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ESTHER AND HERBERT TAYLOR
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ALABAMA JEWS**

MEMOIRIST: RABBI DAVID BAYLINSON
INTERVIEWER: SANDRA BERMAN
 RUTH EINSTEIN
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INTERVIEW BEGINS

<Begin Disk 1>

Sandra: Today is June 29, 2010. I'm with Rabbi David Baylinson, who has agreed to participate in the Herbert and Esther Taylor Oral History Project of the William Bremen Heritage Museum . . . I'd like to begin by first thanking you for being here. I really appreciate it. Second of all, I'd like to begin by asking you a little bit about your background [and] where you were born.

Rabbi Baylinson: [I was] born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. [I] got my BA degree from the University of Pennsylvania and was ordained at Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati in 1957.

Sandra: What led you to the rabbinate?

Rabbi Baylinson: Very interesting. I started University of Pennsylvania [Philadelphia, Pennsylvania] in the School of Architecture and found out I couldn't draw a straight line, so I went into the school of Fine Arts. Actually, my degree is a Bachelor of Arts in Fine Arts. But anyway, I was always interested in, in Judaism and was very active in youth groups. The woman who'd become my wife was a member of Rodeph Shalom in Philadelphia, and so I joined. It was really a young people's society . . . we were in college at the time. We had a young rabbi, Martin Katzenstein, of blessed memory. We had a dance, and my wife was dancing with Martin, the rabbi. I was dancing with his wife. At the end of it, my wife came back to me—then my fiancé—and said, "Martin asked me the strangest question." I said, "What was that?" He said, "How would you like to be married to a rabbi?" She said, "I knew he was happily married, so he

must have meant you.” I can’t call it an epiphany or, or anything like that, but at that moment . . . never having thought about it before . . . I knew I was going to go into the rabbinate. That’s where my destiny lay.

Sandra: Were you raised in a Reformed tradition?

Rabbi Baylinson: I was really raised in no tradition. My family was basically non-practicing. We observed *seder*¹ and went to Temple for the [High] Holy Days,² but that was it. There really no practice in my home. Jewishness, yes . . . *gefilte* fish³ and that stuff . . . but other than practice, no. Although my wife was a fourth generation Reformed Jew, but they were a practicing family. They lit candles Friday night,⁴ etc. . . . although mine wasn’t. So it was a little shock to my parents when I told them that I was going to pursue the rabbinate, because nobody in my family had done anything like it.

Sandra: Were they supportive?

Rabbi Baylinson: Mildly, mildly. My father was not a synagogue goer at all. [He] was very much opposed to organized religion. Although, for instance, on *Yom Kippur*,⁵ he sat with a prayer book and fasted, but he wouldn’t go to temple . . . wouldn’t go to synagogue. So he was really not for it 100 percent. His logic was . . . which I’ll never forget . . . if you really deserve to be a rabbi, then you will recognize that G-d gave you a gift of your hands to create, and so you wouldn’t be a rabbi. But he . . . afterwards he was very supportive, he was very supportive.

Sandra: So you went to Hebrew Union [College]⁶ in Cincinnati . . .

Rabbi Baylinson: Yes.

Sandra: . . . you mentioned earlier, when we were just talking before the interview . . . that as a student rabbi you went down to Anniston, Alabama.

¹ (Hebrew for “order”.) The ritual meal eaten at home on the first and second nights of Passover. The family meal is accompanied by the retelling of the story of the Israelites’ exodus from Egypt.

² The two High Holy Days are *Rosh Ha-Shanah* (New Year’s) and *Yom Kippur* (Day of Atonement).

³ *Gefilte* fish is an Ashkenazi Jewish dish made from a poached mixture of ground deboned fish, such as carp, whitefish or pike, which is typically eaten as an appetizer. They are popular on the Sabbath and holidays such as Passover, although they may be consumed throughout the year.

⁴ The Sabbath candles are lit by the eldest woman of the house no later than 18 minutes before sundown on Friday even (that is, before the Sabbath begins). After kindling the candles, she waives her hands over the flames times to welcome the Sabbath and covers her eyes with her hands.

⁵ (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).

⁶ The oldest extant Jewish seminary in the Americas and the main seminary for training rabbis, cantors and communal workers in Reform Judaism. It has campuses in Cincinnati, New York, Los Angeles and Jerusalem.

Rabbi Baylinson: Yes.

Sandra: How did that happen?

Rabbi Baylinson: We all have to have student rabbis in our third and fourth years . . . or approximately second and third year, I forget which. You draw lots and I got Anniston, Alabama. [I] had no experience with the South at all. This was my first experience with a southern congregation. Remember, this was in the Fifties when everything was segregated. It was a little difficult for me . . . I didn't quite understand it. But at the same time, it was their way of life. I had some scary experiences. I went up on a hill and watched a Ku Klux Klan⁷ meeting. I was petrified and left as soon as I could for fear they would look up and see this Jew sitting up there. I had an experience of going to two old maids [for] dinner. They sent the chauffeur. They called me up and said, "Please take a cab because the chauffeur doesn't have his cap." I said, "That really doesn't make any difference to me." The woman said, "Rabbi, do you think I would let you ride in a car?"—in those days the word was 'colored'—"with a colored man without his chauffeur's cap?" So I took a cab! But, these were my first understandings of what the segregated South was like.

Sandra: How big was the congregation in Anniston at the time?

Rabbi Baylinson: At that time, I guess, they had 75 families. They now have about 35. But they have maintained the synagogue. Temple Beth-El⁸ is the oldest building in Alabama still being used as a synagogue. So they have kept that going for all these years—from 1893 on.

Sandra: I'm very interested in your reactions to being all of a sudden immersed in southern culture. Did you discuss . . . I know you said that it was their way of life, but did you have any discussions with any of the congregants about that way of life when you got there?

Rabbi Baylinson: I had discussions and the answer always was, "This is our way of life and we are afraid to do anything about it." It was a lot of fear amongst the Jewish population because the Klan was not only anti-black, but anti-Catholic and anti-Jewish. They knew, as I

⁷ The Ku Klux Klan (or Knights of the Ku Klux Klan today) 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 the 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. It is still in existence. In the past it members dressed up in white robes and a pointed hat designed to hide their identity and to terrify.

⁸ Temple Beth-El was founded in 1907 and is a Conservative congregation. The current rabbi (2014) is Randall Konigsburg. On April 28, 1958, during the Civil Rights Era, dynamite was placed outside the synagogue but it failed to explode. The crime was never officially solved.

found out later in Montgomery [Alabama], that if you wrote a check to the NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People],⁹ the banks found out, and your business was boycotted. They had the same experiences, so they were very low key about anything. You have to understand, growing up in Philadelphia, I went to school with black people. I went to university with black people. I never knew any difference. Our senior prom . . . it wasn't segregated . . . that's the way it was. So it was a cultural shock to me. I would merely compare my upbringing with what was going on there to show them that I did not understand, but I didn't get up on a soap box.

Sandra: It was so soon really . . . only about 10 years, or 12 years after the end of World War II when racism . . . was really the cause of the destruction of European Jewry . . . did that affect the congregation at all? Did they see a relationship or a correlation between how the Jews of Europe had been treated and how the blacks were being treated in their community?

Rabbi Baylinson: Apparently not, because we had a number of families who escaped the Holocaust. Some of them in . . . I guess the earliest was 1938 or 1939 . . . and came to Anniston. Yet they didn't openly want to talk about what happened to them and what was happening to the black community. They weren't interested in talking about it, so it's very interesting. We have a *hanukiah*¹⁰ in the sanctuary of Temple Beth-El in Anniston that was in the synagogue where two of the members were married outside of Berlin that was destroyed in *Kristallnacht*.¹¹ Many years later, they found that the only thing remaining was the *hanukiah*. One of the members of Anniston brought it back and refurbished it. Let me tell you, when I first lit that *hanukiah* with

⁹ National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). An African-American civil rights organization in the United States. It was formed in 1909 and its mission is "to ensure the political, educational, social, and economic equality of rights of all persons and to eliminate racial hatred and racial discrimination."

¹⁰ A *hanukiah* (or *chanukiah*) is the proper term for the candelabra with nine branches that is lit during *Hanukkah*. Since *Hanukkah* lasts for eight days it permits the lighting of eight candles, one for each day, by the ninth candle. Generally, the candelabra used at *Hanukkah* is almost always called a *menorah*. However, the *menorah*, which has only seven branches, is an ancient symbol of the Jews which has become connected with *Hanukkah*. According to the *Talmud*, after the desecration of the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem, there was only enough pure oil left to fuel the eternal flame in the Temple for one day. Miraculously, the oil burned for eight days which was enough to make new pure oil. The *Talmud* states that it is prohibited to use a seven-branched *menorah* outside of the Temple so the *Hanukkah menorah (hanukiah)* has nine branches.

¹¹ On November 8 and 9, 1938, a state-sponsored nationwide pogrom was started by the Nazis. Across the country (and in Austria) Jewish synagogues, homes and businesses were looted and burned, Jews were attacked on the streets and 91 were killed. Thousands of Jewish men were sent to concentration camps for several weeks and released only when they agreed to leave the country as soon as possible. The Jews were made to pay for the damages to their premises. The pogrom was called '*Kristallnacht*,' which means 'Night of Broken Glass,' because of all the damage done to Jewish shop windows.

Greta Kemp,¹² who was an escapee from the Holocaust, sitting in the congregation, chills . . . just chills . . . I almost couldn't get the words out. It stands there still.

Sandra: Do you remember some of the families . . . I'm sure you still know them . . . you're still going down to Anniston . . . who are some of the founding families whose descendants might still be in Anniston?

Rabbi Baylinson: The Kemp family is still in Anniston. Greta and Rudy have died but their children are still in Anniston. The Caro family,¹³ which was related to the Kemp family . . . the last Caro died two years ago. But there's also the Springer family who were descendants of others who were founders of the Anniston congregation. So there are a number. As a matter of fact the—the young boy whose *bar mitzvah*¹⁴ I officiated at—told me yesterday that it was 55 years ago. He's a grandfather now. But the Kemp family . . . what used to be 'Kempenich' . . . they changed their name . . . they are still descendants there.

Sandra: What did they do for a living . . . the Kemps?

Rabbi Baylinson: The mainstay was . . . they have an iron something factory.¹⁵ But they had some lawyers, some doctors and proprietors, a jeweler, a women's dress shop and things like that. So when I went there, of course, I would . . . Saturday morning have to travel back and forth and visit all the shopkeepers, etc.

Sandra: How were you received by the congregation when as a junior rabbi in Anniston? Were they happy to have you or did they feel that you were too "northern" for them?

¹² The Kemp family lived in Emmerich, Germany where they owned the largest department store in town. Greta, born Margaret Sybilla Nathan, was the daughter of Rudy Kempenich (Kemp). The Kempenich family's assets were seized by the Germans and some fled Germany for the United States, where they settled in Anniston, Georgia. They crossed through Holland and France, arriving in December of 1937. They were among 16 survivors of the Kempenich family that made it to the United States; the remainder of the family—some 27 others—perished in the Holocaust.

¹³ Alfred Caro was born in Poland in 1911. The Caro family moved to Berlin, Germany where his father started a butcher shop. After the Nazis came to power, Alfred was sent to Sachsenhausen concentration camp where he did hard labor under brutal conditions. He was released after six weeks after which he and his family sought to leave Germany. Alfred finally got a visa to go to Colombia in South America. Alfred arrived in Colombia with nothing. He worked in gold mines in the jungle. Later, he moved to Bogota where he became very successful eventually owning a restaurant and butcher shop. In 1952, Alfred joined in sister, Norma, who had immigrated to New York in the United States. There he met his future wife, Helen, and her son, Allen. They married and moved to her hometown of Anniston, Alabama where he opened Caro's Restaurant.

¹⁴ (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.

¹⁵ Rudy Kempenich (now Kemp) founded TapeCraft Corporaion factory that made zippers, clothing and book bindings.

Rabbi Baylinson: All they knew were student rabbis. Rabbi [Irving] Bloom who shares it with me is from Vidalia, Georgia so . . . but no, they received me very well. We got to be very good friends. Unfortunately, the few times I went back before I started going on Friday night, were for funerals. They knew I knew their people and that I was closest. So we've lost . . . Friday night I went through the *yahrzeit*¹⁶ list. I realized that these were people that I knew well. Some of whom I conducted their funerals for. It's difficult. They're dwindling. They're really . . . I only know of one couple who has a child—two-and-one-half years old—and is expecting her second child. That's the only children that we have left.

Sandra: Is there any kind of . . . what do they do for religious education? If there's only a couple of children there, do they go anywhere else?

Rabbi Baylinson: Some of them used to go to Birmingham [Alabama], but not anymore. This little girl . . . I gave her mother books and things like that. That's where she'll get her education, is strictly through books.

Sandra: Now it's time to move on a little further in your life. You finished your . . . what year did you graduate from Hebrew Union?

Rabbi Baylinson: Nineteen fifty-seven. From there, I went as an assistant rabbi to Temple Beth El in Detroit [Michigan]. [I] was there three-and-one-half years. Then [I] went to Morristown, New Jersey. While in Morristown, I was a member of the Mayor's Council in Human Relations, because that was in 1960 . . . 1962. The schools were just being integrated. We had to work with the community on integration. That's . . . I can't say . . . can I go back a minute?

Sandra: Sure.

Rabbi Baylinson: I can't say that's where I started my civil rights movement. I started in Cincinnati [Ohio] as a student. We had a restaurant that was totally segregated. We had a black minister studying as a Christian fellow whose name is [Reverend Dr. G.] Murray Branch, who ended up being the minister of the Martin Luther King Dexter Avenue Baptist Church [now Dexter Avenue King Memorial Baptist Church—Montgomery, Alabama]!¹⁷ But anyway we

¹⁶ ('Anniversary' in Hebrew.) Each year the anniversary of the death of a relative is observed by lighting a special *yahrzeit* candle and reciting the *Kaddish*. Memorial services for the dead are also held during the High Holy Days and the Festivals.

¹⁷ Martin Luther King, Jr. was pastor of this church from 1954 to 1960 and it is named in his memory. The Montgomery bus boycott was first planned in its basement. As of 1974 it was designated a National Historic Landmark.

took Murray down to the Busy Bee. Of course, they wouldn't seat him, so we got on the phone and called as many students as we can. That was the first sit-in that I ever . . . I understand a year later it was integrating. We also . . . there was an amusement park, Coney Island,¹⁸ in Cincinnati which was segregated. We called them up and said we were going to bring a black person, and we want to let you know . . . we're going to . . . try to barge in. But if you don't admit them, then we are going to picket you. They turned it over to the Shriners¹⁹ so that if you didn't have a Shriner ticket, you don't . . . so we did picket. One of my most embarrassing experiences was . . . I was picketing with a black lady next to me. It was a hot, sunny day. Without thinking I said to her, "At least one thing, we can get a good tan." She was very gracious. She said, "Colored people tan too." She was very gracious. That's really where I started my civil rights work. From Morristown . . . I really wasn't happy there . . . one of my professors came to New York. I had lunch with him, and he said, "David, if you want to make a move, I've got an idea. They're looking for liberal rabbis in England. Would you . . . do you think you might want to go? They want an assistant rabbi in London." I said, "Yes, that'd be marvelous." My children at that time were like four and six . . . perfect. They had already filled the position in London at St. Johns Wood liberal synagogue, but I got a call from a member of the Brighton Hove liberal Jewish synagogue. His president heard that I was interested [and] would I come to Brighton Hove? I said, "Yes, I'd be delighted." So we packed up the children, and we sailed to England. I was there three years. My third child was born in England. She was a dual citizen for a while. It was a marvelous experience . . . a wonderful experience. Their liberal Judaism was a little different than our liberal Judaism. It was required for me to wear a *kippah*.²⁰ It wasn't just a *kippah*. It was a square hat with a big pompom on the top. They didn't chant *Kol Nidre*²¹ because they didn't . . . they thought, no, that's not right. But I introduced *Kol Nidre*. They didn't celebrate *Purim*²² because they said it didn't have any historicity, so I instituted *Purim*. The crazy

¹⁸ Coney Island is a small amusement park and waterpark. It is not to be confused with the Coney Island in Brooklyn, New York. Cincinnati's Coney Island was opened in 1867 and still exists today.

¹⁹ The Ancient Arabic Order of the Nobles of the Mystic Shrine, commonly known as Shriners, was established in 1870 and is part of the Freemasons. Now called Shriners International, it has nearly 200 chapters around the world. It is best known for the Shriners Hospitals for Children it administers and the red fezzes that the members wear.

²⁰ 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.

²¹ *Kol Nidre* is an Aramaic declaration recited in the synagogue before the beginning of the evening service on every *Yom Kippur*, the Day of Atonement.

²² 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*

American got away with an awful lot . . . but it was a marvelous experience. We were invited to a garden party at [Buckingham] Palace.²³ We were at Royal Ascot in the Royal enclosure.²⁴ Those things I'll never forget. Good people though . . . good people. I enjoyed it. Then we . . . unfortunately towards the end of our second year there my wife's parents came over to visit. Our daughter was three months old at the time. My mother-in-law . . . in perfect health, never saw anybody healthier . . . the day before they were supposed to leave, had a severe heart attack and died two days later in the hospital in Hove. So Janice being an only child decided we'd better go back to America . . . it was time. So I looked at many congregations. The one thing my wife and I decided, absolutely, definitely, we would not go South. I had written the Placement Commission, "We will not go South. Don't send me any southern congregations." But we had become friends with someone born and educated in Montgomery, Alabama. She always used to say, "When Rabbi [Eugene] Blachschleger²⁵ retires, you would love Montgomery." Unfortunately, Rabbi Blachschleger died suddenly in January of 1965. I got a call from my friends in Princeton telling me that. Out of deference to the woman who grew up there, I said, "I'll go visit Montgomery." I visited five other congregations and flew back. I remember my wife met me at Heathrow [Airport in London]. I said, "We're in trouble." She said, "What's the problem?" I said, "I've been to five congregations. The only one I really liked was Montgomery, Alabama." She said, "Knowing how we both feel, if that's the way you feel, let's go." So in June of 1965 . . . actually in March of 1965 . . . one week after the Selma to Montgomery march,²⁶ I was interviewed and came to Montgomery, Alabama in June of 1965.

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.

²³ Buckingham Palace has been the official London resident of Britain's royal family since 1837.

²⁴ The Ascot Racecourse is a famous English racecourse, located in the small town of Ascot, Berkshire, used for thoroughbred horse racing. The course is closely associated with the British Royal Family, being approximately 6 miles from Windsor Castle.

²⁵ Rabbi Blachschleger was the rabbi at Temple Beth Or from 1933 to his death in January 1965.

²⁶ The Selma to Montgomery marches were three marches in 1965 that marked the political and emotional peak of the American civil rights movement. They grew out of the voting rights movement in Selma, Alabama. The first march took place on March 7, 1965 and became known as "Bloody Sunday" when 600 civil rights marchers were attacked by state and local police with billy clubs and tear gas. The second march on the following Tuesday, resulted in 2,500 protesters turning around after trying to cross the Edmund Pettus Bridge. The third march started March 16. The marchers averaged 10 miles per day and was protected by 2,000 soldiers of the U.S. Army and 1,900 members of the Alabama National Guard under Federal command. They arrived in Montgomery on March 24 and assembled at the Capitol on March 25.

Sandra: That's a really interesting story . . . I'm just . . . so many questions . . . was the reason that you and your wife had said . . . what was the reason that you and your wife said, "No southern congregations?"

Rabbi Baylinson: The reason was that we both thought we could not live under the segregation laws of the South. It was repugnant to us. That's why we said we couldn't go South. But then I realized that somehow, somehow I could do something. That plus the fact that at that time, the congregation was a Classic Reform congregation. That was where I was going. [I] have left it since, but that's where I was going at that time. I felt that we were a good match . . . that there was so much opportunity in Montgomery to work with the people and see what I could do as far as the segregation is concerned. Of course, I came at a good time because that was pretty much the end of segregation. The schools were desegregated at that time. Judge Frank Johnson,²⁷ who was a federal judge living in Montgomery, was the one who issued an edict for the desegregation of the schools. His mother's house was bombed. His house was bombed. He needed bodyguards all the time, but he did achieve it. He appointed a commission, the name of which escapes me now, and asked me to be on that commission. Our job was to go into the public schools and see that integration was working and sit in the classroom, etc. That was a very interesting time . . . very interesting time. There was also a "white flight" out of the public schools. The number of private schools grew up at that time, and so integration worked, but it didn't.

Sandra: I want to just go back a little bit and, to your interview process. Were you asked about your feelings towards segregation during the interview process?

Rabbi Baylinson: The first thing they asked was, "What is this Mayor's Commission on Human Relations?" That was the first thing. Then . . . I told them that one of the reasons that I didn't want to come South was I didn't think I could live in a segregated society . . . that I was opposed to it. But I said I would tread carefully because I haven't lived here. You have and I have a lot of questions. I don't have a lot of answers, but I will have eventually, so you'll have to give me time. They accepted that. I did have lots of opportunities. One of the articles that you

²⁷ Frank Minis Johnson, Jr. (1918-1999) was a United States Federal judge who made a number of landmark civil rights rulings that helped end segregation in the South. Among other rulings he ordered the racial integration of the public transportation system in Montgomery, Alabama (after Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat); upheld black voting rights; required Alabama to reapportion state legislative districts more fairly, mandated the first statewide desegregation of public schools, and ruled that blacks could serve on juries. As a result, crosses were burned on his lawn and his mother's house was bombed because it was thought that it was his home. It is not clear whether the Judge's own home was bombed.

will read was that the next to last group to desegregate were the ministers, believe it or not. The doctors were the last. I couldn't understand. There was a White Ministerial Association and a Black Ministerial Alliance. When I became president in 1968 . . . I guess it was of the white one . . . I said, "We're going to integrate." I had a wonderful vice-president who was a Lutheran minister. We set out to integrate the groups which, without modesty, I will tell you to me is one of the best things that I ever did and achieved. It was terribly difficult. The large white churches fought us tooth and nail with, "They want to be by themselves." That sort of argument. At one meeting [at] which I presided, that was . . . just, just horrible. Of course, it was the Jewish . . . it wasn't bad enough . . . but it was the Jewish rabbi . . . Anyway, the next morning, I called up my vice-president, the Lutheran minister, Elden,²⁸ said, "Who is this?" I said, "It's David." He said, "David, you're better than Our Lord." I said, "Elden, what are you talking about?" He said, "It took Our Lord three days to rise after his crucifixion. It only took you one."

Sandra: That's great.

Rabbi Baylinson: So you know how bad it was . . . but mission accomplished. Although we did not have the support . . . of the First Baptist Church or the First Presbyterian Church, we did have the support of the Methodists, and we had the support of the Episcopalians. They were very supportive.

Sandra: When did the Baptists and the Presbyterians come onboard?

Rabbi Baylinson: The Presbyterians . . . one's U.S.A.²⁹ and one's something else. The conservative Presbyterians never came on board, but the liberal Presbyterians did. A few of the Baptist Churches did, although first Baptist Church . . . never. They would not support us.

Sandra: Can you describe what your first couple months were like as the new rabbi of this congregation?

Rabbi Baylinson: You have to understand, I followed a man who had been there for 33 years, and who died young. He was a pillar of the community. He was a pillar of the Temple. Therefore, this young whippersnapper . . . although I was 37 years old, I still looked 17 . . . what was he going to do? Little by little, they accepted some of the changes. For instance, Hebrew was not taught in the religious school at all, and the rabbi was not part of the board, he was not

²⁸ This might be Elden K. Walter.

²⁹ The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is a mainline Protestant Christian denomination in the United States. Part of the Reformed tradition, it is the largest Presbyterian denomination in the United States and is known for its relatively tolerant stance on doctrine.

invited to sit on the board. But anyway I went to the board and told them that I thought Hebrew should be in the curriculum. They okayed that so we started teaching Hebrew in the fourth grade. *Bar mitzvah* or *bat mitzvah*³⁰ was not part of their ritual. Let's see . . . my son was born . . . anyway my son was about 11 years old. Some of the members of Temple came to me and said they were going to resign from the Temple unless they could have a *bar mitzvah* for their sons. We didn't have *bat mitzvah* yet. So I went to the board. I said, "We're going to lose all these people. I think we should institute *bar mitzvah*." Now, I have to tell you that I was opposed to *bar mitzvah* because mine was a sham. Even at 13, I knew it was a sham. I was guilty all that time. So I was opposed to *bar mitzvah*. But I decided that I could make it real and it would be okay. As it happened, my son was the first one eligible to study for two years. Of course, everybody thought I put it in because of him, but he was the first *bar mitzvah* at the Temple. I don't know how much time we have . . .

Sandra: We have plenty. Can you . . .

Rabbi Baylinson: Anyway, first *bar mitzvah* at the Temple and it was my son. We got through the service and as I was giving the priestly benediction, I noticed some people were brushing something off of their shoulders, but I didn't know what it was. All of a sudden out of the two corners of the *bimah*³¹ termites swarmed. They swarmed and went to the ceiling . . . blacked out the entire sanctuary. When termites swarm, they die, so they dropped onto the carpet. There was two inches of dead termites on the carpet of the sanctuary. You can imagine those who were opposed to *bar mitzvah* . . . "Aha! We told you! A plague upon you!" It's something no one will ever forget.

Sandra: What led you, schooled in Classical Reform Judaism at Hebrew Union, to move more toward the middle?

Rabbi Baylinson: I found . . . especially with my children . . . when I came to Montgomery, my eldest was eight. My son was six and we had a newborn, three months old . . . four months old . . . when we came. I realized they needed more. They needed more ritual in the home. They needed more Judaica in the religious school. It was a slow move for me, but I moved away from

³⁰ (Hebrew for 'daughter of commandment.') A rite of passage for Jewish girls aged 12 years and one day according to her Hebrew birthday. She is now duty bound to keep the commandments. Synagogue ceremonies are held for *bat mitzvah* girls in Reform and Conservative communities as it has not won the universal approval of Orthodox rabbis. Usually a number of girls are called up together, often on a Sunday rather than a Saturday, and the girls read selections of other texts rather than from the *Torah*.

³¹ Hebrew for 'platform.' The *bimah* is a raised structure in the synagogue from which the *Torah* is read and from which prayers are led.

strict Classical Judaism little by little, because I felt there was a need for something more spiritual. Reform Judaism came about as a push toward reason. It was fine in 1875 . . . that was fine, but by 1965, reason wasn't excitable anymore. I found a tremendous lack of spiritualism within the congregation, within the service, within their practice. So therefore, I tried to integrate little things. [I] realized, of course, that every other Reform congregation in the world or at least in the country, had moved away from Classical Reform. Our children in [the] youth group were coming back and saying, "Hey, we didn't know what was going on." Then camp . . . our regional camp is Camp Coleman which is just above [Camp] Barney [Medintz] . . . the White County residents call it . . . the 'upper Jew camp' and the 'lower Jew camp'. Barney's the 'lower Jew camp' . . . Coleman's the 'upper Jew camp.' There the children were getting so much more. I used to go for four weeks as a rabbi up to Camp Coleman and found out that kids were eating this up . . . they were eating it up. They were bringing it back into the congregation. So it was a slow move. Even to this day, we have some diehard Classical Reform Jews who don't like any of the change that was made. I just heard . . . one young man . . . he must be 55 or 60 now . . . just resigned from the Temple because he said he couldn't accept the changes that were made. [He] couldn't get any spiritual feeling from the service, which shocked me.

Sandra: So did most of the congregants move slowly along with you?

Rabbi Baylinson: Yes, the majority did because we had more young people coming in at that time . . . coming into the congregation, young marrieds, etc. They were very anxious to find something within the Temple. We still had the group which I call the "Establishment" . . . who didn't like it and many times did not come to services who fought the . . . when we moved from the *Union Prayer Book* to *Gates of Prayer*, they fought that tooth and nail. But we got there. Then for the [High] Holy Days, when we moved to *Gates of Repentance* . . . we had six months of study groups, etc. I don't know if you're familiar with the *Gates of Repentance*, but at one point there's an alphabetical litany of sins. It ends with 'xenophobia'.³² One of the members of the committee . . . said to me, "What is xenophobia?" I said, "Sam, it's the fear of new prayer books" and let it go at that. Finally . . . now they're using *Mishkan T'filah*, the brand new prayer book. They've come a long way.

Sandra: How many families were at Beth Or when you got there?

³² Xenophobia is defined as an unreasonable fear or hatred of foreigners or strangers or of that which is foreign or strange.

Rabbi Baylinson: When I got there, we had about 270 some families.

Sandra: Today . . . how many?

Rabbi Baylinson: Today, there is 160, maybe. Young people didn't come back. Two of the people who were very instrumental in bringing young people . . . one was the president of KinderCare and, of course, that went sour.³³ The other was Aaron Aronov of Aronov Realty. When Aaron died, his two sons didn't follow his example of bringing these young Jewish people in. So it's just gotten to be less and less and less and less.

Sandra: I want to get back to when you first arrived. You arrived in a very tumultuous time for Alabama, with the Selma to Montgomery marches. Were you there for the very first march and Bloody Sunday?

Rabbi Baylinson: No . . .

Sandra: Were you there yet?

Rabbi Baylinson: . . . I wasn't there for the first or the second . . .

Sandra: . . . second . . .

Rabbi Baylinson: . . . I came after the second. I do know . . . that there were some of the congregation who housed the marchers secretly. Even their family didn't know because they were afraid of repercussions.

Sandra: Do you remember their names . . . the family members who did that . . . families who did that?

Rabbi Baylinson: Dorothy Lubman [sp] was one of them. That's the only one I remember. But I do remember Gloria Schwartz [sp] who went to a meeting of blacks and whites at a church to help move along integration. The [Ku Klux] Klan came and took all the license plates and found out who was there. They burned a cross on Gloria's lawn. It was an experience that really took her years to get over. So we had those who supported integration and those who supported it very quietly. I remember, for instance, Max Baum who sent a check, I think, to the NAACP . . . I think it was Max . . . of course, the bankers found out. That was bad news for him. Whoever did something, paid for it. Therefore, the shopkeepers were quiet because they knew that would be the end of it for them. But I also will say that they accepted the changes that were coming. For instance, we always had a Ministerial Institute. When we integrated the ministers . . . there

³³ One of the teachers at a facility of KinderCare was accused of sexually molesting the children in his care in 1994. It blew up into a big scandal. Ultimately, the case was settled confidentially and the files sealed. KinderCare survived and is still in existence today (2012).

would be black ministers coming to the luncheon. Our lady served them without a blink of an eye and [we] were very happy to have them. There was never any discussion to me, “What are you going to do if they come?” [It was] just taken for granted . . . once it was integrated . . . that they would be there. They were very accepting. We did have a mixed marriage of a black man and a white woman whose children came to Sunday school. Then they disappeared. I always thought that maybe it was a test case as to whether we would accept them, but we did. The young people were accepting and so it took time . . . it took time. A number of the families sent their children to the new Montgomery Academy³⁴ and not to the public schools. I will say that our children and two other families were about the only ones whose children stayed in public school through high school graduation.

Sandra: That’s amazing. Do you remember if any of the congregants were involved with the White Citizens’ Councils?³⁵

Rabbi Baylinson: To my knowledge, no. If there were, I didn’t know about it. But I don’t think so . . . I don’t think so.

Sandra: How did you . . .

<tape is interrupted, then resumes>

Sandra: I think we were talking about how you counseled your congregants regarding civil rights: what would be safe for them to do, what would be not safe for them to do. How did you go about that?

Rabbi Baylinson: I think my main stress was that Judaism tells us that we must not act ill toward anyone . . . since integration has come that they were responsible to accepting not only integration but accepting blacks, etc. Very . . . it might have been subtly. I don’t remember it all, but I know it was an underlying message when I could. But the Jewish population was very law abiding. It was now the law and, once it was the law, they were willing to go along with it. I won’t say that immediately they invited black people to their home, but we did. When my daughter had her *bat mitzvah*, we did have some black people in the congregation. I remember when I knew that everything was okay . . . [it was] when these two young black men, bent down

³⁴ A non-sectarian independent day school. It was founded in 1959 by a group of prominent citizens in Montgomery, Alabama during the period when desegregation of public schools was being hotly debated. The Academy now accepts students without regard to race or religion.

³⁵ White Citizens’ Council (WCC) was an American white supremacist organization formed on July 11, 1954. After 1956, it was known as the Citizens’ Councils of America. It had about 60,000 members, mostly in the South, and was opposed to racial integration during the 1950’s and 1960’s when it retaliated with economic boycotts and strong intimidation against black activists, including depriving them of jobs. By the 1970’s its influence had faded.

to kiss my daughter congratulations on her *bat mitzvah* and nobody batted an eye. So I knew we have arrived . . . we have arrived. My neighbors didn't object to our having black people . . . However, back in Cincinnati; we were living upstairs in a small house. I got a call from the landlord . . . you have to understand, we were paying \$50 a month including all utilities. I got a call from the landlord, "The people downstairs said that you were entertaining" . . . in those days the word was 'colored' . . . "that you're entertaining colored people." I said, "Yes, that's right. Why?" [The landlord told me,] "They said that they would not stay in the same house as anybody who entertained colored people." My heart sank. I said, "What do you want me to do?" This wonderful man said, "I don't want you to do anything. I told them I would break the lease anytime they were ready and they could move out." That was a sigh of relief, but that was the way it was.

Sandra: When you first got there, to Montgomery, how pervasive was the fear within the Jewish community of Klan activities . . . of doing the wrong thing? Could you sense it?

Rabbi Baylinson: Yes, it was there. Then we had . . . you'll excuse me, I can't think of it . . . Admiral . . . anyway this man who was going around saying that there's a Jewish Communist conspiracy in town . . . when fluoride³⁶ was coming in . . . that there was a Jewish Communist [conspiracy] . . . it was all our fault, etc. I wish I could think of his name. He was a retired admiral and his whole family was like that. He named names and it was difficult for those people. So yes, I could sense the fear . . . absolutely . . . and the fear of, not doing too much. Although, when I was appointed to Judge [Frank] Johnson's commission nobody said a word . . . nobody told me I shouldn't do it. When I integrated the ministers, no one said, "I wish you hadn't done that." They were very accepting of anything that I did. I guess it was all right for me to do it. What they never said was, "[It's] a reflection on us or it's a reflection on the Temple." I never got that.

Sandra: Were you worried that there would be repercussions because of your activities . . . against the Temple?

³⁶ Fluoride is supposed to prevent tooth decay and was introduced into drinking water in the United States the 1940's and 1950's. The alleged "conspiracy" arises from those who argue that it causes serious health problems and was about undermining the general health of the public. During the 'Red Scare' it was supposedly done by the Communists, which, of course, as everyone knew, were all Jews. The 'Admiral' was Sir Barry Domvile, founder of a British pro-Nazi association, who coined the title "Judmas" for the alleged Judeo-Masonic conspiracy. Domvile alleged that the Jews were taking over the world, apparently using fluoride.

Rabbi Baylinson: Yes, I was because I can tell you that back in 1933, I guess it was . . . the Scottsboro Boys . . . do you know the case, [the] Scottsboro Boys?³⁷

Sandra: Yes.

Rabbi Baylinson: Rabbi [Benjamin] Goldstein was the rabbi of the Temple at that time. He was a member of the NAACP. He raised money to bring the New York lawyers down to Scottsboro to defend the boys. A group of prominent white citizens came to the leaders of the Temple and said, “Either you get rid of him or we will not be responsible for the Temple or for your homes.” Rabbi Goldstein, being the man that he was, said, “I will not subject you to this. I’ll leave.” He went to New York. I knew that there was a history of this sort of thing, but at the same time, I knew what I had to do. There actually were not a lot of repercussions about it because I had already established myself as a leader in the community. I was respected in the community and therefore I was accepted for whatever I did.

Sandra: Did you happen to witness that final march [from Selma to Montgomery]? Were you there when . . . ?

Rabbi Baylinson: No, I wasn’t. There was an interim rabbi who did go downtown towards the end of the march, but no. But I will tell you, every time I went over that Edmund Pettus Bridge³⁸ I started to shake, even though it was much later. But still the experience of walking over that bridge put chills down my spine. Another interesting anecdote by the way . . . Selma did not have a rabbi at the time. I was asked to conduct a funeral for one of the Jewish people in Selma. They were bringing the casket into the cemetery and I looked and I thought to myself, “My G-d, there is a movie star as one of the pall bearers.” I couldn’t place him but it’s a movie star or a television star or something. All of a sudden I realized it was one of the men who stopped the marchers on Bloody Sunday³⁹ . . . one of the police sheriffs or something. He was a

³⁷ The date is actually 1931 when nine black teenaged boys were accused of rape. They came to be known as the “Scottsboro Boys.” The boys were riding on a freight train with several white boys and two white girls. A fight ensued and the boys were accused of rape by the two white girls. The trial lasted all of 1-1/2 days and all were sentenced to death, with the exception of one 12-year-old boy. They appealed and the case was returned to a lower court with a change of venue. The next trial was held in Decatur, Alabama. One of the alleged rape victims admitted that they had made up the story, but they were all found guilty again. In a third trial, the charges were dropped for four of the 9 defendants. The rest were sentences to life. Clarence Norris, the oldest defendant, and the only one condemned to death was pardoned by George Wallace in 1976.

³⁸ The Edmund Pettus Bridge crosses the Alabama River in Selma, Alabama. It is famous as the site of the conflict of “Bloody Sunday” on March 7, 1965, when armed officers attacked peaceful civil rights demonstrators attempting to march to the state capital of Alabama, Montgomery.

³⁹ March 7, 1965. Peaceful civil rights marchers attempted to cross the river at Selma, Alabama on a march to Birmingham, Alabama were attacked and beaten by armed police. The day came to be known as “Bloody Sunday.”

pallbearer for one of the Jewish members of Selma. I could not believe it. But I was scared to death. So these are some of the experiences that I had.

Sandra: Did you ever have reservations about sending your children to the public schools when everybody else was going to the private schools.

Rabbi Baylinson: No. I didn't have any reservations at all. They got a good education in the public schools. All four of them went through high school in the public schools and did very well, so no, I had no reservations whatsoever. Those children who went to the private schools did come to Sunday school with our kids. I have to say that socially, our kids were not accepted as much as I would have liked them to be. Besides being the Rabbi's children, they didn't go to school with the others. But eventually, as my eldest daughter reached high school, many of the kids left the private schools and came to the public schools in high school. Then they were good friends.

Sandra: Was there a white country club in Montgomery that . . . ?

Rabbi Baylinson: The Montgomery Country Club was all white and all Christian, completely. The Standard Club, which started out with the German Jews, and then little by little some of the non-German Jews, became members, but at first they were segregated . . . the German Jews from the Russian Jews . . . East European Jews. Also we have a Sephardic⁴⁰ congregation in Montgomery.⁴¹ They came to our Sunday school because they didn't have enough for their own Sunday school. So they were very much integrated into our Sunday school. They became members of the Standard Club, which doesn't exist anymore. Some of the Jews in the last five years, I guess, were finally invited to become members of the Montgomery Country Club . . . which I was appalled, but that's another story.

Sandra: Explain why you were appalled.

Rabbi Baylinson: First of all, it was only the wealthiest of the Jews who were invited to come. I still think it was because the Montgomery Country Club needed their money. I felt—as many felt—that after having being denied membership for so long, I wouldn't want to become a member of that. One of our members intermarried a girl whose father was President of the Montgomery Country Club. They were not allowed to be members because he was Jewish. So, I

⁴⁰ The term refers to descendants of the Jews who lived in the Iberian Peninsula before their expulsion from Spain in 1492. It refers to those who use a Sephardic style of liturgy, or who keep the customs and traditions that originated in the Iberian Peninsula. The Sephardim use a traditional language called Judeo-Spanish, or Ladino.

⁴¹ Founded in 1912, Congregation Etz Ahayem. In 2001 it merged with the conservative congregation Agudath Israel and sold its building. It is now called Temple Etz Ahayem.

just felt you don't do things like this but it's become fairly commonplace now. Because of the Standard Club everybody moved out east and a country club [was] established out there. So many of the people joined that one in the area where a lot of Jewish people lived.

Sandra: You mentioned earlier that your wife . . . can you say what your wife's name is for the . . .

Rabbi Baylinson: Janice . . . J-A-N-I-C-E . . . maiden name Kohl, K-O-H-L.

Sandra: . . . she taught in the Montgomery public school system?

Rabbi Baylinson: She taught in the Montgomery public school system from 1968 and retired after 20 years of teaching. She started out in an all black school, team teaching with a black teacher whom she adores to this day. [The black teacher] was a tremendous help to her because Janice really didn't know how to discipline these black children who came out of the projects. Miss Glover taught her [that] you don't yell at these kids because people yell at them all the time and they're used to yelling. You have to help them very quietly. She learned everything from Miss Glover. She was wonderful. [Janice] taught for a number of years in that school. Then she got her Masters in reading from Auburn University. [She] was asked to be a resource teacher in another all black school in which she was basically trying to teach teachers what to do and work with some of the kids who were way behind. After seven years . . . she didn't like that . . . she went to Brubaker School, which was a really, true integrated school and taught first grade for maybe eight or nine years at Brubaker. So she had wonderful experiences there. I remember black people coming up to her in grocery stores saying, "I was thrilled! My son read the menu! You've done so much for our children." One young man . . . I'll never forget him . . . he always had difficulty, but she pulled him through . . . we were at the mall one time, and he came up to her. He said, "Miss Baylinson" . . . and said who he was and [then] he said, "I want you to know [that] I'm married, I have two children, I have a good job. Thank you." She just cried buckets knowing that she had had that influence on these kids.

Sandra: Was she accepted by the Sisterhood and the congregation's wives very readily?

Rabbi Baylinson: Yes. When we were in England, there was no rabbi there, but there was a minister . . . a lay minister . . . and his widow remained. She was as unkind to my wife as any woman could be. She made her life miserable . . . it was, "When I was the minister's wife, etc. etc." Of course, she had no children, [and] we had three . . . so when my wife heard that Rabbi

Blachschleger's wife was still there, she said, "I don't want to go." Anyway, Mrs. Blachschleger was a saint. I knew immediately who she was . . . she always did wedding rehearsals for her husband for 30 some years. The first wedding . . . I asked her if she would do the rehearsal. She came into my study, and said, "David, what do you want me to do?" I said, "Bernice, you've been doing this for 30 some years." She said, "No, I've been doing it for Gene for 31 years. Now you tell me the way you want me to do it." I knew already I had . . . so Janice invited Bernice for Friday night *Shabbat* [Hebrew: Sabbath] dinner once, twice, three times. [Janice] finally said, "Bernice, you have an open invitation." She was grandmother to our children. She never went to the hospital before checking with me. "Let me know when you go so I don't go before you." She was the most wonderful, wonderful woman that G-d ever created. So it was difficult for Janice in that she taught and Miss Blachschleger never did. But [Janice] also attended everything she could. So yes, I can tell you how well she's accepted. There are many sanctuaries and social halls named after rabbis, but in Montgomery it's the "Rabbi David and Janice Baylinson Social Hall." So it gives you an idea of how they accepted her.

Sandra: That's wonderful. Another thing . . . another kind of cultural difference I think between some northern Jews and southern Reform Jews is a lot of southern Reform Jews sort of celebrated Christmas. How was that with the congregation in Montgomery. How did you react to that?

Rabbi Baylinson: I preached against it at *Hanukkah*⁴² time. Many of the prominent members did have Christmas trees. They knew not to invite me to their homes at that time. My mother came to visit one Christmas time. One of the members came up to her and said, "Zippy" . . . my mother's name was 'Zephora' . . . called her 'Zippy' . . . "Zippy, you've got to come to my house. My Christmas tree is more beautiful than ever." My mother who has not . . . never been shy said, "Virginia, I have so many Christian friends whom I can go to see Christmas trees, I'll skip yours." She was . . . this woman was devastated but little by little it stopped. The next generation no longer had it, so I did have an affect there. It was very difficult for me. As a matter of fact, we were driving through one of the sections where a lot of Jewish people lived and all of a sudden my daughter . . . I guess she was eight years old . . . said to me, "Dad, are all

⁴² (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 rulers 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.

the kids in our Sunday school Jewish?" I said, "Yes, Ilene. [sp]" "Oh." A little farther she said, "You must have pointed out the wrong house." I said, "What are you talking about?" She said, "You told me as we passed that house that Lynn lived there, but there was a Christmas tree in the window, so she can't be Jewish." She had never seen this before. I had to explain to her that some kids did. But the next generation . . . very few of them. I don't know if anyone has them, but they knew that I was very much against it, so they wouldn't invite me at that time.

Sandra: Did you have any special relationships . . . who do you recall that you had a really close relationship . . . a congregant and some of the families that were really impacted upon you when you arrived there?

Rabbi Baylinson: Well, I think the families really were the Robert Weil family, the Herbert Jimmy Levy family, and the Schloss family. These were all old, old, old families from . . . most of them either . . . president or past president of the congregation. We were very close. As much as some of them objected to some of the changes that I made, we always remained good friends . . . always remained good friends. We had a group of contemporaries that we were quite friendly with who were the generation . . . it was a large, large group. At that time . . . [in our] mid-thirties . . . we were socially very friendly . . . all those young marrieds. Our children were the same age, etc. Our closest friend had children and the children were all confirmed.⁴³ Their youngest daughter, Denise, was in my son's confirmation class. At the age of 19, Denise . . . visiting in Birmingham . . . suddenly died. They never found out why, except that her first cousin years later died in the same way. So there was something in the genes of that family. Denise's parents . . . every *Hanukkah*, Denise would knock on the door with a tin of chocolate chip cookies for me, which her mother continued. Joan and Vic Hanan became our closest, dearest friends throughout the years. Vic died a year ago . . . April I guess . . . it was very traumatic for all of us, but we still remain close to his wife. We still remain very close to a number of the young people in the congregation. Unfortunately, in the past three months we've been back twice for funerals. This is the way it is. It's an older congregation and we know that we're going to have to go back and forth for funerals many times now, which is sad. But we're so close to the families that we wouldn't not go.

⁴³ A coming of age ritual that originated in the Reform movement which scorned the idea that at 13 years of age a child was an adult. They replaced bar and bat mitzvah with a confirmation ceremony at about age 16 to 18. In some Conservative synagogues the confirmation concept has been adopted as a way to continue and child's Jewish education and involvement for a few more years.

Sandra: Your children, how do you feel about . . . what growing up in, in Montgomery did for them?

Rabbi Baylinson: I think it made them strong. As far as their Jewishness is concerned, they're all very positive about it. But my eldest daughter who's going to be 54 and is single . . . joined the congregation even though she lived in Washington, D.C. because she felt a Baylinson should be a member of the congregation. She still is a member of the congregation, but she doesn't practice her Judaism except she's home for *seder* every year. My second child Peter, who lives in San Diego now . . . after high school, he went to Israel and lived in a *kibbutz*⁴⁴ for 14 years. That's his Judaism . . . *kibbutz* Judaism . . . he doesn't practice anything. But he's single and he comes home sometimes for the holidays . . . always for Passover.⁴⁵ My third child lives here in Atlanta, Linda. She's married to Bert Levy [sp], and they have two sons, Max and Sam, who are very active members of the Temple. Max had his *bar mitzvah* at the Temple, and Sam will have his next September. That's why we're here in Atlanta. My youngest son . . . who is 44 . . . he's married and he has two sons: a nine year old and a seven year old. They're active in their Temple and in the home. Their eldest, Gordy, who is nine-years-old, is severely autistic and this puts a tremendous burden upon them. My son at first could not accept it. He had a terrible time accepting it, though we diagnosed it when he was a year old. The pediatrician basically diagnosed it when he was 18 months old. So he's been getting help since 18 months which is good. He has begun to speak when prodded. If you say to him, "Gordy, say . . . "he'll say it, but he will not initiate speech and [is] socially very much removed. But I give my kids credit, they moved to Potomac, Maryland because that's where they were told had the best public schools for individual help. Gordy goes to a public school in a special classroom with an aide. It's wonderful . . . so he has all that help. He comes home and has therapy. So they're doing well as far as that's concerned.

Sandra: Did anybody take up sort of the civil rights bastion that they were raised with?

⁴⁴ A *kibbutz* is a collective community in Israel that was traditionally based on agriculture, although today they are also based on industrial plants and high-tech enterprises

⁴⁵ (Hebrew: *Pesach*) 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.

Rabbi Baylinson: I don't remember to be honest with you whether . . . by the time they were in school, things had quieted down so much that there really wasn't a Civil Rights Movement when they were old enough . . .

Sandra: . . . to get it?

Rabbi Baylinson: . . . to understand it.

Sandra: . . . or any other kind of protest sort of?

Rabbi Baylinson: Ilene had a contract with public health . . . one of her projects was she had to organize a program against AIDS, and work very closely with people. She had a program . . . she actually did a film that was put into these places where people go for 25 cents or something.⁴⁶ They had to see this film first. Off the record, I remember her saying to me, "Dad, I'm telling them not to do things I never knew they did." But she marched in gay pride parades and all . . . because . . . that was her work. But the younger kids . . . it was already settled with them . . . they didn't know the difference between black and white. My son Evan's best friend was a black kid. So they didn't know about that.

Sandra: I read in your bio[graphy] that you gave the invocation at the first National Martin Luther King celebration, was that correct?

Rabbi Baylinson: At the Martin Luther King Baptist Church, yes. It so happened we were at a ministerial meeting and this black man was sitting opposite me looking at me and I'm looking at him. Finally, we both said, "How do we know you?" It was Murray Branch . . . it goes back to Cincinnati in the Fifties. He had become the minister of the Martin Luther King Church [now Dexter Avenue King Memorial Baptist Church], so that's how I got to do that. I was also active in the Montgomery Aids Outreach Program. I was a founder of the Montgomery Hospice . . . the Hospice of Montgomery. I was the founder of the Goodwill Industries of the Lighthouse. I was president of Family Guidance Center and Brentwood Center for kids who had to be taken from their homes and live in the Center. I was very active in the Community Council and United Way and, of course, the Jewish Federation of Montgomery. So I did a lot of work. I also taught at Huntingdon College which is a Methodist college. I taught there for maybe 30 years, and ended up being Dean of the Fine Arts and Humanities School of Huntington Methodist College.

Sandra: Did you teach religion?

⁴⁶ A peep show.

Rabbi Baylinson: I taught Judaica basically except when they had their courses in the liberal arts seminar which was all kinds of different subjects. I taught there for a couple of years but basically I taught Judaica. I taught a course on the Holocaust every year . . . one semester . . . which was really the best attended course that I had. Then a lot of biblical and history of Judaism . . . things such as that. I was awarded the [Julia Lightfoot] Sellers Award [for Excellence in Teaching] for being the faculty that both juniors and seniors felt got the most out of their courses. I also had got an award from the Daughters of the American Revolution, believe it or not, who had a special award at Huntingdon for contributing to the community and to the college. One of the professors had an award for top teachers. I got that award. The ministers of Montgomery were furious. “Why is this rabbi getting all the awards? What’s the matter with our ministers? Why can’t they get any?” But, it happened. As a matter of fact, Huntingdon is named after the Countess of Huntingdon,⁴⁷ who was a break-off from the Wesleyan movement⁴⁸ in England . . . the Methodist church. She broke off because the Wesleyan movement was giving out sermons for the ministers and she wanted to have a free pulpit. We had a Countess of Huntingdon Church in Brighton [England], believe it or not. So when the present Countess of Huntingdon came to Huntingdon on their 125th anniversary, I got a call from the president. He said, “Are you coming to the luncheon?” I said, “No.” He said, “Yes, you are.” I said, “Why?” He said, “Because you’re the only person we found who ever preached to the Countess of Huntingdon Church. We have to show you off.” So, I had some good experiences. But I trained a lot of Methodist ministers. A lot of them were at First Methodist Church and others throughout Alabama. They all said that every Methodist minister needs a rabbi, so I felt good about that. I’m blowing my own horn but okay . . .

Sandra: No, it’s wonderful. I know you go back to Montgomery frequently. How would you assess the changes in Montgomery over the last . . . you got there in 1965 . . . how’s the city changed?

Rabbi Baylinson: The city itself has changed tremendously. The biggest movement is out east and whereas no one would ever think . . . we have a bypass going around Montgomery . . . no

⁴⁷ Selina Hastings, Countess of Huntingdon (1707-1791) was an English religious leader who played a prominent part in the religious revival of the eighteenth century and the Methodist movement in England and Wales, and has left a Christian denomination (Countess of Huntingdon’s Connexion) in England and Sierra Leone.

⁴⁸ Wesleyanism is a movement of Protestant Christians who seek to follow the methods or theology of the eighteenth century evangelical reformers, John Wesley and his brother Charles Wesley. It stresses the life of Christian holiness: stressing love of God and one’s neighbors.

one would ever think of going to the other side of the bypass. Now your biggest settlements are on the other side of the bypass, and many . . . probably . . . maybe the majority of Jewish families, I don't know, live out east now. We moved out there . . . so tremendous . . . The city itself is suffering . . . the downtown, like all downtowns, is suffering. They're trying to do things, but they're not doing it. I will say as far as the Temple is concerned, it is much more traditional than in 1965. The rabbi wears a *kippah*, which never had been done before in Temple Beth Or in Montgomery, Alabama. They have a student cantor [*chazzan*]⁴⁹ that comes once a month, whereas I only had a choir and cantorial soloist . . . so the Temple has changed quite a bit, too. But it's much smaller, unfortunately. The Sunday school . . . which I predicted never would happen . . . the religious schools are combined with the Conservative congregation. The Sephardic congregation merged with the Conservative congregation. They wanted to merge with us, but they had *yahrzeit*⁵⁰ plaques. There never had been *yahrzeit* plaques at Temple Beth Or. They said they wouldn't put them up. So they went over to the Conservative, which was terrible . . . but you still have that little bit. So my parent's *yahrzeit* plaques are in Anniston.

Sandra: There's a photograph in some of the items you brought today of [you] with Governor George Wallace.⁵¹ Did you have occasion to meet him very often? What were your impressions of him . . . ?

Rabbi Baylinson: George Wallace was a consummate politician. [He] stood on the Capitol steps one time and cried, "Segregation now, segregation forever!" When integration came, he courted the blacks . . . totally, totally different person. One thing I learned about George Wallace was he was a very bright, well-read person. He played the country bumpkin to get votes, but that

⁴⁹ The *chazzan* (cantor) is the official in charge of music or chants and leads liturgical prayer and chanting in the synagogue.

⁵⁰ 'Anniversary' in Hebrew. Each year the anniversary of the death of a relative is observed by lighting a special *yahrzeit* candle and reciting the *Kaddish*. Memorial services for the dead are also held during the High Holy Days and the Festivals.

⁵¹ George Wallace (1919-1998) was the 45th governor of Alabama, serving four nonconsecutive terms: 1963-1967, 1971-1979 and 1983-1987. He also ran for the presidency unsuccessfully. In 1972 he was left paralyzed after an assassination attempt and was in a wheelchair for the remainder of his life. During the Civil Rights Era he was noted for his Southern populist and segregationist attitudes. Wallace's most remembered utterance was: "In the name of the greatest people that have ever trod this earth, I draw the line in the dust and toss the gauntlet before the feet of tyranny, and I say segregation now, segregation tomorrow, segregation forever." He tried to stop desegregation in schools by physically standing in the way of black students at several universities in 1963. Federal marshals and the Alabama National Guard under federal command forced him to step aside. He later renounced these views at the end of his life.

wasn't the real George Wallace. We had a group of Rotary⁵² students coming from Scotland. I took them to meet George Wallace. He discussed with them history of the [American] Revolution and of Britain and the World War II. I was agape. I was amazed about this man . . . at how knowledgeable he was. So he had so many sides to him . . . [one of] which was, at one time, a very evil side. Then he came along and recanted much of what had happened. So I was very impressed with him. I knew his wife, Lurleen, well. We intermingled at a lot of different things. There was a woman who was the Director of the Jewish Montgomery Standard Club for many, many years. Then she went to work at the mansion. When she died, Lurleen called me up, and said, "I know how close she was to the Jewish community. I would appreciate it if you would say some prayers at her funeral." Which was really something coming out of Lurleen.

Sandra: Why did you decide to retire?

Rabbi Baylinson: I hit 65 for one reason and, to be honest with you, the nitty-gritty of being a rabbi was getting to me. I was beginning to resent some of it. I was beginning to resent some of the pettiness that goes on. I was beginning to resent some of the time people expected of me. I decided I'm not going to officiate with less than all of my being. It's time to go, it's time to go. I figured, go while you're on a high and that's when I retired, although I stayed there for 10 years. So really I wasn't retired because, "You've got to co-officiate at my wedding," . . . "You have to be there for my son's *bar mitzvah*," . . . "You'll give the eulogy, won't you, because you knew him better than . . ." So really I was like an assistant rabbi, which is another reason why I left Montgomery because it got to the point where I didn't want to be assistant rabbi any more. I felt I was being taken advantage of. That's when we decided to come to Atlanta.

Sandra: We're glad to have you. I don't know if I've missed anything?

Ruth: I was wondering whether you could speak a little more about Anniston and Montgomery during the Civil Rights Era . . . what you saw of it, and whether . . . there was a difference between Jews who maybe were merchants or professionals . . . how much they wanted to be involved in the movement or whether they saw themselves as simply being on the edge or outside . . . what the relationship was . . .

Rabbi Baylinson: In both . . . as I can remember in Anniston which goes back to 1956 . . . which is a long time ago . . . they did not want to be active in the movement. That thing was true

⁵² International service organization whose stated purpose is to bring together business and professional leaders in order to provide humanitarian services, encourage high ethical standards in all vocations, and help build goodwill and peace in the world. It is a secular organization with about 1.2 million members worldwide.

in Montgomery. They wanted to be on the sidelines. If they did anything, it was *sub rosa* [secretly] . . . it was never outright.

Ruth: What did you do that was . . .

Sandra: He already said that.

Rabbi Baylinson: There wasn't much I could do other than do my own thing. But I didn't feel that it was right for me to pull these people into something that was going to jeopardize their lives and the lives of their children. That's not the right thing to do. You have to do it quietly and little by little by little. Those who tried to be radical didn't get anything done basically and only made enemies. Those northern rabbis⁵³ who came down and marched didn't understand. The Temple here [in Atlanta] was bombed when Rabbi [Jacob] Rothschild spoke out.⁵⁴ In Mississippi, the Temple was bombed because the rabbi spoke out.⁵⁵ I wasn't going to have my Temple bombed, I'll be honest with you. But that's what happened. Rabbi Rothschild, to his credit, was outspoken. He tells a wonderful story of Martin Luther King [Jr.] and his wife [Coretta Scott King] coming to his house for dinner. They were a little late for dinner and Martin Luther King said to Rabbi Rothschild, "I had to stop a few houses down to ask for directions, but that's all right, I told them we were coming to serve." But they were very close, they were very close.

Sandra: Did you ever meet [Martin Luther] King [Jr.]?

Rabbi Baylinson: No.

Sandra: Martin Luther King.

⁵³ In 1963 as Birmingham struggled in the throes of the Civil Rights era, Martin Luther King Jr. made pleas to the Birmingham clergy, including rabbis, to support his marches. When the Jewish rabbis counseled patience and moderation and asked him to wait for desegregation laws to take effect, King called them out on their perceived passivity in a "Letter from a Birmingham Jail." The letter gained national attention and a few weeks later a group of 19 conservative rabbis from the North, outraged by the images they saw on the TV of black protestors being beaten, arrived in Birmingham. They didn't tell anyone in the Jewish community they were coming, which angered the rabbis and many Jews in Birmingham. After talking with King in the Birmingham jail, they toured black churches making speeches of support. Then they left. The whole episode appeared high-handed to the Birmingham Jewish community and they feared an antisemitic backlash from the KKK.

⁵⁴ The Temple on Peachtree Street in Atlanta, Georgia was bombed in the early morning hours of October 12, 1958. About 50 sticks of dynamite were planted near the building and tore a huge hole in the wall. No one was injured in the bombing as it was during the night. Rabbi Jacob Rothschild was an outspoken advocate of civil rights and integration and friend of Martin Luther King Jr. Five men associated with the National States' Rights Party, a white separatist group, were tried and acquitted in the bombing.

⁵⁵ Congregation Beth Israel in Meridian, Mississippi. The rabbi was Milton Schlager. On May 28, 1968 fifteen sticks of dynamite were planted by Thomas Tarrants and Danny Joe Hawkins, members of the Ku Klux Klan. The blast knocked down walls and caved in the roof. Tarrants was eventually arrested, tried, convicted and sentenced to 30 years in prison (for a series of crimes). He only served eight years before he was released, after which he became a born again Christian and as of 1992 was training missionaries in North Carolina.

Rabbi Baylinson: But I was close to Murray Branch. As a matter of fact, when he retired I spoke at his retirement, so I had a number of occasions to be at the Martin Luther King Dexter Avenue Baptist Church. I felt good about that, and I was accepted by them.

Sandra: In retrospect, do you wish there was anything that you could have done differently?

Rabbi Baylinson: Yes, I wish I had probably . . . I know I could have done more probably as far as civil rights was concerned . . . maybe guiding the congregation . . . maybe I didn't do enough there. I regret that, but I did what I thought I could and did the best that I could at the time. I wasn't a radical as far as things were concerned, but I think in my own quiet way, people will tell you I wasn't so quiet. I got things done. I did get things done. I was a respected member of the community. When I retired completely, the mayor spoke at my retirement and one of the judges spoke at my retirement, so I made a mark in Montgomery . . . I made a mark in Montgomery. I was very active with the Shakespeare Festival Theater. I was on the board of the theater. I remember when they were doing *Merchant of Venice*, I got a call, "Come talk to us."⁵⁶ I went to a rehearsal for the *Merchant of Venice* and made a few suggestions. But they did a great deal of study of it. There were those in my congregation who were opposed to it, but Shylock has the best lines of all in the entire production. "Give it to him, give it to him." So it went over fine. It didn't add to any antisemitism or anything.

Sandra: Do you miss your life in Montgomery?

Rabbi Baylinson: I miss our dear friends, yes, but I'm very happy here in Atlanta. We've made some good friends here in Atlanta, some of whom we knew before. Yes, a friendship of 40 years is different than a friendship of three years, and yes, I do miss that. My wife and I both miss that, but we're glad we're here in Atlanta. We're very happy here.

Sandra: think on that note we'll conclude unless there is anything that I have not touched upon that you can think of before we close. Any other . . . I know what I wanted to ask you. You mentioned earlier in the interview that you went up to watch a Klan march or Klan

⁵⁶ The reason a rabbi might be called to talk to the cast of *The Merchant of Venice* is because one of the main characters is a Jew called "Shylock." "Shylock" has become synonymous with a "loan shark," who loans money at exorbitant rates. In the play, Shylock agrees to lend money to Bassanio on the credit of Antonio, Shylock's Christian rival. Shylock, suspicious of Antonio, sets the security as a pound of Antonio's flesh. When Bassanio's investments fail, Shylock demands his pound of flesh—literally. He wants revenge on Antonio, in part, because his daughter has eloped from his house with Antonio's friend Lorenzo and converted to Christianity. Critics today still argue over the apparent antisemitism in the play.

cross burning rally. How did you even know about it and how did you . . . what possessed you to do that?

Rabbi Baylinson: A 16-year-old in the congregation heard there was going to be one and said, “Rabbi, do you want to go?” I said, “Yes.” So we snuck up this hill and down in the valley there they were burning a cross with their white hoods and the whole bit. It was scary, it was scary.

Sandra: Was that the only time you saw the Klan march?

Rabbi Baylinson: That’s the only time I saw the Klan march, yes. That was it.

Sandra: Did you know anybody in Montgomery who was actively in the Klan?

Rabbi Baylinson: I think I must have, but I don’t recall now. I think . . . I certainly knew some people whose names I don’t remember now . . . who were in the White Citizen’s Council. Of course, they were anti-black but some of their best friends were Jews . . . that sort of thing. I did have one other interesting experience. I don’t know if it’s relevant to anything. But I told you about Judge Frank Johnson, who was a federal judge. He had an adopted son named ‘Johnny’ who went to the Academy with many of the kids in the Temple. He had a very troubled life and used to come to me and talk with me many, many, many times. Unfortunately, Johnny committed suicide when he was about 23 years old. I got a call from a friend of Judge Johnson. He said, “Judge Johnson wants you to do Johnny’s funeral.” I said, “Pardon me?” He said, “Judge Johnson wants you to do Johnny’s funeral. Would you please go over and see him?” So I did. Judge Johnson said to me, “Johnny once said to me that you were the only minister he had any respect for and therefore would you please do his funeral.” I did and saw Judge Johnson many times after that and his wife as well. Both unfortunately now, Judge Johnson, I think, was riddled with Alzheimer’s.⁵⁷ A horrible end of his life. But I did see his wife a few times. That was something that meant a lot to me . . . meant a great deal.

Sandra: Thank you very much. This was really, truly a pleasure. You gave us a lot of new insight into what that time period was like and what it was like in Montgomery, Alabama during the Sixties. Thank you.

INTERVIEW ENDS

<End Disk 1>

⁵⁷ Alzheimer’s Disease is a progressive neurologic disease of the brain leading to irreversible loss of intellectual abilities, including memory and reason, which become severe enough to impede social or occupational function.

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