

THE WILLIAM BREMAN JEWISH HERITAGE MUSEUM
SAVANNAH JEWISH ARCHIVES
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

MEMOIRIST: ASHER, ESTA APPLEBAUM

INTERVIEWER: HOLLENBERG, TOBY

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INTERVIEW BEGINS

Toby: ...Ms. Applebaum and she was born right here in Savannah on October 2, 1918, so she's going to be 90 years old in October. Where did your parents come from? Were they born here, too?

Esta: No. My parents, my husband's mother was from here but his father from in Poland, but he died early on. My husband's father died when he was 3 years old. I don't think my mother-in-law ever got remarried. She was born in New York. My parents came from Poland also. I guess they were from Poland. Whatever they said, they used to say that they were Bavarian.

Toby: Did they speak Yiddish?

Esta: Oh, yes. I can speak it, too. And I can read it. I grew up in Savannah. Went to school all the way here in Savannah.

Toby: What schools did you go to?

Esta: I went to Montgomery Street School at that time.

Toby: Where were you living?

Esta: We were living on Hull Street. 112 West Hull Street which they tore down to make space for the Civic Center.¹ It was a house with three families. One of my friends who lived there for a time as a little girl, we're still good friends. She's living in Florida, she was just here visiting.

¹ The Savannah Civic Center is a multi-purpose facility located in Savannah, Georgia, in Savannah Historic District. Built in 1974, the facility consists of four venues; the Martin Luther King Arena, Johnny Mercer Theatre, West & East Promenades and the Civic Center Grand Ballroom. Throughout the years, the center has hosted various concerts, conventions, exhibits, high school and college graduations, trade shows, theatre, ballet and comedy.

Toby: Oh, who's that?

Esta: Cora Lee Fox. And around this neighborhood there's Ethel Rosenzweig, who lives right across the way, Pam Eichholz, Ruth Stein. All of us were, in fact, we went to a luncheon the other day. All of us, not Ruth, but the rest of us were going to be 90.

Toby: How exciting.

Esta: It's unusual.

Toby: It is and wonderful that you were all here to celebrate.

Esta: And I grew up at the JEA.² From there I went to Chatham Junior High School and Savannah High School. Then I went to, it used to be Richards Business College. And I grew up in Savannah, especially around the JEA with all my friends.

Toby: Where was the JEA when you were...

Esta: On Barnard Street. Grew up there. Then my husband and I went together- I went to his bar mitzvah.

Toby: Where did you belong? What congregation were you a part of?

Esta: B.B. Jacob.³

Toby: Did you keep a kosher home? Did your parents keep a kosher home?

Esta: My, I kept a very strictly kosher home. And then I got married. My grand, my mother was very religious. My mother came from a very religious family, from the Cooper family, but she, my father wasn't, he already came from a religious family. He wasn't as religious as she was. But I went to the Workmen's Circle⁴ Jewish School when I was young.

² The Jewish Educational Alliance ("JEA" or "The Alliance") was chartered August 2, 1912 to meet the leisure and Americanization needs of the Jewish community in Savannah. It was originally located on the corner of Barnard and Charlton Streets, and in 1955 a new building opened on the corner of Abercorn Street and DeRenne Avenue, where it still stands as the center of Savannah's Jewish community. The building includes a gym, pool, preschool, and day camp. The JEA is Savannah's Jewish Community Center, and is a member of the Jewish Community Centers Association of North America.

³ Congregation B'nai B'rith Jacob (originally "Kahal Kadosh B'nai B'rith Jacob," or "Congregation of the Children of the Divine Covenant of Jacob," also known as "B.B.J." and "B.B. Jacob"), the orthodox synagogue in Savannah, Georgia, was established in 1861 by a group of eastern European Jews who desired to start their own synagogue patterned after the Ashkenazi tradition. At the time of its establishment, the only synagogue in Savannah was Temple Mickve Israel of the Spanish-Portuguese Sephardic tradition. The name for Congregation B.B.J. probably originated from the Independent Order of B'nai B'rith (I.O.B.B.), a Masonic-inspired fraternal organization for Jews.

⁴ The *Arbeiter* Ring (Workmen's Circle) 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.

Toby: Where was that?

Esta: It used to be on West Broad Street and I went there and I learned to play (unintelligible) Jewish and I could write and read...

Toby: Was that like a full day school?

Esta: No. It was like an afternoon school. And then I also went to Hebrew School at the B.B. Jacob. From there I met the same friends that we grew up, some of them since we were six years old.

Toby: Did you have brothers and sisters?

Esta: There were six of us. My younger brother and I-- My brother had moved to Charleston. My oldest brother moved to Charleston. Two of my sisters moved to New York and were married there. One of my sisters lived here. She passed away eight years ago. So my brother and I made six children.

Toby: Is your brother here? Does he still live here?

Esta: Yes. His name is Abram Applebaum. I see him very often.

Toby: So what was Jewish life, what was it like growing up?

Esta: It was wonderful because you were always amongst just, very close friends. Not very close because everybody was your friend. You went to the JEA and you had so many friends and we used to go have little parties and everybody went together. There wasn't any dating or running around. We used to have cookouts and we went on picnics. We went on hikes. Something children wouldn't even think of doing right now. They wouldn't walk around the corner. But we used to hike from here to Thunderbolt⁵ all the time.

Toby: Really?

Esta: That's right. We would have a little club that was called The Grace Agular Club of the JEA.

Toby: The Grace Agular Club?

⁵ Thunderbolt is a town located in Chatham County, Georgia, approximately five miles southeast of downtown Savannah. As of the 2010 census, the town had a total population of 2,668. It is part of the Savannah Metropolitan Statistical Area. Thunderbolt runs along the western shore of the Wilmington River (a tidal river that is part of the U.S. Intracoastal Waterway). The town is important to Georgia's shrimping industry, with scores of docks for shrimping trawlers. The town's picturesque atmosphere and seafood restaurants draw many local visitors.

Esta: Of the JEA. Yeah. Most of them, I think all five of us, married boys that we grew up with. That we went to school with and we grew up with them.

Toby: Who was the Rabbi at the B.B. Jacob when you grew up?

Esta: We had Rabbi Rosen,⁶ well, there were so many of them at that time. I remember Rabbi Rosen being here and I remember Rabbi Rosen married me. Then there was Rabbi Rosenberg and there were more Rabbis.

Toby: When did you get married? What year?

Esta: That was 1940.

Toby: What's your anniversary?

Esta: June the 22nd. I was married 65 years when my husband passed away.

Toby: Kinda hard after you had so many years together.

Esta: I lived downtown on Huntingdon Street when we got married and I couldn't wait to get off Huntingdon Street because I was ...

Toby: ...So where did you move to after Huntingdon Street?

Esta: 53rd Street. We lived there and then I moved to Sylvan Terrace where most of the Jewish people lived at one time. We couldn't wait to get downtown where everybody used to ride downtown.

Toby: Isn't that funny. Yeah.

Esta: I grew up on Hull Street which really is right downtown because my father was a tailor and he had his store on Bull Street, Bull and Perry Street. It was a number of places now. There used to be a drug store there right next to him ... not Solomons Drug Store, it was actually on Charlton Street. On Sunday afternoon, we all went to the JEA and they had, you know, we went to our clubs and all the young people met there and it was really nice. All of us.

Toby: Now did you all go to the park? Was that still active?

Esta: Well, she was there before my, a little bit before my time. She was there with my brother, my oldest brother.

Toby: Yeah. Talking about Ceil Kelly.⁷

⁶ Nathan N. Rosen (ca. 1905-1990) served as Rabbi at Congregation B'nai B'rith Jacob in Savannah, Georgia for an unknown amount of time.

⁷ Cecile Kelly Arenson (1908-2006). Her oral history can be found at <https://www.thebreman.org/Research/Cuba-Family-Archives/Oral-Histories/ID/874/Arenson-Cecile-Kelly>.

Esta: She used to, she knew him. I can remember a little bit about her but I don't remember too much.

Toby: Okay. So you were talking about the shop on Broughton.

Esta: We were in business for about, over 50 years on Broughton Street.

Toby: You and your husband?

Esta: And his brother, my brother-in-law.

Toby: And his brother. And what was the name of the store?

Esta: Asher's.

Toby: Asher's. That makes sense.

Esta: We had a ladies' and children's shop but we started with a small so-called Sunday shoe store and then we moved further down on Broughton Street⁸ and we opened Asher's. My brother-in-law and his wife and Sidney⁹ and I went and his mother went in our business.

Toby: Did you work in the business?

Esta: Well, I worked there the whole time. I always worked with them. I had good health. I went to work in the store with him. And I worked 'til we closed it.

Toby: Which was when? When did you close the shop?

Esta: Let me see, about 25 years ago. Then we stayed downtown. My husband's brother passed away and he had cancer and he passed away and it was too big a business for Sidney to undertake because he had Parkinson's at that time. So we just opened an office downtown. Then we stayed downtown until about, say about, six years ago when he was unable to...

Toby: What did you do in the office?

Esta: We had another little business along with it. So we stayed downtown and took care of that. We had an office on State and Congress. We used to go every morning and stayed 'til about 1:00. Gave us something to do.

⁸ Broughton Street is a major commercial district in downtown Savannah, Georgia. It has been home to various retail establishments since the late 1700s. It is generally considered to be Georgia's first shopping district. From the 1870s until the 1970s, many of the stores on the street were owned and operated by Jewish merchants and closed on Saturdays and Jewish holidays. The area experienced significant decline after the "white flight" to the suburbs in the 1950s and subsequent development of the Oglethorpe Mall in 1969. Since approximately 2010, the area has been experiencing a resurgence as more people are moving back into the historic homes of downtown, more tourists come to visit Savannah, and more developers restore vacant buildings. Broughton Street is now known for its high-end retail shops and restaurants as well as its well-preserved architecture.

⁹ Sidney Asher (1917-2006) was Esta Asher's husband. He owned Sidney Shoe Store, which later became Asher's Department Store.

Toby: Definitely.

Esta: Because we certainly couldn't retire. He was, he just wasn't able to sit still after working all those years.

Toby: Right. And how many children do you have?

Esta: I have two. I had. My daughter passed away at the age of 22. She and her fiancé were coming home to get married and were killed in an automobile accident.

Toby: Oh, how tragic.

Esta: ...God gives you strength and you can just keep going.

Toby: That's true.

Esta: And I had one son, Alan. And a daughter-in-law who is just like a daughter.

Toby: And grandchildren? You have two grand...

Esta: I have two grandchildren. I have Zachary and Shannon and they're both married. Shannon has two children.

Toby: Great-grandchildren.

Esta: Her husband's name is Scott... They have two children which is Matchlie and Reese.

Toby: Tell me about raising your children in Savannah and then...

Esta: It was a wonderful raising, of course, they also had little crowds of boys and girls all through school. It was just wonderful. It really was. And then they had things at the JEA. That's where we spent all our time and the most of the time that they spent theirs, too.

Toby: Now, when they were growing up had the JEA moved out here already?

Esta: Yeah, the JEA, I was just thinking when my child grew up, she was always, still at the, we were still downtown. Alan, I can't remember, I think Alan was, I think we had already had this JEA opened when...because, no we didn't have it until after he was born, until it was time for, the JEA

Toby: Well, I think it's been here about 50 years.

Esta: And Alan is 60. So he went to the one downtown, too. They both went downtown. We used to, Rita,¹⁰ where, when you went to day camp did you start off downtown?

Rita: Yeah.

Esta: They went downtown on Barnard Street.

¹⁰ Rita H. Asher (b. 1949) is Esta Asher's daughter-in-law, wife of Esta's son Alan.

Toby: Okay. So you grew up here, too?

Rita: Right. Did you tell her about your father?

Esta: My father?

Rita: Yeah.

Esta: My father was a tailor on Bull Street. My mother was, helped him along with it.

Rita: He started Workmen's Circle.

Toby: Okay. Started it?

Esta: He was one, yeah, he was one of the beginners of the Workmen's Circle. He was a big, he worked very hard for them.

Toby: And what did the Workmen's Circle do? Was it a social or a political organization?

Esta: All I know, I went to the Workmen's Circle Jewish School, you know, that they had here. They started, at that time, they even started the Workmen's Circle and they had a loan business.

Toby: Oh, yeah, they have like a credit union or something.

Esta: A credit union. . . he and a few of the other men, Mr. Hoffman, Mr. Scheer, I can't remember too many more of them. My uncle Leon Cooper, all of them helped start it. That's a few of the men that I can remember. That's been a long time ago.

Toby: Were you active in the BBJ, were you in the Sisterhood¹¹ or any of those organizations?

Esta: Yes, I worked, I was a life member of the Sisterhood and also the B'nai B'rith Women¹² and *Hadassah*.¹³ We don't have a B'nai B'rith Women anymore, but they sent me a 50-year, when I was a 50-year member of B'nai B'rith. But we don't have one here anymore. I was very active in all the organizations. I was in the B.B. Jacob Sisterhood.

Toby: Can you remember any of the specific projects or things you worked on?

¹¹ A group of women in a synagogue congregation who join together to offer social, cultural, educational, and volunteer service opportunities.

¹² B'nai B'rith Women was founded in San Francisco, California in 1909. It was originally a social organization designed to attract young, single adult members with parties, picnics and dances. As women emerged into the public sphere it expanded into cultural activities, philanthropy and community service. Their announced aims are to perpetuate Jewish culture, enrich their communities and ensure the religious survival of their sons and daughters.

¹³ *Hadassah*, the Women's Zionist Organization of America, is a volunteer organization founded in 1912 by Henrietta Szold, with more than 300,000 members and supporters worldwide. It supports health care and medical research, education and youth programs in Israel, and advocacy, education, and leadership development in the United States.

Esta: Well, it's been, yeah, I helped with a lot of things. First of all, that was almost when we started help for Israel. We started the UJA.¹⁴ I worked with that when I was able. You know, I was young and I could do a lot of things. Anything that they pulled and asked me I was always happy to help.

Toby: Very active in the community.

Esta: And I wasn't ever an officer. That I didn't take.

Toby: Well, you were working full time then.

Esta: I was working full time.

Toby: Plus raising a family.

Esta: There might have been in, there must have been something years ago in B'nai B'rith that I can't remember, but I just think I was some kind of officer. The Sisterhood, we helped with everything and also Hadassah. We used to have a Young Judea.¹⁵ They don't have that. I think it was just women, wasn't it when it started with just women?

Rita: I don't know.

Esta: A younger group of women. I think it was called the Young Judea. The kids now have the Young Judea, don't they? Or do they have something else?

Toby: They might.

Esta: I don't remember exactly. I have to look up the census for today... I asked Miriam Stein, she lives over there. What was the name of the organization.

Toby: Did you travel at all? Did you go together on the groups of other Jewish kids?

Esta: Well, we went to those days, we really couldn't afford to go to camps and all the way the kids went now. Of course, my children went to Blue Star¹⁶ but I didn't. But we worked. We got to the age where you started to help and you went to work. I was just trying to think of, I can just remember going in and now... what the name of the, it was something to do about Hadassah

¹⁴ The United Jewish Appeal (UJA) was a Jewish philanthropic umbrella organization that collected and distributed funds to Jewish organizations in their community and around the country. UJA existed from 1939 until it was folded into the United Jewish Communities, which was formed from the 1999 merger of United Jewish Appeal (UJA), Council of Jewish Federations and United Israel Appeal, Inc.

¹⁵ 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.

¹⁶ Blue Star Camps is a Jewish summer camp located in the Blue Ridge Mountains of western North Carolina, near the town of Hendersonville.

but it was a younger group than Hadassah. Young unmarried girls growing up and then from there you went into Hadassah.

Toby: I see. Was it like a junior Hadassah? Or something like that?

Esta: I don't call it junior Hadassah. I thought it was, I have to ask her just what it was called and if she, I don't know whether she remembers or not. She'll be going upstairs in just a minute now. I'll call her.

Toby: Okay. Now when you were younger did groups of teenagers from here get together with any of the other synagogues, like in Charleston or...?

Esta: Oh, yeah. Used to have.....I think it was, I can't remember what youth group it was with that we went. It must have been Young Judea at that time. We would go to Charleston, they'd come here and we went to Jacksonville, Charleston, and Savannah. I don't remember going anywhere else. I used to go sometimes with my father to Workmen's Circle....we went different places, you know, with him. They had the young groups go there, you know, younger children.

Toby: My husband's grandfather was involved with Workmen's Circle in New York.

Esta: Yeah, well, my father used to go to New York quite often. He was on some kind of committee when he was... I can't remember, see, it's been a long time ago.

Toby: Well, you're doing great. You certainly have a lot of wonderful memories.

Esta: Because he was the financial secretary or the secretary of Workmen's Circle from the Southern Region. So he used to go to New York quite often to meet a few of the big shots.

Toby: Did you do any traveling personally? Like on a...

Esta: Oh, yeah, I went with my husband. We traveled. First of all, we went, when we went into business we used to go to Atlanta to buy. And New York we went three or four times a year. We went to Israel. I went to London ... Greece. When [Sidney] was able we went to all the islands. When he was able to get away we used to go on a vacation. In the summertime, I would take the children and in the wintertime, he and I would go by ourselves.

Toby: Did you go to Tybee¹⁷ very much as kids?

Esta: When they were little we always stayed at the beach.

Toby: Did your family have a place there? Or you just went to the place...

¹⁷ Tybee Island is a small barrier island (and coterminous city of the same name) off the coast of Savannah, Georgia. The easternmost point in the state, it is a suburb of Savannah and a popular tourist destination.

Esta: We always rented a place at the beaches. Well, even growing up somebody in my family always had a place and we always managed to go, you know, on weekends. I can remember going to Tybee on the train.

Toby: I heard about that.

Esta: When they had a train. My mother used to bundle us all up and my father and they'd take us down. Early morning. You had to get there early to get a place on the train to go.

Toby: Where did the train leave from?

Esta: On East Broad Street downtown. Randolph and East Broad, somewhere around in that section. I'm just trying to think of...

Toby: Would you go just for the day then?

Esta: They would take it in the morning and then we'd take the train, it must have been in the evening and come home because nobody had air conditioning or anything. If it was nice, you'd sit up on the pavilion. They'd bring enough food for everybody in town to eat. My mother was a wonderful cook and she would cook enough for everybody. Had it packed and ready. She'd get up around 4 or 5 in the morning and fix it so we could go. We, my aunts had places down there and when I was little I would go down and stay with them. But they rented also.

Toby: What were the, was summer pretty tough here then, without air conditioning?

Esta: It was. You didn't think about it. You didn't really think about it.

Toby: Your body became accustomed to it and it was just hot and you just...

Esta: I really never thought about hot, to tell the truth. Even when I went to work, I was like a bookkeeper and they didn't have air-conditioning, but we had fans and you didn't think how hot it is. Now, you won't go out of the house if you don't have air conditioning.

Toby: Isn't that funny. Yeah. I've gotten so used to it being cooler that we can't tolerate the heat.

Esta: Did you remember the name of the organization?

Toby: Sure. That's a good idea.

Esta: Jake. Let's call him back.

Toby: The club was called Junior Hadassah. Well, it seems to me there was, that I read about, you know, the name Junior Hadassah somewhere.

Esta: It must have been called junior, because it was not, I called, Young Judea, so it might have been Junior Hadassah.

Toby: Was Young Judea maybe the youth group from the Temple? Synagogue? Or...

Esta: No. The Young Judea was here. The Grace Agular Club might have been something to do with the Young Judea. I don't remember, at that time. We just picked a name from the Bible. Something we called the group. But anyway, we were all members of the Junior Hadassah. We went on conventions. We had a wonderful time.

Toby: You had a very active life, it sounds, you know...

Esta: We had a wonderful life here.

Toby: Savannah was just a great community to grow up in it sounded like.

Esta: . . . says she's 87. I have a friend over here who I think is 85. Ethel's 90. I'll be 90. Thelma Rosen lives across the street, but she's a little younger than we are.

Toby: So do you go, you say you play mahjonn? Where do you play? At the...

Esta: At the, I go back to play at Buckingham, with some of the friends from Buckingham. Ruth Stein who lives in this building, she picks me up, because I have to have somebody to take me now. They help her put this in the car and then I feel so bad 'cause she's not so young and she's got to pick this up when we get there. But if somebody sees us they bring it.

Toby: And do you do anything at the JEA now? Are you involved?

Esta: No. I hardly ever go there because I don't go out too much at night and it's very difficult. Ethel's very active. She keeps going. She keeps running. I don't know where she gets the strength. If you can walk, you can do a lot of things.

Toby: Right. I know they have those senior lunches every Thursday and Monday.

Esta: Oh, we play on Thursdays. We used to go in the evening when I was at Buckingham. If something especially comes up to do... Now, Thelma and Miriam helped on that. Thelma Rosen and Miriam Stein. They help with that. They go every Thursday. They say that in the summertime it's not as good as when the children go back to school. They enjoy it better. Because they have different cooks and they - in the summertime I think they must make a salad and things like that and I like....They said the food's very good then....

Toby: They have different programs. In fact, this Thursday I'm going to be speaking with Jane Kahn. Do you know Jane Kahn?

Esta: Yeah. I know Jane. She...

Toby: We're going to be talking about our trip to Cuba.

Esta: You have been there, too? You went recently?

Toby: Yeah. In February.

Esta: Oh. Well, we, I went there over...

Toby: You went to Cuba?

Esta: When it was Cuba, it was really the nightclubs and all the beautiful there. It was really something. We stayed at the Nationale.

Toby: Oh, we stayed there.

Esta: Is that where you stayed? How does it look now?

Toby: Gorgeous.

Esta: It's still beautiful?

Toby: It's beautiful.

Esta: I'll never forget when I first went there I said to them, they had this big room there, I don't know if they still have, she said "That's the fur room." They had a that really wealthy people used to come. You didn't need the furs there.

Toby: You stored your furs?

Esta: You stored your furs.

Toby: Yeah. It's still beautiful but only for tourists. Locals aren't allowed to go there.

Esta: We went by boat and then we stayed at the hotel. We just went there. In those days they didn't have the pretty boats like they have now.

Toby: Did you see any of the Jewish community when you were in Cuba?

Esta: No. I really didn't. We just went to...

Toby: ...For a vacation.

Esta: We met with another couple from Miami, coming back we hit a storm. I was sick for a week in Miami. I couldn't lift my head up I was so dizzy from...We really had a wonderful time there. And when you called a cab then, they stayed with you all night. They didn't leave you. We didn't know about it, of course, when we went there. When you hired a cab, you hired them for the evening. So he took us to wonderful places that we probably would have never seen.

Toby: Yeah. Now, what about Savannah now? I mean, it's changed an awful lot since you grew up. What do you think about Savannah these days?

Esta: You were never afraid to go anywhere years ago. You walked. Nobody had a car. We used to walk. Especially growing up, no one had cars.

Toby: Right. Do you remember when your family got their first car?

Esta: Well, my father had a, we had a car but my father didn't drive. He used to have to get a driver to drive us. I don't know who used to take us to Daffin Park,¹⁸ you know, to go swimming at the pool there. I can remember that he never drove. He was afraid to drive. He had a driver.

Toby: ...drive?

Esta: I drove. I started driving when my son Alan was 16. I had meningitis when he was, I think he was 12 weeks old. I would never sleep at night, I was just standing over him all night to make sure he was all right after I brought him home from the hospital.

Toby: Where was he born? What hospital?

Esta: He was born at St. Joseph.¹⁹

Toby: Was the Telfair Women's Hospital²⁰ still the hospital or...

Esta: My daughter was born, the one that passed away, she was born in the Telfair.

Toby: The one on Drayton or where is it?

Esta: The one downtown on Drayton Street. It was on Drayton Street. St. Joseph was also downtown.

Toby: And was Memorial²¹ there, too? Or that didn't...

Esta: We didn't have Memorial. We had the Savannah Hospital and we had the St. Joseph Hospital and the Telfair.

Toby: Where was the Oglethorpe Hospital?

Esta: It was on East Duffy Street. I think it was Duffy Street. I never was in the hospital. I only was in the Telfair.

¹⁸ Daffin Park is Savannah's largest public park, at 77 square acres.

¹⁹ St. Joseph's/Candler is a large hospital system in Savannah, Georgia, consisting of Candler Hospital (Georgia's first hospital, chartered in 1804), and St. Joseph's Hospital (founded by the Sisters of Mercy in 1875), as well as smaller centers such as the Mary Telfair Women's Hospital, the Heart Hospital, and other specialty health care providers.

²⁰ Telfair Hospital for Females was founded in Savannah, Georgia in 1884. Funding for the hospital was provided by the will of Mary Telfair (1791-1875), a prominent philanthropist in Savannah, also benefactor of the Telfair Museums. The hospital merged with Candler General Hospital in 1960, and the resulting institution (after subsequent mergers) is now known as St. Joseph's/Candler. Mary Telfair Women's Hospital, as the department is now known, delivers over 3,000 babies each year as of 2017.

²¹ A 612-bed academic hospital formerly known as Memorial Hospital, Memorial University Medical Center is a large, privately-owned hospital in Savannah, Georgia, founded in 1955 as Memorial Hospital. It is owned by the Hospital Corporation of America and is home to the region's only Level-1 Trauma Center, the region's only children's hospital, and the Savannah Campus of the Mercer University School of Medicine.

Toby: So now the complex, all the medical facilities we have now are quite amazing. In going out, you had a chance, I guess you have, see how far spread out Savannah is. I mean, when you were growing up it was probably Victory Drive was considered the country.

Esta: Well we used to know Victory Drive because we went to Tybee, you know, through Victory Drive. And then we had the Daffin Park where all the Jewish kids used to go because we didn't have any swimming pools anywhere. We had Jewish boys were the life guards out there. It was real nice. We all used to go.

Toby: How did you get there?

Esta: Well, somebody always managed to take you, or my father and Sundays a lot of times somebody would drive us.

Toby: Did you say, were there street cars though and buses and stuff?

Esta: I'm, not to Daffin, it was hard to get to Daffin Park 'cause it was on the East side and we lived on the West side. It was very difficult. But somebody always managed to take us 'cause they had a car. They didn't take one or two, they took about ten children. At that time

Toby: You didn't have to have seatbelts or car seats or...

Esta: ...So we had, we had a very good time then.

Toby: Did you find any antisemitism²² when you were growing up?

Esta: No, I didn't find it. Some of the children might have but I never found any of it. Ever growing up.

Toby: Were there ever places you weren't allowed to go? Or things you weren't allowed to do?

Esta: At that time, I'm just wondering now, I imagine there might have been.

Toby: Nothing that you personally came up with.

Esta: Nothing that I probably wouldn't want to go to or could afford to go to, I guess, in those days.

Toby: Did you interact a lot though with the non-Jewish community?

Esta: We grew up mostly with the Jewish community. We went to school with everybody. Had some very good friends.

²² Antisemitism is prejudice against, hostility to, or hatred of Jews.

Toby: Now what about the interaction between the kids from the B.B. Jacob and the AA²³ and the Temple?²⁴ Everybody mix and mingle or?

Esta: The Temple never came to the JEA at that time.

Toby: Oh, really?

Esta: Ask (unintelligible), she'll tell you. She wasn't allowed to go to the JEA when she was growing up. It's a funny world, isn't it. They didn't mix with us. Until we got to high school and then they kind of mixed. When we really grew up. They just ... children and AA children and the B.B. Jacob children. Nobody, now the boys used to have trouble with a lot of the boys from around the neighborhood kids. Especially on holidays, Jewish holidays, you know, a bunch of them would come out and we had some big boys and they stopped them in a hurry.

Toby: And so at the time you were growing up and B.B. Jacob was on Montgomery Street?

Esta: Montgomery Street.

Toby: That was around, almost around the corner from where you lived. Just down the street.

Esta: Right around the corner. My house from there was right there.

Toby: Is that where, and where was...

[Speaking about Agudath Achim]

Esta: ...went somewhere else before but I don't remember it being across from there on Montgomery Street...

Toby: Were they on Drayton Street at one point?

Esta: That's where it was. That's where it was, Drayton Street and they moved up. One of my friends was the first one to get married there.

Toby: Dr. Bodziner's aunt was one of the first ones to get married at the A.A.

Esta: (unintelligible)

²³ Congregation Agudath Achim was founded in 1903 as "Congregation Agoodath Ahhim," an orthodox synagogue. It became the first conservative Jewish congregation in Georgia when it joined the United Synagogue of America (now United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism) in 1947. As of 2017, the current synagogue is located at 9 Lee Boulevard, and it is led by Rabbi Steven Henkin.

²⁴ Congregation Mickve Israel, also known as "The Temple," in Savannah, Georgia is one the oldest congregations in the United States. Sephardic immigrants from London who arrived in the new colony in 1733 originally organized it. The original synagogue was granted a charter in 1799 by General James Edward Oglethorpe, who established the colony of Georgia for England in 1732. In the late nineteenth century it began to shift to Reform Judaism. The current building was consecrated in 1858. The actual synagogue building was built on a plot of land given to the congregation by the city of Savannah. The cemetery, however, was established in 1733 on a plot of land given to the congregation by James Oglethorpe in the name of King George III. As of 2017, the congregation is led by Rabbi Robert Haas, and is affiliated with the Union for Reform Judaism.

Toby: And then you went...?

Esta: That was on Drayton Street.

Toby: So that must have been far out then, when they moved out to, that seemed like a far away, far, when they moved from Montgomery Street all the way out to Drayton and...

Esta: By then we had moved to Gaston Street. We lived around the park.²⁵

Toby: And the park was a very active place for the kids?

Esta: The kids, when mine were little, I lived on Huntingdon Street when my oldest one, we would walk to the park in the morning and everybody lived around there would bring their children to the park. I got married in the B.B. Jacob downtown. I think they had just moved to Drayton Street.

Toby: The AA, yeah.

Esta: (unintelligible)

Toby: Well, when you were a young married, life was still almost the way it was when you were a kid, everyone still was around each other, socialized together.

Esta: ...that's the way, about 65, 60 years we had nothing but...When we first got married, that's when I learned how to play. Jeannette Lipsitz was one of the players. Adele Sutker, we all played together.

Toby: Well, as a newcomer to Savannah I find Savannah being the most wonderful place to live.

Esta: It was.

Toby: Even now, I said, I think it's wonderful.

Esta: (unintelligible)

Toby: Do you know how your parents happened to come to Savannah?

Esta: My mother's brother was here. And my father's family was all up North. Some were in Springfield, Massachusetts, or some were in New York. His sister lived in New York. The others lived in Springfield, Mass. My mother had a brother here. The Coopers, some of the Coopers came first and my mother was a Cooper.

²⁵ Forsyth Park is a large city park established in the 1840s that occupies 30 acres in the historic district of Savannah, Georgia. The park is bordered by Gaston Street to the north, Drayton Street to the east, Park Avenue to the south and Whitaker Street to the west. It contains walking paths, a café, a children's play area, a Fragrant Garden for the blind, a large fountain, tennis courts, basketball courts, areas for soccer and Frisbee, and home field for Savannah Shamrocks Rugby Club. From time to time, there are concerts held at Forsyth for the benefit of the public.

Toby: Is that C-O-O-P-E-R?

Esta: C-O-O-P-E-R. My mother wanted to, she came, she wanted to come where her family was.

Toby: You don't know how they happened to choose Savannah, do you?

Esta: My uncle was already here. Might have come because somebody else was here. Sidney's father didn't have any family here that we know of. They really needed a tailor in Savannah so he came to Savannah.

Toby: So you knew his parents. Did either of you know your grandparents?

Esta: Yes, I knew his grandparents, his grandmother, but I did not know mine. My mother came over and she brought three others. She brought two sisters and a young brother. She was already married there. Had one child, my oldest brother. They came together and she brought them over, so she said. She had a regular ticket and they had steerage but she wouldn't leave them by themselves so she stayed down with them. It was a terrible trip.

Toby: Oh, I can imagine. We can't imagine I don't think.

Esta: My father came first. He stopped in New York and he went to Cooper Union. Learned how to speak English and talking and things like that and he came on to Savannah. She came later.

Toby: Very interesting, yeah. We know a lot of your family history.

Esta: Yeah. I've tried to remember some of it. I used to keep it all together especially on holidays the family here. I always had at least 30 or 40. My mother always did.

Toby: Oh, really? For which holidays? Every holiday or just...

Esta: I don't know. We still have 20 or 25 for Passover.

Toby: The tradition continues. Nice to pass that along to the children and the grandchildren and the great-grandchildren.

Esta: I had some help. Worked for us for 35 years.

Toby: She's part of the family.

Esta: She's a real cook. My mother taught her how to make everything.

Toby: All the Jewish dishes?

Esta: Jewish dishes.

Toby: What were some of the favorite dishes that you remember? What was the family...

Esta: My mother used to make *kishka*.²⁶ She made knishes. They all remember her *knishes*.²⁷ She made a wonderful *tzimmes*.²⁸ I'm aggravated...the dishes, how they do them. They don't have her touch. My son said he tried them but never the way she did, but he knew how to make all them. She knew how to make all the *kugels*.²⁹ She knew how to make *tzimmes*. She could make anything the old-fashioned way. Prunes and sweet potatoes with a piece of meat in there. And then we had *kneydlach*³⁰ on top. The old-fashioned way. She always made every year.

Toby: I've seen it with pineapple. Have you ever seen it with pineapple?

Esta: They don't use pineapple. They used brown sugar, I think. I got the recipe out of a Hadassah magazine. They said it wasn't bad, but it wasn't like Mama's.

Toby: Well, the meat gave it a different flavor, a totally different flavor.

Esta: They'll be happy to have it this week.

Toby: Well...

Esta: We grew up with all the traditions... My father used to sing a lot of Jewish songs.

Toby: Do you still get to speak Yiddish with anybody?

Esta: My brother came and I understand it real well.

Toby: Do you ever speak it? Do you ever have a chance to?

Esta: If somebody asked me a question, I may answer it. I have a pretty good memory, you know, but I just, I think...

²⁶ *Kishka* refers to various types of sausage or stuffed intestine with a filling made from a combination of meat and meal, often a grain. The dish is popular across Eastern Europe as well as with immigrant communities from those areas. It is also eaten by Ashkenazi Jews who prepare their version according to kashrut dietary laws. The name itself is Slavic in origin, and literally means "gut" or "intestine."

²⁷ A *knish* is Eastern European snack food consisting of a filling covered with dough that is either baked, grilled, or deep fried. Knishes can be purchased from street vendors in urban areas with a large Jewish population, sometimes at a hot dog stand or from a butcher shop. It was made popular in North America by Eastern European immigrants from the Pale of Settlement (mainly from present-day Belarus, Poland, Lithuania and Ukraine). In most Eastern European traditional versions, the filling is made entirely of mashed potato, ground meat, sauerkraut, onions, or cheese. Other varieties of fillings include sweet potatoes, black beans, fruit, broccoli, tofu, or spinach.

²⁸ *Tzimmes* is a traditional Ashkenazi Jewish sweet stew typically made from carrots and dried fruits such as prunes or raisins, often combined with other root vegetables (usually yams). Some cooks add chunks of meat (usually beef flank or brisket). The dish is cooked slowly over low heat and flavored with honey or sugar and sometimes cinnamon or other spices.

²⁹ *Kugel* is a baked pudding or casserole, most commonly made from egg noodles or potato. It is a traditional Ashkenazi Jewish dish, often served on Shabbat and Yom Tov.

³⁰ Matzah balls- A dumpling made from *matzah* meal, an Ashkenazi custom. The balls are dropped into chicken soup or boiling water. They are popular during Passover.

Toby: Yeah, not enough opportunity.

Esta: I went to the Yiddish Club at the Alliance when my husband was living.

Toby: Well, that must have been fun.

Esta: It was really (unintelligible).

Toby: Did he speak Yiddish also?

Esta: He understood, but he didn't speak it like I did or read it. I can still read it.

Toby: How wonderful.

Esta: I can read the Hebrew.

Toby: Sure.

Esta: I can keep up with everything in *shul*.³¹ My mother spoke to us in Yiddish and we answered her in English.

Toby: Did she speak English?

Esta: Yes, she could speak English and Polish and Russian. When they didn't want us to know anything they spoke in Russian.

Toby: Right. Never knew enough of it to be able to really converse.

Esta: My youngest brother spoke it. He could write...

Toby: ...that no one else could understand.

Esta: My father...

Toby: Where was your brother stationed? Was he overseas?

Esta: He was overseas. He was in the Navy so he was (unintelligible).

Toby: Well, is there anything else you can think of?

Esta: Unless you want to know something, ask me something that I can remember, questions that you have.

Toby: What were the houses like? Did you live in a single-family house or an apartment?

Esta: We lived on, there was three floors. You had the steps. One family lived on the first floor. We lived on the second floor. And another family lived on the third.

Toby: Was that typical of what a lot of your friends lived in?

Esta: A lot of them lived in their own houses or they lived in things like that.

³¹ *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.

Toby: Like that.

Esta: Apartments.

Toby: Were there apartment buildings the way we know apartment buildings now?

Esta: Not the way we know them now.

Toby: It would just be like multi-family houses?

Esta: Yes. You use the same entrance on the same high stoop, porches. I always talked to my friend because she was there and we went up in the evening - they probably were supposed to go in the house, you know, we went to visit and . . . which was about 2 or 3 blocks from us and we were coming home and it had gotten dark and so we had gotten across the square but was in the middle and somebody jumped out and hollered "Boo!" Scared us. I could run real fast when I was young and I started running and she said, "You're not going to leave me." And I had on a pair of knit gloves. She was talking about that when she was here the other day. She said, "You're not going to leave me." She grabbed that glove and she was pulling it. I was screaming "Mama" by the time we got home, my mother was there with a . . .

Toby: Do you know who it was? Did you ever find out who it was?

Esta: We never went back to find out who it was. But we didn't . . .

Toby: Stay on the main street, don't go over the square.

Esta: Children around the neighborhood waiting for Passover to be over and then go on downtown to Kress's³² to get bags of candy and wait until it got dark so we could eat the candy. Little things like that makes you laugh.

Toby: What do you remember about integration, the beginnings of that, of integration? Were you married already? No. Sure you would have been.

Esta: I had riot experiences when I went to New York, when we used to go to New York. And I was coming back from my sister's house and I was, we went by Columbia University so they shook my bus. I was petrified. But I got back to the hotel, I was white as a sheet. I was shaking all over.

Toby: But things were pretty quiet here in Savannah, I understand.

³² S. H. Kress & Co. was the trading name of a chain of "five and dime" retail department stores in the United States, established by Samuel Henry Kress, which operated from 1896 to 1981. In the first half of the 20th century, there were Kress stores with ornamented architecture on "Main Street" in hundreds of cities and towns.

Esta: ...affecting our business, you know, they would come in and threaten you, you know. They'd say, "big shots," in the black. They wouldn't let you come downtown to buy. We went through it here, but not like there. We didn't have those marches. We had a few of them but not like that. My worst one was in New York.

Toby: In New York. Yeah.

Esta: I never will forget that.

Toby: I can imagine.

Esta: I thought they were going to turn the bus over. But that was part of it. This has been a very great day.

Toby: Well, it has been today. Well, this has been very interesting for me.

Esta: Would you like something to drink?

Toby: I'm fine. No. I'm going off to another meeting shortly, so... But, it's just been delightful and...

END OF INTERVIEW