

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

**MEMOIRIST:** ALBERT BARON  
**INTERVIEWER:** JOHN KENT  
RUTH EINSTEIN  
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**INTERVIEW BEGINS**

<Begin Disk 1>

**John:** Today is Jan 19, 2001. Start with your name, please, and when and where you were born?

**Albert:** My name is Albert Baron, spelled B-A-R-O-N, one 'R.' I was born in Nancy, in France, in northeastern France, on October 6, 1934.

**John:** Could you just give a general overview of your time up until the war and the war period . . . whatever you'd like to mention.

**Albert:** As a child, I had a pretty normal life, as I recall. I spent summer vacation with my parents, and my brother and sister. I have an older brother [Maurice] and an older sister [Therese] who both live in Canada—they were placed in a farm for their summer vacation—and I spent most of mine with my parents. Things were quite normal. My dad [Jacob] had a men and ladies' ready-to-wear and custom tailoring business. My mother [Rose Klarman] worked along with him when she could. Then, of course, in 1940 is when the war really started for us, but until that time . . . although we had a small Jewish community in Nancy . . . it was quite close . . . the synagogue, everything was within walking distance, no one had cars. The synagogue was down the block on the other side of the street, my school was on the other side of the street. I went to kindergarten . . . the last school that I can recall before the war started. In early 1940, we were one of the first cities in France to be bombed, and we knew the war started. But as a

child, you don't understand what war is, and what killing is so I thought it was more play than being worried about getting killed, as my parents probably were. We were placed in air raid shelters. As soon as the sirens went off advising the population that we're being bombed, we ran and stayed in these air raid shelters. At one time we spent nearly three weeks in an air raid shelter that [was] close by . . . we heard the bombs. Of course, as a child, I didn't know what it was all about. My dad . . . at that time when we were in a shelter . . . there was a little period in between bombings that [he] decided that it's probably a good time to get away from there. Now what he knew about the atrocities being committed against Jews . . . all he knew is we were close to the German border. My dad was born near the Polish-German border, knew the Germans, knew the antisemitism . . . I'm sure knew what went on from 1933 to 1940 and thought it would be best, as Jews, to leave Nancy and head south.

So in the spring of 1940, my dad bought an old truck, although he was not a driver, [and he] asked one of my uncles—actually my dad's brother-in-law—to drive us south to a city called Toulouse, which is a major city south . . . way south, actually, of Paris . . . directly south. We left in spring of 1940 with whatever we could load on that truck. Unfortunately, my uncle [Vishnitz] who drove us had left his wife and daughter behind and thought he would drive us somewhere where we could get on a train or go, and then he would go back and get them. Unfortunately, by the time he got back . . . the timing was just strange . . . that they were picked up by *Gestapo*.<sup>1</sup> We never heard from them again. He finally decided to go south again to where we were and join us. I guess the reason we chose Toulouse . . . I guess my dad did . . . was that my mother had a sister who lived in Toulouse. Now you have understand that during the war days, there were French nationals—Jews that had come over from the east, from Poland—in the case of my parents and my aunt [Tefila]—and became French citizens. My parents—for a reason which I still do not understand—never became French citizens, so they were really foreigners. Now when the war started, and they started chasing or looking for Jews, the first one they were looking for were foreigners, or foreign Jews. We arrived in Toulouse—again in the spring of 1940—and took up a little apartment. Now France was divided into two sections—one was 'Free France'<sup>2</sup> that the Germans felt there were enough collaborators and people they can

<sup>1</sup> An abbreviation of *Geheime Staatspolizei*, which means "Secret State Police." It was established in 1934 and placed under Heinrich Himmler. With virtually unlimited powers, it was highly feared.

<sup>2</sup> Vichy France, known officially as the French State (*État français*), was the government headed by Marshal Philippe Pétain (French: Pétain) from July 1940, after the Germans invaded France, until September 1944, when the

rely on that they felt that can take over that part which was more or less the southern part . . . which Toulouse was a part of, which is called ‘Free France.’ The government of an old, foolish general called Marshal [Philippe] Petain<sup>3</sup> [French: Pétain] and a terrible antisemite called [Pierre] Laval,<sup>4</sup> who ran pretty much . . . [the] Prime Minister of Free France. [General] Charles] de Gaulle,<sup>5</sup> [who] was then a general of the army, left and took most of what was left of the French army after they capitulated . . . to England. Here we were in Toulouse in a little apartment. My dad on one of his outing gets caught in what we call in French a ‘*rafle*,’ which actually means a ‘round-up.’ What they were rounding up were Jews to send to what they called ‘work camps,’ which eventually they were sent to concentration camps. Now this was all done by the French police and French *Gestapo* who had been instructed to round up the Jews to be sent to these camps.

My dad was caught by the French police [and] taken to French police station. When we became aware that he had been caught, my French [cousin]—this is my aunt’s daughter, who was a French national and French citizen—was able to pay off the police to let him go. No sooner did they let him go that he came to home and told us he was going into hiding because they’re looking for him. The *Gestapo*—again this is the French *Gestapo*—people don’t realize that you had the German *Gestapo* and you also had either French *Gestapo* or *Gestapo* from any other countries—came looking for him at our apartment. My sister, my brother and I were in that little apartment waiting for some news as to what to do when the *Gestapo* came knocking at our door—of course, realize that I was still a youngster and I wasn’t even as scared I guess as I should have been—but my sister who was the oldest—who was at the time maybe 13 years old—was aware of the danger. They wanted to know where my dad was and that if she didn’t take them where he is that they would come back and take my brother and I. She immediately

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Allies liberated France. An armistice signed in June 1940 divided France into two zones: one under German military occupation and one left under French sovereignty (the Vichy government). Although it was officially neutral, Vichy France collaborated closely with Germany. The Vichy government was complicit with German racial policies, aiding and cooperating with the detainment and deportation of Jews from both occupied and unoccupied France.

<sup>3</sup> Philippe Petain rose to prominence as a general during World War I and later became Marshal of France and then Chief of State of Vichy, France.

<sup>4</sup> Pierre Laval served as Prime Minister of France from January 1931 to February 1932 and was the head of another government from June 1935 to January 1936. Although he began his political career as a socialist, he became far right politically and served in the Vichy Regime following France’s surrender and armistice with Germany in 1940. Laval served under Philippe Petain and signed orders allowing Jews to be deported from France to German extermination camps. Laval was arrested by the government of Charles de Gaulle in 1944 after France was liberated. He executed by firing squad after being convicted of high treason.

<sup>5</sup> Charles de Gaulle led French forces during World War II as a general. In 1958, he founded the French Fifth Republic, which replaced the previous government, and served as president from 1959 to 1969.

said that she would take them where he is and led them off—led them astray—she was quite fleet-footed at 13. They were older, and she outran them—being sure that she wasn't followed—to where my father was hiding in my aunt's attic. My brother and I went there on our own. My brother, [who] was also older, took me by the hand, and then we ran to my aunt's house. At that time we all went into another home—this was a gentile home—and hid in their cellar in the basement for a few days until things calmed down. At that time, plans were made to leave Toulouse and go further south to the mountains.

Now at that time, the only route of escape was either into Spain, or to the ocean. We couldn't go east to Switzerland or Italy because all the doors were closed. Italy was part of the Axis,<sup>6</sup> part of Germany at the time with the German army, and Switzerland had closed its doors to immigrants. We ended up in a little town called Luchon—Bagneres [Bagnères]-de-Luchon is actually what it's called—which is a small little village right at the foothills of the Pyrenees Mountains.<sup>7</sup> My dad rented a little villa . . . little house on a backstreet that was owned by a gentleman<sup>8</sup> who knew—even though he was not Jewish—that we were Jews, and at the jeopardy of his own life, rented us this little villa.<sup>9</sup> We remained there for nearly a year-and-a-half, which we felt was safe . . . we felt that by that time the war would be over. Unfortunately, the war was just beginning, because in 1942 was when . . . if my dates are right . . . Pearl Harbor<sup>10</sup> was in the spring of 1942 . . .

**John:** December, 1941

**Albert:** December, 1941. By that time the United States was already in the war.

**John:** What was told to you as a child about what was going on, what all this meant, what you needed to do or not do in your role as a little kid?

**Albert:** That's a good question. Actually, what my dad explained to me was what a war is and

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<sup>6</sup> The Axis alliance formed between Germany, Italy and Japan during World War II with the goals of expanding territories, defeating the Allied forces (France, Poland, Great Britain, and later the United States) and destroying Soviet Communism.

<sup>7</sup> The Pyrenees is a range of mountains in southwest Europe that forms a natural border between France and Spain. It separates the Iberian Peninsula from the rest of continental Europe, and extends for about 305 miles from the Bay of Biscay to the Mediterranean Sea.

<sup>8</sup> This gentleman's name is Mr. Calve.

<sup>9</sup> The Breman Museum owns the Albert Baron Family Papers collection including images of the Baron family and the children in France (see ABF 406).

<sup>10</sup> On December 7, 1941 the Japanese surprised the United States by attacking the United States' fleet in Honolulu, Hawaii. The ships were all docked in Pearl Harbor. The surprise attack on Pearl Harbor was the beginning of World War II for the United States, which until that time had remained neutral. A few days later, Germany declared war on the United States as well and we began fighting in the Pacific and Europe.

what really was going on. He told us that our religion was different. We practiced our religion even in time of war. My dad had a rabbi visit our home to teach us Hebrew. My brother was going to be 13 [years old] two years later . . . at 11 [years old he] was instructed in *davening*—I guess you could call it—praying. I learned a little Hebrew at that time—more about Judaism and our religion. Then he explained to me about the Germans. He also drew a German helmet and a French helmet to make sure that I was aware or knew the difference between German soldiers and French soldiers, because when I went to school I may run into German soldiers, which eventually I did and because I recognized the difference in the helmets, I was able to know that these were Germans, and they're the bad guys. I knew that I had to go back home because I was instructed that if I see them anywhere in the village to run back home and instruct my father that there are Germans in town so that he can make provisions for our safety again.

As I said, we were in Luchon for nearly a year-and-a-half, so here we are in—I guess it was the fall of 1942 around October—and my dad did find out that the Germans had come down all the way down into that area and they were patrolling the mountains because they had heard that there were a lot of Jews escaping into Spain via the mountains. They came and patrolled—along with the French police and mountain patrol [who] were patrolling the mountain. Now what my dad did was he had placed my sister in a convent about two or so months prior to that—I guess he had suspected there were some problems—and placed my brother and I in a monastery. Now here again, people don't realize that a lot of nuns and a lot of priests were the "Righteous Amongst the Nations,"<sup>11</sup> in essence, who saved quite a lot of Jews by hiding them at the jeopardy of their own lives. We stayed in this monastery for about three weeks or so. My dad at the time was making provisions to get us over the mountain into Spain. Now realize we were talking about a mountain that's somewhere between 6,000 to 7,000 feet high—nowhere as high as the [Swiss] Alps or the Rockies [Rocky Mountains—United States]— just for comparison we're talking about twice the height of the Carolina Mountains which are about 3,000 [feet]. The only way to escape into Spain via the mountain was via a 24-hour trek.

We elected—or I should say my dad elected—along with two other families . . .

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<sup>11</sup> The "Righteous Amongst the Nations," or "Righteous Gentiles" is a title used by the State of Israel to honor non-Jews who risked their lives and the lives of their families to help save Jews during the Holocaust.

because the only guides that you could find to take you over these mountains were Basques.<sup>12</sup> The Basques at that time were a non-entity—they didn't have their own country, lived mostly in the mountains—even today they're still fighting for their own independence and their own country, but they had fought on the wrong side of the civil war in Spain<sup>13</sup> so they could live in Spain . . . they lived partially in France in the mountains. They, for a sum of money, would take us over the mountains safely into Spain, at which time at the border they would have to backtrack and go back down. They felt that the time to do this—if there was a good time—would be prior to Christmas—prior to the holidays—where the patrollers would be preoccupied with the holidays and would never suspect that people were crazy enough to try to climb a mountain with two to three feet of snow on the mountain. We decided that we would attempt to do it, which we did. We were given warm clothes. Warm boots and only what we could carry on our back is all we could take over with us. Everything was left in that little villa that we had rented. My dad had packed up things in cases and left them there and felt that when the war ends that we could go back and get it.

Here we are climbing this mountain, and this uncle that I had mentioned earlier, who had taken us with the truck, whose wife and daughter had been taken away, tried to do this climb with us and unfortunately about halfway he couldn't anymore and went back down. We never heard from him again until we found out that some way made his way to England . . . we still haven't found out [how] . . . survived the war in England and then went back to France after the war, or Belgium. But we did climb over this mountain and went around Andorra<sup>14</sup> and ended up on the border, and a Spanish patroller—a border guard—stopped us. Now we were told, at least my dad showed us, that the Civil Guards—which is what the Spanish patrollers called themselves—wore very strange-looking helmets made out of leather <hold hands up on either side of head> that looked like this really. That I can still remember as a child—of course, I've seen them after that. He stopped us and demanded money or jewelry or anything to allow us to

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<sup>12</sup> The Basques live in the region around the western end of the Pyrenees on the coast of the Bay of Biscay and across parts of north-central Spain and south-western France. They are an indigenous ethnic group who speak Basque and today have some autonomy in the Southern Basque Country in Spain.

<sup>13</sup> The Spanish Civil War began in 1936 and was fought between those loyal to the democratically elected Spanish Republic (Republicans) and a rebel group led by General Francisco Franco (Nationalists). The Nationalists were supported by Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy, while the Republicans were supported by the Soviet Union and Mexico. The Nationalists were victorious in 1939, and Franco established a fascist dictatorship after the war.

<sup>14</sup> Andorra is the sixth smallest nation in Europe and is located in the eastern Pyrenees Mountains and bordered by Spain and France. During the Second World War, Andorra was neutral and became a smuggling route between Vichy France and Spain.

continue to pass. Nobody had any choice just to give him about everything they had . . . to at least be alive and be safe . . . and he sent us to the side of a road. Here we arrived . . . I remember it was pitch dark . . . it was black . . . and here's this group of about 15 people not knowing where to go. The Basque guides are gone, the patrolman sent us off on the side of the road . . . the only thing I remember is my dad telling me that I fell asleep just standing up there on the side of the road. Realize that on that 24-hour journey we allowed to sleep or rest because if you do you could freeze to death, so you pretty much have to keep moving all the time. Now, in the middle of this darkness a whistle appeared on the road, and somebody came by on a bicycle. What this man was doing was looking for people who had journeyed over the mountain to assist them in going further on. He was part of the . . . at that time I think it was the World Jewish Committee<sup>15</sup> rather than the American Jewish Congress, which is what it is now. At that time, they had had quite a few Jews who had gone to Spain to try and rescue or assist refugees that were coming over the mountain. They took us and led us to the nearest village. There was no place to sleep, so they gave us the jail as a place to rest and sleep . . . stay overnight. The Chief of Police who greeted us spoke French—most us spoke French but no Spanish—but most of the people in these areas being close to the borders did speak French—and he was told that this border patrolman had taken money and jewelry in order to let us go by. Surprisingly now, the next morning everything was returned. [The patroller] was apprehended and all jewelry, all the money was returned to whoever they belonged to. From what we gathered . . . theoretically, from what we gathered . . . is that the Spaniards really did not want to be known as thieves and assisted more than anything else at the instruction of the Franco government—*Generalissimo* or General Franco,<sup>16</sup> who was a dictator and a friend of Hitler and the Axis, somehow gave an edict that anyone coming over the mountain has to be allowed to remain and not sent back. I have written . . . I have read actually some books or tried to find out why Franco allowed the Jews to remain in Spain. There's a theory that somewhere his ancestors might have been Jewish and felt that he may have some Jewish blood. Most of the Francos, especially the ones living in this country, are Jews. For whatever reason, they allowed us to remain in Spain but [we] were not

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<sup>15</sup>The World Jewish Congress began in Geneva, Switzerland in August 1936 as an international group of Jewish communities and organizations.

<sup>16</sup> Francisco Franco was born in El Ferrol, Spain in 1892. He joined the Spanish military 1907 at 14 years old and by 1939 had become dictator of Spain after leading an uprising against the presiding administration after the Spanish Civil War. During World War II, Franco sided with the Axis alliance although Spain did not directly commit their military to the war effort.

allowed to work.

Now from the little town that we entered . . . ‘Lerida,’ we were then taken by . . . they were actually army trucks . . . we were herded onto these trucks to take us down to Barcelona [Spain]. Some went to Barcelona, some went to Madrid [Spain]. We went to Barcelona. We were assisted at that time by Jewish groups who assisted refugees and Jewish refugees in remaining in Spain. We made our home in Barcelona from December, 1942, which is when we arrived there. We remained in Barcelona until March of 1944. The war was still raging, the Americans and the Allies had still not invaded Europe, so my dad realized that if the war is going to continue . . . he hadn’t worked and was running out of money . . . he probably didn’t have very much left having not worked for nearly five years . . . that he would try to get to the United States. At that time he had a sister living in Detroit [Michigan] who was an American citizen . . . married to an American citizen . . . they communicated on a regular basis as much as they could . . . tried to get us to go to the United States. Unfortunately, as you know, at that time immigration was closed in the United States. This was the [President Franklin Delano] Roosevelt<sup>17</sup> government who did not allow any Jews into the United States, except in 1943 they allowed some children who were stuck in both Spain and Portugal to go to the United States if they were sponsored or if they had family, more or less like the *kindertransport*<sup>18</sup>—the original that happened in 1939, I guess, or 1938—before the war started.

**John:** Up until this point, as your family went through different living situations, how did anybody know that you were Jewish? How were people identified?

**Albert:** I know that my dad was given stars [of David]<sup>19</sup> to wear back in Toulouse, which he just threw away and said, “We’re not going to wear it. We’re not going to be identified as Jews. We’re just going to try to avoid it,” which he did. But the Germans had a way of knowing who

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<sup>17</sup>The 32<sup>nd</sup> President of the United States and a central figure in world events during the mid-twentieth century, leading the United States through a time of worldwide economic crisis and war. Popularly known as ‘FDR,’ he collapsed and died in his home in Warm Springs, Georgia just a few months before the end of the war. He was a Democrat.

<sup>18</sup>‘*Kindertransport*’ is the name given to a series of rescue missions that assisted Jewish children in leaving Nazi-occupied Europe. The United Kingdom took in nearly 10,000 predominantly Jewish children from Nazi Germany and the occupied territories of Austria, and ex-Czechoslovakia. The children were placed in British foster homes, hostels, and on farms. Some transports were organized by *Oeuvre de Secours aux Enfants* (OSE) in France where German-Jewish children were put up in a series of OSE children’s homes. When the Germans occupied France, the 144 children, in two separate transports, were smuggled out of France into Portugal where they caught a ship to the United States. The first transport left on June 21, 1941 and the second on September 1, 1941. Altogether the OSE sheltered and assisted in getting nearly 1,600 Jewish children out Nazi-occupied areas.

<sup>19</sup> German authorities gave a decree on May 29, 1942 that all Jewish people living in occupied France must wear a yellow Star of David.

the Jews were, where they were—they had lists—but in Spain itself the reason that my dad had to identify himself and most of the others as Jews: one is for asylum to be able to remain in Spain, two to get help from HIAS<sup>20</sup>—the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society—because they're the ones that helped, that assisted with housing, they assisted with funds make sure that whoever is there. Now from the information I was able to gather there were about 45,000 . . . when you think about 6,000,000 who perished . . . only 45,000 escaped via Spain. This included Marc Chagall<sup>21</sup> who in the early 1940's was taken through Spain and eventually ended up in the United States. This was early at the onset of war.

<interview pauses, then resumes>

**Albert:** By 1944, after having been in Spain so long—my sister was already in Detroit—my dad was advised that Canada . . . again here was an antisemitic nation whose one of the immigration ministers, when asked how many Jews he allow or should they allow into Canada, told them that none is too many. There is a book called *None is Too Many*<sup>22</sup> if anybody wants to read, which is quite interesting about the Canadian government during the war and its antisemitism. This was the government of Mackenzie King.<sup>23</sup> However, they did agree to allow about 5,000 Jews into Canada. We're really talking about so few when you think of so many that died and how many could have been saved. But my dad agreed to get to Canada feeling that if we get to Canada then we can get to the United States. In January 1944 he was given the option of going to Canada via Philadelphia [Pennsylvania], because that was the port of entry. There was a ship, which was a Portuguese vessel called the '*Serpa Pinto*,' registered [in] Portugal. Since Portugal was neutral they were allowed to cross the ocean. There were very few ships—[but] this one was allowed to go across the ocean. He was given the option of going across in March or in June. He felt that the sooner the better even though March is not a very

<sup>20</sup> HIAS [Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society] was founded in 1881. Its original purpose was the help the constant flow of Jewish immigrants from Russian in relocating. During and after World War II, they had offices throughout Europe, South and Central America and the Far East. They worked to get Jews out of Europe and to any country that would have them by providing tickets and information about visas. After World War II, they assisted 167,000 Jews to leave DP camps and emigrate elsewhere.

<sup>21</sup> Marc Chagall was born in Belarus in 1887. He moved to Paris in 1910 to pursue a career as a patmosinter. Some of Chagall's work was deemed too modern and was confiscated and burned by the Germans during World War II. Chagall and his family escaped Europe in 1941 and arrived in New York where he stayed until moving back to Paris in 1948. Many of Chagall's paintings had Jewish themes, and in 1960, Chagall created a series of stained-glass windows for the synagogue at Hebrew University.

<sup>22</sup> *None is Too Many: Canada and the Jews of Europe, 1933-1948* by Irving M. Abella and Harold Troper (University of Toronto Press, 1983).

<sup>23</sup> William Lyon Mackenzie King, also known as 'Mackenzie King,' was Prime Minister of Canada from the 1920's to the 1940's.

good month to cross the ocean. We left Barcelona, went to Lisbon [Portugal] where the ship was docked. We joined about 180 passengers on that ship, which was more or less a semi-freighter. It carried some passengers and carried freight . . . cargo to the United States. When we got on the ship, I think it was about March 27 . . . I remember it was before . . . when we got to the United States it was one day before Passover, before *Pesach*<sup>24</sup> on April 6. Unfortunately, the ship was supposed to take about five days to get to United States . . . not five days, eight days . . . it's five days now . . . in those days it took about eight days. Being in late March, the weather was bad, we hit a storm. We were lost in the ocean about three days not able to go west but had to go north to go against the waves. Before we got across the ocean the ship stopped in the Azores<sup>25</sup> and picked up a shipload—I guess you could call it—of pineapples to bring to the United States. I guess, luckily enough, after being lost for three days in the ocean we ran out of . . . the ship ran out of food . . . had nothing to eat virtually. The only thing that was left to eat were the pineapples that were in the cargo section. So they started bringing up pineapples and this is what we ate for three days. With all the people that were sick from it, including most of my family, to today I can still not eat pineapple. Neither does my brother—just will not eat pineapple—that's how bad it was. But anyhow we ended up in Philadelphia with no problem. The second ship that left in June actually was actually stopped by a German U-boat<sup>26</sup> and people were taken off. Some people died, and eventually they did get across. But we didn't have any incidents—we ended up in Philadelphia in April 5 or 6 of 1944. Then we were taken right off the ship onto buses that then took us to the train, because G-d forbid we might escape into the United States . . . they wouldn't want to have Jews running around in the United States, so they made sure. We were guarded by the American army and police. Even as a child I remember wondering what was going on and eventually got onto trains heading for Montreal [Canada]. Some went to Winnipeg [Canada], some went to Toronto [Canada], but being that we spoke French fluently our family was given the right to go to Montreal, which was more or less French

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<sup>24</sup> Hebrew: *Pesach*, refers to the anniversary of Israel's liberation from Egyptian bondage. The holiday lasts for eight days. Unleavened bread, *matzot*, is eaten in memory of the unleavened bread prepared by the Israelite during their hasty flight from Egypt, when they had not time to wait for the dough to rise. On the first two nights of Passover, the *seder*, the central event of the holiday is celebrated. The *seder* service is one of the most colorful and joyous occasions in Jewish life.

<sup>25</sup> The Azores are a group of nine volcanic Islands in the North Atlantic Ocean and is an autonomous region of Portugal. During World War II, the British Royal Air Force, United States Air Force and Navy used the Azores for aerial coverage in the Mid-Atlantic region and to attack German U-Boats.

<sup>26</sup> German: *U-Boot*, which stands for '*Unterseeboot*,' or undersea boat. The term 'U-boat' refers to military submarines operated by Germany in World War I and World War II.

speaking.

**John:** Up until this point in your story do you remember as a kid what you made of the experience from the inside out? What were you thinking? How were you processing it?

**Albert:** You know something, I was really so young that it really had very little effect or none, but the thing that when I think back is I think that we matured a lot differently—a lot faster, because of going through these tumultuous times—you're in hiding, you're out of hiding, you don't really understand what is really going on here. Then we come to a period where we're living in comfortably and then you're uprooted again, climbing this mountain, going to Spain . . . soldiers . . . I mean children . . . when you're five, six you understand about soldiers and shootings . . . you don't understand death as much, but that there's bad guys and the good guys. But it really had not too much effect on me or my brother—we discuss this at times. My parents, my dad, really never wanted to talk about it.

**John:** Do you have a sense what the emotion was in the air amongst your family whether they explained it or not? What was the atmosphere?

**Albert:** The atmosphere is . . . my dad tried to keep us as normal a life as possible. When we lived in France in that little villa at the base of that little mountain, we had a garden in the middle in order to eat . . . we couldn't take a chance, so we grew and became farmers. We had grapes—lot of grapes in the area—we had chickens, we had eggs. The farmers in the immediate area brought us fresh milk, and bread, and butter I believe. But everything else we grew . . . and ate what we could eat. Now we did have I remember at times a *shochet*<sup>27</sup>—how do you call a *shochet* in English [kosher butcher]—someone who kills chickens, koshers them really—came to our house . . . I remember this . . . to kill some chickens so we could have food. We had rabbits—we ate rabbit—it was not kosher, but when you're hungry, you eat whatever is available at the time. But other than that, as I mentioned earlier, my dad had a rabbi come to the home to teach us our religion, to teach us to read Hebrew—to *daven*<sup>28</sup> in essence—to pray in Hebrew, which I'm thankful . . . that's the only way I probably would have really known this is to start young.

**John:** And your mom? How did she handle all this? What was her take on the whole experience?

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<sup>27</sup> Hebrew: slaughterer. A *shochet* is a person who has been trained to slaughter animals in accordance with Jewish law.

<sup>28</sup> The act of reciting Jewish liturgical prayers during which the prayer sways or rocks lightly.

**Albert:** You know something? I've never really sat down with my mother all that much because my mother really was—as a result of the war—became rather a little bit depressed. Here were two people who had a business, very successful, when they first arrived . . . they both arrived from Poland as teenagers, I think my dad was 17 or 18, my mother also 16 or 17 came over from Warsaw [Poland], where she was born. My mother was a seamstress, my dad was a tailor so it was natural for them to go into business together and have this ladies' and men's ready-to-wear and custom tailoring . . . became quite successful in their business from what I understood. They lived quite well. Then suddenly you get uprooted and you lose everything that you've worked for because by the time we came to Canada my dad told me he had about \$12 in his pocket—that was it. When we came there . . . we were greeted by a gentleman by the name of Garfinkel [sp]— I still remember him because we became quite friendly with his son—who didn't really sponsor us but assisted us in getting oriented to the area. They found us a little one-room apartment that we all lived in. My sister wasn't with us then, she was still in Detroit. But my mother, I guess, as a result of it was not a very happy camper and did not really want to talk too much about it. My dad went to work, found work in a big tailoring company but there were problems in Canada when we came there in 1944. One, the Montreal . . . do you want to stop? <interview pauses and then resumes>

**Albert:** Here we are . . . we arrived in Montreal on the first night of Passover. It was April 6 or 7. It was the first night of Passover. We were taken to a *seder*<sup>29</sup> in a big hall called the 'Montreal Talmud Torah' and enjoyed our first *seder* in freedom, really, although we were free in Spain . . . as my dad thought that finally we were free but still not being allowed to work and not being allowed to do this and living under a dictatorship really didn't feel free until we arrived in Montreal. At that time my dad felt that we were going to be living in freedom, allowed to live in a democracy, which it was . . . except you have to understand that at that time of the population in Quebec, which is where Montreal is situated, in the province of Quebec . . . there were at the time approximately 8,000,000 residents, of which 6,000,000 were French-Canadian. 95 percent of French-Canadians are Catholics—only five percent Protestants. Now what they did because of the division of the languages—Montreal was pretty much divided into two areas—you had eastern Montreal which was predominantly French-Canadian . . . you had the

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<sup>29</sup> Hebrew for "order," refers to the ritual meal eaten at home on the first and second nights of Passover. The family meal is accompanied by the retelling of the story of the Israelites' exodus from Egypt.

western section, which was predominantly English speaking. At that time there were probably about 100,000 to 120,000 Jews living in Montreal, pretty much ghettoized—they lived within Jewish areas, as they are in Montreal. There's a town called Cote [Côte] Saint-Luc—out of a population of 30,000. Probably 29,000 are Jews, including the mayor and everyone else except probably the fire department and the police, but this is what life was like in Montreal. The reason they lived that way was for self-preservation and protection. The French-Canadians were very ardent, especially when we got there in 1944—it has changed.

<phone rings, interview pauses and resumes>

**Albert:** Now because of this division and primarily of religions the school boards was divided into two school boards. There was the Protestant school board, which was predominantly English-speaking, and there was the Catholic school board, which was predominantly French-Canadians. Most of the French-Canadians and a few English-speaking went to the Catholic school, paid school board taxes, and went to those schools. On the other side the Protestant school board, was—as I mentioned—predominantly English-speaking but allowed Jewish children as long as their parents paid Protestant school taxes to go the Protestant schools. The Catholic school was mostly in French which would have been good for us, but you have to understand that the French that is spoken by French-Canadians, although the language is written similarly to the French that is spoken in France, it is entirely a different accent. At times you have a problem recognizing the language. My dad wisely enough recommended that we go and learn and go to school in English since we are, or were at the time, surrounded by 220,000,000 English-speaking people, which included the United States. He felt that eventually we may go to the United States—as we did—so we should be educated in English. We could speak French at home to keep our French. We were placed in the Protestant schools. Again realize at the time that even though Jewish children were allowed in Protestant schools, the Protestant school board did not have Jews on the board. They had no representation on the school board until many years later. But when we came there was this division—one, you had the French-Canadians who were primarily antisemitic . . . who were taught at the time . . . there was a dictator by the name of Maurice Duplessis, Prime Minister of Quebec,<sup>30</sup> who pretty much controlled as a dictator what was going to happen . . . the church . . . the priest preached religion along with who they should

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<sup>30</sup> Maurice Le Noblet Duplessis served as the sixteenth premier of the Canadian province of Quebec from 1936 to 1939 and 1944 to 1959. He was a member of the conservative party, *Union Nationale*.

vote and elect in the government. It was not a very pleasant situation.

I went to a Jewish school to learn Yiddish, and on my way home from school . . . at that time the only residence that we could find that were available and what we could afford was close to the eastern side of Montreal rather than in the west—it was too expensive. I was attacked many times by French-Canadians when I came home from Hebrew school especially carrying Hebrew books. Somehow they must have known that I was either English or Jewish. I was attacked many times. It was a serious problem at that time of antisemitism. On the other hand, if you lived in the west, which we did eventually because of this problem—we did not feel the antisemitism as much as when you went into the east, or if you heard the sermons by the French-Canadian priests and what was in the paper—besides, the French-Canadians still are trying to—even to this day—are trying to separate from the rest of Canada. The French-Canadians would like to have Quebec as an independent country. Charles de Gaulle’s visit many years ago contributed to that problem by claiming, “*Vive le Quebec libre!*”—“Long live the French-Canadians!” . . . the Quebec . . . “Free Quebec,” I guess, would be a good translation. There remains still this problem between the French-Canadians and the English. This is one of the reasons why we left to come to Atlanta [Georgia]. I went to English high school . . . I studied at McGill [University—Montreal, Canada], all in English. In McGill University, even though this was now not French-Canadians, if you were Jewish . . . out of 1000 [points] that you would need [on] what was the equivalent of SATs—we call it ‘matriculation,’ and it was marked from 500 to 1,000. One thousand was the top mark—you needed a minimum of 800 to be able to go to school at McGill. But if you were not Jewish you only needed 600, just to give you an idea of what was going on in those days. That fortunately has changed, but there was not only antisemitism from the French-Canadian side, but there was also rules and regulations for Jews within the Protestant schools.

**John:** How did you process that for yourself, both in Europe and in Canada, that being Jewish has a negative meaning or is an oppressive condition. How did you sort that out?

**Albert:** How did you deal with that?

**John:** Did you take it personally, or what?

**Albert:** You couldn’t take it personally because you know that Jews have been persecuted for the last 2,000 years and will always, unfortunately, be persecuted. As there are people in this world that are racist and will always be racist. All in all, the conditions—at least until we came

here to Atlanta—where my experience, or my family’s experience have been very little antisemitism . . . we hear things, but nothing compared to Quebec, especially with the French-Canadians. Even to today, not as bad and they don’t attack the synagogues, they don’t go into the west, although they plant bombs to try to get the English to leave. Now realize that when the French-Canadians came and changed their government in the early 1960’s, the new governments were very, very favorable to separate—they were really separatists. However, they did take it to the people in elections to see if they wanted to. Strangely enough the majority of French-Canadians were wise enough to know that separation was not the answer. They knew that they probably would not be able to survive in a small island surrounded by all the English people, plus what was happening is that the English . . . it was a brain drain . . . especially Jews were leaving Quebec in the late 1960’s. There are many still here in Atlanta, many French . . . many Jewish doctors have moved from Montreal to here. A lot of the children were moving from Montreal to Toronto and to Winnipeg. A lot of Jews left Montreal and the population from 120,000 went down to about 80,000 or 90,000, but was augmented by the incoming Moroccans. The Moroccans who left . . . not only Moroccans, but a lot of the Jews left Northern Africa and came to Montreal . . . because they spoke French but have established themselves as their own group. The Moroccans keep together and have not really gotten involved or assimilated with other Jews. They’ve got their own synagogues, their own everything, their own businesses . . . rather than assimilate. The other Jews did assimilate more and stick together, so that is pretty much one of the reasons why in 1970—I’m going to backtrack again—I lived in France for a little bit I worked for an American company out of Dallas [Texas] that asked me to open up their European office and to take over as general manager for continental Europe, so I took my family from 1964 to 1966—we lived in Paris [France]. We really enjoyed our stay there but decided to come back to the United States to try to get to the United States and decided in 1970 after several bombings. The French-Canadians were trying to chase the English out of Montreal—the separatists planted bombs in some areas and one went off about a mile-and-one-half from our home. One was close to my parents’ business, and we decided that it was time to try to move the United States. We took a tour of the United States by coming here to Atlanta where my wife’s best friend had moved, had married an American and moved to Atlanta. We went to California—my wife’s both brothers—one lives in the Los Angeles [California] area and one in San Francisco, actually Oakland [California] area. We visited them and decided whether we

wanted to live in California and chose Atlanta. That was our choice—it was rather difficult to get papers to move in, but I was sponsored by a local company that just started up and was looking for someone to head up their sales division—I was in the chemical industry at the time. Wisely enough, or lucky enough, we chose to come to Atlanta in 1970 where we are still residing.

**John:** When the war officially ended, what did that mean to you? What did it mean to your family?

**Albert:** Everyone rejoiced at the time the war ended and especially officially it was 1945 . . . 1944. At that time I was nine going on ten—I was still young, but my concern at the time more than anything else was trying to learn the language, realizing that when we arrived in Canada none of us spoke English. I spoke maybe four words—yes, no, no, yes—and as I mentioned, my dad was wise enough to place us in English-speaking school, but I still had to learn English. Also, it goes back now . . . it seems kind of funny . . . I wore knickers<sup>31</sup> at the time or whatever was given to us, and came to this little school, I remember, and I didn't speak any English. Children, being children, made fun of me, and I was short at the time—I was tiny. Somebody asked me if I was a midget—I still remember that—they called me midget in school because I was short. But many people can relate to that.

**John:** Was there any talk with your parents once the war was over, to move back to France and try to reclaim your home, and so on?

**Albert:** There was this discussion about it. Yet by the time we had been in Canada for a few months, I guess my dad felt comfortable and thought that he would still like to go to the United States and try to get papers, then my sister came back after a few months to join us, so we were a family again. They had talked about going back, and yet never made . . .

**John:** There was so much resistance amongst the locals, the news . . .

**Albert:** . . . and yet never made any attempts to return, that I know of. We were in a free country. I think that when people come to live from Europe, especially here in the United States, or Canada, the difference, the freedom, regardless whether there's antisemitism or not, because there's antisemitism everywhere, if we would go back to France, we'd have the same problem

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<sup>31</sup> 'Knickers' are men's or boys' baggy-kneed trousers. In Europe boys traditionally wore short pants in the summer and knickerbockers ('knickers' or knee-length pants) in winter. At the onset of puberty, they graduated to long trousers, which was regarded as a major rite of passage. (Note: In England, knickers means underwear worn by women.)

there. The vast population of France [did not have] that much empathy for Jews especially after the Algerians started coming in. But he chose to remain, decided that he was going to make his life in Quebec, and eventually tried to move to the United States, which never happened. His sister came to visit us in Montreal, remained, and that was the first time that I met our family that were Americans, who spoke English, but we seemed to be happy living in . . . we moved from the small apartment to a larger apartment on Park Avenue in Montreal, which was not like Park Avenue in New York [City, New York], but that was the name of the street. It was a rather nice location, nice section. I went to school and was then, after a while, accepted like all other children. But as far as learning English, as children, it's amazing how fast it comes to children—foreign languages. Where for my parents it was more difficult for them to learn English, but they were able to converse or conduct a lot of their business in French, in the part of the area of Montreal where they had their store there were French-Canadians, but these were different types who were more educated, who assimilated with the English, and became part of that population. In their store that my parents eventually had . . . because they went back into business like they did in France . . . they had a lot of French-Canadians and English-speaking and Jewish-speaking customers, which was kind of interesting even though they were in a part of Montreal called 'Westmount,' which was predominantly English-speaking—a little bit compared to Atlanta would be in the Buckhead<sup>32</sup> area, just to give you an idea of the type of area they had their store in.

**John:** When did you learn about what had happened in Europe, to the Jews especially? When did the information hit you?

**Albert:** As a child, it didn't faze me that much because I didn't really understand it, but as soon as the news—I was reading papers—my dad used to read at that time the *Forward* which was the Jewish paper coming from New York. My dad was involved in Zionist organizations because until 1948 we still didn't have Israel, we didn't have a country or anywhere to even think about, but we knew that there was going to be something done. My dad was a Zionist<sup>33</sup> . . . we knew, or I guess we learned, of the atrocities that happened in Europe, and Germany

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<sup>32</sup> 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>33</sup> Zionism is a movement which supports a Jewish national state in the territory defined as the 'Land of Israel.' Although Zionism existed before the nineteenth century, in the 1890's Theodor Herzl popularized it and gave it a new urgency, as he believed that Jewish life in Europe was threatened and a State of Israel was needed. The State of Israel was established in 1948 and Zionism today is expressed as support for the continued existence of Israel.

especially, of the death of 6,000,000 Jews . . .

**John:** Did you have extended family that was unaccounted for?

**Albert:** My G-d, yes. We had found out that most of the family that remained in Poland—that means my grandparents on both sides—perished in the Holocaust. My dad—let me see—he had a sister . . . my dad didn't have a very large family like my mom, where she was [one] of ten, but just some of the cousins . . . but most of my uncles and my aunts were able to save themselves. One of my cousins, he was taken with his brother—his brother was shot while trying to escape—he escaped, and we still communicate. He lives in Paris, and we still visit each other. But apart from that . . . by now most of my family is gone, but it was really the grandparents, both on my mother's side, were wise enough that when . . . even in the time before the war . . . this was even before the war when they had the pogroms<sup>34</sup> . . . they were wise enough to send their children away. My grandfather . . . I don't know much about my grandparents on my father's side . . . he never really talked much about them because he left as a youngster and never saw them again, but my on my mother's side my grandfather was a *rav*<sup>35</sup>—he was a teacher—and he was smart enough to send all his children. Some ended up . . . I even had some cousins and aunts in Argentina . . . how they got there, I don't know, but somehow they made their way to Argentina. I had an aunt and a cousin in Belgium. We were kind of scattered all over the world, in essence.

**John:** I want to focus more on you again. Could you describe yourself as a teenager when you started to develop yourself more? What kind of person were you, what were your interests, how did you decide what you were going to do with your life?

**Albert:** Until I became a teenager, my interests were two-fold. One, I sang at the time in the choir at the Beth David synagogue in Montreal. I had thought of going into show business, of becoming a singer. Then my parents suggested that I go into pharmacy. This is while I'm in high school, but my main interest at the time was sports. I was really an athlete—I still think I am to this day. I wanted to become a professional skier, which I did to an extent. I did some racing, but after I met Rita she thought it was not a good idea to go into racing and take the risk, especially when you don't have the funds that it takes to become a world champion. I decided to just become a ski instructor. I taught mostly children—I had children's classes—but my interest

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<sup>34</sup> Russian: to wreak havoc. The term '*pogrom*' refers to violent attacks against Jews in the Russian Empire carried out by non-Jews during the 1800's. The term has been applied to all violent episodes against Jews throughout the world and world history.

<sup>35</sup> Hebrew: rabbi, can also refer to a teacher.

was in sports.

<End Disk 1>

<Begin Disk 2>

**John:** Talk about how you met your wife and what that was like in the beginning.

**Albert:** I met my wife [Rita] when I was 18 years old. I was working and going to school at night. I did not have enough money at the time. The problem in Canada is we only a choice of two or three universities. It wasn't like in the [United] States where most of the people I know went off to college—away from their home. In Canada there was really no place to go—you couldn't get at that time into the United States, and Montreal really only had two or three colleges. One was French-Canadian, which was Montreal University, and McGill, which is world-renowned, especially for medicine, and Sir George Williams College. I elected to go into business school at McGill, which you could do at night. You could work during the day and study at night—same thing with accounting. I ended up doing accounting first, not liking accounting and went straight into business. At that time as I mentioned earlier, I was a singer [and] entertainer. I entertained at a 'Y'[MHA—Young Men's Hebrew Association]<sup>36</sup> dance, and while entertaining, I guess my wife thought she liked what she saw. She introduced herself while on a Sunday morning at the 'Y'—we gathered at the 'Y,' which is the equivalent here of the Jewish Community Center. In Montreal we called it the 'YMHA.' I met my wife and it was just before her seventeenth birthday. She was just finishing high school, as a matter of fact I remember helping her, especially with the French which she was having problems with, and you could not matriculate or get your high school degree without passing French, believe it or not, and that's where I excelled. Thank G-d that they had French because that's where I had my best marks. My wife invited me to come to a sleigh ride party. [I] found out that that sleigh ride party was on her seventeenth birthday. That was really our first date, the seventeenth birthday. My G-d, so many years ago . . . but I can tell you that my wife is going to be 66 [years old] in February, so you can get it—it's going to be nearly 50 years since we first known each other. We grew up together from that time—there was no wealth in either of our families, so whatever we've accomplished we've more or less done it together. As I mentioned, I went through school

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<sup>36</sup> The Young Men's Hebrew Association (and its counterpart, the Young Women's Hebrew Association, YWHA) was set up in various cities of the United States for the mental, moral, social and physical improvement of Jewish young men and women. The first YMHW was started in New York in 1874 and spread across the country in the following years. They still exist today and are more like social clubs.

by working and going to school at night. My wife worked at that time as a bookkeeper doing office work in an insurance company. I went to work for a tire company that the owner was a friend of our family. It was easier for me to be able to study because at times I had to go to school during the day, so I remained with the tire company until it was sold. In 1963 I went to work for an American chemical company—a company called National Chemsearch out of Dallas—they were actually in Irving, which is a suburb of Dallas. I was their first successful salesman in Canada. It was fortunate that I was able to converse both in French—I was fully bilingual—I was really able to speak even though I was really never educated in French, there was some of my education was within the curriculum of my high school—you have to learn French—we spoke it at home at that time, now we somehow converse only in English, but this is pretty much my background, education, work. This company that I worked for—National Chemsearch—sent me to Europe for a couple of years with our family which was a great, great experience. Gave us the opportunity, especially my wife, to travel throughout Europe . . . things that we could never do working here in Canada or in this country, to be able to take a month off . . . take a month vacation. We placed our children in a Swiss camp while we toured Italy and France, but we felt that after two years . . . at least I was advised at that time that if you stay in Europe too long you become kind of the European expert and you have a problem coming back to this country. It was still a problem, because when I came back they had another sales manager. I started up another company, and eventually got tired of traveling. My background education is marketing. I decided to become a marketing manager for a company including sales, which was a local Montreal company in the sanitation and chemical business called ‘Avmor,’ which is one of the major janitorial and chemical supply companies in Montreal. But we decided that we wanted to move.

The main reason really for moving from Montreal to the United States was weather. Living in Paris for a couple of years, which is similar to Atlanta in terms of weather, we may get two to three inches of snow or no snow at all through the winter. When you come back—which if you’ve never lived in Montreal you have not experienced winter—which is another problem. [It] really was a problem for our parents who had to put up with snow and snowstorms—days that you couldn’t leave the house—a foot of snow or more is a lot of snow. We decided to move to Atlanta, one of the motivating factors that made us move to Atlanta was weather. We loved Atlanta. When we moved in 1970, Atlanta had a population of about 1,000,000, had decent

schooling, unfortunately didn't have too many places to eat, but if you can't eat in restaurants, you cook at home. Fortunately my wife is a good cook. But Atlanta was really a nice city to live in. It still is, but I think it's become overcrowded with the population reaching 4,000,000 and not providing enough roads or enough ways of getting around. Public transportation in Montreal . . . even though Montreal only had 2,500,000 people . . . they have fantastic transportation—you can go just about anywhere on the subway, they have city buses that come by every 10, 15 minutes, where here sometimes you can wait half an hour, an hour for a bus. I know very few people in Atlanta that travel by bus . . . unfortunately it's a car city—everybody has one, two and three, family cars.

**John:** In terms of culture, I assume you didn't have a whole lot of contact with black people until you came to America. I'm guessing that in Montreal there probably wasn't a real large black population. What was that like for you to be introduced to another type of cultural group?

**Albert:** At that time the only problem I had was that I couldn't understand the language. Their accent was so heavy at the time and until I got used to it, it was a problem of communication. But the encounter I had with blacks mostly was in business. The company that I was with and the other company that I eventually made my career at had many blacks working, and surprising enough I didn't see as much racism as I had been forewarned. When I was telling people we were moving to Atlanta . . . you asked about the relationship . . . in Canada, the blacks were mostly from the [Caribbean] islands. There was very little racism against blacks in Canada—there were blacks on the football team, but most of them were, as I mentioned, from the islands. Our TV repair man was a Jamaican and he came to our home, and as anybody else, drank my wine, sat with us and talked. When I told him that we were moving to Atlanta, he said, "Oh, my G-d." I said, "Don't you want to come and visit?" He said, "I would never go there. The stories you hear about killing blacks . . ." From what I saw here, it was a little overblown. On the other hand, Atlanta was really divided into two areas like Montreal. If you were going south of Atlanta, it was primarily black, if you're going north of Atlanta it was primarily white, and there was a difference that you could feel. But it was said at one time that "Atlanta was too busy to hate"<sup>37</sup>—there was some truth to it. The blacks were not as militant here as I noticed or experienced even in Chicago [Illinois] or most other cities. Except as Atlanta grew and as more

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<sup>37</sup> This nickname seems to have originated with William B. Hartsfield (1890-1971) the mayor of Atlanta for six terms between 1937 and 1961. It was under his direction that Atlanta became a world class city with the image of "the City Too Busy to Hate."

blacks moved down to Atlanta from the north, I think Atlanta blacks became a little more militant. But what's happened in the last few years is that the blacks are assimilating now into the white population. From what I read and what I learned is that the area now known as 'Grant Park' is where a lot of the Jewish population started. Then they moved north, they moved away. Now they're coming back, including my son who lives in Grant Park. I think we have found . . . the only problem I can see in Atlanta is not the racism problem . . . there is underlying . . . there are some problems . . . I don't want to get into it . . .

**John:** What were your impressions, what were your experiences with Jewish sub-culture when you first came here? What was it like in 1970?

**Albert:** One of the things that we recognized at the time . . . we wanted to join a synagogue and found that one . . . we were first . . . because my wife did not have the Hebrew education that I had and did not know Hebrew or [how] to pray in Hebrew . . . she had never gone to a Jewish school. We felt that for her sake . . . I didn't mind going to a Reform synagogue. In Montreal we'd never want to hear of it. Here somehow we decided that we might think about it, but we talked to one at the AA [Ahavath Achim].<sup>38</sup> I was told that AA was only for rich Jews, and the Jews who . . . he said you'd never be able to mix in with them. Then we talked to one of the rabbis at Temple Sinai<sup>39</sup>—who had just started Temple Sinai—which is a Reform synagogue . . . did not make us very welcome, as I found when I called Mrs. Eloise Shurgin, who was the administrator at the Temple. She invited us to a service and greeted us and we couldn't have been any more welcome. We decided that's where we would join and where my son went to Sunday school, even though we'd settled at that time in the North Lake area because my business was in Stone Mountain. But the Southern Jews—I find that even to today—if you're not born in Atlanta or have lived here for many years, you're not as readily accepted, you're still somehow not part of that clique—it's still very cliquish. The Temple had most of the German Jews on the board, and old-timers who had started it, and the same with the AA. I think that that's changed

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<sup>38</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>39</sup> Temple Sinai was founded as a reform congregation in 1968 and met in a variety of locations before establishing a synagogue on Dupree Drive in Sandy Springs.

over the years because Atlanta's grown so rapidly. When I came to Atlanta, we had about 30,000 Jews. Today it's more like 100,000. For Jews that's a big difference. When we had three or four synagogues back then—we had Shearith Israel,<sup>40</sup> too, I forgot—now we probably have about 20 [synagogues]. We have *Chabad*<sup>41</sup> here—I mean, I was up in Alpharetta and I saw this sign “Chabad of Alpharetta.” I'm amazed and I'm pleased by what I'm seeing, how the Jewish community has become . . . I just went to the Jewish theater at the [Marcus] Jewish Community Center. The building that was built is just incredible, but again what's happening here is that they're building for the younger Jews who have moved north of I-285 [known as the ‘Loop’ as it encircles the city], so what's happened is that the older Jews that are in town are really left without service from the Jewish . . . we do have a Jewish Federation, but we don't have a Jewish community center for the older Jews, for the Russian Jews that have moved here who are more or less in town—they're just not going to go to Tilly Mill Road, so that is another little problem. I'm not sure who was really behind . . . again, it's the money people that are pretty much Atlantans—original Atlantans—that are funding and really creating these great facilities, but I think they've forgotten a lot of the . . . fortunately we don't have a problem with that, but [for] people who can't afford to join any of the clubs or travel that far, I think it's a bit of a problem right now.

**Ruth:** When you lived in Paris, did you ever try to re-trace any part of your journey to Spain, because I know that as a child . . . to kind of bring into more reality?

**Albert:** Realize at the time that I went to France to work . . . first, I was young. I was just barely 30. My main thrust was really to create a company—there was nothing there—to work and build up this company, so I didn't have the opportunity immediately to travel, or research, or go through that trip. We did go to Nancy where I was born. Or course, I didn't remember it vividly because I left as a child, but I did know where our home was and my parents' store, but it wasn't there anymore. Now instead of our house on our street was this 30-story building, and shops and stores, as you know what's happening these days—everything mushrooms. What I knew or what I remembered as a child was not these anymore, except part of our family had

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<sup>40</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 1960s, 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>41</sup> *Chabad-Lubavitch* is a *Hasidic* movement in Orthodox Judaism.

come back. My aunt who had been in Toulouse and had hidden us stayed in France during the war in hiding and then went back to Nancy. They had not gone to Spain. So we visited with them. Then I had the opportunity one day to go to Luchon. I thought I would go and visit the little villa that we were hidden in. This was in 1960 . . . late 1964 I went down there, I guess. The gentleman—Mr. Calvé—C-A-L-V-E—was now residing in that little villa of his, where he had a summer kitchen adjoining the house—that was no longer a summer kitchen—this was now a garage for his car. You can see the change just in those few years, from 1944 to 1964—in 20 years, everything had changed. Our garden that was there was not there anymore. This was now a beautiful driveway. That huge tree that was in the middle was gone, and it was now a paved and stone area, so it had changed. But when I mentioned to this elderly gentleman, who was now close to 80 or older, that I was the youngest of the Baron children, I thought he was going to faint—it was like he had seen a ghost. He wasn't really sure what had happened to us—he didn't think that he would ever see anybody in our family, so that was kind of a joyous occasion . . . to see the little village we were in. It was quite an interesting village—the top of the area of Luchon-de-Bagneres was one of the better ski resorts in the Pyrenees area, although the skiing is not all that great because it's not high enough. It's also a major spa, with natural springs where people go to become younger, I guess—rejuvenate. The only thing I remember is that it smelled of sulfur because of that water, wherever it came from.

**John:** Do you have any sense of how those four or five years during the war—how that has affected you or colored your values and your mind, and so on, afterwards?

**Albert:** I don't know . . . the only impact it had, I guess, is I became—as I grew older, and especially in my later years and since I've retired—I've become more interested in the Holocaust and what's happened. If you notice on my shelf up there I have many books that have been written on the Holocaust because I really wanted to reassure myself as to what really happened and why. What happened in . . . in France . . . how many were rescued, how many went to Spain. There have been books written on what happened and why Franco . . . and how he got involved with Jews and with the Holocaust. There is a book on that subject written by a rabbi by the name of 'Lipschitz.'<sup>42</sup> I have become more interested in it now. I do lecture or speak to high school children to tell them about my story and also to tell them about some of the heroes and about some of the Righteous amongst the Nations, to let them know that the Holocaust—even

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<sup>42</sup> The book is *Franco, Spain, the Jews, and the Holocaust* by Chaim U. Lipschitz (Ktav Publishing, 1984).

though it was really atrocities . . . when you say ‘Holocaust,’ you relate [it to atrocities] . . . they have to know that there were also people there who tried to rescue Jews, who some were lucky enough to be able to escape and hide as we did. They have to know that there were many different sides, but not to forget that 6,000,000 Jews were murdered along with Gypsies and people that were just not suitable to the German race. But I don’t think it had a real effect on our lives, as such. We tried to be like most people we grew up with . . . our friends . . . we’re interested in [them], and we donate to the arts and if you look around my home, we have quite a bit of art. We love the arts, we love the symphony and the theater, and Atlanta really has it all. This is one of the reasons we plan to retire mostly and remain in Atlanta rather than go to Florida or else Arizona.

**John:** You mentioned that your father had been a Zionist. Had there ever been any consideration of moving to Israel once there was an Israel? How much involvement with that part of the world have you had?

**Albert:** Although my dad always spoke about Israel and *Yerushalayim* [Hebrew: Jerusalem], unfortunately my dad became sick at the time when he was planning to go to Israel, and died at a young age of a disease called ALS—amyotrophic lateral sclerosis<sup>43</sup>—probably one of the worst neurological diseases that anybody can be inflicted with. I have questioned as to why him, especially with what he did to save his family. I’ve always considered my dad a hero amongst my heroes, to be able to accomplish at the age of 38 what he was able to do to save his family. I have a problem with dealing with that to an extent.

**John:** Did you share the same values . . .

**Albert:** Getting back to what you were saying about Israel . . . I’m still thinking . . . he had wanted to go to visit Israel, but we had . . . no family ever went to Israel. Most of them went back to France, some were here in the United States, Belgium, and I have cousins in England. None actually ended up in Israel. We . . . my dad talked about going to visit but never talked about going there to live. But in 1967 after the Six-Day War,<sup>44</sup> I then made plans to go to Israel,

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<sup>43</sup> Amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), or ‘Lou Gehrig’s Disease,’ causes progressive degeneration in nerve cells in the spinal cord and brain. Voluntary muscle action is progressively hindered, eventually leading to paralysis and death.

<sup>44</sup> This conflict was fought between June 5 and 10, 1967 and involved Israel and the neighboring states of Egypt, Jordan and Syria. Israel launched surprise air strikes against gathering Arab forces. The outcome was swift and decisive. Israel took effective control of the Gaza Strip and the Sinai Peninsula from Egypt, the West Bank and East Jerusalem from Jordan, and the Golan Heights from Syria.

at least on my dad's behalf because he wasn't able to go, and then Rita and I decided to go to Israel. But we never had any plans to move to Israel, I think, because of what we went through—such difficult times—why go to another country where living is not easy. Let's face it, it's hard, and the contribution . . . the only thing that I can do for Israel is donate, which I have for as long as I can remember . . . still realize that if Israel had been in existence prior to the Second World War rather than after the war, probably a multitude of Jews would have been saved. I'm sure we might have made plans because when we were in Spain, we were at that time invited to go to Israel, and many of the people who had crossed the mountain ended up going to Israel. But my dad . . . his plans were to go the United States to be where his sister is. This is how we ended up here.

**John:** Can you also talk about your kids and what it's meant to you to have children.

**Albert:** Of course I can start talking about my children. Unfortunately, I do have a daughter that is mentally ill. Fortunately she is now balanced and with medication is able to live on her own. She has an apartment, and she has her own car, and she's now part of a foundation—actually a group called Skyland Trail<sup>45</sup> which is a program of the Georgia West Mental Health Foundation, which I had been asked last year when I retired to join their board since I'm involved with mental illness. She functions now on her own but is not able to work, so we have to support her. Then I have a son on the other end who's a neurologist who is affiliated with the Emory [University] Medical School [Atlanta, Georgia] doing research on Parkinson's disease<sup>46</sup>—why he chose Parkinson's, I still don't really know. It's not the most pleasant disease, but he is doing research on Parkinson's and doing some clinical work at Emory, and he is blessed with two children. I have a grandson who's five and a granddaughter who's a little over a year and until you've experienced what being grandparents [is like], it's hard to explain. That's pretty much what we live for now and what we make plans is for their future. We hope that we can live long enough to see it accomplished, but we are providing today knowing how expensive it is to go to college now . . . imagine what it's going to be like 15 years from now. We are providing, helping and putting away for their education primarily.

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<sup>45</sup> Skyland Trail is a residential and day treatment program in Atlanta, Georgia that treats young adults and adults with various mental illnesses.

<sup>46</sup> Parkinson's disease causes degeneration of the central nervous system. Symptoms include shaking, rigidity and slowness in movement in the early stages of the disease. During later stages of Parkinson's disease, those affected may experience cognitive degeneration, dementia and depression. Parkinson's usually occurs in older people over 50.

**John:** With your mom, about how long did she live and how much did you share memories, and so on, with her?

**Albert:** Unfortunately my mom passed away not too long after my dad. My dad passed away in 1964 at the time when I was in Europe. I had just arrived knowing that he was going to pass away. They felt—including my dad—that the opportunity I had in Europe . . . I should definitely go and take advantage of this opportunity because it may not come again. We elected to go, and after we were there he did pass away. My mom lived about . . . she got cancer, on top of that . . . she never smoked, got lung cancer . . . we feel that maybe it was from my dad—he was a heavy smoker—so she might have gotten second-hand smoke from him . . . she got cancer of the lungs and passed away . . . she must have survived about eight years after my dad passed away. She lived in Montreal—after my dad passed away she went to live with my sister and stayed with her so she shouldn't live alone and came to visit us here in Atlanta when my son was *bar mitzvah*<sup>47</sup> . . . she had just come that year. Unfortunately, we didn't really have enough time to sit down with my mother to discuss the war years. But we felt that we were able to learn enough from reading . . . my sister was a little bit older, so when my sister came back from Detroit to live in Montreal . . . later on in years I sat and discussed the war years with my sister. She told me also about some of the things that did happen and that experience with the *Gestapo* agent. She told us what had happened and how we were able to get away, about her misleading them and just leading them astray. I learned from her . . .

**John:** You said you were too young during the actual war to appreciate what was going on. Later on when you grew up and you had the maturity and you had more information, too, how did you process it then, especially considering how unusually lucky your family was?

**Albert:** You know something is that when you grow up and were in a foreign county, as I was . . . it's strange enough . . . I wasn't really concerned at that time with what had happened. I was more looking towards what the future's going to bring rather than what had happened, and knowing that I was fortunate, that we were alive, that we have survived that Holocaust period and not gotten caught—that was foremost on my mind. Because of what happened, I did become involved with Zionist organizations, there were groups . . . the Young Zionists of Canada and I

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<sup>47</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.

was part of . . . but as I mentioned earlier, my main interest at that time [was] sports. I was more interested, one, I played high school football—I mean soccer—we didn’t have football we had soccer . . . being from Europe and having a soccer ball on your feet. I joined a soccer team, a three-championship team and then played for a little while I played semi-pro soccer, but I really wanted to go to school and study, so I gave that idea up of becoming a professional soccer player and decided to be a skier instead. But my main interests really were . . . I was very strong, a very ardent sportsman . . . I still am, until this year was the first year I haven’t skied . . . now I’m more into golf . . . as you get older you kind of switch to . . . I played racquetball for many years. Never played tennis—I’ve had tennis elbow, never played tennis.

**Ruth:** You volunteer at the [William] Breman [Jewish Heritage] Museum. As you said you’re a speaker to students who come. Why is it important for you to speak to these young people? What do you hope they take away from your talks with them?

**Albert:** I think they have to realize how fortunate they are to be living in a free, democratic country, and how they can grow up here in total peace, that they can achieve . . . work as hard as they want to work and be able to achieve. We didn’t have that opportunity—growing up as a child. A snack, believe it or not, was half an apple. Realizing that the hardships that I had growing up—it was a hardship, even though I didn’t realize it—I really realized it in later age—that the opportunity even that my grandchildren have, that we didn’t have those opportunities. But as a result, positively, we grew up faster. We matured faster than I find the children today . . . I’m not saying that they’re spoiled, but they surely have it a lot easier than we had. But I think that these children that I speak to have to realize that there were tough times for other children and other people during the war days, especially Jews. That’s really what we want to convey to them—a message of what happened and especially when we have a lot black kids and we talk about racism . . . they would have been included in the Holocaust . . . not realizing that the Nazis went after gays, they went after Gypsies . . . not only Jews, but blacks were not part of their white, “Aryan” community. I think it’s important for them to know that, whether they really care that much I don’t know, but I think we have to tell them the story. Again, the reason I think we’ve kept alive these Holocaust stories is so that we shouldn’t forget—it shouldn’t happen again.

**John:** Let me ask you one last question. Your father has been a real hero to you—what qualities about him have you tried to deliberately keep alive in yourself?

**Albert:** I don't know. You can say "Like father, like son" . . . although I found that my dad was not aggressive—as I am—because things were tough growing up, as I said, a snack was a half an apple. My parents couldn't afford to give me 25 cents to get a hot dog—I would buy just a bun. Things that were tough growing up and we realized it. A football to me was a *schmatta* [Yiddish: a rag] ball. A *schmatta* ball was a sock that you filled with old rags and that's what we played touch football with. We couldn't afford a 'pigskin.' We realize that things are different. As a result my dad, as I said, was not as aggressive as I thought I was. I thought that I wanted to achieve more, I wanted to get educated—he didn't have that opportunity—I wanted to make enough money so that my family, and my children when I had them, could live comfortably. This is really a little bit of difference. What I learned from him is wanting to be a good Jew and respect my religion and my people. If there's a need and any Jews that need money, that I should be there to help them, which I have. We have adopted a Russian family, thank G-d in the ten years they have been here I'm amazed by their achievements, by their hard work. This is what I do besides lecturing. I hope that I can do some help, financially especially, to the needy.

**John:** Is there anything else you'd like to add that we haven't brought up?

**Albert:** I don't think so. I just want to thank you for the opportunity for presenting my story.

**John:** Thank you.

**Albert:** Thank you for your time.

<End Disk 2>

**INTERVIEW ENDS**