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JEWISH ORAL HISTORY PROJECT OF ATLANTA  
JEWISH WOMEN OF ACHIEVEMENT**

**MEMOIRIST:** REGINA ROUSSO TOURIAL

**INTERVIEWER:** PATTY MAZIAR

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**INTERVIEW BEGINS**

<Begin Tape 1, Side 1>

**Patty:** This is Patty Maziar. It is May 4, 1989. This is an interview for the Jewish Women of Achievement Oral History Project. Today I am interviewing Regina Tourial, T-O-U-R-I-A-L. Mrs. Tourial, I am very glad you could set aside the time today to meet with me. I was very taken with your offer to meet at Or VeShalom<sup>1</sup> today. In fact, we are sitting here in the library at Or VeShalom. I thought that this would be a very appropriate place and point of departure. Perhaps you could tell me about your connection with Or VeShalom over the years.

**Regina:** I was born here in Atlanta. The whole community of Or VeShalom is like one big family. It has changed in the past twenty years. There has been such a large influx of Middle Eastern Jews. Some of them have become members. A lot of the Ashkenazi Jews<sup>2</sup> have become members. It has taken on a different . . . but it is still a warm and, more or less, still traditionalist

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<sup>1</sup> Congregation Or VeShalom was established by refugees of the Ottoman Empire, namely from Turkey and the Isle of Rhodes. The 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>2</sup> Ashkenazi is an ethnic division of Jews which formed in the Holy Roman Empire in the early 1000's. They established communities in Central and Eastern Europe.

Sephardic<sup>3</sup> [synagogue] . . . like one big family. I imagine you want me to go into the history of the Sephardic Jewish community here in Atlanta?

**Patty:** Perhaps your family and its involvement in Or VeShalom?

**Regina:** My mother [Sarah Capouya Rousso] was a president of the Or VeShalom Sisterhood,<sup>4</sup> and one of its earliest members. She came here the first year the Or VeShalom Sisterhood was founded, 1920. She was the first secretary who actually took minutes to be read at the next meeting. They were taken in Spanish and always read in Spanish. I think all of the minutes were read in Spanish up until 1938 or 1939.

**Patty:** Why was that?

**Regina:** Most of the members only spoke Spanish. The first generation, the Sephardic young women who were born here, were still in their twenties. You did not join the Sisterhood until you were a married lady. That was the tradition. Today we have a lot of young women, career women, our children, who belong and are not married. I guess you would call it the ‘new American-style.’ I am proud to say that my daughter was a president of the Sisterhood 10 years ago.

**Patty:** Which daughter was that?

**Regina:** My daughter, Sara Grosswald, became the president. It was the first granddaughter and grandmother president that we had ever had. About a year later I was made Honorary President of the Or VeShalom Sisterhood. We have a . . .

**Patty:** . . . after your daughter?

**Regina:** After my daughter.

**Patty:** You had not been president?

**Regina:** I had never been a president. I had been Vice-President for a period with different presidents for 16 years. I never would take the presidency.

**Patty:** How come?

**Regina:** I never drove. I still do not drive today. I just felt there were a lot of things you had to do that involved being at so many places. That always just held me back. I did not mind doing

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<sup>3</sup> Sephardic Jews or Sephardim are the descendants of the Jews who left Spain or Portugal after their expulsion in 1492. The word comes from the Hebrew word for Spain. The Sephardic community scattered across Europe, the Mediterranean, and North Africa. Sephardic Jews use Ladino, a combination of Hebrew and Spanish, and a Sephardic style of liturgy. Many continue the customs and traditions that originated in the Iberian Peninsula.

<sup>4</sup> A group of women in a synagogue congregation who join together to offer social, cultural, educational, and volunteer service opportunities.

the work or doing anything, but that held me back. I had the distinct privilege of being the honorary president of Or VeShalom Sisterhood. Truly it is just the love of being with everyone. We are very close. We all love each other. There is just such a warm relationship between everyone here. It is an unusual relationship between members and families. My mother came here in 1920. My father [Daniel Rousso] came to America in 1908.

**Patty:** What was his name?

**Regina:** Daniel Rousso. He came here with my Uncle Solomon [Rousso], who founded the Sephardic congregation in Montgomery, Alabama [Congregation Etz Ahayem].<sup>5</sup> They went to Meridian, Mississippi and stayed there for almost two years because my uncle had a Greek friend that had written him about it. It was near the water. They had come from the Isle of Rhodes. This was the kind of land that they knew, being near water, the climate. There were not any Jews there to speak of in Meridian. They heard that there was a large Jewish community in Montgomery, Alabama, so they went there. There were a lot of German-Jewish families in and around Montgomery, very wealthy families. The Lehman<sup>6</sup> from New York originated there in Selma, Alabama.

**Patty:** The banking family?

**Regina:** Yes. There were some Seixas . . . S-E-I-X-A-S . . . and Lazarus. Now they were the Sephardic families, the 'real' Spanish Jews that had come from Amsterdam. They were in and around Montgomery. They were in the cotton plantation business at that time, so they settled there. My father stayed there until 1917.

**Patty:** Did they own plantations?

**Regina:** Yes. The Seixas and the Lazarus' were Sephardic families. Their children later moved to New York [City, New York]. Most of them were in the banking business. They left the cotton business and went into the banking business in New York. The reason I know all this

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<sup>5</sup> Congregation Etz Ahayem was established in 1912 in Montgomery, Alabama by *Ladino* speaking Sephardic Jews, particularly from Rhodes. Solomon Rousso was elected the first president of the congregation. Construction of its first building was completed in 1927. In 1962 the congregation moved to a new building, but by the 1990's it had dwindled, as children of congregants moved away from Montgomery, and the synagogue had difficulty finding rabbis to lead it. Etz Ahayem merged with another Montgomery congregation, Agudath Israel in 2001, and adopted the current name if Agudath Israel Etz Ahayem. The synagogue combines traditions, and Ashkenazi and Sephardic rituals.

<sup>6</sup> In 1844, Henry Lehman, the son of a Jewish cattle merchant, immigrated to the United States from Bavaria. He settled in Montgomery, Alabama where he opened a dry-goods store. In 1847, following the arrival of his brothers, Emanuel and Mayer, the firm changed its name and Lehman Brothers was founded in 1850. In 1858 Lehman opened its first branch in New York City. The company grew to be the fourth largest investment bank in the United States until it declared bankruptcy in 2008.

came about many years later. My uncle's first wife died in 1917. About 20 years ago I went to the cemetery in Montgomery to visit her grave. I was so amazed. It was like going back into history to see all these old names that you never see anymore. Old Spanish names like 'de Ventura,' and the other names I have mentioned to you. This is truly going back into the 1800's when there were a lot of the first settlers that came there—the old Spanish Jews that are buried there. That is where my aunt is buried. This is not what you want to hear is it?

**Patty:** This is exactly what I want to hear. Go ahead.

**Regina:** My father left Montgomery in 1917 and went to Portland, Oregon. He stayed there for a year and came back. He then went to Rhodes to visit his mother and sisters. In 1919 he met my mother. They got engaged, later married, and came back to Montgomery. That was his home. After he was there about six months, he came to Atlanta [Georgia]. They came here in 1920. I was born here in 1921. I grew up speaking Spanish. Many of the children in those days only heard that at home. Their parents did not know other languages. There are a few of them that went to grammar school here in Atlanta not knowing a word of English. They were born in Atlanta, but they only spoke Spanish. It was very difficult for them. They learned, of course. My mother happened to be a French teacher who knew quite a few languages. She learned the English language very well early in years. Because of her knowing French, somehow or another . . . we lived right next door to the Temple,<sup>7</sup> on Pryor Street. I think the Temple was 520 Pryor Street. We lived at 534 Pryor Street.

**Patty:** The Reform temple?

**Regina:** The Reform temple. David Marx<sup>8</sup> was the rabbi at that time. Because the house was right next door, he would see my mother so often. He knew she spoke French. There were a few members of the Temple who were very well-educated young women. Their daughters went to some of the private schools in Atlanta. They got to know my mother. In later years, in the early

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<sup>7</sup> The Temple, or Hebrew Benevolent Congregation, is Atlanta's oldest Jewish congregation. The cornerstone was laid on the Temple on Garnett Street in 1875. The dedication was held in 1877 and the Temple was located there until 1902. The Temple's next location on Pryor Street was dedicated in 1902. The Temple's current location in Midtown on Peachtree Street was dedicated in 1931. The main sanctuary is on the National Register of Historic Places. The Reform congregation now totals approximately 1500 families (2015).

<sup>8</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, Rabbi Jacob Rothschild took the pulpit that Rabbi Marx had held for more than half a century.

1930's, my mother tutored a few of the young German-Jewish girls in French. She made some wonderful friends in that way. The language at home was Spanish.

In 1934, we were very fortunate that Rabbi Joseph Cohen,<sup>9</sup> of blessed memory, came to Atlanta. It was thrilling because his sermons on Saturday mornings were always in Spanish. It brought back a lot of it to the older members, but the young members began to learn a lot more. This lasted until the beginning [of] World War II. Then there was a large influx of servicemen. We all wanted to put ourselves out there. I think we became more assimilated. I think that was the biggest change in our synagogue . . . in our immediate community. Everything came to be in English as much as possible. A lot of the culture was lost. It was a time for changing, I imagine. My oldest three children speak Spanish and can understand very well, particularly my son Sidney, my daughter Sara and my daughter, Peggy. My youngest two children, Daniel and David, can understand very well in Spanish and know a few things to say, but they wouldn't dare try to converse with anyone. Their Spanish is very limited. We have lost something that was preserved for 500 years without any changing.

**Patty:** Is it the Castilian Spanish?

**Regina:** It is the *Castillano*, but really we call it 'Ladino.'<sup>10</sup> It is the old Spanish, the fifteenth century, they call it.

**Patty:** Was it the aristocratic . . . ?

**Regina:** . . . the more aristocratic, it was the old Spanish. Today, the new Spanish is like the one they speak today in Cuba and the Latin American countries. It is a much faster pace.

<interview pauses, then resumes>

**Patty:** How is it that the Sephardic [Jews] kept the Spanish language alive? The Sephardim were spread everywhere. Was Greek not spoken at home?

**Regina:** They only spoke the Spanish language. They learned Greek [for] business reasons, particularly on the Isle of Rhodes, of which I have much knowledge. Both my father and mother were born on the Isle of Rhodes. When my father was born in Rhodes [in] 1888, it was [under]

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<sup>9</sup> Rabbi Joseph I. Cohen (1896-1985) was born in Constantinople (Istanbul), Turkey. He was trained for the rabbinate in Turkey and accepted his first pulpit in Havana, Cuba in 1920. In 1934 he moved to Atlanta, Georgia where he was installed as the rabbi of Congregation Or VeShalom, a Sephardic congregation. Rabbi Cohen officially retired in 1969, but remained active at both the synagogue and in the community until his death in 1985.

<sup>10</sup> Ladino, also known as Judeo-Spanish, is a romance language derived from Old Spanish originally spoken in the former territories of the Ottoman Empire (the Balkans, Turkey, the Middle East, and North Africa), as well as in France, Italy, the Netherlands, Morocco, and the United Kingdom. Today, Ladino is spoken mainly by Sephardic minorities in more than 30 countries.

Turkish possession. By the time he was seven, it became Greek. Shortly after my mother was born, in the early 1900's, the Italians took over the Isle of Rhodes. She says it was the most beautiful time of all. A lot of what is there today is because of the Italian people who spent money on beautifying the island. At the time, even in books you would read, it was called '*La Isla de Rosas*,' which means the 'Island of Roses.' They came and they planted gardens everywhere. The main thing that they did was make sure there were wonderful schools there. The people that were born at the time my mother was got a wonderful education. The Rothschilds had put French schools there. They got a wonderful education. They learned Italian and French. They learned many arts that they would not have learned had it still been [under] Greek possession. In the French schools they had nuns that taught the girls to do beautiful things, embroidery and artwork. The young men also got a much better education because of the Italian influx. After World War II, it went back to the Greeks. They took the islands over again. It has done a lot of changing between the Turkish, the Greek[s] and the Italian[s]. Our parents were influenced by all of this.

**Patty:** It sounds like the Jewish community there was a very tightly-knit community.

**Regina:** It was tight knit, but it was a happy community. They did not feel any antisemitism at all. A little from the Greeks—never from the Turkish people. The Turks befriended them and gave them open access to everything. The banks on the island were owned by the Alhadeff family.<sup>11</sup> They also had department stores there. They were only too glad to do business with them. They had open access to everything. A lot of them were import and export merchants. My grandfather was a merchant [who] traveled from Rhodes to Egypt. He died in Alexandria [Egypt]. That was one of the reasons why . . . when my father and uncle left the Isle of Rhodes, they went to visit his grave in Alexandria. From there they decided to come to the United States. They were only coming for a visit, but they stayed. It was a few years before they went back.

**Patty:** Had your family been there for a number [of] generations? How did they get to Rhodes?

**Regina:** As far as I know, they were there for quite a number of generations. My father's family had been to Italy first. Then, because of other people they knew that had gone to Rhodes, went to live in Rhodes. As far as my mother's family is concerned, the name was 'Capouya.'

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<sup>11</sup> In 1819, Behor Alhadeff founded a bank on the Isle of Rhodes which later became Solomon Alhadeff and Sons. The bank eventually became a powerful financial house in the region. Alhadeff Street and Alhadeff Park are named after the family which originated in Rhodes and has spread throughout the world.

They had been on the Isle of Rhodes for many generations. My family name is ‘Rousso.’ They had been in Italy, and years later went to the Isle of Rhodes. They were there for a number of generations, but not as many as my mother’s family. They had a very famous rabbinical college on the Isle of Rhodes<sup>12</sup> from as early as the 1700’s. It has been written in books about . . . it was a large rabbinical college.

<interview pauses, then resumes>

**Patty:** Was your family involved in any way with the rabbinical college in Rhodes?

**Regina:** I do not know. My grandfather was the rabbi of La Kehila Grande.<sup>13</sup> They are the two Sephardic synagogues on the Isle of Rhodes: La Kehila Shalom<sup>14</sup> and La Kehila Grande, which meant the ‘Large Kehila,’ the ‘Large Synagogue.’ My grandfather, Haham Jaakov Capouya,<sup>15</sup> was the rabbi of the large synagogue of Rhodes. He taught almost all of the elders that were here in Atlanta when I was growing up. This was a wonderful experience for me. They would all tell me, “I learned from your grandfather.” It was thrilling. My grandfather died in 1943. All of the older men came and said the *Kaddish*<sup>16</sup> every night. We had services for a week. They would all come to my house and say the *Kaddish* for my grandfather because they really loved him so much. They spoke of him in such a reverent fashion. Even today, in Salisbury, Rhodesia, which is Harare today, South Africa,<sup>17</sup> they have a large memorial plaque in the synagogue. The older students that had left the Isle of Rhodes and went to South Africa to live all grew up remembering my grandfather. When they tell me this, it is a wonderful thing to

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<sup>12</sup> The Isle of Rhodes had been an important Mediterranean center of Jewish life since the second century BCE. For centuries, the Sephardic community of Rhodes was fortunate in having a number of Jewish scholars and there were many rabbis and “*hahams*” that served the community. In 1928, a formal rabbinical college was established on Rhodes to serve the Aegean Sea area. The Rabbinical College of Rhodes (*Il Collegio Rabinnico di Rodi*) attracted professors and students from several countries and earned an international reputation. Originally, the Rabbinical College was located in the Old City of Rhodes in the Jewish Quarter. Later it moved to larger premises in the New City of Rhodes. The College was closed in 1938 due to anti-Jewish laws passed by the Governor of Rhodes.

<sup>13</sup> La Kehila Grande was built by Greek Jews and was there when the Sephardim (Spanish Jews driven out of Spain in the fifteenth century) arrived. It was the largest synagogue in Rhodes and was destroyed in German air raids.

<sup>14</sup> Founded in 1577, Kehila Shalom (also known as Khalal Shalom) is the oldest functioning synagogue in all of Greece, and the only remaining synagogue on the Island of Rhodes. It was originally built in the twelfth century, destroyed during the Crusades and rebuilt at the end of the fifteenth century. Photographs and a virtual tour of the synagogue are available here: [http://www.synagogues360.org/synagogues.php?ident=greece\\_005](http://www.synagogues360.org/synagogues.php?ident=greece_005)

<sup>15</sup> Haham Jaacov Capouya served as rabbi for the largest synagogue on the Island of Rhodes, the Kahal Kadosh Gadol (Kahal Grande). He died in 1943. A photograph of his tombstone in the rabbi’s section of the Jewish Cemetery of Rhodes is here: <http://www.rhodesjewishmuseum.org/cemetery/tombs-of-the-rabbis>

<sup>16</sup> Also known as the Mourner’s *Kaddish*. The word *Kaddish* means sanctification, and the prayer is a sanctification of G-d's name that is recited at funerals and by mourners.

<sup>17</sup> Harare, officially called Salisbury until 1982, is the capital of Zimbabwe.

hear. He must have been a wonderful person. I never knew a grandparent. That is a terrible thing. That was the sad part of leaving a country when you are young. You mean to go back but you never do. The Isle of Rhodes had a wonderful history from what I hear from everyone. It was such a happy place to be. Most of our members speak of it so lovingly.

**Patty:** It is right in the crossroads. I have been to Rhodes, just very briefly, in between catching boats. It is just in the crossroads, of the Crusades,<sup>18</sup> of every war.

**Regina:** That is right . . . of all the little islands . . . there is such a history there. It is right across the water from Turkey so they could come and go freely.

**Patty:** It is incredible that the Jewish community did not undergo more persecution there.

**Regina:** They did. This is just the saddest part to me. They seemed to escape almost everything. When the war [World War II] was almost completely lost and there was not even a chance for Germany to possibly win . . . it was such an awful thing that in those last few months of the war . . . that one last persecution. The Germans rounded up all of the citizens in Rhodes and took them by boat. My grandmother was in her nineties at that time already. They took them by boat to Germany. I do not think there [were] even maybe months left of the war. Most of them were annihilated, almost 2,000. That is such a horrible thing. They had escaped everything. They seemed to have been bypassed for everything. They did not suffer for anything except for just those last few months. Had they known . . . they were so vulnerable and so unsuspecting of anything. Had they known it was just a boat ride of hours away, they could have gone over to the Turkish mainland where they would never have been harmed at all. They told them to meet in the square and that there was going to be nothing done to them, just to come for a meeting. They asked the president of the Jewish community there to tell them all to come, that it would be for their benefit. I guess he just did not dream that this would happen, and they went. The reason we know all this today, [is because there were] handfuls of young women and men who escaped. They went over to Germany to the death camps. They did not even have time. They did not linger in prisons long. It was like they just had to do one more persecution against the Jewish people. They were killed almost instantly when they arrived there [at

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<sup>18</sup> The Crusades were military campaigns sanctioned by the Catholic Church in the Middle Ages. Historians consider that between 1096 and 1291 there were seven major Crusades and numerous minor ones.



Auschwitz-Birkenau].<sup>19</sup> It was really a terrible thing.<sup>20</sup> It really touched us so much. I do not think there was one family here who did not hear about a brother or someone [who perished]. For instance, my mother. Her brother and his youngest son—the older two boys had already gone away—and her mother were killed in the death camp. My father had one sister only left in Rhodes. She had seven children. One daughter is living today. My Aunt Rebecca [Capouya Berro], her husband, Boaz [Berro], and her six children were killed.<sup>21</sup> It was such a tragedy. All of it was a tragedy, but this . . . the war was lost already. Had the Americans maybe just pushed . . . no, I cannot say that. Everything is ‘if’ and ‘if.’ Today there is very little left of the Sephardic heritage and culture there. There is history and there are documents there. The La Kehila Grande was destroyed during the war.

**Patty:** By the Germans? [They] deliberately leveled it?

**Regina:** Yes, deliberately leveled by the Germans. La Kehila Shalom is standing today. They have renovated it a little and added to it. There is a large plaque in La Kehila Shalom that lists the members of La Kehila Grande, which is the large synagogue, and all of the families that died in Germany. There are some landmarks. There are still some homes there. There has been so much new building. Rhodes has become a large tourist attraction. They have put up a lot of hotels where there were homes and businesses that belonged to the Sephardics.

**Patty:** They are going to rebuild the Colossus,<sup>22</sup> too, out of plastic. Is there a Jewish community there now?

**Regina:** No there is not. I think there are about five or six families that have gone back. Most

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<sup>19</sup> Auschwitz-Birkenau was a network of camps built and operated by the Third Reich in Polish areas annexed by Germany during World War II. Nearly 1,000,000 Jews were murdered there in gas chambers, including many Greek and Jews from Rhodes.

<sup>20</sup> Rhodes was part of Italy until the Germans occupied the island in September 1943. Under the Italians the Rhodeslis were sent to the Haidara concentration camp near Athens, Greece where they were held until they were put in cattle cars for the overland trip to Auschwitz-Birkenau in Poland. The trip took 13 days crossing Greece, Albania, Croatia, Hungary and Poland, and many died. Upon arrival at Auschwitz-Birkenau, 1,202 Rhodeslis were murdered in gas chambers; 346 men and 254 women were saved to work in the camp. As the Russians drew near Auschwitz-Birkenau, the surviving Rhodeslis were among those marched out of the camp and scattered throughout German labor camps. In total, only about 150 Rhodeslis survived the war.

<sup>21</sup> This family’s last name was ‘Berro’ or one of several similar spellings (‘Buro,’ ‘Bero,’ etc.). Rebecca was married to Boaz Berro. Some of their children’s names apparently were: David, Fani, Ruben, Stella and Uriel. The Berro family was apparently extended as 10 others with that last name were also deported. The Central Database of Shoah Victims’ Names at [www.yadvashem.org](http://www.yadvashem.org) contains their names, but no details about relationships, age or other information.

<sup>22</sup> The Colossus of Rhodes was a statue of the Greek sun-god Helios, erected in the city of Rhodes, on the Greek island of the same name in 280 BC. It is one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. Before its destruction in the earthquake of 226 BC, the Colossus of Rhodes stood over 30 meters (98 feet) high.

of the homes have been taken over by Greek families. My grandfather's house was locked for a number of years. I think that my family didn't go back to claim it and they should have immediately. It still stands today. It belongs to Greeks now. It is actually a home from the Byzantine Era.<sup>23</sup> It has become like a landmark today. A lot of the houses were in the '*Le Quartier Israelite*,' which is as they are known. It was more or less a ghetto, but one of its own choosing, not like it was closed at any time or anything like that. They all liked to live close together. They all lived in the small quarter. This was known as '*Le Quartier Israelite*,' which means the 'Jewish Quarter.'<sup>24</sup>

**Patty:** Were there other ethnic groups on Rhodes? I imagine the Turks and the Greeks . . . did they separate out?

**Regina:** The Greeks and the Turks—from what I hear, and this is hearsay—never got along. But they got along with the Jewish people. [The Jews] never had any problems with the Turks or the Greeks. Often, at holiday times, the Greeks would back off a little bit. My uncle lived in Lindos, which was more or less a nicer residential area at the top of a mountain in Rhodes. He had been well-to-do, in comparative circumstances. He had a dear Turkish friend . . . his name was 'Regep' [sp]. For some reason or other, he must have had inkling that something might not go well. He had some valuables and some jewelry that he put in tins. That is the way they used to keep things that they wanted to hide, or something. They knew how to put them in tins and close them with soldering. He told Regep, "If something should happen to me, I have two sons, Jacob and Giuseppe. You keep these for me." Sure enough, quite a few years after the war, my cousin Jacob went back to Rhodes and Regep gave him the jewelry that had been my aunt's and my uncle's. He was a dear friend. There was no proof of anything, no papers or anything. He could have kept them. They were close and there was a trust. They missed them. The island faltered a lot. When the Sephardic, or Spanish Jews, lived there, they prospered because of them. The Turks were aware of this and liked having them be in business there. Like you said, they could trust. They knew that they were more or less getting more for their money, for their

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<sup>23</sup> The Byzantine Empire was the predominantly Greek-speaking continuation of the eastern part of the Roman Empire during Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages. Its capital was Constantinople (modern-day Istanbul, Turkey), originally founded as Byzantium. It survived the fragmentation and fall of the Western Roman Empire in the 5th century AD and continued for another thousand years until it fell to the Ottoman Turks in 1453. During the Byzantine Era the empire was the most powerful economic, cultural, and military force in Europe.

<sup>24</sup> The Jewish Quarter was also known as '*La Juderia*' in Ladino.

living, or their betterment with them on the island. They used to go back and forth on their boats to the Turkish island. It was very close, just a very small distance away.

**Patty:** They had a very strong identity. Were there non-Sephardic Jews who lived there?

**Regina:** As far as I know, they came to do business and they came to visit. They came to the rabbinical college to look up . . . the history there. Some of them were educated there. The Ashkenazi had come to be educated. I do not think there were any others than the Sephardic Jews living there.

**Patty:** You've never been back there?

**Regina:** Oh no! I am scared to death, do not drive and do not fly. My children have been, and they loved it. They try to make me go. I have heard in the last 10 to 15 years there has been a big change. The first ones who went back in the early 1950's could still find the landmarks that were pretty much the way they left them. Now they have a hard time finding their homes or the schools where they went. Progress takes over. They build new things and they have leveled a lot of things to put up other things. It is hard to find the places they knew when they were growing up. It is not the same, except the climate is so beautiful. I have a cousin [who] is going to leave in two weeks and take her children and grandchildren so she can show them where she grew up and where she went to school. Rhodes is not too much that I can tell you about except just hearing from my mother. It had to be so sad. You leave your family. You do not know that it is going to be forever, but with most of them it was forever. They did not go back. Making a trip when they first came in the early 1920's, or 1918, 1917, it was a long trip by boat then. It was not like today when you can go in a week's time by boat, and in a day by air. The times were not that the money was so plentiful that you could afford to make a trip. Also, you had to have a lot of time. It would take two, sometimes even three weeks by boat. You had to take a lot of time off. Not too many people could afford that. You had to stop and think about things like that. They left their parents, their brothers and sisters and never saw them again.

My mother had two brothers that went to live in Buenos Aires [Argentina] before she left. One left in 1912 and one left in 1917. She did not see anyone in her family until 1939. Thank G-d, my aunt, her oldest sister, came here to live with her daughter. Her name was Behora Franco. She came to live with her daughter, Marie Franco. My mother got to have a sister here 19 years after she had left her home. In 1972, my mother went to visit her two brothers in Buenos Aires. It was the one of the most thrilling things that she had ever done. After all those

years . . . she had not seen them in 56 years. That is a terrible thing—that's a lifetime. She stayed there . . . she was going to go for a year, but after she was there six months, I think she missed her grandchildren more than she did her children. She could not wait to come back. My daughter went to get her. My daughter took her there and my daughter went back to get her.

**Patty:** To Buenos Aires?

**Regina:** To Buenos Aires, yes. I'm so glad she did because [her brothers] died several years later. So at least they had that. She never saw the rest of her family except [her] older sister. My aunt was such a beautiful, beautiful woman. She was my mother's oldest sister. She went back to visit in Italy in 1965. While she was visiting there, she died in Pisa [Italy]. She was visiting her son at a resort there. They took her to the hospital there in Pisa and she died in Italy. They had quite a few years here together where it was wonderful to have someone from my mother's family here. It was the first time that we had ever known anyone. That was a wonderful relationship, too.

**Patty:** To know the customs in such a unique area of Judaism. The customs are different. There is a certain kind of understanding, especially when the language was so strong. I guess the Eastern European Jews had Yiddish to bind them.

**Regina:** That's right, that's true. There were Sephardic Jews here from Izmir [Turkey] and Constantinople . . . Istanbul [Turkey]. There were a few from a couple of the Balkan countries [like] Yugoslavia. There was one member in our congregation that was from Yugoslavia and one from Bulgaria . . . I'm remembering this . . . the Spanish language tied them all together. They all spoke Spanish. This was incredible. They all spoke the same language. It was a strong bond between them. Growing up, this was the only language , , , when you went to the synagogue . . . I could tell you this since you are asking. I have to tell you about how the language was. My husband [Ralph Tourial] became the youngest president the congregation has ever known.

<memoirist shows interviewer a page in a book she has>

**Regina:** In 1937, 1937 really my husband was made president of Or VeShalom at the age of 21 years. Of course, he was. . .

**Patty:** . . . you were married then?

**Regina:** No, I was not. He was 21. They wanted to bring in the participation of the young members who had been born here and that grew up here. They felt like it was time for a big

change, so they brought all of this in. He thought it was such an honor. He really was almost too young to be president. He got up to address his first board meeting. He started speaking to them in English . . . out spoke about two or three of the older members, “Who do you think you’re addressing, the new generation? This is Or VeShalom, and if you can’t speak to us in Spanish, then . . .” From then on, all of his meetings were conducted in Spanish. We all knew the language. We spoke it and understood it because it was the language that was spoken at home.

**Patty:** The people who came from Izmir and Bulgaria, were they also merchants or were they working the land? . . . Were they peasants, or were they sophisticated and educated as the group in Rhodes has been?

**Regina:** The saddest thing to saw was that the ones that had had a better education . . . not all of them, some of them were, as you said, peasants, but not working the land. They were no farmers. Not that I know of any Jewish farmers. Even the ones that came, they weren’t farmers. They came here with a language barrier, which is very hard. They took jobs that they had never known before. They became restaurant men, hat cleaners . . . most of them restaurant people . . . shoemakers. They picked up trades they could pick up fast, services that were not the norm here. They were not shoemakers when they left Rhodes and they certainly were not hat cleaners. They knew nothing about the restaurant business on the Isle of Rhodes. Most of them were merchants or working for other merchants. They came here and had to take anything that they could to make a living. As time went on they did very well. Later on, education came in. The older people and then the first generation came. All they could think of was an education for my child. The picture changed all the way.

Today, thank G-d, Or VeShalom is so different. We are so thankful and so very, very proud. There are so many professionals in our congregation. It makes us feel good because we are still one family. This too will go, but right now, if someone does well, it is just like my own child. You get so proud. You get this wonderful, wonderful feeling. It is so close by, yesterday, when our fathers . . . I know my father did . . . it was a struggle. They worked so many hours. My father would get up at five o’clock in the morning. He had to be at his place of business at six o’clock in the morning. He would stay until seven or eight [o’clock]. Even just that one other customer might make such a difference in our income. We grew up through the [Great]

Depression years.<sup>25</sup> We never realized how bad it really was because somehow or other Jewish fathers and mothers tried to do so much for their children. I do not remember suffering for anything, or really wanting for anything. I guess they shielded us or tried to do the best for us. We didn't feel the hardship that we read about today. It seems like such a vague thing because we did not actually feel it at home. You cannot compare it to today. Today there . . . you can't give them enough or do enough for them.

**Patty:** Sometimes it is important to return to those values.

**Regina:** I think we had the best of everything. There was so much love and so much warmth.

**Patty:** [Do] people who live in the Mediterranean . . . have a different feel for life?

**Regina:** It is a happier feeling . . . these things keep coming into my mind . . . we had such a wonderful relationship with our neighbors. They were neighbors and some of them lived further away. My father and mother had a group that met every week. It started out as once a month, but I guess they could not get enough. It did not only involve them. Later on, as the children grew, the children got married, and their children had children. It involved all of them. Three or four times a year they would have something big like New Year's [Eve]. It was the most wonderful thing in the world. There were about 12 to 14 couples. You have to imagine that all of these couples had anywhere from three to six children. When their children got married, the ladies in the group would start cooking from . . . I remember going to my mother's house after I was married. They would start cooking a week ahead of time to get everything ready. They knew even if we went out we would all end up at the house, wherever they had it. It was the most wonderful, beautiful thing. The more people that came, the happier they got.

**Patty:** You wanted more people to come.

**Regina:** It was singing and dancing. It was just the most wonderful, wonderful feeling. I do not think anybody had such richness of just having a good time. Every time that one of us would come, if we came from another party or somewhere, they could not accept . . . it was almost an all-night party. It did not end there. The next day on New Year's Day, the men were off [from work] and they would come. It was just a feast of eating and wanting to do so much for everyone. They loved people. They loved to show off their cooking expertise. They wanted you to—like all typical Jewish people—eat, eat! This was not only eat, but be merry and happy.

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<sup>25</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.

They loved it. My father played the **mandolin**. He could play every instrument available. He could play any instrument that there was around. He was more or less the musician for the . . . They used to use record players too, but when they wanted to sing their old songs, their *romanceros*,<sup>26</sup> their old folk songs, he would be the one to play the mandolin.

**Patty:** Were these Spanish songs or Jewish songs?

**Regina:** All Spanish songs. All of these songs told such beautiful, beautiful stories. Every once in a while my children will start laughing because I will start singing one or two of them. My daughter, Sarah, my daughter, has learned to sign them too, and it thrills my mother to death. All of the *romanceros* are just telling a story. They are not just romantic songs, but there are songs that will make you cry. There's one . . . do you want me to tell you about the song?

**Patty:** Of course, do you want to sing it into the tape?

**Regina:** Let me see if I can remember it. There's one that goes . . . I'll explain it to you in a minute . . .

<Regina sings a *romancero* in Spanish>

**Regina:** I am going to start crying. My mother used to sing this to put us to sleep. There are so many verses. "To a very religious **convent** I'm going to go with my *niño* [Spanish: baby boy], my baby, to confess all the sins that I have committed and I did them by . . . [Spanish words: 51:20] . . . by mistake." Then she goes on to sing, [Spanish words: 51:25] "Who is going to love me? Who is going to love me? Knowing how much I loved you?" [Spanish words: 51:40] "I'd die for my love of you." There are many verses. They are beautiful songs. There are a lot of funny songs. We used to go on picnics. We would go on buses and we would just die laughing because they would add their humorous touches. They would modernize them with things that happened on **Livington** Street [sp] in [Brooklyn] New York.

<End of Tape 1, Side 1>

<Begin Tape 1, Side 2>

**Regina:** The houses . . . so many of us lived so close together. The families were very close. This is unusual, but the same thing happened to the Russian-Jewish people on Washington Street. We were on Pryor Street and Central Avenue. All of it . . . was not a ghetto, but it really was one. We were all within a small area. The synagogues and the Temple were all within a very, very small area.

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<sup>26</sup> A *romancero* is a type of Spanish folk ballad. The earliest examples date from the fourteenth century.

**Patty:** It really recreated the Spanish Quarter.

**Regina:** Yes, it did.

**Patty:** I think that's what people oftentimes . . .

**Regina:** Everybody knew everybody. Everybody knew when anything happened with anyone. All the weddings and the births—they were for everyone. If you had a *bar mitzvah*,<sup>27</sup> a wedding, or a *bris*,<sup>28</sup> the whole community had to be invited. It was not that large of a congregation at the time.

**Patty:** When was the first time you met an Ashkenazi Jew whose customs were really different and did not even speak the same language?

**Regina:** Very early in life. The minute we got to grammar school.

**Patty:** But there weren't any in your neighborhood.

**Regina:** Yes, there were. What I'm saying is that the synagogues and the **Temple** . . . we lived next door to the Temple, you have to realize that. We knew just by seeing them all the time on Sundays . . . or if they came to day school . . . no, they didn't have a day school . . . but from Sunday school. We lived four short blocks from Shearith Israel.<sup>29</sup> Our synagogue was only two blocks from Ahavath Achim.<sup>30</sup> On holidays our paths would cross all the time. We knew each other quite well.

Later, as we got older, the social clubs . . . a lot of them joined the social clubs. We all went to the Jewish [Educational] Alliance,<sup>31</sup> which was a wonderful thing for playing ball,

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<sup>27</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>28</sup> A *bris*, formally known as the *brit milah* (Hebrew: Covenant of Circumcision) involves surgically removing the foreskin of the penis. Circumcision is performed only on males on the eighth day of the child's life. The *brit milah* is usually followed by a celebratory meal.

<sup>29</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>30</sup> Ahavath Achim (AA) 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. The final service in that building was held in 1958 to make way for construction of the Downtown Connector (the concurrent section of Interstate 75 and Interstate 85 through Atlanta). The synagogue moved to its current location on Peachtree Battle Avenue in 1958.

<sup>31</sup> The Jewish Educational Alliance operated from 1910 to 1948 on the site where the Atlanta Fulton County Stadium was located. The JEA was once the hub of Jewish life in Atlanta. Families congregated there for social,



sports, or whatever sports there were. This brought the whole Jewish community together. This was the most wonderful thing that had happened to us.

**Patty:** Were the German-Jewish kids involved in that, too?

**Regina:** Some. Not as many as the Russian Jews. The Russian Jews at the Jewish Alliance . . . the bigger part of the children who went to play ball or took part in the sports there were the Russian-Jewish kids. I'm saying this, but that is the way it was then. Later on, all of our children started going. The German Jews . . . not too much from what I can remember. At one time, we did not have a rabbi for a short period of time. I must say that that Rabbi **Marx** was very good. A very few of our members did go to the Temple Sunday school. Rabbi [Harry] Epstein<sup>32</sup> was the rabbi at AA, Ahavath Achim. They gave us . . . there were three little houses on Woodward Avenue right behind Ahavath Achim that they used for Sunday school classes. They gave our children a certain part of that so we could go to Sunday school, at least during the time when we did not have a rabbi. We also had some wonderful, wonderful teachers. Myself, I had Miss Bessie Goldstein, who later became Mrs. Ben Rice, who taught me Sunday school. She was just wonderful. We were very, very fortunate. The synagogues in those days were so good to each other. They really helped. When they knew that you did not have a rabbi for a short time like we did, they were so good to make sure the children did not miss anything.

I heard this from my mother-in-law. When they first came to this country . . . my mother-in-law came here in 1912. There were some wonderful women. She particularly remembered two or three of them. One of them was Mrs. [Morde] Foote . . . F-O-O-T-E. One was Mrs. [Helen] Montag, who were so kind to these women. They knew they had a language barrier and would help them to get settled and to find things. [They] would show them how to go to a grocery store and to be careful with their money—this is what you did and didn't do. To people who came from countries not knowing English—and my mother-in-law didn't know a single word—this was like the most wonderful thing in the world. In this instance, the German Jews were just so open-hearted and open-handed, helping these women get started learning how

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educational, sports and cultural programs. The JEA ran camps and held classes to help some new residents learn to read and write English. For newcomers, it became a refuge, with programs to help them acclimate to a new home. The JEA stayed at that site until the late 1940s, when it evolved into the Atlanta Jewish Community Center and moved to Peachtree Street. It stayed there until 1998, when the building was sold and the center moved to Dunwoody. In 2000, it was renamed the Marcus Jewish Community Center of Atlanta.

<sup>32</sup> Rabbi Harry Epstein (1903-2003) served as rabbi of Ahavath Achim Synagogue in Atlanta, Georgia from 1928 to 1982, when he became rabbi emeritus. Under Rabbi Harry Epstein, the congregation began to shift to Conservatism, which they joined in 1952.

to do in this country. They felt so alone. I can't imagine going to a country where I would not know the language. It must have been an awful hardship . . . more than financial, but not to be able to make yourself understood, and being frightened.

**Patty:** How did your father do it?

**Regina:** My father knew . . . eight languages. He really was a linguist. He could pick it up, I guess. When he went to Meridian, Mississippi, which was where he landed when he first came here, he knew the Greek language very well. He made himself known there. They started teaching him things. By the time he got to Montgomery, he had already picked up enough English to make himself understood. Later on maybe because he also knew French, Italian, and Spanish it was very easy for him to pick up the English language. My mother doesn't even have an accent today. Many people are amazed that she did not know the language until she came to this country. Now she has been here 68 years. You can learn a lot in 68 years. My mother-in-law, until she died, knew very little English, maybe because she did not want to learn. She learned a lot of it because of my children. Not because of her children, but because of my children . . . having to converse with her grandchildren. Because of my mother-in-law my children learned Spanish. I have to give her the credit for that. They had to make themselves known to her and to understand her. That is the way she spoke to them. I can thank her for teaching them their Spanish.

**Patty:** It was really the equivalent with **Yiddish**. My grandmother taught me Yiddish because it was spoken at home.

**Regina:** Exactly the same thing. The language that is spoken at home is what you pick up. My husband . . . when my mother-in-law took him to grammar school . . . she started to leave him, he started crying. He would not let go. He did not know a word of English when he went to grammar school. You can imagine how the times have changed. They lived in their own little world. There was no need for translating or speaking English. My father-in-law did, but he went to business. He died when my husband was seven years old, so consequently my mother-in-law never had to learn. Otherwise, she may have had to pick it up some from her husband because he would have to know it going for a business . . . he had a restaurant.

**Patty:** Your parents moved here in 1920, which was right after Leo Frank.<sup>33</sup>

**Regina:** Yes. Since you are talking about Leo Frank, I can tell you something of a personal nature. My father's godmother was the first of the Sephardic women that we know that actually lived here in Atlanta. Her name was Rebecca [Sarda] Amiel, A-M-I-E-L.<sup>34</sup> She was such a beautiful lady. She spoke French so fluently and she spoke Greek. She had come from Cairo, Egypt. She spoke Greek. She knew some Spanish, but she spoke Italian, French, and Greek mostly. I guess that is what they had spoken there, but she did know Spanish too. She was such a modern woman for those days. She had had some German-Jewish neighbors. When Leo Frank was in prison . . . she was a very courageous woman . . . I do not think I would have ever been able to do it, but she used to make food for him and put it in a basket. She would walk to the prison, with her hat on, as proud and as fearless . . . her husband was petrified for her. She would say, "He's a Jewish man and he deserves to have food." This is true.

**Patty:** She was bring him kosher<sup>35</sup> food?

**Regina:** She would take him food . . . I don't think he would have cared whether it was kosher or not. She thought it would make a difference. She would fix food for him, take it in her little basket and take it to the prison. They would take it to him. She was not afraid. I do not think I could have . . .

**Patty:** Did she know him before he was in prison?

**Regina:** She knew some members of the family. I do not think she knew Leo Frank himself. I think there is a picture in here <referring to the book> It is a shame it is not written in this book. She used to tell us little stories, and it is such a shame that she's . . .

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<sup>33</sup> Leo Frank (1884-1915) was a Jewish factory superintendent in Atlanta, Georgia. In 1913, he was accused of raping and murdering one of his employees, a 13-year-old girl named Mary Phagan, whose body was found on the premises of the National Pencil Company. Frank was arrested, tried, convicted and sentenced to death for her murder. The trial was the catalyst for a great outburst of antisemitism led by the populist Tom Watson and the center of powerful class and political interests. Frank was sent to Milledgeville State Penitentiary to await his execution. Governor John M. Slaton, believing there had been a miscarriage of justice, commuted Frank's sentence to life in prison. This enraged a group of men who styled themselves the "Knights of Mary Phagan." They drove to the prison, kidnapped Frank from his cell and drove him to Marietta, Georgia where they lynched him. Many years later, the murderer was revealed to be Jim Conley, who had lied in the trial, pinning it on Frank instead. Frank was pardoned on March 11, 1986, although they stopped short of exonerating him.

<sup>34</sup> Lyda Sarda Amiel's oral history is available at the Breman, OHC 10025.

<sup>35</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. Kosher refers to Jewish laws that dictate how food is prepared or served and which kinds of foods or animals can be eaten. 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. Kosher can also be used to describe ritual objects that are made in accordance with Jewish law and are fit for ritual use.

**Patty:** Do you think there was anything in particular that motivated her to do that?

**Regina:** She loved to help. There is a small thing here that says, “When all of our young men brought their brides here to this country, they were all taken to Mrs. Amiel’s home.” She was sort of like a mother to all the young women that would come here. The language was so hard for them. She would open up her home to all of them. If a young woman came here . . . a lot of them came here with no family, and they would have to stay somewhere until the wedding. She would say, “There’s room. Let them stay here until the time comes.”

**Patty:** Did she help them prepare for their wedding? Get them their garments?

**Regina:** She would help them. Most of them brought their **trousseau**, as it was, with them. My mother-in-law had to buy her wedding dress here. Mrs. Amiel took her to Chamberlin-Johnson-[Du Bose]<sup>36</sup> and bought her her wedding dress. She was such a wonderful . . . she was a lady. She really was a lady.

**Patty:** She had been here for a while?

**Regina:** She came in 1906. My mother-in-law came in 1912. Mrs. Amiel was here for a long time. That should have been put in this book. She always told us about Leo Frank. My mother-in-law told us at the time of the Leo Frank trial, my father-in-law would tell her, “Don’t you dare open the doors and don’t go out.” There was a terrible feeling of antisemitism. She was afraid. Ignorance makes you more afraid than anything. Mrs. Amiel spoke English beautifully. My mother-in-law didn’t know any English at all. They did not put anything in here <referring to the Or VeShalom book> about that. She told us so many of the little stories that I never even read in the paper about Leo Frank. She told about that when he died—I do not think this was in the paper—a gentile and a Jewish man had had the Jewish funeral home. We had a Jewish funeral home here at one time, Greenberg’s . . . Sam R. Greenberg. That was the funeral home. They had taken the body of Leo Frank after he had been killed, lynched. They were going to prepare the body for a funeral to take to bury . . . I don’t know if this ever made the newspapers, I do not remember hearing it.

**Patty:** What kind of funeral did he get?

**Regina:** They came to the funeral home with torches outside and they wanted the body to take back to the [Marietta] Square.

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<sup>36</sup> Chamberlin-Johnson-Du Bose was a department store in Atlanta from 1866 until 1931.

**Patty:** The Ku Klux Klan did?<sup>37</sup>

**Regina:** This is **terrible to even repeat these things, that's why I do not think the paper would have printed it. The people from the funeral home said, "We can't give you the body." [The KKK] said, "If you don't, we're going to burn the place down." They finally let them come in and take the body. They took it back to the Marietta Square. This is true, you can verify this.**

**Patty:** How did the Jewish community handle that at so many levels . . . but purely from a religious level of needing to have a Jewish burial?

**Regina:** I don't remember if it was later, but they finally did take the body away from here. They didn't want him buried here, anyway. It was an awful time for them. When Mrs. Amiel talked about it, it was, "How did they dare? It was a horrible crime that they had committed." For my mother-in-law . . . it was a time of fear. She was never so afraid in all her life. You see how two different people that were like sisters almost, so very close . . . one was outraged, the other was scared to death. I think a lot of it had to do with being educated and not being educated maybe. Or being the way that one would look at and the other would look at it. They were so very close in their nature and everything. Here is Mrs. Amiel [saying] that, "I'm going to take him food. I don't care what they say or do." And my mother-in-law keeping the doors closed, not letting the children go out, and her not daring to go out.

**Patty:** Do you think it was because Mrs. Amiel had been here longer and was more assimilated, more secure?

**Regina:** Maybe. She was definitely more assimilated. Her **son** went to the AA day school, he [became] *bar mitzvah* at the AA. He also remained a member until . . . he was a wonderful member in our synagogue. His friends, the boys that he grew up with, were members of the AA. He was one of the first members of the [Jewish] Progressive Club.<sup>38</sup> He stayed friends with

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<sup>37</sup> The Ku Klux Klan (KKK or Knights of the Ku Klux Klan) is a white supremacist, white nationalist, anti-immigration, anti-Jewish, anti-Catholic, anti-black secret society, whose methods included terrorism and murder. It was founded in the South in the 1860's and then died out and come back several times, most notably in the 1920's when membership soared again, and then again in the 1960's during the civil rights era. When the Klan was re-founded in 1915 in Georgia, the event was marked by a cross burning on Stone Mountain. In the past it members dressed up in white robes and a pointed hat designed to hide their identity and to terrify. It is still in existence.

<sup>38</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.

them.

**Patty:** This was before Or VeShalom?

**Regina:** . . . before. He and his brothers started going to Hebrew school before Or VeShalom was founded. [Mrs. Amiel] also was a neighbor with a lot of them. She lived next door to one of the synagogues on Gilmer Street, when the AA was there. One of the first services that they had before we had a synagogue *per se* . . . there were about 14 young men that were living here who were Sephardic Jews. There was no synagogue. They were not married. She wanted to have a service for them. She had become so close to one of the rabbis at the AA that she asked him . . . he actually let her bring a *Torah* to her home so they could have a *minyan*.<sup>39</sup> People were different in those days. They wanted to help each other. She had services in her home with a *Torah* from one of the synagogues so that these young men could have services and say it in Spanish the way that they wanted. I am sure the synagogue would have let them come in on a holiday, but they wanted to have it the way that they knew, the way that they read. The Sephardic pronunciation and the Ashkenazic pronunciation were so different they would have felt, not unwanted, but outsiders maybe. This way, she asked and the rabbi said, “Of course.”

**Patty:** It sounds like she had a real feeling for loneliness in people and that sense of isolation.

**Regina:** She was the most unusual person that I have ever known. Maybe because of my husband I had the privilege of knowing her but I have heard strangers that just barely knew her say, “What a shame that we didn’t have a tape recorder [to record] the tales she could have told.” She came to this country with her husband in 1905 for the Jamestown Exposition,<sup>40</sup> which was compared to the World’s Fair . . . it was in Virginia. They went there for that. Then the very next year there was one in Piedmont Park<sup>41</sup> . . . it was the **Piedmont Exposition**. They were sort of traveling . . . In other words, they would go to where there were fairs or things . . . Mr. [Leo] Amiel and his brother Jacob . . . they would go there with things from Egypt, bring them there, make their money, and go back. They came to Atlanta and they met some Jewish people. They must have liked it because they decided to stay.

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<sup>39</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>40</sup> The Jamestown Exposition was one of the many world's fairs and expositions that were popular in the United States in the early part of the 20th century. Commemorating the 300th anniversary of the founding of Jamestown in the Virginia Colony, it was held from April 26 to December 1, 1907 in Norfolk, Virginia. It celebrated the first permanent English settlement in the present United States.

<sup>41</sup> Piedmont Park is a 189-acre park located just north of downtown Atlanta. It was originally designed by Joseph Forsyth Johnson to host the first Piedmont Exhibition in 1887.

When they came here, my husband's uncle, Ezra Tourial and Victor Avzaradel were the first of the Sephardic Jews that we know of who came to settle in this city in 1905. Mr. Amiel met them and right away there was a bond between them. Three or four people had come together and they know Spanish and they were Jewish. Mrs. [Lydia Sarda] Amiel had a hard time convincing . . . when they first settled, they decided to stay in Atlanta and try it and they stayed. They found a house on Gilmer Street because he knew that is where the Jewish people more or less lived . . . the influx of the Jewish people who were living here. He went as near to them as he could and then he started looking for a business. Mrs. Amiel had a hard time. She knew English so she could make herself understood. She knew English very well because the English people lived in Cairo [Egypt]. The schools were in English so she knew the **King's English** very well.

**Patty:** In was French in the Mediterranean . . .

**Regina:** Yes. She did not have a language barrier like a lot of women. She spoke beautiful English. But she had a hard time convincing the Yiddish-speaking people that she was Jewish. She got a *mezuzah*<sup>42</sup> to put on her door! They still did not believe her. She said one time she had to show them her little child and she said, "Look, he's circumcised, so you know he's got to be Jewish."

**Patty:** Because she did not have any of the other traces?

**Regina:** The Yiddish. She did not know the Yiddish and they couldn't understand . . . As time went on . . . Leo, her son, grew up with all the boys and became very popular. Jacob Amiel, Mr. Amiel's younger brother, is buried at Oakland Cemetery<sup>43</sup> in the Jewish plot there. She went back a long way. She had a lot of German-Jewish friends. She spoke beautiful French. A lot of them had been better educated so they knew the French language.

**Patty:** It sounds like the Sephardic community was better educated than the Eastern European community. There were more similarities intellectually with the German-Jewish

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<sup>42</sup> A *mezuzah* (Hebrew for 'doorpost') is a parchment scroll often contained in a decorative case which is fixed on the right side of doorpost of a home. The parchment scroll made by a scribe contains the handwritten text of the first two paragraphs of the *Shema*.

<sup>43</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 U.S. Amateur, U.S. 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.

community.

**Regina:** Intellectually, yes, in the beginning. Then things changed. Like everything else it all changed. I think I mentioned to you that my mother tutored some of the girls in French that were going to private schools. But that happened in New York [City, New York]. When the German Jews came to New York they wanted to join the Sephardic Jewish club, the Knickerbocker Club. As time went on and financial circumstances changed . . . the Knickerbocker Club<sup>44</sup> I would say is probably 99 percent German Jews. There might still be one or two Sephardic Jews as members. But if they go back to the old membership all the names would be Spanish. In the late 1800's it changed and it all became German-Jewish names after the Civil War. But prior to that, it was all Spanish-Jewish names.

**Patty:** What cemetery were the Sephardic Jews buried in? There's never been a Jewish cemetery in Atlanta has there?

**Regina:** No. Just plots . . .

**Patty:** . . . plots in Oakland . . .

**Regina:** . . . in **Oakland**, then Greenwood,<sup>45</sup> now Crest Lawn<sup>46</sup> and Arlington.<sup>47</sup> They all have Jewish plots.

<interview pauses, then resumes>

**Patty:** . . . we [should] talk about your grandfather. The way you spoke about him when he came here. I wasn't clear . . .

**Regina:** My grandfather didn't come here.

**Patty:** Your grandfather . . . who was the rabbi? Did he pass on in Rhodes?

**Regina:** In Rhodes. He died in Rhodes in 1943 . . .

**Patty:** . . . in 1943 . . . so before the . . .

**Regina:** . . . right before the Germans . . . thank G-d he did not have to go through that, but my grandmother did.

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<sup>44</sup> The Knickerbocker Club is a private club in New York City, New York founded in 1871.

<sup>45</sup> Greenwood Cemetery, opened in 1904, is designed in the Lawn style, with long vistas in all directions. Greenwood has a large Jewish section.

<sup>46</sup> Crest Lawn Memorial Park is a 145-acre cemetery that was established in Atlanta in 1916. It has a sizable Jewish section.

<sup>47</sup> Arlington Memorial Park is a cemetery in Sandy Springs, Georgia north of Atlanta. Originally named Arlington Cemetery, the first burial took place in 1922. Arlington Memorial Park covers 122 acres in a park-like setting with rolling hills, trees and lakes including a Jewish section.



<interview pauses, then resumes>

**Patty** You were discussed with your friend who was in here about how that the Sephardic Jews really always harkened back to this Golden Age in Spain.<sup>48</sup>

**Regina:** Because they had an inferiority complex. For the longest time, they had a terrible inferiority complex. Thank G-d, maybe because when they first came here . . . I think because of the language or maybe because of education . . . but like I say today the times have changed. The children have become more educated and much more affluent than they were for a long time. What I said is true about dreaming of things that had gone, always talking about the past, never thinking that today we can make things happen again. I think this went over into the children's feelings for a long, long time. It has changed.

**Patty:** I think there has been this **feeling that the Sephardic Jews who lived in Spain carried with them this nostalgia with them for all the Jewish accomplishments that had taken place in Spain.** The Jews really established themselves in an alien society, in a Catholic society, and were very secure.

**Regina:** Very secure, and had gone to high places. When they went to these countries, they lost all that. It was hard to accept for those that must have gone on. The only thing I can think of, the ones who went to Amsterdam [Netherlands] particularly, and then on into the English countries, must have taken money with them because it didn't take them too long to establish themselves in high places also. They keep it very toned down. They are not flamboyant about it. They had stayed close among themselves and they have married into each other's families a lot. In fact, there was a very interesting article about it in the April issue of *Town and Country*.<sup>49</sup>

**Patty:** I saw it. I was going to ask you about it!

**Regina:** They finally intermarried, even with the German-Jewish families, with the Rothschilds. It that today . . . it still exists. The Grand Rabbi of the British Isles is a Sephardic. He was . . . he is retired now and they have a new [rabbi]. His name was Solomon Gaon,<sup>50</sup> from

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<sup>48</sup> The Golden Age of Jewish culture in Spain coincided with the Middle Ages in Europe. During intermittent periods of time, Jews were generally accepted in society and Jewish religious, cultural, and economic life blossomed.

<sup>49</sup> *Town & Country*, formerly the *Home Journal* and *The National Press*, is a monthly American lifestyle magazine. Founded in 1846, it is the oldest continually published general interest magazine in the United States.

<sup>50</sup> Solomon Gaon was born in Yugoslavia in 1912. Both of his parents died in the Holocaust. In 1949 he became *Haham* (Chief Rabbi) of the Sephardic congregations of the British Commonwealth. He died in 1994.

one of the Balkan countries. He is about as Sephardic as you can get. He has been to visit us on just a few very special occasions.

**Patty:** What does it mean to be, “As Sephardic as you can get?”

**Regina:** He came here . . . the first time I remember him coming was maybe 1967 or 1968. He had come to New York to dedicate something. There was a layman from Shearith Israel in New York,<sup>51</sup> his name was Solomon Cardoza [sp]. He told him about the **Sephardic** community here. He came here for just two days. He met our women. He started singing to them just as a joke. Before you know it, it was like a big chorus. “We can do you one better.” They started singing . . . he was like a kid. He had a ball with them. He didn’t want to leave. His schedule was so tight and then because later on he also took on South Africa. Anything that became a British possession he had to do with. It was a wonderful thing for us, because we had Sephardic rabbis, but they knew mostly English but very little of the Spanish except in the Hebrew reading and pronunciation. Solomon Gaon’s parents must have been like our [parents]. He was such a warm person. He loved hearing stories and telling stories. He loved to sing the *romanceros*. He loved it, he just did. He has come back about three times since. Today he is retired. I think he is in charge or has something to do with the studies of the Spanish Jews at the big Yeshiva<sup>52</sup> in New York. He only does this as a visiting lecturer. He lives in New York now, he and his wife. I do not think his health is too good. He has not come to see us in quite a while. I know when I went to New York, I went to Saturday morning services at Shearith Israel, and he was so thrilled. He remembered some of the names of the women. I was so shocked, I was amazed that he could even do that.

**Patty:** There is a certain zest for living.

**Regina:** Yes. It’s very different in New York. A lot of people don’t like the services there. It’s still **separate seating [for men and women]**. There is no English reading in the services on Saturday. It is very formal and pompous in a way. But I loved it. It was like going back in time a little bit.

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<sup>51</sup> Congregation Shearith Israel in New York — often called The Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue — is the oldest Jewish congregation in the United States. It was established in 1654 and until 1825 was the only Jewish congregation in New York City. The Orthodox synagogue is located on Central Park West at 70th Street. The congregation's current building was occupied in 1897.

<sup>52</sup> Yeshiva University was founded in 1886 in New York City, New York. It is the oldest institution of higher learning in the United States that combines Jewish scholarship with studies in the liberal arts, sciences, medicine, law, business, social work, Jewish studies, education, and psychology.

**Patty:** It is very interesting how Jews always preserve their culture even though they live in alien lands, but tend to absorb some of the feelings and the emotionality of Mediterranean countries. That warmth and zest for life; yet still some characteristics of the religion that are just unchangeable.

**Regina:** There is. Our services have changed a lot.

<End of Tape 1, Side 2>

<Begin Tape 2, Side 1, 01>

**Patty:** This is Patty Maziar. The date is June 20, 1989. This is the second interview with Regina Tourial for the Oral History Project. I wanted to ask you . . . before I started asking you a lot of questions. Was there anything that came to mind after our last meeting of some things that you were thinking about or . . .

<general discussion about last interview and where to start this one>

**Patty:** I want to hear about it in your family's involvement and what your family was like, to really give us an understanding of just what it was like being in Atlanta as a family. What families were like, what your schooling was like.

**Regina:** I think I discussed my mother. She picked up the language real well. She became a PTA [Parent Teacher Association]<sup>53</sup> president.

**Patty:** That I did not know. I do not know how your parents met, or how your mother got here. We talked about your father.

**Regina:** My father came much earlier . . . in 1908.

**Patty:** He had gone to Montgomery [Alabama]?

**Regina:** He went to Montgomery. Then from there he went to Portland, Oregon. He didn't stay. That was in 1917. He did not stay but about six months, just visiting cousins and trying to find out if that is where he wanted to be. He came back to Montgomery because my uncle was there. In late 1919, he had a sister that was going to be married. He and both of my uncles used to send money home all the time. They was the whole thing, they came to the '**Land Paved with Gold**' so that they could send money home. He went back to visit my grandmother, to go for his sister's wedding, and also to take some money to make her dowry bigger and better.

While he was there, a cousin of my mother's first cousin acted as sort of a matchmaker. Early in

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<sup>53</sup> Parent Teacher Association or PTA is national organization with affiliations in local schools throughout the U.S. composed of parents, teachers and staff, and devoted to the educational success of children and the promotion of parent involvement in schools.

1920 they got married. They came back to this country. It was more of a fixed . . . that was the usual thing . . . a fixed marriage. They came back to Montgomery.

**Patty:** He didn't know her?

**Regina:** No. He had never known Mama. The families knew each other very well . . . the reason that this thing was made . . . his older sister that had already been married quite a few years . . . she married before my father left Rhodes. She had just gotten married when he left Rhodes. He was much younger than she was. She was married to my mother's first cousin, an older first cousin. It worked well with this part of the family. Let's do it again, or whatever. They came to Montgomery. By the time he came back to Montgomery, he had been gone from there a year approximately . . . the time that he went to Rhodes. He stopped in Egypt to visit my grandfather's grave in Cairo. From there he went on to Rhodes. A year had passed and he decided that wasn't where he wanted to be. They came to Atlanta in August or September of 1920. He founded a business here. He opened about two or three months before I was born in 1921. He did very well. He had a wonderful few years. He even bought a building at the corner of Walton [Street] and Peachtree [Street]. If he only had the foresight to have kept it, how wonderful it would have been. He owned it. It was a little corner building. He had a big operation. It was a hat cleaning, dry cleaning . . . it was a service kind of thing . . . and shoe shine parlor. That was a big business Downtown. I remember as a child, when you went into these places . . . he had about eight stalls, more or less like dressing rooms with curtains. Men would come and have their suits pressed . . . many of them old clothes like they do today. They would come in especially if they had something big. The banks were all in that close proximity. They would come in, have their suits pressed, and then wait in there with a newspaper, or something. Then come out, have their shoes shined, and walk out like they had just left home. The few hotels were right down there in the same place: The **Piedmont Hotel**, the **Ansley Hotel**, all of these were right there within a block.

**Patty:** Did he know everyone Downtown?

**Regina:** He knew almost everybody. He knew all of them. Then **1929 came along**. It hurt everybody. The people that used to go in there and spend the money—they were big tippers—stopped coming. It hurt that Downtown section, which like I say was the banking place. It really

hit them hard. He sold the building. We had exact date. Later it became George Muse.<sup>54</sup> Isn't that something? That is written, by the way, in the archives in the *Atlanta Historical [Journal]*. It tells how Daniel Russo sold that corner building. If he only . . .

**Patty:** . . . you remember being down there?

**Regina:** No. I don't . . . I am just reading it. He went on later to do the same business. He kept it until 1955 or 1956 and then more or less retired. He worked off and on for somebody else for a few years. It was the best thing he could have [unintelligible: 9:10] . . . because he died in 1960. He worked almost until he died. We thought then that he had lived a [long life] . . . it was a fairly young age . . . 72 years old is not old anymore. I know I am going by myself. I did tell you about my mother. She was a French teacher. She had tutored. I think I told you that.

**Patty:** Did she become a French teacher here, or was she teaching . . . ?

**Regina:** No, she was teaching in Rhodes. She taught French. She was young when she was teaching. She had won a scholarship. They had wonderful schools in Rhodes. The Rothschild family had built a French schools . . . *L'Alliance Française*. She got a wonderful education. She won a scholarship. She and a young man that she had grown up with had won the scholarships to go to Paris, to a school there. The day that the boat was coming, something happened. It had to do with the war. It was the end of World War I. There was something that frightened my grandfather and my grandmother. They decided they were not going to let her go. It took her a long time to get over it.

She was a wonderful scholar in those days. Who appreciated a girl scholar on the Isle of Rhodes? When she came here, she learned the language incredibly . . . when I stop to think of it, [she came] to a country where she didn't know a word of English. She did know Italian and Spanish. She knew French very well because she got a real good French education because of the schools that were built there. She used to tell us that Baron Edmond Rothschild<sup>55</sup> came, with his daughter, to the Isle of Rhodes when they dedicated . . . not for the dedication . . . they used to come once in [a while] to visit to see how the students . . . if they were taking advantage . . . if the school was up to their standards. She said she could remember . . . I asked her again about it

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<sup>54</sup> The George Muse Clothing Company building (Muse's) was a department store (until 1992) at 52 Peachtree Street in downtown Atlanta. The building was completed in 1921 and served as a department store until 1992. It was converted to lofts in the mid 1990's.

<sup>55</sup> Baron Edmond Benjamin James de Rothschild (1845-1934) was a French member of the Rothschild banking family. A strong supporter of Zionism, his generous donations lent significant support to the movement during its early years, which helped lead to the establishment of the State of Israel.

and she said [she] can remember how beautifully she was dressed. She had a beautiful, white embroidered dress and a big white hat. They thought, “Paris!”

**Patty:** Every girl’s dream. It was your mother’s dream, too.

**Regina:** Yes, of course. They were fortunate to have had they had good schools then. Then in 1912, the Italians moved into the school and into the island all the way.<sup>56</sup> They beautified the island very much. They built gardens. They also put very good Italian schools there. This was the later generation. By that time, my mother was already in French schools. A lot of the later . . . people that grew up in Rhodes later were educated in some of the Italian schools by the nuns. They had brought a lot of them in there.

**Patty:** But they allowed the Jewish school to remain?

**Regina:** The *Alliance Française* were Jewish schools. They were the Rothschild schools. But [Benito] Mussolini<sup>57</sup> never bothered them with their Jewish education or the synagogues and everything. They loved him because he had done so much for them. *La Juderia* which was . . . it was not a ghetto, but it was where they all lived, like ‘*La Quartite Israelite*.’ The older ones called it ‘*La Juderia*,’ which meant the ‘Jewish place.’ The ones that had learned French called it ‘*La Quartite Israelite*,’ which was the ‘Israelite quarters.’ It was no ghetto where they closed the gates, or anything like that. They all lived in the same neighborhood, which we tended to do here. When my mother came . . . the neighbors at least were 60 percent at least . . . that’s quite a bit . . . Jewish. I told you we lived next door to the Temple . . .

**Patty:** Next to the Temple that is standing now [on Peachtree Street at the top of Spring Street]?

**Regina:** No. It was on Pryor Street. It was on the corner of Pryor and Richardson Street. It was a beautiful temple. Rabbi David Marx was the rabbi there.

**Patty:** Did your father have the same kind of education as your mother did?

**Regina:** No. He knew how to speak many languages. But he came much younger . . . my uncle brought him when he was quite young. He could speak more languages than my mother could. He spoke Greek very fluently . . . spoke Italian and French fluently. He spoke Spanish and

<sup>56</sup> In 1912, Italy seized Rhodes from the Turks during the Italo-Turkish War.

<sup>57</sup> Benito Mussolini (1883-1945) was an Italian politician, journalist, and leader of the National Fascist Party. He ruled Italy as Prime Minister from 1922 until he was ousted in 1943. He ruled constitutionally until 1925, when he dropped all pretense of democracy and set up a legal dictatorship. He was known as ‘*Il Duce*.’ Mussolini was captured and executed near Lake Como by Italian partisans on April 27, 1945.

Arabic. He knew Hebrew very well. I'm trying to think. He knew more languages than she did. My mother knew a few Greek words, not any to speak of. She couldn't carry on a conversation. My father could. My father could write Greek.

**Patty:** Was it your mother who really took on the responsibility of educating the children, or was your father as enthusiastic?

**Regina:** My father educated us in many other ways. He had the most wonderful hobby that kept him up until all hours of the morning. He was a stamp collector, a philatelist. He belonged to a big society. That was how we got to know some of the old friends. When the **[1929] crash**<sup>58</sup> had come along, I'd say in the early Thirties . . . 1932, 1933, 1934 or 1935 maybe, when things started picking up a little bit better, we used to have cars . . . that would drive up with chauffeurs that would come in the evening. We would all have to scatter and be quiet because he would taken them in . . . The houses in those days were different. We had a big house. Most everybody did. They were the old, big homes that were left by the wealthy who had moved on to better places. It had big entrance hall where we used to sit. The living room was for company and the dining room. We would all have to be real quiet, go upstairs, and get out of the way.

My father had some wonderful people who would come to look at and buy his stamps. This would add to his income. He really had a collection. It is such a shame. In his later years, he got careless and he sold a lot of it. My brother still has a large part of it. He gave a small amount of it to my son, who is a big collector, mostly **baseball cards** today. He has a good stamp collection. Once in a while he goes to a convention. He loved it. My father used to take more time with him than he ever did with either of my brothers to show him . . . “this is this and this is that.” With that he added to our education. He would teach us all the countries of the world and the capitals of the world. “This came from here and this came from there.” With pennies he would have contests. “Who can say this? Who can answer this?” My mother was the one. Sad to say, my father even took away from the education. [World War II]—I know I am jumping—the war helped a lot of our boys become well educated. If that had not come along I do not know that they would have done as well as quickly as they did. When they all came back,

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<sup>58</sup> The Stock Market Crash of 1929, also known as the Wall Street Crash of 1929, Black Tuesday, or the Great Crash, began on October 24, 1929, and was the most devastating stock market crash in the history of the United States, when taking into consideration the full extent and duration of its fallout. The crash signaled the beginning of the Great Depression that affected all Western industrialized countries.

the GI Bill of Rights<sup>59</sup> gave them the right and the opportunity to go to college and get a good education.

**Patty:** Many of the Sephardic men went into the service?

**Regina:** Quite a few of the young boys did. A large number. In that book that I gave you, you will find there is a big . . . the reason I am saying this is that my mother wanted so badly for my brothers to get [a good education]. They did not believe in the girls getting a good education, but the boys should definitely get a good education. I had a brother, my oldest brother Morris. I am the oldest [girl]. He wanted to become a doctor so badly. My mother was thrilled to death. At the time when he graduated from high school, he was already talking about going to Emory University [Atlanta, Georgia]. There was no problem with his grades and everything. He had gone to Boys' High.<sup>60</sup> Shows you how your neighbors and friends can influence you. All of the young men his age there was . . . the government had a lot of jobs. There were the CCC [Civilian Conservation Corp]<sup>61</sup> camps. Any young man could graduate from high school and go to work for the government right away in civil service. In those days, there was no competition.

**Patty:** What year was this about?

**Regina:** [In] 1939, 1940. They had not been drafted yet. They all had **to sign for the draft**. At that time it was 21. Or was it still 18? I can't remember. They told him, "My son has gone to . . ." People that were a year or two older than him . . . "He's already working making money. You're killing yourself and you're going to let him do this and that." My father said that he could go to something like Georgia [Institute of] Tech[nology—Atlanta, Georgia], and get a four-year education, but he was not going to educate him for eight years.

**Patty:** Why?

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<sup>59</sup> The Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, known as the G.I. Bill, was a law that provided a range of benefits for returning World War II veterans (commonly referred to as G.I.s). Benefits included low-cost mortgages, low-interest loans to start a business, payments of tuition and living expenses to attend university, high school or vocational education, as well as one year of unemployment compensation.

<sup>60</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>61</sup> The Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) was a public work relief program that operated from 1933 to 1942 in the United States for unemployed, unmarried men. Originally for young men ages 18–23, it was eventually expanded to young men ages 17–28. It was a major part of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal that provided jobs related to the conservation and development of natural resources in rural lands owned by federal, state and local governments.



**Regina:** I said it is a terrible thing. It broke my mother's heart. He went to Georgia Tech and he became an . . . aeronautic[al] engineer. Immediately upon graduation, he went to NASA [National Aeronautics and Space Administration].<sup>62</sup> At that time they were in Cleveland, Ohio. The largest wind tunnel was in Cleveland. It was not in Florida or in Texas like it is now. That is where he went straight from Tech. He left immediately that week. My younger brother went to Emory and became a dentist. The war made it much easier for a lot of our young men. They all came back, they all went to school, and they got good educations. They have come a long way. It makes me feel real proud. I've seen the changes in our synagogue and what the education has done for a lot of them and how the incomes of the families changed drastically. That happened with a lot of the Jewish people.

**Patty:** Your brothers did not serve, though?

**Regina:** Yes. My brothers . . .

**Patty:** . . . they did?

**Regina:** Yes.

**Patty:** Both of them were in the service?

**Regina:** Yes, Jack and Morris.

**Patty:** Where were they?

**Regina:** Jack went to Biloxi, Mississippi and then later he was transferred to Fort Jackson.<sup>63</sup> He was stationed right outside of Biloxi, Mississippi. He was in the Air Force. Then he went to . . . it wasn't **Gunner's Field**. There are pictures in the book.

**Patty:** Did he go to Europe?

**Regina:** No. He did not . . . he got in . . . it was late when he went. He did not go overseas. Quite a few of our young men in his pictures are in the book with their uniforms on. We have a page with all of those.

**Patty:** Were you able to keep in contact with the family in Rhodes while the war was going on?

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<sup>62</sup> The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) is the United States government agency responsible for the civilian space program as well as aeronautics and aerospace research.

<sup>63</sup> Fort Jackson is a United States Army installation located in Columbia, South Carolina. This installation is named for Andrew Jackson, a United States Army General and seventh President of the United States of America (1829–1837) who was born in the border region of North and South Carolina.

**Regina:** Up until the time that the Germans came. It was hard. We did not get mail as often as we wanted. When the **Germans went to Rhodes**, it was most difficult to get mail out and in. What they would do . . . the little fishing boats that would **cross from the Turkish mainland into Rhodes . . . they knew so many of them and they would slip a letter [to them]. Sometimes it would come, sometimes it would not. Once they went to the concentration camps, it was a long time before we heard from any of them. Then when we did hear, 90 percent were gone. [The Germans] sent them to Auschwitz-[Birkenau]. That was fast. They did not linger there. I hate to use the term, but [the Germans] were just hell bent on getting rid of as many as they could. They did not wait around.**

**Patty:** Were there attempts made to try to get people out during the war?

**Regina:** There were a few of them who were very fortunate. We have a family here in Atlanta who got caught in some gun fire, but got away. They spent a long time near **Malta**, just waiting, praying, that they wouldn't be sent back until a boat could bring them here later. They waited too long. It is a shame. They were living in a fool's paradise. Nothing had touched them. The war had not bothered them in any way [as far as] their wants, except that they weren't getting . . . There was a fairly wealthy family there. There were several that really were quite well-to-do. They had relatives here in this country. They would . . . it is sort of a coded message . . . they would say, "If you see . . ." . . . say Jacob Capouya, my grandfather's namesake . . . "Please give him 20 kisses or 20 hugs for me." That meant give him . . . the equivalent of \$20 American. This way my mother knew that she was sending something. The man's brother-in-law, here in this country, would take her money and put it in the bank here, should he be able to get away some day and come here. They had money there. They were not hurting. There was always someone that could send them the money. They were tickled to death to do it.

Things did change. Once the Germans got on the **island** and once Mussolini had declared war with this country [**United States**], it was very difficult. That was a short time but during that short time, they were able to get money to them. They were not really hurting or suffering for anything. All of this happened within . . . the people . . . the ones who lived to tell us said that nothing changed in their life. They did not stop them from going to the synagogue. They did not stop them from doing anything at all. When they told the president of the congregation, "Bring the people to the **kortishu [sp], which was the Mandraki [Harbor]**" . . . in a meeting place . . . "Tell them that we really won't touch them" . . . a few of them had the . . . not

the foresight, but maybe [were] fearful that something might happen. They buried a few of their treasures. My uncle happened to be one of them. He didn't bury it. He had a Turkish friend whose name was **Regep**.

**Patty:** I think you told me.

**Patty:** Then he buried some things.

**Regina:** Yes. My cousin Jacob went back many years later.

<End Tape 2, Side 1, 01>

<End Tape 2, Side 1, 02>

**Patty:** Your brothers going into the service . . . were they drafted or did they volunteer? That is a mother's worst fear, in a way.

**Regina:** I think when they were in college, they knew that they were allowed to finish and then you had to automatically go in. My son did the same thing. He graduated from Emory's dental school. Two days later he was already on his way to Washington, [D. C.]. He did not go overseas. If you were in college and they let you finish your education, you signed up and said, "I'll leave immediately upon graduation." My brother Morris was lucky. He went to Cleveland. My brother Jack went to the Air Force and never did go overseas. He served two years.

**Patty:** You had two brothers?

**Regina:** Two brothers, one sister. My brother-in-law and my sister got to live the best of it. They went to Germany. He was stationed in Stuttgart [Germany] for a little over two years. He was a doctor. In those days you did not have to go that many years like you do today. There is so much residential work. He did most of his fellowship and researching when he came back from the Army. They had two incredible years. She said when they got there everything was brand new at the American air base where they were stationed. They went into brand new living quarters. She said they were furnished with a brand new electric coffee pot. She could not get over it.

**Patty:** She was able to go with him?

**Regina:** She went about four or five months after he left. This was in the 1950's though. When Jack went in, they were still drafting. The war was over when he was drafted.

**Patty:** Let me try to get a picture. Who is in your family? Are you the oldest?

**Regina:** I'm the oldest.

**Patty:** Can I ask the terrible question?

**Regina:** I'm 68.

**Patty:** Really.

**Regina:** Yes. I have a brother . . .

**Patty:** . . . you do not sound it or act like [you're 68]. I think there are stereotypes about that.

**Regina:** I have a brother, 66. My sister is 64, and my brother is 61.

**Patty:** Do they all live in Atlanta?

**Regina:** My mother was very fortunate. They all live here. My brother was gone from Atlanta about eight or nine years. He stayed with the wind tunnel program for a long time, even after he was discharged. There was a future in it. It just was not what he wanted. He came back to Atlanta. My mother really is fortunate. She had her whole family here.

**Patty:** Are you all close?

**Regina:** Very close. Do we live near each other? No. We are close because of my mother. I am sure that is the whole thing. She keeps the family together. It is wonderful. It is not she as much as it is just the pattern that I see today. We were the 'in-between citizens.' You did what your parents told you to do and then you did for your children. I don't expect . . . I know my children will not do for me what I did for my mother, or what I do to try to keep the family together because of her. I know that that is her biggest pleasure—when we can all be together. That is what she loves. Sunday was '**Father's Day**,'<sup>64</sup> but it could have been 'Grandma's Day.' We all got together because of her. It is very important to make her as happy as we can. We get together more than a lot of families I know. Passover<sup>65</sup> is a chore, but we are together both nights for *seder*.<sup>66</sup> [There are] 40, 41 the first night. We are 30 the second night.

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<sup>64</sup> Father's Day is a celebration honoring fathers and celebrating fatherhood, paternal bonds, and the influence of fathers in society. Many countries celebrate it on the third Sunday of June, though it is also celebrated widely on other days by many other countries.

<sup>65</sup> Passover (Hebrew: *Pesach*) is 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. In addition to eating *matzot* during the *seder*, Jews are prohibited from eating leavened bread during the entire week of Passover. In addition, Jews are also supposed to avoid foods made with wheat, barley, rye, spelt or oats unless those foods are labeled '*kosher* for Passover.' Jews traditionally have separate dishes for Passover.

<sup>66</sup> Hebrew for "order". The ritual family meal eaten at home on the first and second nights of Passover, accompanied by the retelling of the story of the Israelites' exodus from Egypt.

**Patty:** What did she do when you were young? What are some of the things that you remember growing up that made you feel so happy?

**Regina:** She was different from my father in this respect. She liked to become involved. My father did not. He shunned it if he could. She was a great volunteer. I was in the third grade and for her to be president of the PTA? That is no small . . . she had not been here that many years. She had been in this country eight, nine years maybe. For her to be able to communicate, it was not a Jewish school.

**Patty:** What school was it?

**Regina:** Formwalt.<sup>67</sup> It does not exist anymore. She stayed active. She was very active. The first year she came, the **Sisterhood** had just formed four or five months, maybe six, eight months. When she came to Atlanta, she was already pregnant because I know. She always told me, “You were almost born in Montgomery.” They came here. She became the first secretary of actually keeping a journal. She could write in Spanish. We found some books when we moved from the old synagogue—the one from Highland Avenue in 1971—to this synagogue. We found some old journals that had been written in Spanish. They used to write the minutes in Spanish. The receipts were written in Spanish when they collected 20 cents a month for dues for Sisterhood. Then she became a vice-president on the second election. She was the fourth president of our Sisterhood. She became involved almost immediately. She got involved with the educational part. You will find in the book that I gave you that she had the first charter made for the Hebrew school. **Judge Galanti** . . . there is a picture of her. She did a lot of volunteer work. She worked with a Mrs. Baker and a Mrs. Foote. Mrs. Baker was not Jewish. Mrs. Foote was German-Jewish. She did more to help a lot of early families that came to this country. If she found out that they were having problems, she would get around. My mother was a sort of a liaison starting in the late Twenties, early Thirties, if people were having a hard time. Especially when the **Depression** came, they didn’t want anybody to know. They had a fierce pride within. You’ll even find that Mrs. Foote wrote an article about how a lot of them suffered because they would not go to the **[Jewish] Educational Alliance** where they had free dinners or free clinics. They were ashamed. They did not know that they were there to help. She used her as a liaison

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<sup>67</sup> Formwalt School was located on Formwalt Street just southwest of downtown Atlanta. The school and street were named for Moses W. Formwalt (1820-1852), the first mayor of the city of Atlanta.

to find out. [People] would come and whisper to [her], and [she would] get in touch. In later years, Mr. **Edward Kahn**<sup>68</sup> was at the Jewish Educational Alliance. They did not call it the Community Center then. He had a most wonderful secretary named Rose Goldstein. She later became Rose Andrus. She became very friendly with my mother. She had learned French in college and wanted to practice it. Through her, she would also tell her, “Let me know.” They were there to help and they wanted to help. We had a wonderful system within our . . .

<interview pauses, then resumes>

**Regina:** We have a *Bikur Cholim*.<sup>69</sup>

**Patty:** What is that?

**Regina:** It is a charity. The *Bikur Cholim* is always a charitable society. The most wonderful part of our *Bikur Cholim* is that I doubt if five percent of the congregation ever knew what they had done. This to me makes it so wonderful. For instance, say in the early 1930’s when people had really just gone bankrupt or broke and they didn’t have anything. If they had a brother or a cousin that was in Los Angeles [California], or somewhere else, and they said, “They’re willing to stake me if I can just get there.” . . . 1932, 1933 even. They were still suffering from the Depression. They would give them the money. It did not cost as much in those days. “If you can pay us back someday, fine. If you cannot, do not worry about it.” They would help people. It never got out. This is what charity should be about. That is what charity is: doing something and nobody having to ever know about it.

**Patty:** That is the highest form of *mitzvah*.<sup>70</sup>

**Regina:** It truly is. Thank G-d it doesn’t happen anymore, but even in the not too many years past, if someone came upon hard times and [the *Bikur Cholim*] found out, it was done very

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<sup>68</sup> Edward M. Kahn (1895-1984) was an immigrant from Bialystok, Poland. He became a leader in Atlanta’s Jewish community and served as executive director of several organizations including the Jewish Educational Alliance, the Atlanta Jewish Welfare Fund, and the Atlanta Federation of Jewish Social Service, an earlier incarnation of the current Jewish Federation of Greater Atlanta. He also worked with *Southern Israelite* as a writer and adviser.

<sup>69</sup> This charitable institution was funded February 17, 1921 through the initiative of Isaac Alhadeff and Victor Behor. Its purpose was to assist the infirm and the needy as well as the newly-arrived immigrants of the Sephardic community. *Bikur cholim* (Hebrew: visiting the sick) is a term encompassing a wide range of activities performed by an individual or a group to provide comfort and support to people who are ill, homebound, isolated, and/or otherwise in distress. *Bikur cholim* societies exist in Jewish communities around the world. The earliest *Bikur cholim* society on record dates back to the Middle Ages.

<sup>70</sup> The Hebrew word *mitzvah* refers to precepts and commandments as commanded by God. It is used in rabbinical Judaism to refer to the 613 commandments given in the Torah at Mount Sinai and the seven rabbinic commandments instituted later for a total of 620. In its secondary meaning, Hebrew *mitzvah* refers to a moral deed performed as a religious duty.

quietly. I remember Mrs. **Baker** telling my mother how people were so peculiar. They did not want anybody to ever know if they were suffering financially.

**Patty:** Are you talking about the Sephardic?

**Regina:** Very much so. I imagine most Jewish people. The Sephardic were very funny that way. Someone told me—I hope it is not true but it may be—that when they finally started making money, they were slow to start giving it out loud. They did not want people to know that. Today, for the size congregation that we have and in the Atlanta community, I think they do very well now. They do work with the community. They do a lot of volunteer work. They contribute comparatively, percentage-wise. It makes me proud. We are having the new president of the Community Center.<sup>71</sup> Is it all right if I talk about this?

**Patty:** Absolutely.

**Regina:** Asher Benator<sup>72</sup> is a young boy who grew up in our congregation. It makes us so proud. On Friday . . . this is the most wonderful thing . . . I wish you could have known his mother [Marie Benator]. She was such a darling . . . they are going to name the camp<sup>73</sup> after Marie Benator. That is such a wonderful tribute.

**Patty:** Women had very different ways of making their contributions back then. It sounds like your mother had so much potential. There were so many things she could have done.

**Regina:** Many things that she did do. Because she could converse with the doctor when he came, she would help deliver babies. Even when she went to the hospital with one or two, he would let her go into the delivery room. Today, it is normal. People go into the delivery room. He could tell her, “Tell them do this and do that.” She worked with . . . the *Bikur Cholim* was charitable. They also went when the sick needed them, or if someone was dying. We had a wonderful man in our congregation. He believed that *Bikur Cholim* was everything. His name

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<sup>71</sup> The Marcus Jewish Community Center of Atlanta is the primary Jewish community center in Atlanta. It is located in Dunwoody, north of the city, and offers family-centric programs and events with programs, events, and classes that enrich the quality of family life. Their programs include preschool, camping, fitness and sports, Jewish life and learning, arts and culture and social and educational programs. It was named in honor of Bernard Marcus, one of the co-founders of Home Depot, who gave a major gift to the capital campaign. It was preceded by the Atlanta Jewish Community Center (AJCC) on Peachtree Road in midtown.

<sup>72</sup> Asher Benator (1931- 2013) was a businessman and Jewish community leader in Atlanta who was active in many organizations. He was past president of Congregation Or VeShalom, Men’s ORT of Atlanta and Marcus Jewish Community Center of Atlanta; chairman of Israel Bonds for the State of Georgia; commander of Jewish War Veterans Post 112; board member of Butler Street YMCA; Man of the Year for B’nai B’rith and ORT; Southeast Region Israel Bonds Award of Honor; and Lifetime Achievement Award-winner for Jewish Federation of Greater Atlanta. In 1949, Asher was the State of Georgia Golden Gloves boxing champion.

<sup>73</sup> A camp for young children located at the Marcus Jewish Community Center in Dunwoody, north of Atlanta.

was Rabeno Galanti. He has four sons today that really have done quite well [in the] community. This man . . . everything was, “Don’t forget *Bikur Cholim*. Don’t forget *Bikur Cholim*.”

My mother was one of his crew that he would take if someone was dying. She would go. He would come and get her in the middle of the night. They did not drive. We lived in a neighborhood where they could walk a few blocks and get to the person’s house. If they had to go to a hospital or something, they would call a cab. There were some people that worked with them. She was very giving of herself. She took people to the doctor. In those days, that was a chore, too. They needed to go. They did not know how to converse, so they needed a translator. She would go with them on the streetcar—because she did not drive—and transfer. This meant quite a few hours of going and coming. She was something. Until not too long ago, she was wonderful in the kitchen. She is just great. She would come and cook. She took it as a *mitzvah*. It was a small thing, but [only] up until today. In fact, Marty was just telling me, “Your mother bakes the bread . . . every *Sukkot*<sup>74</sup> we bake *borekas*.<sup>75</sup> We serve them four or five days in the morning in the *sukkah*.<sup>76</sup> You must come, because it really is wonderful.” The first, second and the last two days of *Sukkot* we meet in the *sukkah*. Anybody is welcome. We serve a light breakfast. Traditionally, *bourekas*. *Simchas Torah*<sup>77</sup> is another thing. My mother started when we were on Central Avenue. I am going back 40 years ago, or better. She would go to the synagogue and bake the bread to serve in the *sukkah*. Later it became different. We would have to get some help, because now we make . . . we used to make six to eight loaves. It was enough. There were big *challahs*.<sup>78</sup>

<sup>74</sup> One of the Harvest Festivals. It is seven days long and comes after the ingathering of the yearly harvest. It celebrates God’s bounty in nature and God’s protection, symbolized by the fragile booths in which the Israelites dwelt in the wilderness. During *Sukkot* Jews eat and live in such booths which gives the festival its name and character.

<sup>75</sup> *Borekas* are baked pastries that can be stuffed with a variety of fillings. Originally from Turkey, *borekas* fall into the category of small savory pies common throughout the Middle East, North Africa, and parts of Asia. They are a favorite dish among Sephardic Jews, particularly on holidays and other celebratory occasions.

<sup>76</sup> During *Sukkot*, Jews transfer their living quarters for the house to a *sukkah*, which is a makeshift booth whose roof is of branches or vegetation thin enough to let the rain in. People eat in the *sukkah* and many pious Jews sleep there. The *sukkah* is meant to remind Jews of the booths in which their ancestors dwelt when they wandered in the wilderness during the Exodus.

<sup>77</sup> *Simchat Torah* (Hebrew: “Rejoicing of *Torah*”) is a Jewish holiday that celebrates and marks the conclusion of the annual cycle of public *Torah* readings, and the beginning of a new cycle. The main celebration of *Simchat Torah* takes place in the synagogue during evening and morning services. In Orthodox as well as many Conservative congregations, this is the only time of year when the *Torah* scrolls are taken out of the ark and read at night.

<sup>78</sup> *Challah* is a braided bread traditionally eaten by Jews on the Sabbath and holidays.



**Patty:** Did you go with her?

**Regina:** Later, after I got married. Before I got married, I would never. Is that terrible?

**Patty:** How come?

**Regina:** I don't know. Either school, or then right after I graduated from school, I went to work.

**Patty:** Did she not want you to be involved, or did she sort of feel like this was your time to be young and free?

**Regina:** Immediately when I got married, I became very much involved with the Sisterhood and with the synagogue. I started doing as much as I could possibly do. We have had the bazaar,<sup>79</sup> [which] more or less took over. Before that, [we had] the carnival.

**Patty:** When you were growing up . . . you had said that it was very important for your brothers to get the education. What did your mother talk about with you?

**Regina:** I said it was something that we accepted. We never questioned. We never questioned their pattern of what was [expected]. A girl graduated. At that time you went to work for a couple of years. Then you got married. I had quite a few Jewish girlfriends that I know went off to college immediately when we graduated from high school. I do not remember if it was because I did not care much about going away more than anything. That frightened me. I never felt badly about it until much later. I thought about the wonderful opportunities we could have had. In the meantime, I had taken Latin. I was going to go to Girls' High.<sup>80</sup> At the last minute, my father said that my brother would be graduating soon. I changed and went to Commercial High School.<sup>81</sup> You had to have lived here to know the difference. It was a business education that is comparable to any good college today that gives you a good business course. They do not have anything like that in any of the schools today. I could name you quite a few of the Jewish

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<sup>79</sup> Congregation Or VeShalom's annual Hanukkah Bazaar is one of the largest Hanukkah events in Atlanta. The bazaar at the synagogue features Mediterranean cuisine, hand-made delicacies and pastries, merchandise from local vendors, children's activities, a book sale, and an auction. Members of the congregation's Sisterhood bake and prepare foods throughout the year for the annual event.

<sup>80</sup> Girls' High School was one of seven schools as part of the original Atlanta public school system. It opened in 1872, and was the only public school in the area exclusively for girls. It was a superb school academically, and had 104 rooms including science halls, laboratories, sewing rooms, a library, and outdoor classrooms. In 1947, Atlanta high schools became co-educational and Girls' High was renamed Roosevelt High School.

<sup>81</sup> Commercial High School began as a department of Girls' High School in 1889 for girls who wanted to learn business skills. They taught bookkeeping, typing, math and history. It expanded to a four-story brick building on Pryor Street, and in 1910 became Atlanta's first coed high school. It closed in June 1947.

people that graduated from Commercial. A lot of them went on to become big successful businessmen without going to college. The reason we know is because one of our biggest alumni is the guy that founded Chick-fil-A.<sup>82</sup> He graduated the year after I did. The opportunities in those days were just different. Today, you can hardly do anything without a college education. We had young men who went on with just a little extra course and became some of the most prominent CPA's [Certified Public Accountant] here in Atlanta with just the Commercial High School education. Today, you have to go to college and take tests before you can. It is a different educational standard today.

**Patty:** I think Atlanta was more wide open, too. There were not as many people.

**Regina:** Yes. It was so much easier—more opportunity and education. If you were a young Jewish man that got . . . if you became a doctor or an accountant, you were 'The Boy.' Everybody wanted you. The competition was not as rough. Today, competition is king. There are too many doctors, too many dentists, too many lawyers.

**Patty:** It has changed. You hear so many stories of immigrant families. They really spent a period of time, or at least their generation spent a time, living in a strictly Jewish community. That did not happen with your family.

**Regina:** We lived within walking distance of a lot of them. On the street where we lived . . . Washington Street, more or less, was 95 percent Jewish. From the AA synagogue all the way to Bass Street, which was a long way, was Jewish. Crew Street School was more than 50 percent Jewish. It was a grammar school. Georgia Avenue [School], where a few of our people went, had five percent Jewish people. Formwalt may have had 10 or 15 percent, not like it became with some schools. When my children went to Grady High School, on the Jewish holiday you might as well have closed up the school. You probably have heard this from other people. It was really incredible. I do not know how it happened because we did not all live on top of each other. We were close by. It encompassed a large area. After they changed the school system, it might have taken three or four high schools to take in what Grady took in at that time. It was a big high school with a large Jewish population.

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<sup>82</sup> Regina is speaking here of Truett Cathy (1921–2014), an American entrepreneur who founded the fast food restaurant chain Chick-fil-A. Cathy began the chain in the Atlanta suburb of Hapeville in 1946 with a restaurant called the Dwarf Grill. It was there that he, along with his brother and business partner Ben, created the chicken sandwich that later became the signature menu item for Chick-fil-A. Cathy received numerous honors for his community involvement, business accomplishments and philanthropy.

**Patty:** Then things started to change. People started moving more towards the northwest?

**Regina:** It even happened even after that. We had some close friends. They went to Margaret Mitchell [School], a grammar school. It had so many Jewish children. They tended to move in droves near each other.

**Patty:** When you went to schools that had small Jewish populations, did you ever experience any antisemitism?

**Regina:** No, but this is what . . . I argued this point with a very prominent person. I am not going to even say names. My mother was interviewed by a big Jewish news commentator on CBS.<sup>83</sup> I guess it was 10 or 15 years ago.

**Patty:** It will come to you later.

**Regina:** He came to Atlanta and wanted to know about the Leo Frank case. It came up around three or four times years ago. About 15 years ago, something happened. Again, it became a news item. This national news commentator came to Atlanta. They had five people on this Channel 5 forum. My mother was petrified. She was probably the oldest citizen that was speaking on this. Why they picked her, I don't know.

**Patty:** She would have had probably . . .

**Regina:** . . . there was Herbert Cohen, a very prominent . . . no, Elliott Cohen, prominent attorney, who grew up here in Atlanta. Gerald Cohen, the linen man . . . Helen and Gerald Cohen. I am trying to remember who they were. There were five. There were three of them and there were two more. They [the reporter] wanted to know about the antisemitism that they might have felt. I was shocked. I was there because I wanted to hear everything that was . . . Elliott said that he had grown up in the middle of the elite, gentile community, sort of in the Ansley Park<sup>84</sup> area. To go there, you had to be pretty well to do. I am sure his family circumstances must have been such that it merited it. He went to Marist College<sup>85</sup> with the young people that grew up around there. That was the thing to do. The boys went there. He said he never felt antisemitism. Two of them did, one more particularly than the other. I guess I should not

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<sup>83</sup> CBS (an acronym of the network's former name, the Columbia Broadcasting System; corporate name CBS Broadcasting, Inc.) is an American commercial broadcast television and radio network.

<sup>84</sup> Ansley Park is an affluent residential neighborhood in Atlanta, located east of Midtown and west of Piedmont Park. Ansley Golf Club borders the district. The neighborhood was largely completed by 1930. It has been designated a Historic District on the National Register of Historic Places.

<sup>85</sup> She may be talking here about Marist School, an independent private Roman Catholic college preparatory school in Brookhaven, Georgia, north of Atlanta.

mention names now.

<End of Tape 2, Side 1>

<Begin Tape 2, Side 2>

**Patty:** . . . with the Tourial tape for June 20, 1989. We were talking [earlier] about your father's Greek partner and his business.

**Regina:** Maybe in the late Forties. This was after the war. A fairly young man came from the Isle of Cos, which was not too far from the Island of Rhodes. He had known my father's oldest brother on the island. When he came to Atlanta, he went to look for him. By that time, my father was ready to let go a little bit, too. He started working for my father. Then he became a partner. He was a very nice young Greek man. He became very close with my family. My father had many Greek friends. He spoke the language.

A lot of them had businesses and restaurants on Luckie Street, which was around the corner from where my father's office . . . Washington Hatters was the name of his establishment. They came there to sit. He had a shoeshine parlor. They could climb up there, sit, and carry on conversation. A lot of them may have thought that he was Greek. He never had trouble. All those years that he had these friends that would come to the house to see his stamp collection; they were not any of our Jewish friends, or anything like that. They happened to have all been gentiles. I am not saying anything wrong when I say that. There was one in particular named Hugh Richardson, Mr. Hugh Richardson. He came from a large real estate holding family here in Atlanta. He loved to come to my house. My mother would always put a little dish of homemade candy, made with almonds and sugar, or some small cookies. He would sit there and nibble. She never bothered him. She was always in the background. G-d forbid any of us should go in there while my father was talking or showing anything. The only time that I felt it was in later years when this story about Leo Frank came up. For some reason or other, they would talk like they just knew he was guilty. We had nothing to do with it. It just became a news story, like we were trying to whitewash something that had happened.

**Patty:** Who were "they?"

**Regina:** People that I came in contact with, friends or at work. The story would come up every day. The *[Atlanta] Constitution*<sup>86</sup> was doing a series and would not let go of it. Every day there

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<sup>86</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.

was an article following up. It would be the big conversation early in the morning before we started working. My mother-in-law told me that, at the time of the Leo Frank trial, my father-in-law would tell her not to dare go out of the house. They were afraid in those days because you had a lynch mob. He was afraid for her to get out of the house. She would not dare leave.

**Patty:** It is interesting that nothing ever came up at school just between kids.

**Regina:** Never had any problem. We did hear Herb Kaplow.<sup>87</sup> He is the correspondent who came. Gerald did talk of the times when going to school. He was afraid to go to school and hear names called. I never saw actual fear of gangs or somebody jumping you. Maybe we were lucky. We missed it. I never remember any of the teachers . . . we had one of the best teachers I ever had in grammar school. We had two Jewish teachers at school—Mrs. Pearl Bokritzky [sp] and Mrs. Sams [sp]. We had Judy Goldberg, the secretary in the principal's office. We never had any problems at the school. It was wonderful.

**Patty:** You mentioned that your brother had wanted to go to Emory. From what I understand, Emory had **quotas**.

**Regina:** We never knew this until my brother, Jack went to school.

**Patty:** This is your younger brother?

**Regina:** My younger brother. In the latter part, maybe the last two years of his dental school, it started coming out. They did a big write-up about it. They had a way of keeping them out. The ones \who were in the center of the political structure of the school had a way of doing it and kept it quiet for many years.

**Patty:** Do you think your parents knew that?

**Regina:** No, my parents were completely oblivious to it. Later on, some of the more educated ones or were more involved with the college might have known about it. It truly was one of the worst when it came to having quotas. They say it stopped completely. We found out much later. We had quite a few young Jewish men who went to Emory to become doctors and dentists. Unless you really knew how many were not admitted, there was no way of knowing.

**Patty:** What about your younger sister? Were your parents the same way with her, or do you feel they were more encouraging?

**Regina:** She wanted to go to college. She did go. Things were changing fast. The war made

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<sup>87</sup> Herbert Elias 'Herb' Kaplow (1927 – 2013) was an American television news correspondent. His main focus was reporting out of Washington, D.C.

things happen so much faster. She got married quite a few years after the war. She went to Germany in early 1955, or late. My brother-in-law went to Germany in 1954, a year after they got married. He was gone for almost three years. She was gone for two whole years. After the war, things started happening. Everything had changed.

**Patty:** She was a good bit younger than you?

**Regina:** Yes. Things really started changing much faster. The structure in Atlanta . . . I may be repeating myself. Here in Atlanta, we went to school. We were very close with the Jewish children that we went to school with. Socially, the German Jews went with the German Jews; the Russian Jews went with the Russian Jews, and the ‘Spanish Jews’ as they called us—not Sephardic—the Spanish Jews went with the Spanish Jews. There were some that joined each other’s clubs, but not too many. They would congregate to have meetings with two or three of the clubs like Young Judaea.<sup>88</sup> The LOT [Light of Tomorrow] Club,<sup>89</sup> the Sephardic Jewish club for the youth, would meet with the other clubs from AA and the Temple. They would have meetings. They were friends, but socially they did not mix that much.

**Patty:** Why? From what I have been able to understand, the Ashkenazi Jews were seen as being not as cultured and . . .

**Regina:** . . . as the German Jews? The German Jews looked down. It would have been just as hard for an **Ashkenazi** Jew to get into the Standard Club<sup>90</sup> as he would have getting into the Piedmont Driving Club.<sup>91</sup> It seems impossible, but it happened.

**Patty:** I think it is a very interesting bit of Atlanta lore, because everyone talks about that.

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<sup>88</sup> Young Judaea is a peer-led Zionist youth movement founded in 1909. Its programs include youth clubs, conventions, summer camps and Israel programs that provide experiential programming through which Jewish youth and young adults build meaningful relationships with their peers, emphasize social action, and develop a lifelong commitment to Jewish life, the Jewish people, and Israel.

<sup>89</sup> The LOT (Light of Tomorrow) Club was a social club for Sephardic youths in Atlanta.

<sup>90</sup> The Standard Club is a private, country club, with a Jewish heritage dating back to 1867. The club originated as Concordia Association 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. The club later moved to the Brookhaven area and opened in what is now the Lenox Park business park. It was located there until 1983 when the club moved to its present location in Johns Creek in Atlanta’s northern suburbs.

<sup>91</sup> The Piedmont Driving Club is a private social club in Atlanta, Georgia with a reputation as one of the most prestigious private clubs in the South. Founded in 1887 originally as the Gentlemen’s Driving Club, the name reflected the interest of the members to drive their horse and carriages on the club grounds. The club later briefly used the adjacent grounds as a golf course until it sold the land to the city in 1904 to create Piedmont Park. The club’s facilities include dining, golf, swimming, fitness, tennis, and squash. In May 2000, the club built an 18 hole championship golf course and Par 3 course several miles away on Camp Creek Parkway.

How was the Sephardic community perceived?

**Regina:** They did not think that we were pushing or pushy. The way I am going to make it sound is terrible. They did not try to push us back. They did not try to keep us out because we were not as ambitious or as pushy. I cannot complain at all because I know at one time we did not have a rabbi. We went for a short time there between Rabbi [Mordechai Abraham] Gabay<sup>92</sup> and Rabbi Cohen where we did not have a Sunday school *per se*, or a Hebrew school, that was to take care of the children. We were very fortunate. Rabbi Epstein opened up and told us we could go to AA. Rabbi Marx was wonderful and told us come to the Temple. We had a few who did go to the Temple. I know two or three families that thought, “This is a wonderful door opening. Let’s go.” Later, when it even got harder, we went to AA. It was like a neighbor synagogue. It was two blocks from where we were used to going. Miss Bessie Goldstein—she later became Bessie **Rice** [sp]—was my Sunday school teacher. They were wonderful to us.

**Patty:** Did the families have some concern that you were going to lose your heritage in some way with this happening?

**Regina:** I do not think so. They may have lost a few young people that got to be so close to their friends who did not want to come back. It did not change things too much. Later on during the war, so many of the young girls had an opportunity. All the boys had gone away. They met at the USO.<sup>93</sup> Before you know it, maybe one in 50 would marry an Ashkenazi, or vice versa. They stayed within each other’s culture. After that, the USO made a lot of marriages and engagements. They came back. My son married an Ashkenazi girl, to a family who we had known all of our lives. Nathan Gershon, the doctor. My mother had known him from the time he became a doctor. We could not wait so we could start going to him. Then my daughter thought the same thing. That changed it. Today we call them ‘Sephardics,’ but I would say half of them have one parent or the other who are not Sephardic. We say they are Sephardic Jews.

**Patty:** How do you term those marriages? They are not exactly mixed marriages.

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<sup>92</sup> Rabbi Mordechai Abraham Gabay was a native of Istanbul, Turkey. He arrived in Atlanta in 1926 and served as rabbi of Congregation OrVeShalom on and off until 1933.

<sup>93</sup> The USO (United Service Organizations) is a private, nonprofit, non-partisan organization whose mission is to support American troops and their families with programs and services. During World War II, the USO began a tradition of entertaining the troops that still continues. The USO is not part of the U.S. government, but is recognized by the Department of Defense, Congress and President of the United States.

**Regina:** If you take the 1954 edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*<sup>94</sup> . . . I remember because of David. It said, “In 1952, the American Jew came into being.” I truly think that that is when it happened. Before then, we were the German Jews, the Spanish Jews, the Russian Jews, and the Polish Jews. They were not American Jews. The war changed all of that. I truly think that is when we became Americans instead of holding on to the mother country . . .

**Patty:** . . . a lot of immigrant groups get very worried when those kind of changes come about . . .

**Regina:** Because of the . . .

**Patty:** . . . intermarriage and . . .

**Regina:** This is true though. You mean other immigrant groups. You do lose a lot of your culture. You have to give up a lot of things. Because you are split, you lose it all. Which one is more important—then nothing becomes important. I think we have lost a lot. We were very fortunate in that a lot of the women stayed alive for a long time and could teach us the traditional things. At Shearith Israel . . .

**Patty:** We talked about it some, but it did not get on the tape, so I am glad . . .

**Regina:** Joe Tarica was a young man from Montgomery. He went to Shearith Israel, the big Sephardic synagogue, the oldest one in New York. He became the director there. We used to talk once in a while. He would call me up to ask me something. About six or eight years ago, he was still in New York. He is in Detroit [Michigan] now. He is a director of the largest synagogue there. I do not even know if it is Sephardic.

**Patty:** You mean Shaarey Zedek?<sup>95</sup>

**Regina:** Is that in Detroit?

**Patty:** That is where I grew up, and that is probably . . .

**Regina:** Really? Is it a big synagogue?

**Patty:** It is a very large Conservative synagogue.

**Regina:** I bet you \$1 that is where he went. He said they gave him an offer that he just could

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<sup>94</sup> The *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (Latin for ‘British Encyclopaedia’) is a general knowledge English-language encyclopedia. It is written by about 100 editors and more than 4,000 contributors, who have included 110 Nobel Prize winners and five American presidents. The 2010 edition—the 15th, spanning 32 volumes—was the last printed edition.

<sup>95</sup> Congregation Shaarey Zedek is a Conservative synagogue in Southfield, Michigan near Detroit. It was founded in 1861 and became one of the founding congregations of the United Synagogue of America.



not possibly turn down.

**Patty:** It has several thousand families in it.

**Regina:** Then that is what it is. I am going to ask him when I talk to him again. Shaarey Zedek.

**Patty:** Shaarey Tzedek. Morris Adler.<sup>96</sup> a very well-known **Conservative** rabbi, was the rabbi there.

**Regina:** I am going to ask him.

**Patty:** There is another large Conservative synagogue there, Adat Shalom. I would not be surprised if . . .

**Regina:** I was shocked when I heard he was going to leave Shearith Israel. He was so important there. I knew that he loved the traditional part of it. He said they just made an offer that he could not turn down. He is very dedicated to making a synagogue click and work. About six or eight years ago, he called me up, laughing, to ask me how we took care of a bazaar. He wanted to know. He said, “Regina, I think someday soon when we don’t have any more of the people to cook the traditional foods, what will be left of Sephardic?” When they come to the bazaar, this is all that is left of our traditional heritage, the way we do things and what we serve on holidays. Even in our services today, they are not any way the way that I remember—except on *Rosh Ha-Shanah*<sup>97</sup> and *Yom Kippur*.<sup>98</sup> Rabbi [Robert] Ichay<sup>99</sup> has taken it upon himself to learn some of the traditional songs in Spanish instead of singing them in Hebrew. This used to be so important to us. 90 percent could understand and 90 percent could follow. Today, how

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<sup>96</sup> Rabbi Morris Adler was shot in front of a packed congregation of 1,500 worshipers on February 12, 1966 on the *bimah* of Shaarey Zedek by the mentally-disturbed young Jew, Richard Wishnetzky whom he had been counseling. Wishnetzky then shot himself. Rabbi Adler died one month later.

<sup>97</sup> Hebrew for ‘head of the year,’ i.e. New Year festival. The cycle of High Holidays begins with *Rosh Ha-Shanah*. It introduces the Ten Days of Penitence, when Jews examine their souls and take stock of their actions. On the tenth day is *Yom Kippur*, the Day of Atonement. The tradition is that on *Rosh Ha-Shanah*, God sits in judgment on humanity. Then the fate of every living creature is inscribed in the Book of Life or Death. These decisions may be revoked by prayer and repentance before the sealing of the books on *Yom Kippur*.

<sup>98</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).

<sup>99</sup> Rabbi Robert Ichay (1929 – 2012) led Congregation Or VeShalom for 33 years. Upon retirement he was named Rabbi Emeritus. While leading Or VeShalom, Rabbi Ichay helped grow the congregation to more than 500 families, up from less than 200. He also helped lead the congregation into a new building in 1971, less than two years after he arrived in 1969. He was born in Tunisia and educated in England and Zimbabwe.

many could? On Passover, we did half of the *Haggadah*<sup>100</sup> in Spanish this year. My children, to please my mother, would try. It is so much more beautiful than it is in Hebrew. We start off, “*Este es la pan que comieron mis padres en Egipto . . .*” “This is the bread that we ate . . .” and the whole thing.<sup>101</sup> The kids love to hear my mother. Her voice quivers now. Thank G-d, she loves to do it.

**Patty:** What do you do for prayer books for *Haggadah*?

**Regina:** We had some here. I looked this year to try to get some more. We had gotten hold of one. It was such a good one. We bought several. They were published in Istanbul [Turkey]. Pamela Dorn, have you met her yet? This young girl lives somewhere in the vicinity of Atlanta, in Forest Park. One of her parents is not Jewish. I do not know if it is her mother or her father. She became aware of it when she was not too young. She was still a young girl, before college-age. She started going to the Temple. That is where her parents were from. She wanted to [expand] on her Jewish heritage. She could not understand how none of our children here had ever become interested enough. She applied for a Jewish scholarship. There was a Sephardic scholarship available. We never had known about it. If you look for it you can find it. She went and got the scholarship and loved what she learned. Later she became so interested in it. She learned all about the *romanceros*, the songs. She had a young girl come—she came [to the] Temple, which is where Pamela came from. They had a concert one night. We went to it. The girl’s name was Robin Greenberg. I think she makes the club circuits, like the old-fashioned clubs. She told us she was booked somewhere near Euclid Avenue in the Little Five Points area. She came with such a wonderful variety of Sephardic songs. It was not a big audience, very small. Very few of our members. I do not think they realized how much she was going to tell about. She had gone to Spain. She learned these old songs. They were still sung by some . . . so many of them were not even strange to me. I remember hearing them when I was a little girl. Pamela became involved with us. She went and lived with a family in Istanbul for one or two years. I think one year. She became very friendly with one of the rabbis there. She brought

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<sup>100</sup> A Jewish text that sets forth the order of the Passover *seder*. Reading the *Haggadah* at the *seder* table is a fulfillment of the scriptural commandment to each Jew to “tell your son” of the Jewish liberation from slavery in Egypt as described in the Book of Exodus in the *Torah*.

<sup>101</sup> The reference here is to the point during the *Passover Seder* in which the matzah is raised and this prayer is said, “This is the bread of affliction which our ancestors ate in the land of Egypt. Let all who are hungry come and eat. Let all who are in need come and celebrate Passover. This year we are here: Next year, in the land of Israel. This year we are slaves: Next year may we be free.”

back one or two books. We loved the *Haggadah* that she brought. It was a beautiful one, all in Spanish. She ordered a few of them and they were gone in no time. We should have some more here. The young today people would not say it, but the few families that did still know [Spanish] loved [the *Haggadah*]. My brother xeroxed quite a few copies and made them into a folder. We were able to [have the *Haggadah*]. We do a lot of it in Hebrew. Some of the children still hear it in English. My grandchildren would try to struggle through the Hebrew part just to show off to my husband. My daughter loves the Spanish. Sarah does—Peggy’s not too crazy about it—and she loves to do it. My husband knows it all in Spanish. He happened to learn it that way. His brother, once in a while, will help with the Spanish, but he would rather go with the English. He does not even want to bother. My mother, my husband, and my mother’s niece, Marie Franco, love the Spanish. My brother Jack loves it. We manage to do a good bit of it in Spanish.

**Patty:** We are an hour and a half into the interview. Are you getting tired?

**Regina:** No. You probably want to be leaving too.

**Patty:** Could I ask you to meet one more time?

**Regina:** Sure. I hope I am not boring you or telling you things that you are not interested in. My husband says, “You always start in the middle of a sentence,” which is probably what I am doing with you. I remember something and I just say it from the top of my head.

**Patty:** Those are the things that are usually the most special, because I think that one thought really kind of brings back a treasure of memories. Those are the things that are so important. Those are the things that no one knows about.

<End of Tape 2, Side 2>

<Begin Tape 3, Side 1>

**Patty:** This is Patty Maziar. We are recording the third session of the Regina Tourial tapes for the American Jewish Committee Oral History Project. The date today is July 11, 1989. We are going to briefly chat about a Sephardic cookbook that we have both taken a look at.

**Regina:** A lot of the [recipes] were very similar to ours in that they used a lot of fresh vegetables. A lot of olive oil was used, which we do not use today. We now use corn oil. In most of our recipes, olive oil. That was all that they had. The recipes were still a lot different. They had some Arabic Jewish influence in it. I have noticed they have a lot of couscous and eggplant dishes, which are not . . . eggplant is very common. We use it in a lot of our recipes. They did use a lot of artichokes. When the grocery stores here did not have them, we had to go

to specialty food stores. That was common on the menu. I am almost positive that in the early 1920's, I would go to my Jewish friends, they did not use artichokes or eggplant. Broccoli was unheard of. Even the grocery stores did not carry those vegetables. We used to go to an Italian gourmet store. He imported a lot because of the Italian people . . . it was Cerniglia [sp]. He had a grocery store on the corner of Mitchell [Street] and Central Avenue. There were three brothers. One of them was just in the wholesale tomato business. This was Joseph Cerniglia. He . . .

**Patty:** . . . it is still around.

**Regina:** The tomato business is.

**Patty:** Is that what it is?

**Regina:** Not the one that brings in all of these fancy foods. My brother and I would walk there. It was not a far walk. We were not afraid to walk in those days. It was a mile, at least. We would walk there on Thursdays. That is when the artichokes and fresh broccoli would be there, and the baby eggplants, which my mother used to stuff. There were a lot of things that we had in our menu that the other Jewish homes did not use, and vice versa. We used a lot of tomatoes. Almost everything was cooked with tomatoes and onion. Tomatoes and a hint of garlic, or tomatoes and parsley. Parsley went into everything. No matter what my mother made . . . stuffed tomatoes. There were two ways she would [make it]. *Tomates reinado* was fit for a king. It was stuffed with meat, a little bread crumbs, and a lot of parsley. After you stuffed it, you would dip it in egg and flour, fry it, put it in a pan, and then put it in the oven. It was heavenly. Then there were the penny-pinching days, when you would take meat and rice and make it go on forever. You would cook that with a little garlic and parsley, put a few stuffed squashes, a couple of potatoes, a couple of bell peppers, everything. It was just a melting pot almost of just anything. She would put it in the oven and leave it in there all day long. By the time you ate it, it was just was heavenly. A lot of our recipes—if you kind of glanced at our cookbook—tell you that we used nothing but as many fresh vegetables as possible. I think we ate veal chops on Sunday. Once in a **blue moon** she would fry some chicken. Our dinners consisted of a lot of fresh vegetables every night and a small piece of meat to accompany it. We were not roast and brisket eaters. That came much later in our lives

**Patty:** Isn't that a more Ashkenazi . . .

**Regina:** . . . the brisket? That is something that we did learn from them. If you stop to think where the [Ashkenazi] came from, there were not fresh vegetables in the Baltic countries. It was

a much colder climate. Everything was a root. It was either beets, carrots, potatoes, things that grew in the ground. My mother made fresh vegetables when my friends used to come to our house. They had never tasted them. My mother would say, “Taste it, you’ll like it.” Okra. It is **squeamish**. Okra and spinach, ugh. They were common with us. We were really weird on them, but that is what they ate in Rhodes. Everything was a lot of fresh vegetables. They cooked them in such delightful ways. The whole thing cooked all day. It had to. They started it in the morning and they would leave it with a low [fire]. The hours made it taste better.

**Patty:** So your mother cooked every day?

**Regina:** Every single day. Except *Shabbat* [Hebrew: Sabbath]. Those meals were geared to be served cold. They were a different kind of a thing. She would cook fish for Friday night. There would be one kind of filet. She would cook it just a little different, either fried or something which they would call ‘*pectin*,’ which would become congealed. We would eat it cold on Saturday. Chicken could always be eaten cold Saturday. The fish that we had was delicious. Today, I don’t I think about it. I mean to do it, but it is so much easier to just broil it or fry it. She used to cook it with fresh tomatoes, parsley, lots of lemon juice, and just let it bake. It was out of this world. It really was delicious.

**Patty:** There is a tremendous pleasure in sitting down and sharing a good meal. One of the things that I thought was amusing and interesting about the cookbook are the descriptions. It was sort of fit for a king. The names of the foods were descriptive, like Haman’s Ears.<sup>102</sup>

**Regina:** That is now . . . that’s the Italian cookbook, now. We did not use that. For *Purim*,<sup>103</sup> my mother would make *folericos*. This was the gallows that they hung Haman from. Every Purim, she took the trouble to boil eggs and make them hardboiled. After they were hardboiled, she would take little tiny strips of dough—the same dough that we make *borekas* with—make about eight tiny little strips, cover the hard-boiled egg with it, make a little stand for it, and bake it in the oven. This was the gallows where Haman was hung. All this to give *Purim* a meaning

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<sup>102</sup> Haman’s Ears (‘Orejas de Haman’ in Spanish) is a Sephardic Purim treat made with strips of dough that are fried and sprinkled with confectioner’s sugar. Haman, who plotted to kill all of the Jews in ancient Persia, is the villain of the Purim story.

<sup>103</sup> A Jewish holiday that commemorates the deliverance of the Jewish people in the ancient Persian Empire from destruction in the wake of a plot by Haman, a story recorded in the Biblical book of Esther. According to the *Book of Esther*, Haman planned to kill all the Jews, but his plans were foiled by Mordecai and his adopted daughter Queen Esther. The day of deliverance became a day of feasting and rejoicing. Some of the customs of *Purim* include drinking wine, wearing masks and costumes, and public celebration.

for the children. They were such wonderful holidays. We knew *Hanukkah*<sup>104</sup> was *burmuelos*.<sup>105</sup> Then they are dipped in honey. We bake them every year for the Hebrew school children who have never heard of them at home, or seen them. This is the one treat that they all go and say, “If you have one left over, give them to me”. They are delicious. They love them. We do still try to keep tradition. [Our menu] is about the only thing that is really left that is traditional. Most Jewish people come into the mainstream of being Conservative. Sort of a lackadaisical way, but just saying, “I am Jewish.” Of course, there are still quite a few that keep a kosher home, but not to the point of being as strict as it was many years ago.

**Patty:** Was this considered an Orthodox synagogue? The men and women did not sit together?

**Regina:** We never sat together until we came to this building in 1979. A few people tried in the old building on Highland Avenue in the late 1960’s. Rabbi Cohen was just beginning to turn his head the other way. They sat toward the back so that the husband and wife could sit together. The men always sat in the front. The women sat way back. We had an incline so that it would not be on the same level. We did not have a balcony like some of the other synagogues did.

<phone rings, interview pauses, then resumes>

**Patty:** Were there any special things that your mother did on Friday to prepare for Shabbat?

**Regina:** She always baked *desayuno*, which means ‘first meal’ . . . *des-ay-uno* . . . ‘uno’ is one. ‘*Sayar*’ is to eat. That is the day when she would make the *borekas* or the *burmuelos*, either filled with spinach, or potatoes and cheese. She would finish doing that. That had to be the first thing. Then she would bake her bread and everything. Once she got that . . .

**Patty:** . . . she made her own bread?

**Regina:** Made her own bread. She started at the crack of dawn. When we went to school the oven was already going full blast. She would cook the meal for Friday night, for *Shabbat* and even late Saturday night. My father worked all day Saturday. In those days, you had to work hard to bring home a living. He liked little last minute things, rather than anything that was a

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<sup>104</sup> Hebrew for ‘dedication.’ An eight-day festival of lights usually falling around Christmas on the Christian calendar. *Hanukkah* celebrates the victory of the Maccabees in 165 BCE over the Seleucid rules of Palestine, who had desecrated the Temple. The Maccabees wanted to re-dedicate the Temple altar to Jewish worship by rekindling the *menorah* but could only find one small jar of ritually pure olive oil. This oil continued to burn miraculously for eight days, enabling them to prepare new oil. The *menorah* with its eight branches commemorates this miracle.

<sup>105</sup> *Burmuelos* are a sweet, fried donut or fritter prepared for *Hanukkah* in the Sephardic tradition.

heavy meal. We ate at home Saturday and Saturday night. She spent all day long, almost, every Friday. Almost without fail, we had fish . . . *gobba*,<sup>106</sup> *gaina*, *arroz*, on Friday night. *Gobba*, fish . . . *gaina*, chicken . . . *arroz*, rice. First, we had a portion of the fish, cooked like I told you with the tomato sauce, parsley and lemon. Then we had chicken which she baked. Lots of vegetables, rice, salad, and a lot of fruit. Desserts in those days were not . . . she baked a lot of things. Every Friday she made sponge cake so it would be there for Saturday for dunking with milk. We were four children, so she always had a lot of things. The sculptures—the little cookies—there was always a jar full. No pies, rich cakes, or things like that. The *baklava*,<sup>107</sup> the marzipan,<sup>108</sup> was strictly for festive occasions and parties. We ate healthy foods, healthier than now. When I stop to think of it, it was just incredible what our menus were comprised of.

**Patty:** It was a tremendous amount of physical labor.

**Regina:** Thursday morning she would leave the house real early and go shopping. She would end up going to the butcher and come home. After she had lunch, between Thursday and Thursday night, she was cleaning chicken, cleaning fish. It was really a two-day preparation for eating for Friday and Saturday. In those days they had help available for a very minimal amount here in Atlanta. From the time I can remember, four and five years old, she always had help who came in seven days a week. On Thursday, somebody extra came in to do the ironing. It was different.

**Patty:** This gives us a concept about a Jewish home and how a home should be run.

**Regina:** We always had company. Our friends were always welcome. She cooked and baked a lot. There was always plenty for our company. She liked entertaining. We lived in a neighborhood where there were old friends with whom she had come from Rhodes. There was always afternoon coffee between three and four o'clock on the block where we lived, or across the street. It was a time to sit down, get their wits together, and rest. They would drink coffee and serve each other something on the porches, if the weather allowed. If not, then in the kitchen. The living room and dining room were for holidays and special company.

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<sup>106</sup> Actually 'ceresole tench,' a fish related to the carp, barbell, and chub known as the 'golden-humped' [*gobba dorata*].

<sup>107</sup> *Baklava* is a rich, sweet pastry made of layers of filo filled with chopped nuts and sweetened and held together with syrup or honey. It is characteristic of the cuisines of the former Ottoman Empire, and is also found in Central and Southwest Asia.

<sup>108</sup> Marzipan is a confection consisting primarily of sugar or honey and almond meal, sometimes augmented with almond oil or extract.

**Patty:** For Friday night? Did people. . .

**Regina:** . . . on Friday night we ate in the dining room. That was a big night. We had a kitchen that even had a leather couch in it. The kitchens were big in those days. We lived in real old, big home. Our neighbors did, too. Our whole block . . . we were 534 Pryor Street, right next door to the Temple. It was a big house. When I think of the things that we left there, but were torn down, I would give anything to have them today. The tile fireplaces . . . the tile ceilings in the kitchen. We had the chandelier in the dining room. The entrance hall had been gas, originally. The jets were still there. They were transformed into electricity. The original jets were there on these lamps. They would just be something just to preserve. Every room had a fireplace. Everybody had those huge porcelain big stoves that would heat as much as you possibly could. In the wintertime, you stood right on the fireplace, get real hot, and you would move away. You would go back in a minute because you would freeze to death. We did not have air conditioning. We did not feel the heat like we do today.

**Patty:** Did you have fans in the house?

**Regina:** We had a ceiling fan in the kitchen. My father brought it home after many years, when he changed the store. We had windows everywhere. They always were open for cross ventilation. We got hot because we sat on the porches at nine and ten o'clock at night, even though we were young. The neighbors would come from across the street and next door. My mother was always making pitchers of lemonade in which she mixed fresh cherry or strawberry preserves that she had cooked. She would cook them and keep them in jars. At night, when we got hot, she would make pitchers of lemonade and put some of this in it. We would sit on the porch and drink that to cool off. I still insist that [when you are] young, you can stand anything. We did not feel the heat. Everybody today, if they don't have air conditioning, it is just impossible.

**Patty:** From what I can understand from other people, the homes had high ceilings.

**Regina:** Very high ceilings. It was so wonderful to just walk out and have neighbors everywhere. This is the one thing that was wonderful. On the same block that we lived, right across the street, there were two German-Jewish families. Two doors down, there was an Ashkenazi-Jewish family. On the very next block, there were some German-Jewish families. You walked out and it was your people. It was just wonderful. It was not a ghetto because there were a lot of gentile neighbors. They were very good friends, too.



There were a lot of Greek people within the eight to ten blocks that we lived on. In the back, alleys separated Pryor Street and Central Avenue. We could go into the back yard and if we were playing ball, the Greek neighbors would come from the other yard and play with my brother. We were very good friends. My father—I think I have told you this—spoke Greek so well. The Isle of Rhodes was Italian when my mother came here. My father did have a lot of Greek friends because he knew the language so well. It just was a wonderful ethnic neighborhood.

**Patty:** It sounds like it must have just been a very secure and really felt like you belonged. Everyone cared about everyone else. It is almost unusual because in many big cities, when ethnic groups move to a city, they really stay together. They do not move out into other neighborhoods. Had the German Jews been there for several generations already? First generation, people newly arrived in the United States, foreign born . . .

**Regina:** We moved into the house that my mother lived in for 38 years. I was the only one of my brothers and sisters who was not born in that house. We all went to school. I got married from that home. My children were born and my mother still lived in that same house. She moved later. When my father bought the house in 1928 or 1929, he was doing very well. There were some German Jewish people still living there, maybe because they were not doing so well. They had already started to move to **Druid Hills** and Ansley Park. The German-Jewish people were beginning to move away. The Russian Jews, the Ashkenazi Jews, the mass majority still lived on Washington Street, Capitol Avenue, Crew Street, Richardson Street, and Pulliam Street. The German Jewish people had lived on Pryor Street. That is where most of them had lived. They had already started moving to Druid Hills. We were buying the homes that they had moved away from. Still basically a lot of Jewish people were moving into those homes. They were moving away into much bigger and grander homes. There was a change. There was still was a wonderful feeling about it.

**Patty:** Was the Ashkenazi community more homogeneous, or was it also mixed with other arrivals from Greece and other places?

**Regina:** They were mostly from Russia. There were a few from Lithuania. Most of them were from different provinces or cities in Russia. They belonged to Shearith Israel . . . four or five blocks from it and maybe 10 to 12 blocks from Ahavath Achim, where we were. We saw a few,

not many. Not as many as when you went to Washington Street. On the High Holy Days,<sup>109</sup> it was a wonderful thing to do. You would walk out on the *Rosh Ha-Shanah* morning because we never went to the synagogue on *Rosh Ha-Shanah*. Only the men went on the first night of *Rosh Ha-Shanah*. They all walked back in robes. Everybody's house was lit up because everybody had company. You could just walk down the street and you could see the houses. The lights were all on everywhere so you knew it was company night. On the morning of *Rosh Ha-Shanah*, I remember the wonderful feeling of just walking out in the street. I could see people walking. Not in droves like you see today, but people walking. The men walked earlier, the women later. There were a few Ashkenazi women that would pass by our porch, not too many. On the block that I lived, on our side of the street, across the street, and the next block, it was all cars and chauffeurs. The Temple crowd had cars driven by chauffeurs. That was the big difference.

**Patty:** They drove?

**Regina:** They drove. I dare say that at that time they were, by far, much more affluent than any of the Ashkenazi Jews. It changed later on, certainly more than the Sephardic Jews. I remember seeing the chauffeurs. They would stand out in front of the car. You would see three or four of them talking to each other. We got to where we even knew a few of them because they were hanging around. I am telling you, all these things in my mind, like a picture just coming in front of me. The street would just get full of cars with chauffeurs on *Yom Kippur* and on the first day of *Rosh Ha-Shanah*.

**Patty:** Did people wear top hats in that . . .

**Regina:** . . . never. I have seen that quite a few times at Shearith Israel, black homburg [hats] on our men. My father always wore . . . they wore felt hats to the synagogue. They did not put on *yarmulkes*.<sup>110</sup> Every year he bought a new hat to go to the synagogue with. He wore a hat all the time. There were quite a few men in our synagogue who wore a black or a very dark, grey felt hat on the high holy days. *Yarmulkes* came into our being so much because of boys. A lot of them wore caps when they [went to] youth groups. My brother, when he was little, always wore a small cap with a bib. I do not mean like these baseball caps or anything . . . that was the one big difference in our synagogue. A few of the men at AA also wore felt hats. A lot of them, when they went in, would take off the hat and put on a . . . they wore hats though, even in the

<sup>109</sup> The two High Holy Days are *Rosh Ha-Shanah* (Jewish New Year) and *Yom Kippur* (Day of Atonement).

<sup>110</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 God's presence.

synagogue on Highland Avenue. I am thinking about it now in the 1940's and even 1950's, they were still wearing their cloth hats. *Yarmulkes* just starting easing in. I guess it got easier. Men stopped wearing hats as much as they used to. The *yarmulkes* were there for them to put on.

**Patty:** How do you explain that?

**Regina:** It was traditional in the old country. That is what they wore. They wore hats. They did wear top hats in some of the richer synagogues. In New York, even to this day, when they know that they are going to have an *aliyah*,<sup>111</sup> which is carrying the *Torah* or being called to the synagogue, they wear their cutaway suits. They alert them ahead of time. They still wear the top hat.

**Patty:** This is the Sephardics?

**Regina:** At Shearith Israel synagogue. Two years ago, I was in New York with my cousin. They belong to Shearith Israel. My cousin [unintelligible: 29:35], on Saturday morning, we walked to the synagogue. He had on his felt hat. He went into the synagogue. He never took it off. They still observe wearing hats. They buy the real nice felt hats to go to synagogue with.

**Patty:** It is interesting. What about a *tallit*?<sup>112</sup>

**Regina:** They wore *tallits*.

**Patty:** Was there some sort of uniform or garb that they . . .

**Regina:** The people who could afford it bought the pure silk and the fancier ones. Today those that we have in our synagogue now were donated. They hang on a hanger out where you can walk in and get them. Everybody brought their own. Some were bigger, some were grander, and some were showier. It has been 18 years since we came to this building. Time flies by. The hat is the exception. The *yarmulkes* are the rule.

**Patty:** What about the women?

**Regina:** The women always wore hats until the last 15 years. The High Holidays was a time when you would splurge on hats. Everybody showing off, once again. That is another thing that I have to tell you about. There is a big difference. There were marks with note tells in those days. There were all these little barbs given by one and the other—even though we were so

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<sup>111</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 God for giving the Torah to the Jewish nation. After the reading, the recipient then recites another concluding blessing.

<sup>112</sup> A prayer shawl fringed at each of the four corners in accordance with biblical law. The wearing of *tallit* at worship is obligatory only for married men, but it is customarily worn also by males of *bar mitzvah* age and older.

close. When our women dressed up to go to the synagogue on *Rosh Ha-Shanah* and *Yom Kippur*, it was from top to toe. The hat, the pocketbook, the gloves, the shoes . . . everything was for the High Holidays. You had gotten so dressed up. The Ashkenazi women made such a big show of walking down the street with their hands outstretched in gloves, and no pocketbook. “I don’t carry a pocketbook on *Shabbat*, and I don’t carry a pocketbook on the High Holy Days.” They did not spend any money. They carried a couple of handkerchiefs, maybe smelling salts, or a little perfume on *Yom Kippur*. They thought they were going to faint dead away and had to take a sniff. I laugh about it now. I had a couple of friends say, “How can you take a pocketbook on *Rosh Ha-Shanah* to the synagogue? I won’t get it wet walking to the synagogue.” ‘Slap.’ LISTEN I thought of something last night. I know I’m going to be jumping the subject. We had something that even existed when I got married. It has been gone now quite a few years. When my daughter got married, it was all but over. Exchanging of gifts was different. We had something that goes way back. I think I said something to you about people having dowries at the time. It was not a dowry *per se*, a trousseau that had to be inspected. When you got engaged, the first thing that showed that the engagement was official was the mother, or the parents, of the groom sent a *mandada*, a Spanish word which means a ‘gift to the bride.’ This could be as big or as small as you wanted. It was compared to your means. It was never intimate lingerie. Later on, it got fancier and fancier. It was supposed to be big bath towels for the bride to use when she had her *baño de novia*, which was the bath the bride took before she got married. In my case, by that time they were sending terry cloth robes. They were the nicest, heaviest, thickest, prettiest ones you could find anywhere. They would also send sweets, a piece of jewelry, whatever their family could afford in the way of cosmetics . . . perfume, a comb, brush and mirror set to be used by the bride.

**Patty:** Anything that she would use for her . . .

<End of Tape 3, Side 1>

<Begin Tape 3, Side 2>

**Patty:** This is Patty Maziar. We are going to continue on this side for the Tourial tape.

**Regina:** I think I told you about the *mandada*, which was a gift swapping. On a Wednesday or Thursday before the wedding—which would be most of the time on a Sunday—the mother would give a *visita*, a grand visit. It was an afternoon tea. All of the bride’s trousseau would be there for inspection. A lot of mine was handmade. My mother embroidered beautifully, did

gorgeous covers and sheets. I have sheets today. It is such a pity. Everything was for a double bed in those days. The hours that she spent doing it on just cloth . . . it should have been pure linen. The tablecloths and the scarves were out of linen. When I think of the beautiful sheets and tuck work that she did on the pillowcases, literally . . .

<interview pauses, then resumes>.

**Patty:** It is a beautiful way to start off.

**Regina:** They bought enough clothes that you would have enough to last you say . . . I got married in February. There were enough clothes for me to have for the spring, summer, and probably to wear the next fall. I got pregnant in the meantime. Like I said, linens, clothing and lots of lingerie . . . the more the better to make a big show.

**Patty:** Were the gifts all laid out?

**Regina:** The gifts were not, that came in much later. I had been married maybe 15 or 18 years before we started going. People would open up the tables in the dining room. The gifts and the cards would go in there so you could see what they got, and from whom. We never did that. I do not remember that *per se*.

**Patty:** This is just for the women to come over?

**Regina:** Just for the women. The *visita* was for just the women. It was an afternoon coffee. She made a *desayuno*, the cheese things. Fancier maybe than others; lots of sweets, coffee and tea; lots of fruit, dainty, pretty things. All of the bakers and relatives would come. The mother-in-law was free to bring anybody. She might turn up her nose at us, and “This is what became my . . . this what my son is getting, my poor son?” Or they might say, “**Ooh, ah, oh so much.** LISTEN She won’t have to buy clothes for years. Look at that stuff.” That was just part of it. It was like a game.

**Patty:** Was this done for your younger sister also? She is considerably younger than you?

**Regina:** My sisters-in-law were from Florida. They came in the weekend before the wedding. They didn’t have all of this. My mother did give [a *visita*]. My sister went to her future husband’s home in Florida. They had a lot of relatives there. They had a party and gave her the engagement ring there. In turn, my father had sent a gold watch. He gave him a gold initial ring, too. Things were getting better. Times were getting better. My sister got married 14 years after I did. There were a lot of changes. Money became a little more, so my father gave my brother-in-law at the time an initial ring and a gold watch.

**Patty:** Was there this same grand *visita* at the house as at . . .

**Regina:** Maybe because his parents did not live here. For those people that wanted to keep tradition . . . A cousin of mine has been married for 28 years. She had one of the biggest *visitas* I have ever seen. My cousin gave the *visita* because the girl was from Mexico. You just could not believe all the gifts that she was giving her. My aunt, my mother's sister, came from New York. They brought such beautiful exquisite things. By that time, they had become more affluent. The lingerie was in greater abundance and much more expensive. Robes that you just do not even find here. We did not have the grand stores here 25 and 30 years ago. Such beautiful things from New York to just "Ooh and aah" over. They made so many more dishes to serve. Things have changed. The night of the *visita* was just for the women. If they could afford and if they wanted to, they would say, "You're going to stay for supper tonight. You invite who you want." My mother would have our very closest relatives. There were not too many. That did not pose a big problem. My mother-in-law brought her two sisters-in-law and brother-in-law, who were my husband's father and his wife. That night they ate dinner at my house. The men did not care about it. There was a little whiskey drinking before and a few toasts made. It was really families getting together now that their children were going to get married. It was nothing grand, but it was a warm beautiful thing. This was the Wednesday or Thursday night before the wedding. That was the night after the *visita*.

The same thing when my cousin got married, many years after I had. I had already had all my children. My aunt and my mother were there cooking for days. That night they had to have a very large family for dinner. There were a lot of brothers in my cousin's family. They had a tremendous crowd for dinner. We were working all night in the kitchen trying to serve and bring back. There were tables in the living room, in the den, everywhere. When I got married, maybe 30, 40 people [came for dinner]. That was a lot of people. My mother had one sister in Atlanta. My father had no brothers here living in the city. They all came in the Friday before the wedding. Wednesday night we had no one, except just 30 or 40 people. That was a pretty big crowd. The night after I got married, I had left on my honeymoon. For two or three nights, my mother had company every single night. They came, they drank, and they made merry. This was a celebration that just went on with the neighbors and the very close friends. I heard about it when I came back.

**Patty:** Were you married at home?

**Regina:** I was married at the Biltmore Hotel. Our synagogue was small. We had quite a large wedding.

**Patty:** How many people did you have?

**Regina:** We had close to 300 people. That was a big wedding in those days. My husband had a lot of business associates at that time. His uncle knew so many people. We had lots of Greek and Jewish friends at my wedding. We got married in the Georgian Ball Room at the **Biltmore Hotel**.

**Patty:** Who married you?

**Regina:** **Rabbi Joseph Cohen.**

**Patty:** He was here then?

**Regina:** It was such a lovely . . . I remember him saying, “This is one of my first Hebrew students that I’m marrying.” I was. When he came to this country I was already 13 years old. We did not [become] *bat mitzvah*.<sup>113</sup> We went to Hebrew school. He was such a wonderful teacher. I wanted to go. There were not too many of us my age that went to Hebrew school when he taught. Then he formed a choir. Later on, I taught Sunday school until I had my first child. I went back to substitute teach a few times. I quit teaching about a month before I had my first child. We were very close with Rabbi Cohen. He was very dear to me.

**Patty:** I wanted to know more about some special things about your marriage ceremonies, particularly Sephardic things. I am looking at my watch. It is 10 [minutes] to 12 o’clock. If you want to get up to Lenox [Square]<sup>114</sup> we might stop now and pick up at that point.

**Regina:** On the wedding ceremony?

<End of Tape 3, Side 2>

<Begin Tape 4, Side 1>

**Patty:** Another tape for the American Jewish Committee Oral History Project. This is with Regina Tourial. The date is July 21, 1989.

**Regina:** . . . perfumes, lingerie.

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<sup>113</sup> Hebrew for ‘daughter of commandment.’ A rite of passage for Jewish girls aged 12 years and one day according to her Hebrew birthday. Many girls have their *bat mitzvah* around age 13, the same as boys who have their bar mitzvah at that age. She is now duty bound to keep the commandments. Synagogue ceremonies are held for *bat mitzvah* girls in Reform and Conservative communities, but it has not won the universal approval of Orthodox rabbis.

<sup>114</sup> Lenox Square is a mall in Atlanta’s Buckhead community. It was built in 1959 and has undergone several major renovations.

**Patty:** The gifts that the groom's family sends to the bride.

**Regina:** Then the bride turns around with a gold wrist watch.

**Patty:** The gold wrist watch?

**Regina:** We did get that?

**Patty:** I believe that is on the tape. That is the part where we had a difficulty on the last tape. We talked a bit about the wedding. We were not able to get into any special Sephardic customs that might have been associated with the wedding ceremony itself, if there were any.

**Regina:** The *tallit*, at one time a lot of them were used for the *chuppah*.<sup>115</sup> They took four poles and a *tallit* and made a *chuppah*. This custom goes way back into the Spanish days. Even if it was in a big synagogue, they still wanted a *tallit* that was more sanctified. For this reason, a Sephardic custom is that when the bride and groom are at the *bimah*<sup>116</sup>—even if they get married in an Ashkenazi synagogue—if the bride or groom is Sephardic, the father of the bride or the groom will ask permission from the rabbi to use the *tallit* to bless them with. When the Seven Blessings<sup>117</sup> are being recited, which is done in all Jewish ceremonies, the bride's father, with the help of the groom's father or vice versa, will take his *tallit* and put it over the heads of the bride and the groom. The Seven Blessings are recited with the *tallit* on. It can mess the bride's hair or her veil a little bit. It is the final blessing that adds the final touch. The *tallit* is removed and the ceremony proceeds with the finishing touches, the blessing, the breaking of the glass,<sup>118</sup> and so forth. This is one of our customs. It is observed in all of Sephardic ceremonies here. If they should marry in another synagogue or in the hotel, the *tallit* ceremony is observed.

**Patty:** The *tallit* belongs to . . .

**Regina:** . . . to the father of either the bride or the groom. In some instances, if they want to be extraordinarily generous, the bride's family will buy a new beautiful *tallit* for the groom. They use it that day for the first time. He keeps it. It is a keepsake.

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<sup>115</sup> Hebrew for 'canopy.' The wedding canopy under which a Jewish wedding takes place.

<sup>116</sup> Hebrew for 'platform.' The *bimah* is a raised structure in the synagogue from which the *Torah* is read and from which prayers are led.

<sup>117</sup> A traditional part of the Jewish wedding ceremony is the chanting of *Sheva B'rachot*, or Seven Blessings. Taken from the pages of the *Talmud*, the blessings begin with the *kiddush* over wine and increase in intensity. It is no accident that there are seven blessings, given there are seven days of creation. It is a common custom for the blessings to be chanted by a *chazzan* or rabbi, if they preside over the wedding ceremony.

<sup>118</sup> After the bride has been given the ring, or at the end of a Jewish wedding ceremony (depending on local custom), the groom breaks a glass, crushing it with his right foot. The origin of this custom is unknown, although many reasons have been given. One explanation is that it is a reminder that despite the joy, Jews still mourn the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem.



**Patty:** Are there any other set of religious items that are handed down to the new couple?

**Regina:** That is the only different custom that I know of. One reception could be here and one could be at AA. You would not know the difference if you walked into the room. They are catered. One other thing, marzipan is served during the reception. At one time, it was customary until maybe 25 or 30 years ago, no matter where or how big or small the ceremony was, *bonbonieras* . . . did I mention that to you before?

**Patty:** No.

**Regina:** *Bonbonieras* can be very expensive or they can be very inexpensive. They are tulle, porcelain, silver, or in some instances, little white satin boxes that have marzipan inside. It is made with just plain almonds and sugar. Almonds and sugar were supposed to give the sweet touch in any ceremony. This is truly a Spanish custom. If there was a *bris*, birth of a baby, *bar mitzvah*, [there would be] a *fadas*.<sup>119</sup> *Fadas* is the ceremony that is done when a first girl is born into a family. Beside a *bris*, we have *fadas*. *Fadas* . . . F-A-D-A-S . . . is a real Spanish word. When you celebrate *fadas* . . . I am going to get off the subject of the wedding. I will tell you about the marzipan. These were all done for festive and happy occasions. They used to take the marzipan and put silver coins in with it. It would be in a porcelain or silver box if the father was very wealthy; if not, taken in a net and tied with a little silk ribbon. As time went on, silver became too costly. To give it the extra touch, they started using silver bells, the candies, and putting it in with the *marzipan* or some type of almonds that were coated actually with silver. How they do it, I do not know. They are ordered from New York. When my first grandchild was born, we called up and my cousin sent me some immediately, like [it was] the end of the world. Sugar and almonds are to signify that they will have a sweet life. I will tell you about the *fadas*.

**Patty:** Who were these given to?

**Regina:** To everyone.

**Patty:** All the guests?

**Regina:** All the guests received them. We went to a wedding just last year. Where they got them, I do not know. You can import them from Italy. They still make them a lot there. They are hard to come by from Spain. A little silver basket lined with a silver and white beautiful paper. Inside she had the marzipan and the silver bells. During the years, my mother has quite a

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<sup>119</sup> A Sephardic ceremony when a first girl is born into a family. *Fadas* is an ancient Spanish word meaning 'godmother.' During the ceremony, the baby would be handed to the Godmother and the rabbi would sing and name the baby.

collection. I have a few, but my mother has a tremendous collection. Every time her nephews or her great-nephews, her great-nieces sent her a souvenir, they would send her one or two of the little *bonbonieras*. If they came from Africa, they were very expensive. The silver with the little bride and groom are still beautiful. They are almost lavish inside. They still tuck the *bonboniera* and the marzipan still tied with the net. A small card says, “Irene and Bernard, such and such a date, the wedding date.” If it was a *bar mitzvah*, little porcelain box had the boy’s name and the date. The silk and satin boxes were in this country because it really became a very costly thing. In 1965, a cousin of mine got married in New York. Those are the last silver ones that I have seen that were given to all of the guests. On the little silver box was the name of the bride and the groom. We have even had crystal ones, [unintelligible: 8:38] from Brussels [Belgium], like a little ring box. A crystal little box and on the lid etched the name of the bride and the groom. It is according to how many thousands you want to spend. This is a Sephardic custom. It is really a Spanish custom.

**Patty:** Did the entire community participate in the . . .

**Regina:** At one time, you just said the true thing. In the 1930’s and even in the 1940’s, there was never a wedding—in the early 1940’s anyway—of anybody who belonged to the synagogue where the whole synagogue wasn’t invited. It was a much smaller synagogue, maybe 200 to 225 members. Everybody knew everybody. They had all come together. The children had grown up together. You could not leave anybody out. The war changed things. A lot of people were brought in whom we had never known before. A lot of the girls married service men. The whole picture changed all of the Jewish communities. It was not only the Sephardics. It was everybody. We all became one. All of a sudden instead of having 200 . . . when I said 225 people, I meant children and members. All of a sudden you were talking 300, 350 guests. That was too much. Little by little, feelings were starting to be hurt. You could not invite everybody. You had to start with family and the family of the groom or bride, and their friends. It became a different picture completely. Before that everybody was included. A *bris*, no matter how small the house was, there was always room. You could be falling out the windows, but everybody had to come and do.

**Patty:** There was this real sense of everybody sharing in the joy of someone’s fortune.

**Regina:** When my first son was born, the *bris* was at the hospital. I stayed two weeks. That was not unusual in those days. They went home and they had a party until five o’clock in the

morning. I did not know about it. At 1:30 in the morning, my husband came with about three people. He wanted to come to see if I was all right. They were singing and dancing all night long. We had the *pidyon haben*<sup>120</sup> which everyone has for the first born. That is another big party. I can tell you now about the *fadas*, if you would like to hear.

**Patty:** I would like to know. I have never heard of that.

**Regina:** If the firstborn is a daughter, the *fadas* makes no difference. They have it when the baby is a month old. Some will do it a week or two later. Usually they wait until she is a month old. She has a godmother, like we have the godparents for *bris*. For a *brit milah*, which is *bris*, when the first son is born, he is always named for the groom's side of the family. Unless in the case where the bride's immediate parent had passed on, she would ask permission from the in-laws, "May I name, for my father's . . ." The happiest thing that can happen is for a grandfather—for the father of the father—to have his name. This is a Sephardic custom.

**Patty:** Even if they are alive?

**Regina:** That is the biggest blessing of all. The biggest happiness of all is for him to hold that child and say, "His name will be Ralph." Our first grandson is named Ralph. The second, my son's first son's Hebrew name is 'Raphael Sobetai,' my husband's name. They called him 'Robert Stephen.' My daughter's first son, named for my husband, is Ralph. He could not appreciate the fact that Robert still has 'Ralph' as a Hebrew name. It was not good enough. He wants his name to be 'Ralph.' My grandfather, my father's father, had seven Morris named for him. Four Morris Roussos: my brother's name, of course, my cousin in Montgomery, my cousin in California, and my cousin in Brussels. Three sons of his daughters are all named for their father. This is a wonderful thrill for them.

**Patty:** That is interesting. I do not know whether the Ashkenazi do that.

**Regina:** They are beginning to change. In fact, this came up. There was so much intermarriage. I mean in the sense that Sephardic marry an Ashkenazi. They were so superstitious about naming for the living that Rabbi Epstein conducted one of his classes one morning. He told how it was strictly superstition. There was nothing to base it on. No religious intonation at all of naming for the living or naming for the dead. There were parts of the country

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<sup>120</sup> The *pidyon haben* or redemption of the first-born son is a mitzvah in Judaism whereby a Jewish firstborn son is 'redeemed' by use of silver coins from his birth-state of sanctity. The redemption is attained by giving five silver coins to a Kohen (a patrilineal descendant of the priestly family of Aaron). In the Hebrew Bible the laws concerning the redemption of the first-born male are referred to in *Exodus, Numbers and Leviticus*:

where they did not name from the living. They thought you were robbing them of the days of their lives. Something might happen. It was just strictly a custom based on the country where you came from. The most wonderful thing you can do is name for your parents. There were four children in my mother and father's family. I am named for my grandmother, Regina. My brother is named for my father's father, Morris. My sister's named for my . . . her name is Marie. She is named for my grandmother, Mariel. My brother Jack is named for my grandfather Jacob. This is the custom. The first boy and the first girl—if there are—are named for the father's family. The second boy and the second girl are named for the mother's family. If you have more, then you can go and name them for whomsoever.

**Patty:** It is interesting that, within the Jewish community, there should be such a divided opinion. I remember when I moved here, I realized there were people at the Temple who had the same names carried on from generation to generation.

**Regina:** Now, the father and the son can be named the same. We do not have that. It's a big blessing for the father's father. It is a thrill for them. What was I going to tell you? In another instance, my mother-in-law's name was 'Reina,' which is 'Regina.' My name is Regina. I could not name my first daughter for my mother-in-law. My son is named for his grandfather, for my husband's father, **Zedkiah**. His name is 'Sidney.' His Hebrew name is 'Zedkiah.' My mother-in-law's name was 'Mazaltov.' I will tell you the personal side. She wanted me to name my daughter Matilda. She said, "Pass you the honor to my mother." My daughter's name is Sarah. My mother's name is 'Sarina.' 'Sarah' is her Hebrew name.

When my second daughter was born, we called her 'Peggy.' Tamar, my sister-in-law, told her mother, "You want the name Matilda. Your two brothers named their daughters 'Margarite,' for their mother, 'Mazaltov.'" Her name was Margaret. My second daughter is Margaret, for her great-grandmother. My second son Daniel, [is named] for my father. These are the customs. You keep the names in the family if you are very fortunate. It is beginning to come back. They were naming for the father, giving them these very fancy names, and not naming for Rebecca or Sarah. If there was a 'Sarah,' everyone would become a 'Susan.' If there was a 'Rebecca,' they would become something else. Today, those names are so fashionable that you are more fortunate. If they are naming for somebody, they are only too proud to name the old Biblical names. It is coming back.

**Patty:** What would happen if there was disenchantment with the relative for whom someone

was about to name [their child]? I know that sometimes people will handle the Hebrew name. The child will be given the Hebrew name. If they really did not want to honor the person, their American name would be different.

**Regina:** This is not only in our religion. I read a most interesting article in one of the magazines not long ago. I wanted to bring and show it to the rabbi. I thought it was very funny, about old family names, like Abigail, that had been in families for generations. All of a sudden names like ‘Tiffany’ came. He says, “What would happen is old family names that used to be so popular to carry from one generation to the other [are not so popular].” This is what happened. The fashionable names—names from a movie or popular book—they became so much more popular. Today they are going back to tradition some. Family names are carried on. In my husband’s family, I do not know how many times they traced it back . . . Raphael Sobetai. This is most unusual because we only give one name, for example ‘Raphael ben Zedkiah.’ The same thing with the daughters. There were never two names in the Jewish religion. They were given one name, not a middle name. In this instance, there was, from his grandfather and great-great-grandfather on. My father-in-law had recorded how many times that name had been used and it should always be. His name is Raphael Sobetai. My two grandsons are named Ralph . . . ‘Raphael Sobetai.’ Robert’s Hebrew name is ‘Raphael Sobetai,’ but [his English name is] ‘Robert Steven.’ This is the way it goes.

**Patty:** With that information, how far back have you been able to trace your families? How many generations back?

**Regina:** In my husband’s instance, quite a few, because it was written. His grandfather was a rabbi. My mother’s father was the big rabbi of the Isle of Rhodes. There is a book with his name and picture in it that was distributed by the Italian government. They had a famous *yeshiva* in Rhodes that had been traced to the 1600’s. It died because of the changing between the Greek and the Turkish, and some antisemitism. They kind of closed it down after a while. They reopened it when the Italian government took over the Isle of Rhodes in the late 1800’s. It became very prominent in the early 1900’s. It opened up again. They were beginning to come, even from Russia, to learn and study the customs at the Sephardic *yeshiva*. It broadened their aspect of Jewry. If they had the funds and means by which to do so, some from Israel would come to study. Very many came from the Baltic countries, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria. They came to college, Collegia Hebreo in . . .

**Patty:** . . . is there a Sephardic *yeshiva* now?

**Regina:** World War II destroyed everything. The La Kehila Grande, the big synagogue, was bombed. The war was lost. That is one of the saddest things in the world. The war was over. It truly was practically over; the Americans had already taken over Paris [France], and had already been liberated. Yet they . . . just that one last stab at destroying and killing a few more Jewish people. They were herded into cattle cars and taken. They were the last ones. They did not stay in the concentration camps. They did not suffer for months and months. They were not there but a very short time in Auschwitz-[Birkenau].

**Patty:** That sounds like there was an entire aspect of their culture . . .

**Regina:** . . . wiped out.

**Patty:** . . . disappeared.

**Regina:** It was beautiful. You hear these stories and it just is so sad. They lived, even though they did not have ‘streets lined with gold,’ like they thought were in the United States. They had a happy and a wonderful life. They went through hard times, like all the countries did in the late Twenties and Thirties. In the early 1900’s, the [Isle of Rhodes] was small. They had 2,000 Sephardic Jews there, which is a lot. It did not compare to Salonika [Greece]. Salonika has 250,000 Sephardic Jews. They had magnificent synagogues; huge, beautiful, rich places. There were so many wealthy Sephardic Jews. Rhodes was a small island. The majority lived well. There were a few who did not. The majority were merchants. They could go by boat and come in the same day. Or maybe be gone for three or four days. They would go to the Turkish and Greek small islands. There was nothing else to do. They did have two banks that had become affluent, La Banca Mahlal [sp] and La Banca Alhadeff. These people were the big givers to the synagogue.

**Patty:** Was that the only Sephardic *yeshiva* within the Sephardic world at that time?

**Regina:** There were others. That one was famous because at one time it had been the bigger one. The island was small and because of constantly changing hands with the Turkish and the Greek, it became where people did not want to go there to study. There were bigger ones that were being built in Bulgaria and on the other larger Greek islands, and in Yugoslavia. These countries became antisemitic all the way. They were wiped out completely. That one never did go down until World War II. It had some lean years, but at one time had been the bigger one. The others grew bigger. They were wiped out and this one still stood.

**Patty:** What about in Salonika?

**Regina:** That was completely wiped, devastated all the way. With **250,000 Jews** there . . . there are not even 500 there today. On the Isle of Rhodes, there are only two families who we know of. The young people are not there. There was a couple. They had survived the war.

**Patty:** Was that the family who had sheltered a child?

**Regina:** You are talking about the one that lived with a Greek family. They kept someone, a young woman.

**Patty:** I believe a young Jewish girl who had . . .

**Regina:** . . . I asked about her because someone just came back from Rhodes. She went and saw her. She lives as a Greek woman today. Many years have passed. She does not practice the Christian religion. She said, “I have no one to converse with. No one to tell me anything.” Her family life was gone. The people who took care of her are like her family. She says, “When I die”—she did not ever marry—“When I die, I don’t know what will happen to me. I don’t know who will. . .” Right now, the people are kind to her. She never could bring herself to marry a Greek man even though this was offered to her. She lives lost almost. It is very sad for her. She said, “I guess I have to be thankful that I’m alive, though my family is not.” I was telling you about the **Shalems**. They survived the camp. They went back . . . Moise Shalem [sp], his wife and a son. They went back to Rhodes. After a while, there was no life there for them too much. His life became to take care of the synagogue that was left. La Kehila . . .

**Patty:** . . . there were two.

**Regina:** There were two: La Kehila Shalom and La Kehila Grande. La Kehila Grande was bombed. La Kehila Shalom is still there today. With funds that were raised by members of the Shearith Israel in New York, members from the synagogues in **Salisbury, Rhodesia**, which today is **Zimbabwe**, and in **Lubumbashi**, which is **Zaire** [now Democratic Republic of the Congo], which was the Belgian Congo. These people were very affluent. They could not wait to go back to see what was left of Rhodes. When they saw that the synagogue had been bombed and the other one was still standing, they raised quite a few funds, refurbished the synagogue, but did not change it. They did not want to change it. They paid for this family to live well so that they could take care of the synagogue, see that the cemetery was kept clean, and that nothing was desecrated. Mr. Shalem passed on. Their son went away. She is there alone today. There is another Sephardic family. At least she has someone to visit and to talk with. The person with

whom I talked, who just came back this past month, said she says, "I have no argument. I live well. The people from these countries have set up a fund. If I ever need anything to be painted or whatever, all I have to do is write to a certain person in New York, and immediately the money comes to fix, to paint, to whatever." She says, "I'm getting old. What will happen to these memories when I pass on? No Jewish people want to come back here." This is sad. This will die also, like what happened in Poland and Hungary. These Jewish populations that were so large and affluent. There is nothing left today. This is very, sad.

**Patty:** That is true. Many of the things we were talking about, the rituals, the important things about the community, and the customs that were handed down, have just disappeared. One of the things that I read about in a book about Rabbi Cohen, which I had not known about, was about the grave stones. Perhaps we could talk a little bit about that.

**Regina:** The Hebrew lettering that spells out the Spanish names?

**Patty:** Maybe you could say a few words about that. There is a very interesting chapter about it.

**Regina:** If you can find some headstones that they found in Spain, very old ones that have not been destroyed, they tell the same thing. They spell the name of the deceased in Hebrew letters. With Spanish, the Hebrew letters spell out the Spanish name. This is common in all the Sephardic cemeteries on all the little islands, in the Greek islands. In Italy, it is very prominent. Here in Atlanta, in our cemetery, the Shearith Israel cemetery in New York, and in Montgomery, Alabama. I think I told you that I visited my aunt's grave for the first time about 20 or 30 years ago. She died in 1917 in Montgomery. I could not believe the dates that were there, with the real Spanish names. They were the real early settlers that had come to this country. They had come through Louisiana and come back up through Alabama. They were cotton growers, importers, and exporters. They were all through Selma and Montgomery, Alabama. They lived in Mississippi and Louisiana. I saw dates that went back to the early 1800's. I felt like I was looking at history. These names were so. . . I remember one of the names . . . Seixas . . . that is a very old Spanish name. There was, I'm trying to . . . Alvarez, de Gomez, Hernandez. These were, I thought, Spanish names. These were Jewish people with the Jewish star on the headstone. You had to read it because there was not anything like that today. You see the Hebrew on one side. If you turn and you come back out, you will see the English name. These are for the young people today. They would not be able to read the Spanish names. In the older



part of the Sephardic cemetery here in Atlanta, Greenwood, there is no English. It is all in the Hebrew. The Spanish name on the lettering is the Spanish given name.

**Patty:** From what I could gather in reading this, and for the purposes of the tape, we are reading from a memorial book that was written?

**Regina:** It is a memorial tribute to **Rabbi Cohen**.

**Patty:** Various people wrote chapters in it. This one is about how he would help the families prepare the headstone.

**Regina:** He did the lettering. This is almost a lost art today. He did the lettering for all of the other synagogues that wanted the letters done in Hebrew and not in English. Today, Rabbi [Robert] Ichay is beginning to carry on this tradition so that it will not die out. He has learned. He is doing this little by little and working with the marble companies. Rabbi Cohen did many with the Hebrew lettering for AA and for the others, but not in the Spanish words. Like here [referring to the book], these are Hebrew letters. They spell out, "*Aqui descansa para siempre nuestra muy respetable y honorada . . .*" Then it goes on to give the name. "Here rests forever a very respected and honored . . ." sister, brother, mother or father, and then goes on to give the name.

**Patty:** Would he help the families decide what they wanted to put on the stone?

**Regina:** They would go to him. Most of the time it was very simple unless the family has something very specific that they wanted to say. It would go to just this very simple thing, Here lies," or "Here rests." "*Descansa*" is to rest or to sleep. It was the same thing over and over, except for in special instances. If there was a tragic thing or a very young person, he would help them with that. They would want to say something. There is one that is so meaningful, but so sad. A cousin of mine was a young girl injured at birth. She lived to be 27 which no one could even believe. He wrote something that was so meaningful and so sad. "A bird with a broken wing would fly no more." It said it all because she never lived a full life. This said, in just so few words, what I am sure the family must have felt. I do not read them *per se* anymore. I did not visit my father-in-law's grave until not too many years ago. I went with my son. He died in 1922, quite a few years ago. I never knew him.

**Patty:** This is your grandfather?

**Regina:** My husband's father. He died in 1922. I never knew him. I did go down. It is in the older part of our cemetery. He was one of the first ones to pass away after we bought a lot. I

think they bought the lot in 1918, so in 1922, it was very early in the life of the cemetery. Before that, we had four or five of our members buried in Oakland Cemetery in the German-Jewish plot. We did not have a plot. The first one was in 1915. Joseph Amiel died. He was [Rebecca Sarda] Amiel's brother-in-law, and a bachelor. He was the first one to be buried in **Oakland Cemetery**, in the plot that was owned by the German-Jewish [community]. They were wonderful about that. After this one, we had acquired a plot in **Greenwood Cemetery**.

**Patty:** I had hoped we would be able to have time to talk a little bit about this synagogue and the community. I was able to do a fair amount of reading about the history of this synagogue in this book and the book about Rabbi Cohen. It sounds like it was not easy getting this synagogue going and getting a religious leader.

**Regina:** It was a terrible time. I do not remember most of this. I do remember a good bit. In early, say 1918, when they first had a building, they had a 'schoolmaster.' He was not educated to teach, but he knew enough Hebrew that he could teach the children. It did not work out well. It was not what the people really wanted. Someone would come in [who knew] a little bit more. There was such a conflict with everyone. He was more qualified, but not educated. This one knows how to *hazania*, which is to be a **cantor**, which we did not suffer from. Everything was volunteer, except for the school teacher. You had to pay him because he took his days from working. In 1923, they had a school mistress. She was educated to be a Hebrew teacher. She was not a rabbi *per se* . . . Rachel [Amine].<sup>121</sup> She later married a young member from the synagogue. We had a rabbi in between. I do not think they paid him enough, so he went back to New York. He came back and taught for a very short time.

**Patty:** Was his name Gabay? It was written up. He came back and forth several times. Apparently he was very controversial.

**Regina:** He was very strict. He was from Istanbul. The majority of our members were from Rhodes. The members from Istanbul had a few different, not habits, but a few different observances in their ceremonies. Our liturgy was more lyrical. Theirs was stricter. They were always looking for someone else. In 1927 or 1928, we got a very educated member, Rabbi

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<sup>121</sup> Rachel Amine was a native of Palestine who taught Hebrew at Congregation Or VeShalom in Atlanta from 1923 to 1924. She married Isaac Beneviste, a member of the congregation, and resigned her position.

[Robert] Uziel.<sup>122</sup> He was most *hacham*,<sup>123</sup> meaning a ‘learned man.’ He really was not a rabbi. Now, he was a rabbi. He was educated to be a rabbi.

**Patty:** Rabbi Gabay?

**Regina:** Rabbi Gabay. Rachel **Benveniste** is the one educated to be a Hebrew teacher. Mr. [Reuben] Piha<sup>124</sup> was not an ordained rabbi, but he had a magnificent voice. I would stand him up to any cantor today. It was truly beautiful.

**Patty:** Who performed the weddings if there was not a rabbi?

**Regina:** In this instance, Mr. Piha did. There must be so many ceremonies that were not licensed, or legal. I will not even think about it. He truly was not [a rabbi]. We laugh about this today. This is most interesting. I do not know if you read this about the Temple. This was all because of Mrs. Foote. This is written in the archives of the Atlanta Historical Society where Rabbi Marx . . . the Temple really was very good and helped us to set up the *Talmud Torah*.<sup>125</sup> Even though they did not have *Talmud Torah*, they had a Sunday school. Our children were more than welcome to go to their Sunday school. For some reason, very few went to the Temple. Ahavath Achim was very good to us. They opened up their Sunday school to us. We felt like it was more **Orthodox**. Most of the children, like me, went to AA Sunday school for a short time, until Rabbi Cohen came and we finally got our [own]. This was 1927. He was probably one of the more refined, very educated rabbis. His wife had lived in New York. He had been a rabbi at a much larger synagogue. She was used to so much more of a better social life. She could not stand that she was not happy here in Atlanta. That is the main reason [they left]. I do not know what they wrote here.

**Patty:** Rabbi Uziel. . . . U-Z-I-E-L.

**Regina:** That is a French name. It is a very common name in France even today, Uziel.

<interview pauses, then resumes>

**Regina:** That was one of the problems. His two daughters became very friendly with the

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<sup>122</sup> Rabbi Robert Uziel served as rabbi of Congregation OrVeShalom for one year from 1927 to 1928 when he returned to New York. He was ordained at the Seminary in Istanbul, Turkey.

<sup>123</sup> *Hacham* (or *chakam*, *hakham*, *haham*; Hebrew: ‘wise’) is a term in Judaism, meaning a wise or skillful man. It often refers to someone who is a great *Torah* scholar. The word is generally used to designate a cultured and learned person:

<sup>124</sup> Reuben Piha aided in the services at Congregation OrVeShalom for many years and was known for his beautiful voice.

<sup>125</sup> *Talmud Torah* schools were created for both Ashkenazi and Sephardic Jews, as a form of primary or religious school, where students were given an elementary education in Hebrew, the *Torah*, and the *Talmud*.

members of the Temple. He and Rabbi Marx got along famously. Mrs. Uziel did also. They just said [they were leaving] for personal reasons. That was the personal reason. She found the members of the Temple so much more affluent. This was the kind of life that she had been hoping to aspire to. It did not work out. Rabbi [Menachem] Sarfarti,<sup>126</sup> he was . . . this was very wrong. The student attendance was the best that we have ever had when Rabbi Sarfati was here. His reason for leaving was a personal reason. It was a very sad reason. It was one of the . . . I do not understand how this was because I went through most of this. **I do not know how we were this ridiculous. LISTEN**

**Patty:** Was he there for very long?

**Regina:** He was here from 1928 to 1931. He had three boys. They were David, **Immanuel**, and Jacob. Jacob was the most beautiful little child. When they came here, Jacob was a baby. His wife was beautiful. Her name was Sarah. He had us eating out of his hands. We even went to summer Hebrew school. The man had a rapport with children. I cannot believe this. They got them an apartment. We did not have a house for the rabbi. He was within two, two-and-a-half blocks of the synagogue. There was an apartment house right across the street from the Jewish Progressive Club on Pryor Street. It was a large apartment house. It was almost occupied completely by Jewish families. It was close enough that he could walk. The price was right. It was across the street from the largest Jewish establishment here. When walking, he would only pass the homes of some of the members or other Jewish people. We felt like this was ideal. They had a front entrance and a back door. The back door at that time had a little tiny porch. It was just a little balcony where you would go down through the back. Jacob walked up. When he first starting walking, he was about a year-and-a-half or maybe two, three years old, maybe. He fell. Several days later he died. She did not want any part of that place again. She really wanted to go back to be with her family. That is why he left. It was a terrible time for her and for the two boys.

David and **Immanuel** were beautiful children. David came back once during the **war**. He was a soldier stationed nearby. He came back to see what it had been like. He did not remember very much. He was in the first or second grade when he was here. He wanted to come back and see what the Atlanta Jewry was, what the members of the congregation were like.

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<sup>126</sup> Rabbi Menachim Safarti was contracted to become *chazzan* and teacher at Or VeShalom in 1928. He left in 1931 to go to Rochester, New York.

He even talked about, “Someday I’m going to come back here to live. You know, my father told me so many wonderful things about it.” He did not. He was stationed at one of the bases not far from Atlanta. We were very fortunate and Rabbi Gabay came back a short time and stayed. The gods smiled down on us and Rabbi Cohen came. He was truly something extra special. I told you that I taught Sunday school. Here, this picture; that is me.

<Regina shows a book to Patty>

**Regina:** Wait a minute . . . we were all volunteer teachers. The first Sunday school teacher was my sister-in-law, Tamar. She lives in Vallejo, California. She was the first teacher that Rabbi Cohen hired. He taught her and told her what he wanted. He was so wonderful. It worked out great until 1972 or 1973. We never hired a teacher. We had Hebrew teachers. We did not want for Sunday school teachers. During the summer, you practiced or studied with Rabbi Cohen. He told you his programs. He outlined everything. It was so easy. The books had study packs with them. You had such a wonderful guideline. You did not have to be educated. You did have to know how to discipline. This was a hard thing to do.

**Patty:** What was so special about him?

**Regina:** He had a way with children that there is just no way to describe. He made you want to learn. The students today that learned from him read Hebrew so beautifully, incredibly well. This does not exist anymore. It just does not happen. It is sad but true. He had a way that the children wanted to come. We had between 195 and 210 in the Sunday school and Hebrew school. Today, we have between 38 and 40 children. A few do go to the Hebrew Academy [now Atlanta Jewish Academy].<sup>127</sup> There are some. This eliminates them from the everyday Hebrew school. People started having fewer children. This had a lot to do with it. There were a lot of circumstances that . . . girls did not want to go. The mothers said, “It’s too hard.” They started moving. “It’s too far to take them.” Little by little, we lost a lot of children.

<End of Tape 4, Side 1>

<Begin Tape 4, Side 2>

**Regina:** They were picked up for Shearith Israel, AA and Or VeShalom. We did not have too much problem. As long as the children stood on a certain corner, they were picked up. This made it very easy. When the children live way out and the mother has to come back, it is not to

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<sup>127</sup> Atlanta Jewish Academy was incorporated in 2014, as a result of the merger of Greenfield Hebrew Academy (GHA) and Yeshiva Atlanta High School (YA), the oldest Jewish day schools in Atlanta.

her advantage to go home, and then come back to get them. Hebrew car pools were beginning. There were so many arguments. “I took one day. I cannot. I work. You do not. You do.” It just got harder and harder. A lot of parents just said, “I’m going to let my boy go. He needs to *bar mitzvah*. My daughters don’t have to.” This took away half of our school membership.

**Patty:** From what I’ve come to understand about Or VeShalom, it really is just a very unique, large family. It represents a really very unique aspect of Judaism, people that had a shared heritage, which was quite different in its characteristics and customs. It must be so hard to find a spiritual leader who can really express that for the community. There are no longer any Sephardic communities or places of learning. To find someone like Rabbi Cohen—who apparently was able to do that, from birth until death—that is what interested me about that article. He was with the families into death and beyond, to be able to inscribe the tombstones and to understand the meaning of that to the families.

**Regina:** When he died, our way of life went on. We were so thrilled to have Rabbi Ichay. We just went along. I do not even want this on tape. I do not mean it in a disparaging way. He has been so wonderful in so many things. The fact that we have become so much more a part of the community is due to Rabbi Cohen, even though . . .

<interview pauses, then resumes>

**Regina:** He became so friendly with so many of the members of the community. He was very close friends with Frank Garson.<sup>128</sup>

**Patty:** Rabbi Cohen?

**Regina:** They respected him so much.

**Patty:** Who is Frank Garson?

**Regina:** He was one of the larger founders, one of the larger philanthropists of the Jewish community in Atlanta. He was the instigator of the Jewish Home.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>128</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>129</sup> A nursing home in Atlanta providing short and long term dementia, Alzheimer’s, and nursing care. Formerly The Jewish Home, it first opened in 1951 at 260 14th Street, NW, on land that had been donated by real estate developer Ben J. Massell. The Home’s growth called for a larger, updated facility, leading to the construction of a new building at 3150 Howell Mill Road, NW. The second Jewish Home opened on February 16, 1971. In 1991, it was renamed The William Breman Jewish Home to honor and recognize its third president, Bill Breman, as the prime motivator of the modern day facility.

**Patty:** He was German?

**Regina:** German-Jewish. Rabbi Cohen—in the beginning, when we wanted to move to Highland Avenue—had gone to him. I think that Frank Garson had said something. Rabbi Cohen was so full of spirit. He answered him and began to respect him. Then he started looking for him and they became very close. He was very good friends with Rabbi Epstein. Rabbi Epstein respected him very much. He became friendly with Rabbi [Tobias] Geffen.<sup>130</sup> Rabbi [Jacob] Rothschild<sup>131</sup> respected him so much. He was from the Temple. He loved Rabbi Cohen. He showed Rabbi Cohen too much favoritism if there was ever a forum with all of the other rabbis. He always said, “Rabbi Cohen said,” . . . this did not make him very popular with a lot of people. He started pushing the young children. We had been separated from all of the other synagogues and social groups: the German-Jewish, the Russian-Jewish, and the Sephardic-Jewish. The clubs were different. He started pushing the children toward Young Judaea and B’nai B’rith [Youth Organization].<sup>132</sup> B’nai B’rith was very big with him.

[Rabbi Cohen] started taking leading roles in the community. That is the tree fund, the Jewish National Fund,<sup>133</sup> is it? This became so big with him. He was the first rabbi that was ever honored by that particular group. He taught us charity. This was so important to him. It became a big thing with the Sunday school students and the Hebrew school students. It was part of the learning all of the time, no matter how little or how big. He gave the young members confidence. “You’re just as good as everybody else. You can be a leader in the community. You can be in charge of the [Jewish] Federation [of Greater Atlanta].<sup>134</sup> You can take a large role in

<sup>130</sup> Rabbi Tobias Geffen (1870-1970) was an Orthodox rabbi and leader of Congregation Shearith Israel in Atlanta from 1910-1970. He is widely known for his 1935 decision that certified Coca-Cola as kosher. He also organized the first Hebrew school in Atlanta, and standardized regulation of kosher supervision in the Atlanta area.

<sup>131</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>132</sup> B’nai B’rith Youth Organization (BBYO) is a Jewish youth movement for students in grades from 8 through 12. The organization emphasizes its youth leadership model in which teen leaders are elected by their peers on a local, regional and international level and are given the opportunity to make their own programmatic decisions.

<sup>133</sup> The Jewish National Fund (JNF) is a non-profit organization founded in 1901 to purchase land for Jewish settlements. Since its founding, JNF has evolved into a global environmental organization by planting more than 250 million trees, building over 240 reservoirs and dams, developing over 250,000 acres of land, creating more than 2,000 parks, providing the infrastructure for over 1,000 communities, and connecting children and young adults to Israel and their heritage. (2015)

<sup>134</sup> The Jewish Federation of Greater Atlanta raises funds which are dispersed throughout the Jewish community. Services also include caring for Jews in need locally and around the world, community outreach, leadership development, educational opportunities. It is part of the Jewish Federation of North America (JFNA). The JFNA is an organization that raises and distributes funding for social welfare, social services and educational needs with the

the Community Center. It doesn't have to be because they're more of the Ashkenazis or more of the Russian Jews. If you play the role, if you do the work, you also will be a part of it." Sure enough, I look at his students and it makes me so proud. Morris Benveniste became a president of the [Jewish] Community Center. Today Asher Benator [is president]. One of the camps is named for Benator's mother [Marie]. This is so wonderful. In other words, they have gone out and they have been . . . they still hold back. They do not want to take . . . I do not think it is the responsibility or the name. They do not want the . . . I do not know what it is. It is not shyness. That is not a word to use. Sometimes it is even a little superstition. They do not want the honors. They think something could happen. [Rabbi Cohen], more than anyone, instigated the feeling of community.

**Patty:** He was a real leader. What was his background?

**Regina:** He studied in the *yeshiva*. He was a graduate of the *Collegio* in Istanbul.

**Patty:** Was he Turkish?

**Regina:** He was a Turkish citizen who had gone to Cuba. In Cuba, he found a wonderful place for himself. The times were getting very bad there. We needed a leader. Someone had gone to Cuba on a vacation or to visit family and heard about him. They came back and told us. The [congregation] grabbed [the opportunity to hire him] and he came. I do not know how happy he was in the beginning. He loved people so much. He loved children. This was so obvious from the very beginning. I do not know how bad or rough things had gotten. Maybe his wife might not have been too happy. He would never have left. He went through some rough times here. He came at the height of the Depression . . . just beginning to get over it. In fact, you said you read the book. If you did, this story of the scrip<sup>135</sup> is true. Rich's<sup>136</sup> was paying with scrip. The

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objective of protecting and enhancing the wellbeing of Jews worldwide. After the Holocaust, the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (the "Joint", or JDC), the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS), and other philanthropic organizations that later merged to form the JFNA worked together to support Jewish survivors. Refugees from displaced persons camps in Germany, Austria, and Italy received funds to help them resettle in places like the United States or Palestine and create new lives.

<sup>135</sup> Scrip was used during the Great Depression era as a substitute for government issued currency. Because of the banks closing temporarily and the lack of physical currency, someone had to come up with another form of currency to keep the economy going and a way for trade to continue. Therefore the old idea of local currency was reborn. Paper, cardboard, wood, metal tokens, leather, clam shells and even parchment made from fish skin was used. At one point, the United States Government considered issuing a nationwide scrip on a temporary basis.

<sup>136</sup> Rich's was a department store retail chain, headquartered in Atlanta that operated in the southern U.S. 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



synagogue at the time could not raise [pay] his salary every week. It was like from hand to mouth. They had to send men out to collect the few pennies or few dollars. We have to pay this man his salary. He has to live. At that time [the synagogue was] having a hard time. My husband's uncle, Ezra Tourial, said, "I will pay the salary." The synagogue said, "We will give you an IOU<sup>137</sup> for so much per week." Every week, Mr. Reuben Galanti, who was treasurer of the synagogue, would go to Mr. Tourial's establishment. He would give him an IOU slip. Someday in the future, when things got better, they would repay him. In the late Thirties, things started picking up. Rabbi Cohen would go to Mr. Tourial's place of work every Friday morning or Thursday afternoon, and collect his money. In the late 1930's, Mr. Galanti was still treasurer. They were going to start paying him back. [Mr Galanti] said, "What you give the synagogue, you never take it back." He never got the money.

**Patty:** What kind of business was Ezra Tourial in?

**Regina:** He had a wholesale leather house. He sold shoe repair supplies, machinery, and leather. He supplied shoe repairing shops, of which there were quite a few then. Today there are very few. In those days, we must have had 25 or 30 members in our synagogue that made a livelihood from just shoe repair. They were just a fraction. There were so many. There were lots of Italian shoe repairmen and quite a few Greek shoe repairmen.

**Patty:** Did his business prosper during the Depression?

**Regina:** He never felt the Depression. He lived well the whole time. He had no children. He had a family. He practically raised my husband, his brother, and his sister. My mother-in-law never wanted anything. Her husband, in those days, did not leave her anything. He took care of them. He took care of his mother. He had two sisters who he almost had to support in those days. He did not have any hardship. The tragedy was that just when things were beginning to get so very good, he died suddenly. Things did not go too well then. He really was a foundation of the synagogue. They do not remember today, because things have changed. This is him here.

**Patty:** Was Rabbi Cohen Orthodox in his practices? Did he believe in separate seating?

**Regina:** Very much so. Things changed after the **war** in the very late Sixties. A lot of our boys had been in the service. They brought back brides from New York, from San Francisco, from

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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.

<sup>137</sup> An IOU (abbreviated from the phrase "I owe you") is usually an informal document acknowledging debt.

Chicago, who had never had separate seating. One of the young members did everything that was good for the synagogue. After she had her second or third child, she came to services with her husband one holiday. I think her father-in-law was aghast more than anybody. She just decided, “If I’m going to come to services, I’m going to sit with my husband.” Nobody was going to turn around and beat her on the head. Everybody was just staring. It just took one. The others—who were not born and bred in our synagogue—started taking heed. It brought a lot of controversy, a lot of meetings, and a lot of anguish. Everybody loved everybody. This was one thing. Rabbi Cohen saw that there was nothing that he could do about it.

In the meantime, the AA had already built their new synagogue. They had separate seating on Washington Street. All of a sudden the families were allowed to sit together. He saw that the handwriting was on the wall. There was nothing he could do about it. We did not want to do what Shearith Israel did. It had a little caged in section where the men that said, “I will not sit with the women,” sat. The rest of the place was mixed seating. The only one that was having separate seating was Beth Jacob.<sup>138</sup> When they were first building their building, at several occasions they had to use our synagogue. On the times that they would use our synagogue, everybody would have to move. They would have to put lockers to show that they had to have separate seating.

**Patty:** But when you built the synagogue here in the early 1970’s . . .

**Regina:** We had already had mixed seating. Rabbi Ichay came in. He was very Orthodox. When he came here, he came from a very Orthodox background. He said there was no way he was going to have mixed seating. The board said, “We’ll see.” They gave in to one thing only. They built it with the accommodation for separate seating, should he win them over. He said, “I will. I will show you that I’ll have you in the palm of my hand in no time.” Rabbi Cohen was still alive at the time. He wished him well, because that is what he had wanted. He saw that he could not win. Rabbi Ichay, if he is still fighting the battle . . .

**Patty:** . . . still has not moved the seats.

**Regina:** They are still there. Now we have had visiting rabbis come: Sephardic rabbis, from New York from Shearith Israel, the Grand Rabbi from London, England, and the rabbi from Zimbabwe, which is Rhodesia. On those days, we have to write explicit letters telling them, “No

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<sup>138</sup> Beth Jacob is an Orthodox synagogue on LaVista Road in Atlanta founded in 1942 by former members of Ahavath Achim who were looking for a more Orthodox congregation. Beth Jacob is now Atlanta’s largest Orthodox congregation. The first location was a converted house on Boulevard.

way will you sit with your husbands, or will there be mixed seating on the days that they're here. We will make no exceptions." We have had some big arguments about how hypocritical you can be when all year long we have mixed seating. Just because this rabbi comes, [we must sit separately]. We had one time when a rabbi was coming here for about four or five days. We had a banquet planned, seminars, and everything. There were a few members who were just really almost obnoxious in that they insisted. "I'll do it, just to prove to you that I'm going to have my rights." Rabbi Ichay told them in no uncertain terms, "This rabbi wants to know from now. He will not even come here, will not honor our invitation, unless we tell him from ahead of time that in the sanctuary, at a dinner or banquet all right, but in the sanctuary, he will not in any way accept mixed seating." We have had quite a few of those times when we have had visiting rabbis. Under no circumstances would they accept mixed seating.

**Patty:** When there are visiting rabbis that come, do they conduct the services in Spanish?

**Regina:** Yes, and English, but mostly in Spanish.

**Patty:** Not Hebrew?

**Regina:** Not Hebrew. Of course, some of the readings from the *Torah* are done in Hebrew. The hymns and the sermon are all in Spanish. Always with "*Querido hermanas y hermanos.*" "My dear brothers and sisters, and members of the congregation." He loves it. We had one, Rabbi Solomon Gaon. He was from the Zimbabwe area, from Rhodesia originally. He went to live in London. He became the Grand Rabbi in London. He lived such a wonderful life. He could go to the palace. He was on talking terms with the **Queen**. He had a marvelous life there. Then, as he grew older, he could not travel. He had to go to Australia, to the African continent, and to India. It became almost too much. It had to be a younger man. He was offered a post as a teacher of Sephardic culture with the **Yeshiva** in New York. He had been like an honorary rabbi for Shearith Israel. He would come once a year to Shearith Israel to conduct a particular service. Not the High Holy Days, because he had to be in the British Isles. They paid him a retainer that was well worth his while just to come to the congregation, address them, and tell them a little bit of what had been before. They loved hearing his sermons and hymns in Spanish. He really was a charmer. He took this post. He lived among some friends that had moved from Africa to New York. He thought that it would be a very good life for him there. Time takes its toll. His wife had not been too well. I think they are sorry that they did not stay in Cape Town [South Africa] when he retired, instead of coming here. He should have gone to Cape Town. It would have

been more their style of living in Africa. The Sephardic community there lives extremely well.

**Patty:** In South Africa?

**Regina:** They have not suffered any hardships in any way yet. It will come, eventually. Cape Town still has a large part of the young Jewish community. In Rhodesia, there are very few young people. They have gone to Australia. They have gone to Great Britain. They have gone to Cape Town [South Africa] to wait out the time. In the Congo, forget it. They had three very prosperous Sephardic congregations in Elizabethville [Democratic Republic of the Congo], Leopoldville [Democratic Republic of the Congo] and Luneberg [South Africa], which did not . . . . Luneberg, I do not know the African name. Leopoldville is now Kinshasa [Democratic Republic of the Congo]. Elizabethville is now Lubumbashi [Democratic Republic of the Congo]. We still have family that stayed there for a long time. There are no young people whatsoever there. They went to live in Italy, Brussels and the Congo. They live in Milan [Italy] and Rome [Italy], and in New York.

**Patty:** Are they Jews from Rhodes who have gone to the Belgian Congo?

**Regina:** To the Congo and to Rhodesia. They did very well there. Today, you have a large Sephardic community in Cape Town. They live a wonderful life. I have Ashkenazi friends. They came from Johannesburg [South Africa]. We have about 500 people here living in Atlanta today from Johannesburg. Did you know that?

**Patty:** I know that. There is a very large community.

**Regina:** I think they have gone into AA and to the Temple.

**Patty:** B'nai Torah.<sup>139</sup>

**Regina:** B'nai Torah.

**Patty:** I believe.

**Regina:** We have a few here.

**Patty:** Really?

**Regina:** We have a few members here. There are a few Sephardic, very few. We have a few, maybe because Rabbi Ichay knew the South African customs. They were drawn to him.

**Patty:** Now he was where?

**Regina:** In Rhodesia.

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<sup>139</sup> A Traditional synagogue north of Atlanta in Sandy Springs. It was founded in 1981 by young unaffiliated Jews who met in the Hillel facilities of Emory University on the High Holy Days. In 2004 they became affiliated with the Conservative movement. Membership today (2015) is about 750 families and the rabbi is Joseph Heller.

**Patty:** He was in Rhodesia. Did that synagogue close?

**Regina:** No. It is still there, but here are no members. They had a big rabbi. When he left there, they had a big [unintelligible]. Rabbi Ichay was an associate. He was the head of the education department, the Sunday school, like the headmaster. He was not the Grand Rabbi when he came to us.

**Patty:** Is Rabbi Ichay Sephardic?

**Regina:** Yes, he is. He is Arabic. When he came here, he did not know Spanish.

**Patty:** He is not a descendant from Spain?

**Regina:** No.

**Patty:** Where was his family?

**Regina:** They were in Tunisia. French was mainly their language. His mother still lives in Paris with his sister and brother. His father died a few years ago. It was so easy for them to leave Tunisia after the war. The war tore everything up. They went to live in Paris. As a young boy, he went to the **Montefiore** schools in Manchester [England]. They had a Sephardic *yeshiva* there. That is where he met Rabbi Gaon. Rabbi Gaon is the man who told us about him. He said, "You have to have this young man come." When he came, everybody fell in love with him. It turned out to be a wonderful thing for us.

**Patty:** He came when Rabbi Cohen was still . . .

**Regina:** . . . still, yes.

**Patty:** Was he going into retirement?

**Regina:** We already had two rabbis before that, for two years. We had Rabbi Burlett [sp], an Ashkenazi student rabbi from New York. He had graduated from the *yeshiva* in New York. It did not work out well at all. There was so much conflict. He did not have what we wanted. He was very strict. He was a Hebrew teacher. The pronunciation, which today is our pronunciation . . . Any rabbi who is ordained today reads the Sephardic way. That tore us up. We had [Rabbi] Azwan. He was from Morocco and had studied in a Montefiore school. He was 'all rabbi.' Everything was Hebrew. He knew no Spanish at all, not even a little French. He just did not have the Sephardic feel that everybody wanted. He was a wonderful Hebrew teacher. He had the children singing songs and reading Hebrew. Rabbi Cohen liked this. He did not have a way with people. He could not communicate. He was a good teacher. That was the beginning and the end of it. He did not fit. Sweet as could be. He suffered very much. He married an Atlanta

girl from Beth Jacob because he was so Orthodox. We were not. We had become Conservative. He had changed places so many times. In the last five years, he has found his niche. He is a Hebrew school teacher at one of the academies somewhere in Florida. He taught here at the Hebrew Academy for one year. [His wife] wanted to come back to Atlanta. It did not pay him enough to make a living. They had four boys. They finally found a place in Florida. They are very happy there now. He is not a rabbi anymore, just a Hebrew teacher.

**Patty:** I am looking at my watch because I know that you want to stop shortly. I just wanted to get back to one of the things we had talked about. There is a piece of your history that we have not gotten to, the importance of language and ritual for the Sephardic. I am just so fascinated. For the purpose of the tape, we have not discussed your job and what you do as a translator.

**Regina:** Today? I am not . . .

**Patty:** I was fascinated when I learned about what you do and how you came to do it.

**Regina:** Where?

**Patty:** As a proofreader. We talked a long time ago that you . . .

**Regina:** . . . you mean for the Senate? For the legislature? Is that what you wanted to know?

**Patty:** I thought that was fascinating. Immediately what I thought of was the interest in language and the importance of precision in language, and to express those certain kinds of ideas. How did you get to do it?

**Regina:** It was a job there. The [Georgia State] Capitol,<sup>140</sup> if that is what you are speaking of, had a job. Only one time has that taken my language into consideration. Hamilton McWhorter<sup>141</sup> Jr. has been Secretary of the Senate for close to 30 years. We had a Spanish speaking delegation here from Spain. They were having a hard time getting around. He knew that I spoke Spanish. He said, "I don't know if you're going to understand them or not." By that time, my tongue just got . . . I forgot every word that I ever knew until they started talking. All

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<sup>140</sup> The Georgia State Capitol, in downtown Atlanta is an architecturally and historically significant building. It has been named a National Historic Landmark and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. It is the main office building of Georgia's government. The offices of the governor, lieutenant governor, and secretary of state are on the second floor, while the General Assembly meets on the third floor. The fourth floor houses visitors' galleries overlooking the legislative chambers and a museum.

<sup>141</sup> Hamilton McWhorter, Jr. (1913 – 2011) was a Georgia attorney who served as Secretary of the Georgia Senate from 1967 to 1992. During and after World War II he served in the Military Intelligence Service. He served as Oglethorpe County attorney, served on the Lexington City Council, and represented a district that included Oglethorpe County in the State Senate in 1961 and 1962.

of a sudden, it just came back. That was for two days. They were so thrilled to have somebody going around. I became important. I could take them to this and that, and translate back and forth. That never has come up in my job with the legislature. Proofreading is to make sure that the bill reads the way it should so. There are so many bills today . . .

**Patty:** I am very interested. Language plays such a part with your mother, then for you to become involved. This is how I interpreted it. With the exactness of language and that it expresses the right idea.

**Regina:** I never knew how important a word is. The State of Georgia is very fortunate in that we have a Legislative Counsel.<sup>142</sup> When I first went to work under Mr. McWhorter, we did not have a Legislative Counsel. This is made up of some lawyers, but mostly young interns and law students from the University of Georgia [Athens, Georgia] who interpret the language to be exact. We have so many bills in the state today. Maybe I should not say this because they probably do not want it to get around. [Some are] illegal because of a small word here, or a comma. When I first went to work, we were told that these bills had to read exact. If we did not like the punctuation, just change it. We had the right to do that. To be able to change anything today, even a comma, you have to have an amendment that has to be voted on. A senator or a committee can make an amendment to a bill that is presented by the House. If the House—a representative or a senator—wants to amend a bill that is written by the Senate, the amendment has to be approved three times to change a bill the way it was presented . . . even a comma.

Twenty years ago—as little as 15 years ago—there were six proofreaders on the Senate side. They had 11 on the House side. If we thought “or” sounded better if it was “of,” we would change it. If we thought the comma should be here after this word, before “and,” we could change it. Computers today make [the corrections] if we do not have everything right. The margins are correct. If we had to count letters, it was so different than it is today. We did so many things until they started reading some of these bills over. Now, it is different. Every single year, the bills that are passed, 300 to 400 in the Senate, only 150 passed. Maybe 180 . . . even maybe 200. In the House, hundreds of them [passed]. They are all put into a book. The students

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<sup>142</sup> The Office of Legislative Counsel is a joint office of the General Assembly of Georgia, created by statute in 1959. The office serves as legal counsel for the General Assembly and provides services to all members in their official capacities on a confidential, nonpartisan, and impartial basis. Primary responsibilities include drafting legislation, counseling legislators and legislative committees, and issuing legal opinions to legislators on statutory interpretation and constitutionality.

can study them. As time went on, they studied and became more educated. They started reading these things and interpreting them differently. There is no leeway. We are not allowed to change even a comma anymore. We can call the committee if it has not already been passed. They can change the bill, bring it up the next year, and tell them, “Look, this, this, and this can be interpreted this way, because when they go to court, they have these bills and this is what makes it legal.” The laws make them. So many things have had to be reintroduced. Even an amendment has to be put in. It has to go back downstairs and they have to approve it. We were unknowingly tampering with laws. If a smart politician wants something to get through, he can use a language that is so they hear it but do not understand it. It gets passed. All of a sudden there is a law doing exactly what you did not want it to do, but that is what he wanted. It was passed because he was smart enough to put it in such words that it got through. This is what was beginning to happen. We have to be very exact in making sure that the bill was original and the amendments did not change the word around. If there is ever any conflict, right away we call in the committee. They have to go over it again with a fine tooth comb.

**Patty:** How did you get involved in doing that?

**Regina:** I went to work first as just a clerk, a temporary job with the legislature.

**Patty:** Your kids were grown?

**Regina:** They were all in school. Sidney was a senior in high school when I first started. It has been . . . he was already in college when I first started. Mr. McWhorter had just come in to take George Stewart’s place. He had been Secretary of the Senate and was not very happy when he left. A lot of things got through. It was really a social place at the Capitol. Things were not nearly as legal as they are today. It is who you knew. When Governor [Carl] Sanders<sup>143</sup> was there, his wife brought in three or four young girls from her county. They were just put work somewhere. They did not do anything but sit at a table and go through books all day. They were put on the payroll. People would come back every year. “I was here last year, you know, whether you hired me or not.” Little by little, these things went away. Everything became more political, but it was not . . . It had to be legal. You had to be hired. You had to know what your job was. You had a certain office. You could not just come in. It was not a playground

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<sup>143</sup> Carl Edward Sanders (1925- ) served at the 74<sup>th</sup> governor of Georgia from 1963 to 1967.



anymore, even for the senators. The Henry Grady Hotel<sup>144</sup> was just notorious for just a good time place. That is all it was. It has become different.

Today, I would say at least 50 or 60 percent of the legislature are lawyers. When I first went to work, I do not think ten percent were lawyers. That does not make it better because you need some of everything. What it amounted to was that the more affluent people from the town or the county could afford to come to Atlanta, and have a good time. They could be a drugstore [owner], a banker, the hardware store [owner], a realtor, or anything that made money in the little town or the county. They came to Atlanta and spent the 45 days they were supposed to, which could stretch out to six months if they wanted it to. There would be 45 legal days. You have so many interim periods in between. They have to. They could never do it all in 40 days. They have to have meetings, come together, and argue to make it come together.

**Patty:** The sales meeting that you picked, did you have something in mind when you did that?

**Regina:** Mr. McWhorter asked me if I would try it. I did not know how good it was going to be. I did not like it at all. It meant staying ungodly hours. The first few years, it has changed. He has made a lot of changes. The legal aspect made it different. It was a playground. We could not leave until they had their last meeting at night so that we could put the schedule on their desks for the next morning.

**Patty:** Did you take minutes?

**Regina:** We were allowed to go to the meetings in the beginning. Now everybody can go. The Sunshine Law<sup>145</sup> makes it legal for you to walk into a meeting. They try to have it in places where nobody will ever find them. They do not want everybody at some of their meetings. The Sunshine Law does give everyone the right to go. We do not go to meetings at all. We do get the bills immediately when they are straight from a committee meeting, even though it has to be written five or ten times until it is finally ready and passes. We have to go over it many times to make sure it is the way it should be. The governor signs it. That is the legal bill.

**Patty:** You proofread the bills before they go to the governor and go into the state archives?

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<sup>144</sup> The Henry Grady Hotel was a 13-story hotel located at the corner of Peachtree Street and Cain St. (now Andrew Young Intl. Blvd.) in Atlanta from 1924-1974. It was named after Henry Grady, Georgia's most celebrated orator. It was built on the site of the third Georgia Governor's Mansion, previously the mansion of John H. James. After the Grady was demolished, the Westin Peachtree Plaza was built on the site.

<sup>145</sup> A law requiring certain proceedings of government agencies to be open or available to the public.

**Regina:** That is right.

**Patty:** Do you put them in the computer?

**Regina:** Today they are brought up from the computer. When they are finally finished they come from a computer. The Legislative Counsel presents them to us. That is changed on a regular typewriter because amendments have to be put in. Finally, it is put into a computer. It has been lost many times that way, too. That is the tragedy of the computers. The terminals came with a wrong command and it is wiped out. This has brought grief many times. It has caused us to have to go back . . . just one little wrong thing and it is lost. I do not have to tell you that. That is the terminals for you.

**Patty:** It is interesting because here you have done so much for Or VeShalom. You have really been the backbone of the synagogue.

**Regina:** No, truly not.

**Patty:** Why do you say that?

**Regina:** I have had a lot to do with the bazaar because I like it. I do not want it to be lost. It is changing so fast now. It is hard to get volunteers today. I see the necessity of it. The young people, the wife and husband [are both] working. It is so common. We are very lucky that we still have a lot of young people coming. It is a different kind of thing. They all take the job. I do not want it to sound the way it is going to sound. We had no problem the past two years . . . presidents, vice-presidents, secretaries, and everything, but they were all working. There is no one to help in the kitchen anymore. I saw this up until last year. I do not know what is going to be this year. Maybe it will change. [People] are not coming through to help us and do the work. The food is what is left traditionally. I look around and see the older women getting old. I am 68. I will be 70 soon. My crowd is still holding on to some of these, but how much longer? My daughter helped until very recently. Last year, she came maybe three or four times out of 18 or 20. Here is Corey [sp]. Come on in. This is my sister-in-law, Corrine Rousso. This is Patty Maziar.

**Patty:** So nice to meet you.

**Regina:** I do not know if you know Jack Maziar. Who else would she know? She would not know Howard.

<interview pauses, then resumes>

**Patty:** There really is this sense of devotion. I do not know why you do not want to take

more credit for what you have done.

**Regina:** I never finished telling you about the *fadas*, did I? It does not even fit here, but with the *fadas*, I knew what we did. I read in an old Spanish book that the godmother has to be a young girl. She should be a virgin. They get someone very young who has a living mother and father. It should never be the child of a widowed mother or widowed father so that this is a happy thing. She becomes the godmother for this first-born girl. It used to be very meaningful. The godmother was second to the parents. If there was ever a birthday, party, wedding, or anything years later, she counted more than the grandmother.

I do not remember hearing of a *fadas* now in 15 years, or more. These customs are dying out. They do not mean anything to anybody. If the parents are not Sephardic from both sides, it has no meaning. We had a lot of conflict of interest. The first one was my sister-in-law. When my nephew Danny was born . . . my father's name was Daniel. Her father had a fit. He went to Rabbi Epstein and told him, "There's no way they're going to name him for Daniel Rousso. His name is going to be Daniel Rousso, and his grandfather still living? I will not accept this under any circumstances." My brother said, "You either are or you're not." Anyway, he finally won out and nothing happened. My father was thrilled to death. He already had a Danny. My son Daniel was named for him. To have a Daniel Rousso was just too much. Her first daughter, Robin, was born. Her mother died when she was two years old, so they named her for her mother. Her mother was Rachel. The second daughter was born and they named her Sarina, for my mother. Everything ended up okay.

**Patty:** It is interesting. It is the only group that extends the recognition of women's role, which is not very often in Judaism. Even though women are exalted and their role is especially appreciated on *Shabbos*, women often take a back seat. They are supposed to sit separately. They are oftentimes the backbone, but do not get the recognition.

**Regina:** The most wonderful thing here is to name for the grandmother. If the mother of the child can name for her mother, just think of the feeling that she must have. It meant so much to her. Today, it is one of the many wonderful heritages that is going away. There is not anything we can do to stop it. Some of the smaller Sephardic communities, like in Seattle [Washington], have two very small synagogues. They say they are so old fashioned. They hold onto these things very dearly. There might be a little bit of tradition left. In Cape Town there is still a young community. They are still affluent and they still keep some of the traditions alive. In

New York, it is almost impossible. New York is such a big city. Even though the synagogue is very strict with the separate seating, they still adhere to wearing the top hat and cut away suit when they carry the *Torahs*, especially on the High Holy Days. It's such a big honor. This too shall pass . . . except the separate seating is very strict. They are suffering for one thing: young members. The people live so far today. It is so much easier to put your children in Hebrew school or learn for a *bar mitzvah* if you join a satellite [synagogue]. Why come to the synagogue except just once a year, on *Rosh Ha-Shanah*, to be with your mother and father, or *Yom Kippur*? That is what it has amounted to. If you do not have young people there every Saturday, you lose.

**Patty:** Do you think that, because women have had such a hard time gaining recognition in the more traditional kinds of roles, they feel that if they are going to get that kind of recognition, it has to be in the secular world?

**Regina:** We are losing more because women are going to work more. When they stayed in the synagogue, I do not think they resented it as much as today's working [women]. Women's lib[eration]<sup>146</sup> makes them resent more than anything. If that had not come into the picture, they weren't too unhappy, not wanting recognition. I do not think they wanted to be president of the synagogue, like is happening today in a lot of the synagogues. It has got a lot of headaches with it.

I think women had a much more wonderful role being the housewife so she was not exalted as a president. She was still the mother and the backbone of the synagogue. The best part of it was the playing part. The Sisterhood had a better time and took charge of the Hebrew school, where you were repaid in a lot more in many ways than having to haggle about the building, fixing the roof, the leaks, putting new kitchen in, and the membership. Women's lib has taken away so much. Today, I see why [women are] having to work, not because they need it financially. They are doing better than ever. They want more things. It is so much more costly. Children today cost a fortune. It is almost imperative that both members of the family have to work to get all these things. We were satisfied with so much less. A lot of the traditions are

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<sup>146</sup> The feminist movement, also known as women's liberation, women's lib, the women's movement, or feminism refers to a series of campaigns for reforms on issues such as equal pay, reproductive rights, domestic violence, maternity leave, women's suffrage, sexual harassment, and sexual violence. Feminism began in the western world in the late 19th century and has gone through three waves. First-wave feminism was oriented around the station of middle- or upper-class white women and involved suffrage and political equality. Second-wave feminism attempted to further combat social and cultural inequalities. Third-wave feminism is continuing to address financial, social and cultural inequalities.

dying. I know it is happening a lot. I see it here in Atlanta. I do not think that women wanted the exalted position in synagogue. My children tell me I ‘bury my head in the sand.’

**Patty:** What do they mean?

**Regina:** They tell me that I do not face reality when I tell them things like this. “Mama, you’re ‘Alice in Wonderland.’”<sup>147</sup> You don’t know what’s going on.” I want things to be like they were. I think they were happier for everybody. Even in the synagogue, and in our customs, they tell me it is impossible to do things like that. It is impossible because they do not have time for it. They do not make the time for it. When you are working, you do not have the time for it. I do not think you would have that much less if you did the volunteer work and took time away from [something else]. I think you would gain a lot more. The synagogues would get a lot more.

**Patty:** It sounds as though the hours that are put in created such a feeling of community and security . . .

**Regina:** . . . and family and warmth. It was just incredible. Some of the best days we have ever had were preparing for the bazaar. Five years ago, three years ago, if you came in here the month of July, we were already filling the freezers. They are going to start in August, but then they take off so much time for the holidays. The bazaar does not go as late as it used to. We used to go as late as the middle of December. We started selling food in July. People were filling their freezers for the holidays. Suppose it was in early September. You had to cook in July if you wanted to give everybody a chance to get everything. It’s gotten harder and harder. Nobody has the time. The people that are older, it is too much to come for three, four, or five months. We did actually work four and five months to put on this bazaar. It was fun. We came here. It was like a picnic. It was a party. You cooked, but you sat down and had lunch. It was the best time in the world. The people who still come love it when they first start coming. They do not want to start as early now. They cannot say no. When you start coming, it becomes like a habit and all of a sudden . . .

<interview pauses, then resumes>

**Regina:** . . . you just do not have time for other things. The young people today forget it.

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<sup>147</sup> This is a reference to the character, Alice, in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (commonly shortened to *Alice in Wonderland*). The book is an 1865 novel by English author Charles Lutwidge Dodgson under the pseudonym Lewis Carroll. It tells of a girl named Alice falling through a rabbit hole into a fantasy world populated by anthropomorphic creatures.

Maybe it will come back around. I do not know.

**Patty:** Some people feel that people are becoming more traditional.

**Regina:** We will wait and see.

**Patty:** The ‘Hippies’<sup>148</sup> and ‘Yuppies’<sup>149</sup> are becoming more traditional.

**Regina:** What I saw last year is an example. I said I was going to come and just get it started.

Ten or 11 years ago, when it was an every day job, my husband said, “Why don’t you go to work? Go to work, give them your salary at the end of every week, and at the end of the year you’ll be the biggest member of the synagogue.” He said, “You go there, and what have you got?” We used to have a lot of controversy if everybody did not get what they wanted. They would be mad. When the holidays came, we could not cook fast enough to make enough.

**Patty:** People would order food for the High Holy Days?

**Regina:** They wanted traditional dishes which nobody makes anymore. Corrine will attest to that.

<interview pauses, then resumes>

**Patty:** At this point, Mrs. Tourial needed to end the interview due to a prior engagement. We agreed that we had covered a lot of territory and would arrange to meet again if more information came to light.

<End Tape 4, Side 2>

**INTERVIEW ENDS**

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<sup>148</sup> A hippie is a member of a subculture that was originally a youth movement that started in the United States during the mid-1960s and spread to other countries around the world. The term came from the word ‘hipster’ and was initially used to describe beatniks who had moved into New York City’s Greenwich Village and San Francisco’s Haight-Ashbury district. Hippie fashion and values had a major effect on culture, influencing popular music, television, film, literature, and the arts. Since the 1960’s, many aspects of hippie culture have been assimilated by mainstream society.

<sup>149</sup> A yuppie (short for ‘young urban professional’ or ‘young upwardly-mobile professional’) is an acronym that came into use in the United States in the 1980’s referring to an educated adult who has a job that pays well and lives and works in or near a large city.