

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

**MEMOIRIST:** ROSE LIBOWSKY KLEIN  
**INTERVIEWER:** JOEL LOWENSTEIN  
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**INTERVIEW BEGINS**

<Begin Tape 1, Side 1>

**Joel:** This is Joel Lowenstein interviewing Rose Klein on October 24, 1990, for the Jewish Oral History Project of Atlanta, co-sponsored by American Jewish Committee, Atlanta Jewish Federation, and National Council of Jewish Women. This is Tape Number One, nine-thirty, Wednesday morning. Rose, I would love for you to start at the beginning and tell me how you got to Atlanta [Georgia] where you came from, and a little bit about your parents and your background

**Rose:** I'd be glad to. My father came from Russia, a city called Brinza<sup>1</sup> [now Brînza, Moldova] which has been eliminated, it's not there anymore. He got here around 1904, 1905, sometime. He was a teacher there. He was a socialist. He had to run away from Russia, so he came to this country and then brought my mother here. I think they were in New York a short time before they came directly down to Atlanta, where they got married by Rabbi [Tobias] Geffen,<sup>2</sup> the old Rabbi Geffen.

**Joel:** You know what year that was?

**Rose:** Nineteen . . . it would have to be in 1913 or 1912, around there, because they were . . . it had to be around that time. I have three brothers, and three of us were born right here in Atlanta.

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<sup>1</sup> Brînza is a village in Cahul District, Moldova (in Bessarabia, Russia prior to World War II) that was established in 1630.

<sup>2</sup> Rabbi Tobias Geffen (1870-1970) was an Orthodox rabbi and leader of 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. Rabbi Geffen and his wife Sara had four sons and four daughters: Joel, Samuel, Louis, Abraham, Lottie, Bessie, Annette, and Helen.

I was born at the old Piedmont Hospital<sup>3</sup> in 1920. I was born on October 27, 1920. When I was nine months old, my parents decided to go back to New York for business reasons, and we stayed there about 15 years.

**Joel:** What business were they in?

**Rose:** My father had a garage and a warehouse type [building] where he kept Linde Air Products,<sup>4</sup> the oxygen tanks and things. My mother was from a family of kosher butchers, so she opened up a kosher butcher store in New York and so did all her family. They all settled there. We had one aunt that had settled here, and they were in the grocery business. My parents were in the grocery business here, before they even got married here, and they went to New York and came back. We came back here in 1936, where I entered Girls' High School<sup>5</sup> here in Atlanta. My real early youth in New York, I didn't like, so I used to come here every summer to Atlanta.

**Joel:** To visit?

**Rose:** Yes, I liked it. Then we moved back here permanently in 1936, my three brothers, one brother that was born in New York, and we settled here. Now my father was one of the original organizers of the Workmen's Circle<sup>6</sup> better known as the *Arbeiter* Ring. The translation is Workmen's Circle. This was a fraternity for people, laborers that worked. There were no unions, and they needed something to get the people from the unions to be organized. These were all refugees from some part of Eastern Europe.

**Joel:** What was your mother's maiden name?

**Rose:** My mother's maiden name was Sarah Rosen. R-O-S-E-N.

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<sup>3</sup> Piedmont Atlanta Hospital is located at 1968 Peachtree Road, Atlanta, Georgia. Piedmont was established in 1905 as the Piedmont Sanitarium in the former mansion of Charles Thomas Swift at the northwest corner of Capitol and Crumley streets in the then-affluent Washington-Rawson neighborhood. The name was changed to Piedmont Hospital and eventually the hospital took up an entire square block. The Washington-Rawson neighborhood was razed in the early 1960's to make way for Atlanta-Fulton County Stadium and its parking lots.

<sup>4</sup> Linde Air Products, now known as the Linde Group, is a German multinational company that was founded in 1879 by Carl Von Linde. It is the world's largest industrial gas company (2017). A manufacturer of compressed gases, industrial and medical gases, and welding equipment, it has been a part of Union Carbide and Carbon Corporation since 1917.

<sup>5</sup> Girls' High School was one of seven schools that were 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>6</sup> Workmen's Circle, or *Der Arbeiter* Ring, is a Yiddish language-oriented American-Jewish organization committed to social justice, Jewish community and Ashkenazi culture. It provides old age homes for its aging members, as well as schools, camps, affordable health insurance and programs of concerts, lectures and holiday celebrations. It was founded in 1900 and was strongly socialist politically. It has moved more to the right on the American political spectrum in modern times.

**Joel:** And your father?

**Rose:** My father was Joseph Libowsky.<sup>7</sup> L-I-B-O-W-S-K-Y. My father was a big socialist, and was a very liberal man. He and three others from Atlanta organized the Workmen's Circle here. There was a Mr. M. J. Merlin<sup>8</sup> from Atlanta, also a refugee, and Mr. Russ, Morris Russ<sup>9</sup> and then they had a big following. These were people that had so much in common. They all spoke Yiddish. They all had business. They helped each other. Whenever they had family problems or business problems, they got together. The Workmen's Circle became a national organization all over the country. In the big cities where it warranted the need for people that came from Eastern Europe who had no one here, as to the American style of living. They did not want their children to forget Yiddish.<sup>10</sup>

**Joel:** So it was just for the Jews?

**Rose:** It was only a Jewish organization.

**Joel:** It was just a Jewish organization?

**Rose:** Yes. I went to *Arbeiter Ring Shule*,<sup>11</sup> the old Workmen's Circle school in New York as a little girl, and my brothers went to it here, where you were taught Yiddish. You never forgot your Yiddish. I speak Yiddish very fluently. I write and read Yiddish. All my brothers do. I feel now that most people want to go back and learn more about it.

**Joel:** Absolutely.

**Rose:** The only problem that happened after all this, the new generation, the second generation evidently did not want their children, or the children were told not to speak Yiddish. We had our grandparents so we spoke Yiddish. The Workmen's Circle is still in existence today. Not as affluent and not as busy, but they still have their needs. Now then they started organizing young English speaking Workmen's Circle and young people of the younger age. They were the

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<sup>7</sup> Joseph Libowsky (1887-1956) was a businessman and the owner of Libowsky Grocery located at 482 Decatur Street in Atlanta, Georgia.

<sup>8</sup> Mitchell (also known as Michel) Julius "M.J." Merlin (1885-1969) was an Atlanta grocer who was born in Dubrovno in the Russian Empire (now Dubrowna, Belarus). He was one of the founding members of the Arbeiter Ring (Workmen's Circle) in Atlanta, Georgia.

<sup>9</sup> Morris Russ (1883-1944), a native of Russia, was a belt manufacturer in Atlanta, Georgia. He was one of the founding members of the Arbeiter Ring (Workmen's Circle) in Atlanta, Georgia.

<sup>10</sup> Yiddish is the common historical language of Ashkenazi Jews from Central and Eastern Europe. It is heavily Germanic based but uses the Hebrew alphabet. The language was spoken or understood as a common tongue for many European Jews up until the middle of the twentieth century. Yiddish is a reference to a person's language and not necessarily their ethnicity, religion, or culture.

<sup>11</sup> *Shule* is a Yiddish word meaning "school."

children of the original organizers.

**Joel:** Do we still have Workmen's Circle?

**Rose:** We still have a Workmen's Circle here, and it's under the jurisdiction of Joe Jacobs,<sup>12</sup> the attorney. I do not know how many belong, but they were big in Miami. They are still big now in New York. They bring all the Yiddish shows that travel around the country. They were for the workingman. That's why it was called a Workmen's Circle. It was needed. They helped in the sweat shops. They helped to organize better labor conditions. They fought for the laborer.

**Joel:** Much the same as a union today.

**Rose:** That's right. They were part of like the interest of the union. The unions are not needed as much today, but they were needed then.

**Joel:** Was there a great charge to belong to this or was it a . . .

**Rose:** No, it was a nominal fee. You had certain benefits that went with it. In other words, the Workmen's Circle had their own cemetery. They had their own doctors. They had connections with clinics. You could go to a Workmen's Circle clinic and it was very cheap for these people. Now, they have Workmen's Circle retiring homes, nursing homes, those that are still being kept up. But we were . . . how shall I put it? Politically there was a misconception there. You had the socialist and the communist, the left wing and the right wing. The worst part of it is that families were split because of this. Some of them believed in the socialistic ideal of freedom without force, and the left wingers believed in fighting. So families were actually split up by this thing. My father was a very, very, liberal man, and very much interested in freedom.

**Joel:** What about your brothers?

**Rose:** My oldest brother was very, very, active.

**Joel:** What are their names?

**Rose:** It's Irving Libowsky,<sup>13</sup> who is retired now and lives in Pompano Beach [Florida]. My

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<sup>12</sup> Joseph Jacobs (1908-1998), a graduate of the Atlanta Law School, was a labor lawyer in Atlanta, Georgia and the southern United States. He was a union organizer during the 1934 Textile Strike and the 1936 Lakewood-General Motors Strike. He served as an officer and member of the Workmen's Circle for more than fifty years. He was the first recipient of the Organized Labor and Workmen's Circle Award Banquet award in 1969. He was elected three times to the Democratic National Convention and as chairman of the Fulton county Democratic Party.

<sup>13</sup> Irving Libowsky (1914-1998) was a native of Atlanta. He was the owner of Gale City Table, a dinette manufacturing firm in Atlanta, renamed Duchess Furniture when it merged with National Service Industries. A World War II veteran who served in the Navy, he attended Brooklyn College and Brooklyn Law School in New York. He was a Jewish War Veterans post commander in Atlanta, president of the Zionist Organization of America (ZOA) Atlanta district, and president of the Atlanta Jewish Board of Education. When he retired to Pompano Beach,

second brother is deceased, and my youngest brother is Ben . . .

**Joel:** What was his name, the second boy?

**Rose:** Robert Libowsky,<sup>14</sup> better known as ‘Rube.’ My youngest brother, Ben Libowsky,<sup>15</sup> was born in New York. He also went to Workmen's Circle. But he didn't get involved as a youth as much because at 18 he went into the service. That's when we were in World War II.<sup>16</sup> You see, the Workmen's Circle was looked at, you remember when there . . . I don't know if you would remember, but there were subversive groups that Washington was trying to pick out because their ideas were more on the socialistic idea. Workmen's Circle was cleared of all these things that people were talking about as being a subversive group. Any time you mentioned Workmen's Circle, the ears perked up as Communist. This was not . . . until it was fully, fully, investigated, and cleared. Mr. Joe Jacobs still takes care of the cemetery that we have here in Atlanta. We have a cemetery out at Greenwood<sup>17</sup> it's called the Workmen's Circle Cemetery. All my father and mother and most of the older ones . . .

**Joel:** Is your brother Rube here also?

**Rose:** My brother . . .

**Joel:** Is he in the cemetery?

**Rose:** . . . is buried here too, right.

**Joel:** Did the boys come to Atlanta also? They lived . . .

**Rose:** We all came back.

**Joel:** Everybody came back.

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Florida, he was known as a philanthropist and co-founder of Broward County's largest adult day-care and feeding program, a precursor of the Daniel D. Cantor Senior Center in Sunrise, Florida. He was awarded the JNF Tree of Life Award and was the first inductee into the North Broward County Jewish Federation Hall of Fame.

<sup>14</sup> Robert “Rube” Libowsky (1916-1986) was the owner of Rube’s Market in Atlanta.

<sup>15</sup> Bernard “Ben” Libowsky (1924-1999) was born in Brooklyn, New York and resided in Atlanta, Georgia where he graduated from Commercial High School. He was served overseas in the United States Army during World War II and lived later in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

<sup>16</sup> World War II (often abbreviated to WWII or WW2), also known as the Second World War, was a global war that lasted from 1939 to 1945, although related conflicts began earlier. It involved the vast majority of the world's countries—including all of the great powers—eventually forming two opposing military alliances: the Allies and the Axis. It was the most widespread war in history, and directly involved more than 100 million people from over 30 countries. Marked by mass deaths of civilians, including the Holocaust (in which approximately 6 million Jews were killed) and the strategic bombing of industrial and population centers (in which approximately one million were killed, and which included the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki), it resulted in an estimated 50 million to 85 million fatalities. These made World War II the deadliest conflict in human history

<sup>17</sup> Greenwood Cemetery in Atlanta, Georgia opened in 1904. It is designed in the Lawn style, with long vistas in all directions. Greenwood has a large Jewish section.

**Rose:** The whole family came back in 1936 and we settled here. The two older boys graduated school in New York, and my younger brother and I graduated here. The Workmen's Circle started to deteriorate when the second generation decided to do away more or less with the speaking of Yiddish and the producing . . . we even had a Yiddish school here that was called the Workmen's Circle *Shalom Aleichem*<sup>18</sup> School, and Yiddish was taught there. There were two teachers that I remember, Mr. M[oshe Mordecai] Bloshtein<sup>19</sup> and Mr. [Leon] Rosen.<sup>20</sup> It was on Capitol Avenue, and the building was called the Lyceum . . . L-Y-C-E-U-M. We were the, how would you call us, like . . . You have the Ashkenazic Jew<sup>21</sup> and the Sephardic Jew<sup>22</sup> and the German Jew. We were more or less the Ashkenazic Jew. We kept the Jewish language alive, and the Jewish history more. Not the . . . Yiddish history, I should use the word Yiddish more. We still have . . . There are theatres that go around, that come out of New York, and that are sponsored by the Workmen's Circle. This is all done in Yiddish. We now have a request, more or less a demand, to do more Yiddish shows and bring them here. Two of my children went to the Workmen's Circle school here until it completely closed.

<Interruption in tape>

**Joel:** I'd like to know a little bit about your religious background before . . .

**Rose:** All right, now that . . .

**Joel:** I know that's . . .

**Rose:** That's where the difference came in. A lot of Workmen's Circle people did not belong to

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<sup>18</sup> Shalom Aleichem (Yiddish: "peace be with you") was the pen name of author and playwright Solomon Naumovich Rabinovich, born in Russia in 1859 (d. 1916). Shalom Aleichem wrote in Russian and Hebrew at first but only in Yiddish after 1883, which earned him a place as a prominent Yiddish author by 1890. As pogroms raged through Russia in 1905, Aleichem immigrated to New York City, New York, but later joined his family in Geneva, Switzerland. The family moved to the Lower East Side of Manhattan, New York in 1914. Shalom Aleichem died of tuberculosis and diabetes in 1916. The musical *Fiddler on the Roof* was based on his stories about 'Tevye the Milkman.'

<sup>19</sup> Moshe Mordecai Bloshtein (1893-1964) was a teacher and principal at the *Arbeiter Ring Shule* in Atlanta, Georgia from 1938 to 1955. He also authored two Yiddish books on child psychology: *In Defense of the Child*, and *The Ways of the Child's Soul*.

<sup>20</sup> Rabbi Leon Rosen was a director for the *Arbeiter Ring Shule* in Atlanta, Georgia during the 1940's.

<sup>21</sup> Ashkenazic Jews originated in the Holy Roman Empire in the early 1000's. They established communities in Central and Eastern Europe.

<sup>22</sup> Sephardic Jews are the Jews of Spain, Portugal, North Africa and the Middle East and their descendants. The adjective "Sephardic" and corresponding nouns Sephardi (singular) and Sephardim (plural) are derived from the Hebrew word 'Sepharad,' which refers to Spain. Historically, the vernacular language of Sephardic Jews was Ladino, a Romance language derived from Old Spanish, incorporating elements from the old Romance languages of the Iberian Peninsula, Hebrew, Aramaic, and in the lands receiving those who were exiled, Ottoman Turkish, Arabic, Greek, Bulgarian and Serbo-Croatian vocabulary.

synagogues. So they got the impression—some people—that we were atheists, we were not religious, and we had no religion, which was not true. My father was a *yeshiva*<sup>23</sup> *bochur*<sup>24</sup> in Europe, and he came from very ultra-religious people. When he came to this country, they became very Yiddish, not over religious in the synagogue. After we came back as grown children here in 1936, we all got involved in Shearith Israel.<sup>25</sup> We were all married out of Shearith Israel. Rabbi Geffen married me, who married my parents. I have been a member there since I've been back, which is 50 something years. All my children. [My brother] Irving happened to have married a religious girl from a very religious family, and is quite religious in his way. My younger brother moved to Milwaukee [Wisconsin] and married a girl that was not. They were from the more or less Reform,<sup>26</sup> or highly Conservative.<sup>27</sup> But we are all involved in our synagogue, and more on the Orthodox<sup>28</sup> that have turned Traditional.<sup>29</sup> But the original Workmen's Circle was downed for the fact that the first thing when you mentioned Workmen's, “Oh they don't believe in any religion.” Which I don't believe was true. They may not have practiced it—which there are so many today—but they did come from some sort of religious background. Those that were on the left wing, they never belonged to synagogues. They sort of

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<sup>23</sup> *Yeshiva* (Hebrew for “sitting”) is a Jewish educational institution for religious instruction that is equivalent to high school. It also refers to a *Talmudic* college for unmarried male students from their teenage years to their early twenties.

<sup>24</sup> Yiddish word meaning “young unmarried man” or male student.

<sup>25</sup> Founded in 1904 in Atlanta, Georgia, 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>26</sup> A division within Judaism especially in North America and Western Europe. Historically it began in the nineteenth century. In general, the Reform movement maintains that Judaism and Jewish traditions should be modernized and compatible with participation in Western culture. While the Torah remains the law, in Reform Judaism women are included (mixed seating, bat mitzvah and women rabbis), music is allowed in the services and most of the service is in English.

<sup>27</sup> A form of Judaism that seeks to preserve Jewish tradition and ritual but has a more flexible approach to the interpretation of the law than Orthodox Judaism. It attempts to combine a positive attitude toward modern culture, while preserving a commitment to Jewish observance. They also observe gender equality (mixed seating, women rabbis and bat mitzvahs).

<sup>28</sup> Orthodox Judaism is a traditional branch of Judaism that strictly follows the Written Torah and the Oral Law concerning prayer, dress, food, sex, family relations, social behavior, the Sabbath day, holidays and more.

<sup>29</sup> Traditional Judaism stands between Modern Orthodox Judaism, which retains a belief that the Torah was transmitted in an unbroken tradition from Moses on Mt. Sinai, and Conservative Judaism, which has sometimes permitted personal views to override classical scholarship. Traditional Judaism attempts to combine modern approaches to studying Judaism's sacred texts while staying in keeping with classical approaches to interpreting and making decisions regarding Jewish law. For instance, it does not ordain women as rabbis but it does allow women's prayer groups.

went the thinking of a different political way of thinking.

**Joel:** What about the holidays when you were growing up in your home? Did you celebrate them?

**Rose:** Yes, we celebrated every holiday as we do today.

**Joel:** Did they . . .

**Rose:** *Pesach*<sup>30</sup> was very big. My grandparents came here, when I was nine months old, to this country. They lived in New York and we lived there at the same time. Passover was a tremendous thing because all the families were there. *Rosh Ha-Shanah*<sup>31</sup> and *Yom Kippur*<sup>32</sup> were very important to us. The other holidays were not as significant as the three most important to us at the time. Because we weren't involved going to *shul*.<sup>33</sup> We were learning Yiddish. Yet my brothers were *bar mitzvahed*.<sup>34</sup> My son went here to the Hebrew Academy [of Atlanta],<sup>35</sup> and he was *bar mitzvahed* 20 some years ago. So it's hard to explain what happened in between the growing up, where those that intermarried into other, different parts, of the Jewish people of Atlanta, because we were a mixed group.

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<sup>30</sup> *Pesach* is a Hebrew word meaning Passover, the anniversary of Israel's liberation from Egyptian bondage. The holiday lasts for eight days. Unleavened bread, *matzah*, is eaten in memory of the unleavened bread prepared by the Israelite during their hasty flight from Egypt, when they had not time to wait for the dough to rise. On the first two nights of Passover, the *seder*, the central event of the holiday is celebrated. The *seder* service is one of the most colorful and joyous occasions in Jewish life. In addition to eating *matzah* during the *seder*, Jews are prohibited from eating leavened bread during the entire week of Passover. In addition, Jews are also supposed to avoid foods made with wheat, barley, rye, spelt or oats unless those foods are labeled 'kosher for Passover.' Jews traditionally have separate dishes for Passover.

<sup>31</sup> *Rosh Ha-Shanah* [Hebrew: head of the year; i.e. New Year festival] begins the cycle of High Holy Days. 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*, G-d sits in judgment on humanity. Then the fate of every living creature is inscribed in the Book of Life or Death. Prayer and repentance before the sealing of the books on *Yom Kippur* may revoke these decisions.

<sup>32</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>33</sup> *Shul* is a Yiddish word for synagogue that is derived from a German word meaning "school," and emphasizes the synagogue's role as a place of study.

<sup>34</sup> *Bar mitzvah* is 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>35</sup> Hebrew Academy of Atlanta was established in 1953 as the first all-day Jewish day school in Atlanta, with Alex E. Milt chairing its organization committee. It was renamed the Katherine and Jacob Greenfield Hebrew Academy and in 2014 the Greenfield Hebrew Academy (grades pre-K through 8) and Yeshiva High School (grades 9-12) merged into one college preparatory day school now called the Atlanta Jewish Academy.

**Joel:** Mixing more and more every day.

**Rose:** Mixing. Right. So the Sephardic married Ashkenazic, Russians, and Germans. The same thing happened to us. We took our religion with us. My husband was from New York, and they were third generation Americans, so they were really not into religion. They belonged to the synagogue, but I don't think they practiced the way we did in Atlanta. After he got here in the service, he loved it. He loved going. He loved his services at the synagogue. We had our *Shabbat*<sup>36</sup> at home. We had our *Kiddush*<sup>37</sup> at home. We did the things that we felt were needed to expose our children. I am proud to say that I have a daughter who is very involved here in one of the synagogues. I have another daughter very involved . . .

**Joel:** What are all their names, your children?

**Rose:** I have five children. I have four daughters and a son. Rochelle Rothenberg lives in Charlotte [North Carolina] and has two grown children. Maxine Jacobs lives in Columbia, Maryland, who is the first woman president of the synagogue. Hershene Borrin who is a teacher here, is involved in B'nai Torah<sup>38</sup> very much, her husband is a Canadian. I have a son, Harley Klein, who is not married yet. I have a daughter, Jody Klein, who is not married yet. They are members of Shearith Israel. As for grown adults, they attend when they should, and they should attend more.

**Joel:** How many grandchildren?

**Rose:** I have five grandchildren. I have a granddaughter 26; a grandson 25, who lives in California. I now came back from a trip to San Diego, where grandson number two just graduated boot camp. He joined the navy right before the conflict. I have a granddaughter Elisha, who's 15, and a granddaughter here in Atlanta, Danielle, who is eight, who goes to the [Hebrew] Academy [of Atlanta] now. I think we have wavered away from the feelings of them

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<sup>36</sup> *Shabbat* (Hebrew) or *Shabbos* (Yiddish) is the Jewish day of rest and is observed on Saturdays. *Shabbat* observance entails refraining from work activities, often with great rigor, and engaging in restful activities to honor the day. *Shabbat* begins at sundown on Friday night and is ushered in by lighting candles and reciting a blessing. It is closed the following evening with the recitation of the *havdalah* blessing.

<sup>37</sup> Hebrew: 'Sanctification.' A blessing recited over wine or grape juice to sanctify the Sabbath and Jewish holidays. In many synagogues congregants gather for Kiddush reception after the Friday night or Saturday morning service to recite the blessing over wine or grape juice and have something to eat.

<sup>38</sup> Congregation B'nai Torah is a synagogue on the north side of Atlanta. 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 is about 800 families and the rabbi is Joshua Heller (2017).

saying, “Oh those Workmen's Circle people are not interested in religion.”

**Joel:** Right.

**Rose:** I hope that the people have thought about this.

**Joel:** Tell me a little bit about your background, besides Workmen's Circle, the things that you did as a mother with your children. Activities, if you had any time, being a mother of five.

**Rose:** Yes, I did. I was very busy in volunteer work. I was a Gray Lady<sup>39</sup> with the [American] Red Cross<sup>40</sup> for nine years. I led Young Judea<sup>41</sup> clubs for 19 years. I was on the Youth Commission. Then I came to work as a volunteer at the [Jewish] Federation [of Greater Atlanta]<sup>42</sup> in 1958. I was offered a permanent position here. I've been here now 32-and-a-half years.

**Joel:** I think that's as permanent as a temporary position.

**Rose:** Yes. I'm still very interested in my Yiddish background. I'm not over-religious, but I am very Yiddish. I like still listening to my Yiddish records, and I like to go to the Yiddish shows. I like the concerts. We find that it comes in very handy when I went to Israel, and no one spoke Hebrew, but I spoke Yiddish. I met people who couldn't speak English, but they spoke Yiddish. So it made it very comfortable.

**Joel:** Do your children speak Yiddish?

**Rose:** No.

**Joel:** None of them?

**Rose:** They went to Yiddish school when they were little. Then the school closed, so none of my children speak Yiddish. I have one who is now trying to go to school to learn Hebrew

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<sup>39</sup> Gray Ladies were American Red Cross volunteers who worked in American hospitals, other health-care facilities, and private homes, notably during World War II. They provided friendly, personal, non-medical services to sick, injured or disabled patients. They wrote letters, read, tutored and shopped for patients, and served as guides to visitors and as hostesses in hospital recreation rooms and at information desks. Gray Ladies also provided hospitality services in Red Cross Blood Centers and joined forces with other Red Cross workers in caring for disaster victims.

<sup>40</sup> The American Red Cross (ARC) is a humanitarian organization that provides emergency assistance, disaster relief and education in the United States. It is the designated United States affiliate of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. The ARC was founded in 1881 by Clara Barton.

<sup>41</sup> Young Judea 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>42</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, and educational opportunities. It is part of the Jewish Federation of North America (JFNA).

because her daughter is at the Hebrew Academy. No, not a one speaks Yiddish. My brother speaks a very fluent Yiddish. You'd think he was born in Russia somewhere. He keeps in very close contact with what goes on. The schools here were sort of under the supervision of the Atlanta Bureau of Jewish Education,<sup>43</sup> the Workmen's Circle school, when it was in its prime. We had a bus system, and we had quite a number of children who went to it. But then when it started to drop down in the next generation, parents were not sending them to Yiddish school.

**Joel:** It was not the “in” thing to do.

**Rose:** No. That's when the Hebrew . . .

**Joel:** They were trying to assimilate into the United States and the American way.

**Rose:** Right. That's what really happened, between Workmen's Circle and the American way of life. The grandparents were told not to speak Yiddish because they were in an American country and you spoke only English. So it made it hard for the children to continue. But I still find it very fascinating. It helps in my work.

**Joel:** Absolutely.

**Rose:** I have people who come here and they'll call me from the front desk and say, “Rose, we have someone here who's talking Yiddish. Can you come up and help them?” I feel like I've added a little something to it. I still do my work, my volunteer work. I like to, I help them down at Bingo.<sup>44</sup> I did that for [inaudible 20:10] three years. I worked with the Veteran groups. I'm very close to Veteran groups, because we had five boys in the service, and they all came home. So I feel, now I have a grandson in the navy, and I just feel like it's real important.

**Joel:** Do you feel like that maybe today we're getting more back into the traditional way of living for the Jew?

**Rose:** I think they are because we're not separating ourselves. At one time, I remember that

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<sup>43</sup> The Atlanta Bureau of Jewish Education (ABJE) was created in 1946 to foster Jewish education in the city. In 1947, it was instrumental in forming a Hebrew High School in Atlanta. Over the course of four decades, the Bureau offered services to schools, the community and individuals including curriculum guides for Atlanta-area public schools, Holocaust education programs, conferences, workshops, programs for teenagers in Israel, festivals, adult education, classes, lectures, and extension classes for Sunday school teachers. The organization also operated a lending library of Jewish books and resources. Hans Erman, a German Holocaust survivor born in 1914, served as its Executive Director from 1963-1969.

<sup>44</sup> Bingo is a game of chance played with different randomly drawn numbers which players match against numbers that have been pre-printed on 5 x 5 cards. Someone calls the numbers from 1 to 75, picked randomly, and the players match them against their cards. A player wins if they get an entire row first, either vertically, horizontally or diagonally by claiming, “Bingo!”

Ashkenazic girls weren't taken out by The Temple<sup>45</sup> crowd, and vice versa. I feel like now a Jew is a Jew. It's not whether he's a Yiddish speaking Jew or a Hebrew speaking Jew. We have a lot to work together for. Yes, I think we're getting back into it. I would like to see the younger people getting back even more, like my younger people. I mean, they respect me for my thinking of *Yiddishkeit*<sup>46</sup> so much, but they could do without it. I feel that they are missing out a lot. We do have a lot of people in their early seventies who were children of Workmen's Circle members here in Atlanta, but I don't think they're involved. Now Joe Jacobs is still very much involved. I was just down at the cemetery the other day, on our portion of it, the Workmen's Circle, where my parents are buried. I was proud to see the front gate that said "Workmen's Circle", and that these were all the old members of the Workmen's Circle. I don't know how their meetings are now because I don't attend any of the meetings. I'm so involved with . . . you get away from it, which I'm sorry I have.

**Joel:** You have no idea how large the Circle is anymore?

**Rose:** No, I really don't. I need to talk to Joe Jacobs and get more details on what they do. I do know they bring the shows here.

**Joel:** Right.

**Rose:** They're very interested. They're teaching Yiddish now at the [Atlanta] Bureau [of Jewish Education]. They have a couple of different classes. Now some of the synagogues have picked it up, because some of the members would like to.

**Joel:** At any time, was any of the aim of Workmen's Circle Zionistic?<sup>47</sup> I mean, did they want to go back to Israel or was . . .

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<sup>45</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 more than 1,500 families (2017).

<sup>46</sup> *Yiddishkeit* literally means "Jewishness", i.e. "a Jewish way of life" in the Yiddish language. In a more general sense it has come to mean the "Jewishness" or "Jewish essence" of Ashkenazi Jews in general and the traditional Yiddish-speaking Jews of Eastern and Central Europe in particular. From a more secular perspective it is associated with the popular culture or folk practices of Yiddish-speaking Jews, such as popular religious traditions, Eastern European Jewish food, Yiddish humor, and klezmer music, among other things.

<sup>47</sup> Those who believe in Zionism, a movement that supports a Jewish national state in the territory defined as the Land of Israel. Although Zionism existed before the nineteenth century, in the 1890's Theodor Herzl popularized it and gave it a new urgency, as he believed that Jewish life in Europe was threatened and a State of Israel was needed. The State of Israel was established in 1948 and Zionism today is expressed as support for the continued existence of Israel.

**Rose:** I think they had a quite a few. There was a split there. The *Farband*,<sup>48</sup> that's another group that came out of all this. Workmen's Circle members that wanted to go back to Israel, that's a portion I know very little about; how many were active in it, how many have been there, and how many would have gone *aliyah*.<sup>49</sup> I know most of us had people there. I have a cousin, a rabbi in Bnei Brak<sup>50</sup> [Israel], so there was religious doings in the background of our families. As for now, I can't even try to give you an answer there.

**Joel:** Back then, was there any feeling for Israel, do you remember?

**Rose:** Yes. I personally feel when Israel was established that we were all in favor of it, definitely, that we needed a country. I don't think that we've ever been against Israel, and against Zionists. Except they have their own political beliefs of how to bring around a country like this, or how to give our support to a country like this. We came from a . . . our parents came from a trying time. When they came to a free country their main purpose here now was to raise their children to be educated and not to be slaves of any kind. To work, schooling, and going to school was very important to my parents, and to most of us.

**Joel:** I think to most Jews.

**Rose:** Right. The only beliefs that I feel are different are our political beliefs. I remember as a little girl even walking in the parades for the Workmen's Circle on May the first.<sup>51</sup> It was for the laborer. I mean, that's what I was told, I'm fighting for the working man. It sounds like right away they called us communists, which was very degrading. But we had to prove to them that we were not.

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<sup>48</sup> Yiddish *Natzionaler Arbeiter Farband*, the Yiddish name for the Jewish National Workers Alliance, was an early Yiddish-speaking Labor Zionist *landsmanshaft* in North America. The *Farband* operated as a mutual aid society parallel to the political party *Poale Zion*, organizing cooperative insurance and medical plans and an extensive Yiddish and Hebrew educational system. In the 1920's, it developed a cooperative housing building in the Bronx, New York.

<sup>49</sup> *Aliyah* (Hebrew: ascent) is the immigration of Jews from the diaspora to Israel. It is one of the most basic tenets of Zionism.

<sup>50</sup> Bnei Brak is one of the most densely populated cities in Israel and home to a large Orthodox community. It is located just east of Tel Aviv.

<sup>51</sup> May Day, also known as International Worker's Day, is a celebration of laborers and the working classes that is promoted by the international labor movement and occurs every year on May 1. The date was chosen by socialist and communist political parties to commemorate the 1896 Haymarket affair in Chicago, Illinois when a general strike that began on May 1 led to the death of eight participants, injuries to 60 police officers, arrests of hundreds, and trials and executions of four who were arrested. During the Great Depression of the 1930's, hundreds of thousands of workers marched in May Day parades in New York's Union Square. Unions and [anarchist, socialist, and communist groups](#) have continued the International May Day tradition with rallies and demonstrations. During the Cold War, May Day became the occasion for large military parades in Red Square by the Soviet Union and was attended by the top leaders of the Kremlin, especially the Politburo.

**Joel:** It was certainly different.

**Rose:** It really was. I was married to a man who knew nothing about Workmen's Circle or Yiddish . . .

**Joel:** What was his feeling for it?

**Rose:** He respected it because of my parents, but he never was involved in it at all. When we got married, the Workmen's Circle here with the youth group was rather not the same. So we got involved with the veteran groups and the synagogue. We were involved in the synagogue. That was important to us with our growing children.

<End Tape 1, Side 1>