to the south by Gordon Road.

<sup>126</sup> Herman Jerome Russell (1930-2014) was born in Atlanta. He was the founder and former chief executive officer of H. J. Russell and Company and a nationally recognized entrepreneur and philanthropist, as well as an influential leader in Atlanta. In 1957 he inherited his father's business and turned the small plastering company into a construction and real estate conglomerate. Some of the construction projects H. J. Russell and Company were a part of include Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport, the Georgia Dome, Philips Arena, and Turner Field. Russell became the first black member of the Atlanta Chamber of Commerce in the 1960's, and later became the

of the wealthiest men in Atlanta.

**Marvin:** Black real estate developer.

**Mendel:** The meeting was in his home. He had a great big downstairs including an indoor swimming pool, which kind of shocked me at the time. I'm the one who killed the thing. Those people were so upset. Not the community, but the whites who were trying to promote this thing. I told them the only way they could have a successful club was to include people who couldn't afford to belong. I named some names . . . the gentleman who was the head of the Butler Street YMCA<sup>127</sup> . . . certain ministers who were very prominent . . . the leadership . . .

**Marvin:** . . . of the black community . . .

**Mendel:** . . . the leadership of Atlanta. Even then, everybody talked to them before they did anything. I said, "You've got to have an exchange. It can't just be people that got it. It's got to be people who have ideas and can . . ." It kind of killed it, because at that time those people were not ready to be socially progressive.

**Marvin:** Just for the tape, the Butler Street 'Y' was, and probably still is, an all-black YMCA [Young Men's Christian Association].

**Mendel:** It may not be all black.

**Marvin:** I know white individuals who have stayed recently. They still have sleeping quarters at Butler. That's just for the tape.

**Mendel:** I've got so many great stories. I wanted to be a professional scout. I was very active in the Boy Scouts.

**Marvin:** We hadn't hit that.

**Mendel:** No, I should have done it that day when you said, "Don't you have any Christian friends?" Or did have. Only reason: antisemitism. The question you asked. I was 16 years old; that makes it 1945. I was getting ready to talk about going to college. I was going to take social work so I could be a professional Boy Scout leader. That's how involved I was. I get involved in

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second black president of the chamber. When Russell stepped down in 2004 as head of the company, he handed leadership over to his two sons and daughter.

<sup>127</sup> The Butler Street YMCA (Young Men's Christian Association) was founded in 1894 and was an icon of Atlanta's black community. The facility in Atlanta's Sweet Auburn Historic District was housed in several locations until it opened a building on Butler Street in 1920 with dormitory rooms, class rooms, a gymnasium, a swimming pool, and an auditorium. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. grew up going to the Butler Street YMCA, as did other civil rights leaders in the city. Former Atlanta Mayor Andrew Young first lived there when he came to Atlanta and worked with King. The Butler Street YMCA was informally known as the 'Black City Hall of Atlanta.' It lost its charter with the National YMCA Program citing safety issues, and closed in 2012.

things. I was told, “You realize there are only” . . . at that time . . . “two cities and maybe a third, where you can be a scout executive: New York or Chicago.” I said, “What?” Then I realized what they were talking about. I was Jewish. I had to go where they had a big Jewish Scout movement. I guess that’s antisemitism, but the man didn’t mean any harm. He was just telling me what their policies were.

**Marvin:** Which he did it in a very nice way, really. He could have just said, “Hey, you’re Jewish. You can’t come here.”

**Mendel:** I’m sure they had Jewish Scout professionals . . . in New York and Chicago . . . maybe Philadelphia.

**Marvin:** You developed condos. You worked with the black community.

**Mendel:** I worked with a group of black doctors. We built the finest medical building in town.

**Marvin:** What year are we talking about now?

**Mendel:** The doctor’s building was in the 1960’s.

**Marvin:** Integration had already taken place, or is this right at the beginning of the movement?

**Mendel:** Integration took place, but not economic integration. For example, historically there used to not be any black sales people on automobile dealers’ floors. There weren’t any black mechanics. Yet, you could ride in parts of town and you’d see cars up on bricks and people working on them . . . good mechanics. The unions or whoever, controlled who the mechanics would be at the automobile [dealers] wouldn’t let them. The only jobs they got were porters in those kinds of places. One of my dreams that I worked with the Rockefellers on was to have a black-owned dealership. It was going to be on a piece of property that I owned, another piece other than the one I talked about before, with nothing but black salespeople, black mechanics . . . and make it something proud . . . you got a car from this dealership. Through the Rockefellers, Chrysler Corporation was willing. This was in the late 1960’s. I said, “It’s got to be a General Motors car” . . . because Chrysler was already having trouble. It didn’t have an inexpensive car that was acceptable in the community. That didn’t work, but I kept trying. I kept wanting to create things. I went to New York to get Macy’s to build a store on the west side of town. The chairman of the board was a very well-known person. He said, “We’re not going build that store.” I’d gone to a lot of trouble and expense of having a market study made of the area. Every criterion . . . income, age, everything could be . . . was 100 percent, except for one thing. They were black. His argument was that if we open that store up, they’ll start blackmailing us. If

you don't hire some [blacks] in Buckhead or Avondale [Mall]<sup>128</sup> or wherever else they [wanted to] work, we're not going to shop in your store here. We're not going to give them that gun. This was a very liberal, big-time merchant in New York. It was very hard.

I tried to tell the Atlanta Life Insurance Company to move their headquarters to the west side. They've got a very beautiful office on Auburn Avenue and Piedmont [Avenue]. It was like *Amos 'n' Andy*.<sup>129</sup> I knew the executive vice-president. His daughter was one of my tenants in my nice apartments. He said, "You and all of the other Greeks and Jews are trying to steal our property." I said, "Sir, I don't want your property. I don't care what you do with your property. I'm telling you, before you build a new home office building on Auburn Avenue three blocks from Peachtree [Street], you either move up to Peachtree and build a building or move out here on the west side, and create something new. I will give you two acres of land for your building. This is what I want to do. You're going to be at the top level of this piece of property. We're going to have water cascading down towards Gordon Road, down Martin Luther King [Boulevard], with the shops going up towards your home office building." I said, "We're going to get . . . " I'd already asked people like Bob Gerson, who owned Robley Hats, and was very interested in men's clothing. I'd already asked some people like that if they would be sponsors. Not own the stores, but help young . . .

**Marvin:** . . . black. . .

**Mendel:** . . . people go into business. It would have been a natural. It would have been a mecca. The whole world would have come to see it. This man said, "You're trying to steal our property." I said, "Sir, I want to give you two acres. You'll make me rich. Just come out here." Anyhow, I had great ideas. Some of them worked and some didn't.

One of my great political stories which is one of the things that you wanted to ask.

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<sup>128</sup> Avondale Mall, originally known as 'Columbia Mall,' opened in 1964 near Avondale Estates east of Atlanta. The mall's original name came from its location at the intersection of Columbia & Memorial Drives. It was demolished in 2007.

<sup>129</sup> *Amos 'n' Andy* was an American radio and television show set in New York's historic black community of Harlem, which was popular from the 1920's through the 1960's. The original radio show was created, written and voiced by two white actors, Freeman Gosden and Charles Correll, who played a number of different characters, including the titular Amos Jones (Gosdon) and Andrew Hogg Brown (Correll). As the show came to television, black actors took over the majority of the roles. The show eventually drew controversy over the images it presented of blacks. In 1966, CBS gave in to pressure from the civil rights movement and the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People), and cancelled the program.

When Maynard Jackson moved to Atlanta . . . Maynard Jackson<sup>130</sup> was a former mayor of Atlanta, [he] was the grandson of a very prominent black leader in masonry in America.<sup>131</sup> They named a street after his grandfather. Houston Street is named after his grandfather. T.M. Alexander, a very prominent real estate person here, said, “You’ve got to meet this young man. He’s gone to work here for the [National] Labor Relations Board.”<sup>132</sup> He took me to their office. Hello, how are you, nice to meet you, and everything else. Mr. Alexander said, “Now you two should know each other because you really . . . you are all the future of this town.” About a year later, if that long, Maynard ran for United States Senate against Herman Talmadge.<sup>133</sup> I knew there was no chance, but I had to support him. We were as friendly as you can get with politicians. Then he ran for vice-mayor, at the same time Sam Massell ran for mayor.

Maynard already knew that Sam was a friend of mine and I wasn’t interested. I’d already gotten mad at local politics, because I never wanted any favors from the government as part of my do-goodness. Anyhow, I supported Maynard for vice-mayor. When he decided to run against Sam for mayor, at the time when I told Sam, “Your constituency has moved.” I told Maynard, “Maynard, this man’s been a friend of mine my whole life. You can count on me for anything four years from now. But I’m going to be for Sam.” I don’t think I’ve ever told Sam this story, but when he reads this some place, he’ll know it. When they had the run-off election between the two of them, I didn’t like the ad campaign that the [Massell] group ran. “Don’t let Atlanta become like . . .” and they named one or two other cities that had black leadership.

<phone rings>

**Mendel:** I gave Maynard, not as much as I’d given him previous times he’d run, but I gave him \$500. It was like giving \$5,000 today. He did not speak to me for eight years that he was mayor of the city.

**Marvin:** Give me a year of this first run, approximately.

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<sup>130</sup> Maynard Holbrook Jackson, Jr. (1928-2003) was an American attorney, politician, a member of the Democratic Party, and the first black mayor of Atlanta, serving three terms (1974-82, 1990-94).

<sup>131</sup> Mendel is speaking of Maynard Jackson’s maternal grandfather, John Wesley Dobbs (1882-1961) who was a black civic and political leader. In 1936, Dobbs founded the Atlanta Civic and Political League, and in 1946 he co-founded the Atlanta Negro Voters League. During those years, 20,000 African-Americans were registered to vote in Atlanta. His family home was on Houston Street in Downtown Atlanta. The street was renamed John Wesley Dobbs Avenue in Dobbs' honor by Maynard Jackson in 1994.

<sup>132</sup> The National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) is an agency of the United States government charged with conducting elections for labor union representation and with investigating and remedying unfair labor practices.

<sup>133</sup> Herman Eugene Talmadge (1913-2002) was Governor of Georgia twice; once in 1947 and then from 1951 to 1955. He spent most of his public service in the United States Senate, serving from 1957 to 1981. He was a Democrat.

**Mendel:** In the 1970's, I would guess . . . whenever Sam Massell was mayor. It was that time. About eight or nine years later, my daughter comes home from one of the local schools and says, "Dad, I met a man. He just said the most wonderful things about you. He was so happy to find out I was your daughter." "Who's that?" [She said], "Maynard Jackson." I said, "He must be planning to run for office again." It's really amazing, because that gave me a real bad taste of politics. I've been involved in a lot of political things, but that was just [uncalled] for. It was a question of, deep down, his dislike of whites. I'd tell him to his face today.

I found that, as I did a lot of these things and I thought I was doing good things. I got called . . . I had hired my secretary's husband who lost his job with the YMCA. I gave him a job to oversee a building project I had. He was hiring people from prison. I'm all for whatever it takes. My foreman fired three men, two blacks and a white, for being drunk on the job. They went to the Concerned Black Clergy<sup>134</sup> and said that they had been . . . because they were friendly and lived together, that's why this redneck from Alabama fired them. I had to go to a kangaroo court . . . Reverend [Joseph Everhart] Boone . . . Joe Boone.<sup>135</sup> I'll always remember him, because he told me, "Mr. Romm, we've always heard nice things about you but you're a racist, like all the rest of them." I said, "Sir, I don't know who you heard that from, but I'm not a racist. I'll tell you what we're going to do. We're closing this job down. We're not going to build these buildings. We're just going to forget about it. You're putting about 100 people out of work, of which 70 or 80 are black." I said, "If you want to boycott me" . . . I think at the time had about 500 or 600 tenants . . . "I think I can find a few hundred of them that'll come out here and march in opposition. The man that you don't like, he came from Addison, Alabama, and he's learned that we're making our money from black people. The money is what's important. You ask him when they call up and say their air conditioning isn't working, who's up there in ten minutes to fix their air conditioning. Or if their door's not locking right . . . anything. This man knows he's working for those people. He's polite and he's nice. I wouldn't have it any other . . . if anybody ever complained, I'd have been up there complaining about. I'm not having drunks working for me. I don't care who they are or what they do, or anything else. We're doing

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<sup>134</sup> The Concerned Black Clergy of Metropolitan Atlanta, Inc. is a proactive and principle-centered organization comprising mostly of black ministers and laity.

<sup>135</sup> Joseph Everhart Boone (1922-2006) was a minister, business owner, and civil rights leader who marched with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. He was a key organizer of the Atlanta Movement, which led to the integration of lunch counters and department stores in Atlanta during the early 1960's, and the Director of the Metropolitan Atlanta Summit Leadership Congress Inc. During this tenure, Boone negotiated with the Atlanta Public School Committee for the desegregation of the Atlanta Public School system.

something . . . somebody can get hurt.”

They didn’t know . . . I’ll put this in the history . . . I owned the land, free and clear. I had not made the first construction [unintelligible: 29:35]. We had put in the roughed-in plumbing, the pipes were sticking up, and we had poured the slab over. That could sit there for years. I didn’t owe any money. They didn’t know that. They thought they had me. “Hey, he’s building there. He’s got to have money. He’s going to do something.” I just wasn’t going to do it. So they came back about it. I took all of my ‘so-called friends,’ leaders in the black community, some of my doctors from the office building, and the Alexanders, T.M. Junior who had been in [President Dwight David] Eisenhower’s<sup>136</sup> cabinet as the undersecretary of HUD [Department of Housing and Urban Development]. I had all of these [people] that came. They didn’t open their mouths up. They sat there like bumps on the wall. When we had a little break, they came out and said, “Don’t worry about it, Mendel. We’ve got the thing taken care of.” I said, “You didn’t take care of it very good. That man called me all kinds of names in there.” I said, “You only need to stand up and say, ‘Hey, you’re talking about our friend. This is a good guy.’” Anyhow, they compromised about a week later. They said if I rehired the three guys and give them a second chance they’d forget about it. I said, “Not if they get drunk again.”

**Marvin:** Are you talking about black racism against whites, or are you talking about antisemitism in the black community?

**Mendel:** No . . . in those days, I don’t remember ever hearing anybody . . . black people . . . I was around them a lot . . . none of them even said anything that was close to being antisemitic. It was anti-white. One way or the other I was . . .

**Marvin:** . . . you fit the description . . .

**Mendel:** . . . part of it. If I had it to do over again, I played the game wrong . . . part of my greed. I’d ask new black people who moved to town, “Where are you going to live?” “There’s only one place to live.” They’d name one of my deals. I said, “This is what it is.” It was about the same time they started opening up housing apartments all over the city to blacks. These people who were high-up government employees who had been transferred here were living with me. Star baseball player, Hank Aaron, didn’t live there that long. His family came and bought a

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<sup>136</sup> Dwight David Eisenhower (1890-1969) was the 34<sup>th</sup> President of the United States, serving from 1953 until 1961. He was a five-star general in the United States Army during World War II and served as Supreme Commander of the Allied Forces in Europe. He was a Republican.

house. But I had Joe Caldwell<sup>137</sup> with the [Atlanta] Hawks,<sup>138</sup> a lot of well-known people were living . . . and the children of the people that I envisioned living there. But they all either bought homes . . . in fact, some of them bought homes out here in Buckhead. Which I liked, because I had a waiting list of people to get in.

**Marvin:** That's a far change from the Atlanta you grew up in.

**Mendel:** Yes. Martin Luther King was born four days after I was . . . within four blocks . . . close to Georgia Baptist, now the Atlanta Medical Center. He was on Auburn Avenue, at the family home. They were too high up to go to Grady Hospital, the public hospital, and had a midwife. I lived on St. Charles. He lived over there on Auburn Avenue . . . less than a mile and a half, from each other. If we hadn't gone to grammar school together, we definitely would have gone to high school together. He would have gone to Boys' High. He wouldn't have gone to Tech High . . .

**Marvin:** Except Boys' High was segregated at that time.

**Mendel:** That's what I'm saying. We were born at different places. We grew up and didn't know each other. We would have gone to high school [together] . . .

**Marvin:** . . . if not for segregation . . .

**Mendel:** . . . we didn't meet until [we were] in our thirties, just a few years before he got killed. That is a change in what's happening.

**Marvin:** For the better?

**Mendel:** The change? Of course, it's better . . . and the pendulum will swing. Where people worry about one group having too much rights, it'll swing the other way. Sooner or later, if things work out, it will be down the middle. The pendulum will remain still and we'll all be one happy family.

**Marvin:** Politically, you consider yourself a . . . ?

**Mendel:** I'm independent. I vote for individuals and for issues based on what I think they are. But down deep, it has to go back to my upbringing. I think I'm a liberal, big 'L,' person.

**Marvin:** This has been interesting. There are about seven minutes left on the tape. Any personal remarks you'd like to make that we may have missed? We've covered a fair amount of ground today.

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<sup>137</sup> Joe Louis Caldwell (1941- ) is a retired American professional basketball player. He spent most of his professional life with the Atlanta Hawks franchise.

<sup>138</sup> The Atlanta Hawks are a professional basketball team based in Atlanta.

**Mendel:** You asked me what happened to the Mayfair Club . . . The Mayfair Club burned down. We had enough insurance, because the head insurance man was very fair. He made sure every insurance member of the club got part of it. He made sure that the coverage was right. We ended up with a considerable amount of money and owned the land. Now the land includes where the Selig Center<sup>139</sup> is, and there's a motel<sup>140</sup> north of that next to the road . . .

**Marvin:** . . . that would be Peachtree [Street] and Spring [Street].

**Mendel:** There's a road that runs straight into the old Retail Credit Building on Peachtree. There's a bridge there. The Mayfair Club was south of that bridge, because to the north of that bridge is the Peachtree Christian Church's parking lot. We had played with ideas of getting Ben Massell to build a high-rise building. We'd have the club on the top of it, and give him the land in exchange for many years of rent.

We felt like we needed an in-town club. There were a lot of people who had, over the years, become widows or moved away. They owned bonds. Max Cuba,<sup>141</sup> may he rest in peace, was the accountant here, he organized those people to liquidate. The old-time people who were still around, and members who were willing to take the money and give it to charity. If you don't want a club, let's do something big with it. But there was a lot of . . . big word . . . 'greed' among people. They wanted their \$1,000, \$2,000, \$3,000, or whatever they were going to get. That's why there is no longer a Mayfair Club. The Standard Club was having financial problems. They may still be having them. They made a deal for members of the Mayfair Club to join the Standard Club for the same amount of money they were getting from the liquidation of the club. Mr. Cuba was also very involved in advising the Standard Club how to operate. Mr. Cuba came from the old [Jewish] Progressive Club, too.

**Marvin:** What happened to the Progressive Club?

**Mendel:** What happened to it? . . . We didn't have a lot of eating places right in town. As the town expanded, people moved further out. We started getting restaurants and the other things,

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<sup>139</sup> The Selig Center is located at the corner of 18<sup>th</sup> Street and Spring Street in Midtown Atlanta. The building houses the Breman Jewish Heritage Museum and the Jewish Federation of Greater Atlanta.

<sup>140</sup> That was the Fairfield Inn, now a dormitory for Savannah College of Art and Design.

<sup>141</sup> Max Cuba (1903-1972) was born in New York and lived in Atlanta, Georgia. He was a Certified Public Accountant, community leader, and philanthropist. Max served as a city alderman several times, and was a leader on the Atlanta-Fulton County Joint Planning Board for over 30 years. He was also twice the president of the Atlanta Jewish Community Council, and a member of the Board of Directors of the Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds. He was the "Man of the Year" for B'nai B'rith, Jewish War Veterans, and the Jewish Theological Seminary. He was the President of Ahavath Achim Congregation and B'nai B'rith. As he had no family of his own, his personal life was closely linked with the family of his brother, Joe Cuba, as he lived with them for some time.

football and baseball. It just became a luxury that people didn't see they needed any more. They tried different things. The old card players . . .

<brief interruption when children arrive, interview resumes>

. . . wanted to continue playing. They tried other locations. [It was] a big mistake that the Standard Club made, not buying the Progressive Club on Moores Mill Road at the expressway [Interstate 75]. Then they could have had a town club. It's too far to ride out to eat at the Standard Club now. There are a hundred good restaurants within a couple miles from here. You don't need to go.

**Marvin:** No Jewish Clubs in Atlanta then.

<phone, talking, then interview resumes>

**Marvin:** Let me ask one more question because it was in the paper recently. The Commerce Club<sup>142</sup> . . .

**Mendel:** . . . Want a great antisemitic joke? When the Commerce Club was formed, Mills B. Lane was the Chairman of the Board of the C&S National Bank. People got invited to join. I wasn't invited. I didn't think a thing of it. I really had no interest in joining. I was young, maybe in my thirties. I was in a stock brokerage house that I did a lot of business with Johnson, Lane, Space, [Smith] & Co. Inc. A couple of the young men in there, A.F. Steadman [sp] and John Candler, grandson of Asa Candler of Coca-Cola, were complaining that they didn't get invited to join either. The vice-president said, "I'll take care of that. Are you joining, Mendel?" I said, "They didn't invite me." He looked into it and we got invitations. I found out that each officer of the bank was supposed to go through their customers, and pick names to submit for membership. The young officer who had my name even told some people he wasn't going to let any Jews join the club. I joined anyhow.

**Marvin:** My understanding of the club originally was to bring the Christian, Jewish and black communities together.

**Mendel:** No blacks in there when we opened that club.

**Marvin:** That's right. By law, they couldn't have. But to bring . . .

**Mendel:** . . . I didn't know it was law.

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<sup>142</sup> The Commerce Club is a private business and social club on Peachtree Street in Downtown Atlanta. Since 1960, the Commerce Club was located at 34 Broad Street in the Five Points area of downtown, where major banks, law firms and accounting firms were headquartered within walking distance. In 2010, The Commerce Club merged with the One Ninety One Club and the new Commerce Club opened on the 49<sup>th</sup> floor of the 191 Tower. Since the merger, the Commerce Club is also known as the '191 Club.'

**Marvin:** No, by law at that time. So do you think they are going to stay Downtown?

**Mendel:** I've got a feeling they're going to move. If all the big law firms are moving, it's a shame. The salvation of Downtown, obviously at this point, is for Georgia State [University—Atlanta, Georgia] to keep getting bigger.

**Marvin:** The reason I bring this up, is to show again the difference between the time we talked about last time when you knew everyone Downtown, to the fact that Downtown Atlanta no longer exists. It's a question.

**Mendel:** 'Downtown' is now 'Midtown.' 'Midtown' would be 'Downtown.'

**Marvin:** The city has moved out.

**Mendel:** The state government will eventually . . . state government and the schools will take over . . . and housing.

**Marvin:** People are moving. Incidentally, Atlanta really never had housing Downtown.

**Mendel:** No.

**Marvin:** In spite of what they say. Mendel, I've got about a minute here.

**Mendel:** We did have housing Downtown.

**Marvin:** Not much though.

**Mendel:** When are you talking about . . . 100 years ago?

**Marvin:** No. We're talking about when you were growing up.

**Mendel:** When I was a kid? People lived on Boulevard and . . .

**Marvin:** . . . that's not Downtown.

**Mendel:** . . . Piedmont. Isn't Piedmont Downtown? What you consider Midtown, wasn't that Downtown?

**Marvin:** No. Where Macy's<sup>143</sup> was . . . Downtown. Where Rich's<sup>144</sup> was. Five Points.

**Mendel:** Some friends of mine houses right there on Peachtree [Street] in the Twenties . . .

**Marvin:** That's right, but not many. Anyway, there's been a change. That's what we've

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<sup>143</sup> Macy's, originally 'R. H. Macy & Co.,' is a chain of department stores owned by American multinational corporation Macy's, Inc. As of January 2014, it operates 850 department stores locations in the continental United States, Hawaii, Puerto Rico, and Guam, with a prominent Herald Square flagship location in New York City.

<sup>144</sup> Rich's was a department store retail chain, headquartered in Atlanta that operated in the southern United States from 1867 until 2005. The retailer began in Atlanta as M. Rich & Co. dry goods store and was run by Mauritius Reich (anglicized to 'Morris Rich'), a Hungarian Jewish immigrant. It was renamed M. Rich & Bro. in 1877, when his brother Emanuel was admitted into the partnership, and was again renamed M. Rich & Bros. in 1884 when the third brother Daniel joined the partnership. In 1929, the company was reorganized and the retail portion of the business became simply, Rich's. Many of the former Rich's stores today form the core of Macy's Central, an Atlanta-based division of Macy's, Inc., which formerly operated as Federated Department Stores, Inc.

explored for the couple hours we've been together. Your life and the life of the City of Atlanta. With a minute left, thank you. It's been a pleasure talking with you, Mendel.

**Mendel:** One thing I can do is talk and talk.

**Marvin:** We'll try again another day. Maybe someone will listen to this and say, "Hey we needed another three hours." Again, thank you, Mendel.

**Mendel:** Thank you, sir.

<End Tape 4, Side 1>

**INTERVIEW ENDS**