INTERVIEW BEGINS

TOBY: ....Arenson and she was a Recreation Director at Forsyth Park and then she’s talking about working at the U.S. Marine Hospital.

CECILE: ...at night…

TOBY: Say that a little louder. You refereed…

CECILE: Yes.

TOBY: This was at Forsyth Park? Or at the hospital?

CECILE: No. This was at Forsyth Park and the gyms at night.

TOBY: So you refereed the night games…?

CECILE: …and supervised. Men’s leagues and refereed the girls’ games. The City Recreation Department.

TOBY: This was what? Basketball?

CECILE: Volleyball.

TOBY: Volleyball.

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1 Forsyth Park is a large city park established in the 1840s that occupies 30 acres (0.12 km\(^2\)) 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.

2 The U.S. Marine Hospital, located at the corner of York and Drayton Streets, opened in 1907. Part of a federal program constructing hospitals in various port cities to provide health care for Merchant Marine sailors, the hospital also played a key role in monitoring and preventing the spread of infectious diseases. The hospital’s mission grew over the first few years it was open to include a wider variety of public health functions and in 1912, the name was change to the Public Health Service. It operated as a low income out-patient health facility until 2003, when the Savannah College of Art and Design purchased the building and converted it into administrative offices, renaming it Bradley Hall.
CECILE: Volleyball, basketball, during the winter months.

TOBY: And in the summertime...

CECILE: …I had full-time in the morning and afternoons. But those were after the Great Depression days.

TOBY: In the 1930s?

CECILE: I graduated in 1926 and went to work April 1st. I worked the City Recreation Department until after World War II, just after World War II, I don’t remember the correct date.

TOBY: And a lot of these people that you see now used to be the kids that you worked with at the Park, right?

CECILE: Old men.

TOBY: Now they’re old men. Now you also, you played basketball in high school, didn’t you?

CECILE: I was, played varsity basketball at Richard Arnold Junior High.

TOBY: Richard Arnold Junior High.

CECILE: And high school.

TOBY: Which high school did you go to?

CECILE: Savannah High.

TOBY: Savannah High.

CECILE: Are you recording?

TOBY: Yeah. At Savannah High. Yes. And you played varsity basketball there, too?

CECILE: At Savannah High? I varsity at junior high and senior high.

TOBY: And then you were an avid tennis player, weren’t you?

CECILE: Once. Considered a good tennis player.

TOBY: And I know you played with, you and Bess Center talk about playing tennis together when you were, uh, what other sport did you play?

CECILE: Oh, handball on the beach.

TOBY: Handball on the beach.

CECILE: I couldn’t play much. I had to work. We were in all the church leagues, too. Not, I refereed the church leagues and the city league games at night in the gyms. ..., If Mr. Bounds wasn’t there, I was in charge.
TOBY: Who was Mr. Bounds?
CECILE: He was Superintendent of Recreation of the Recreation Department.
TOBY: So you had a very, you knew lots of people, didn’t you?
CECILE: I’d have sometimes 900 out there in the afternoon.
TOBY: 900? Wow.
CECILE: Was the league games at night, softball leagues, scores. Later on the churches.
TOBY: And what did they call you? Miss Kelly? Or Miss Ceil?
CECILE: Miss Kelly. He told me that when I went to work there that I wasn’t to let the boys call us, the Great Depression time, he told me I should not let them call me Cecile, they had to call me and respect me. And that worked fine.
TOBY: Where did your family live then?
CECILE: We lived on Whitaker between Anderson and 31st.
TOBY: You lived a lot of different places in the City of Savannah, didn’t you?
CECILE: And then from there we moved to 224 East Henry Street. It was a big three-story house where Grandmother Kelly lived next door to us on the corner. On the other side of the house we had three homes there alike. They were at one time alike. As time went on different people changed the fronts, picket fence. They had a fence around them. They had a sunken kitchen and dumbwaiters. We never did use the dumbwaiter. My family sealed it off. We had a living room, I mean a dining room upstairs on the first floor, or the parlor floor, whatever you want to call it. You’re not recording this now are you?
CECILE: Um, hm. .... to work. I only went there in the mornings from 9 ‘til 1 and then I went and helped my brothers, relieve Bertie and Bill for lunch and then at quarter to 3 I went to the Park.
TOBY: Oh, so you worked three different jobs then.
CECILE: Well, I just helped out there.
TOBY: What kind of store did they have?
CECILE: They had a men’s shop which was converted, military store, say.
TOBY: And what was the name of it?
CECILE: .... I don’t remember.
TOBY: It had a military...and then what, during the war where did you work?
CECILE: The same jobs. U.S. Marine Hospital at the time I was there.

TOBY: You told me about going to the USO. Did they have dances or was it the Temple who had dances?

CECILE: Yes. Yes. Being a recreation worker, I was right away helped with the USO. I have a 3-star pin and a certificate, I think it was.

TOBY: Where did they have their activities?

CECILE: Who do you mean?

TOBY: USO.

CECILE: USO was in the artillery building. You know, where the school is now. You know, the art school started....

TOBY: SCAD.

CECILE: I had friends that were head of that and they requested I help them. Then I used to go up to, during the war I went to, I can’t think, I’m getting confused, you know, I’ve got things between mixed up. We bought a lot of land and put on, opened the recreation part for the patients up there. They used to take us, lead us, some of us, and take us up there to help teach them and learn square dancing.

TOBY: Oh, the soldiers that is, the people...

CECILE: No. That was just civilians...

TOBY: Oh, civilians.

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

4 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.

5 Savannah College of Art and Design (SCAD) is a private, nonprofit university with locations in Savannah, Georgia; Atlanta, Georgia; Hong Kong; and Lacoste, France. Founded in 1978 to provide degrees in programs not yet offered in the southeast, the university now operates two locations in Georgia, a degree-granting location in Hong Kong, a degree-granting online education program, and a study abroad location in Lacoste, France with rotating course offerings. The university enrolls more than 11,000 students from across the United States and around the world with international students comprising up to 14 percent of the student population.
CECILE: The patients, not the patients, the…
TOBY: …Soldiers?
CECILE: They’d come by and pick us up and take us for a ride in the horse and buggy.
TOBY: Oh, your grandfather had a horse and buggy and…
CECILE: Oh, yes, he stayed with a horse and buggy until, he got rid of that and he got a little Saxon\(^6\) to keep my little brother happy, teach him to drive. He drove over the grass spots.
TOBY: Which grandfather was this?
CECILE: Oppenheimer. I didn’t know the other grandfather. He was dead when I was…
TOBY: But then you used to go out to Tybee\(^7\) also, didn’t you?
CECILE: We used to get the trolley car. When we moved from Henry Street during the Great Depression\(^8\) I drove from Henry Street until, during the Great Depression. The people would knock around you, on the door or ring the bell and ask for a piece of bread. They’d mark 224 out on the curb and ask for a donation and then come ask for a donation.
TOBY: Now where did you move after that and you went out, you say, out to the streetcar?
CECILE: Most of my youth was spent there.
TOBY: On Henry Street.
CECILE: Yes. We had beautiful dolls my grandmother used to give us. With real curly hair. The tall characters. And bring us all ------. She had an open account at Hogan’s Dry Goods Store. She’d buy clothes, beautiful games and things, child’s games, and hair ribbons and the little panties with the little embroidered trim on our panties.
TOBY: Those were for the dolls or for you?
CECILE: No. That was for us.
TOBY: For us. Oh, okay.

\(^{6}\) The Saxon was an automobile produced by the Saxon Motor Car Company, from 1913 to 1923. The company was based in Detroit and then Ypsilanti, Michigan.

\(^{7}\) 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.

\(^{8}\) The Great Depression was a severe worldwide economic depression in the decade preceding World War II. The time of the Great Depression varied across nations, but in most countries it started in about 1929 and lasted until the late 1930s or early 1940s. It was the longest, most widespread, and deepest depression of the twentieth century.
CECILE: Mama would make them.

TOBY: Your mother was a good seamstress?

CECILE: Oh, she wasn’t. She made our clothes. I mean, she never, I don’t think she always had them. Her family was rich.

TOBY: Oh, your mother, yeah, that’s right, your mother was very active in the PTA.

CECILE: Oh, yes, she was a… of local schools and district president of the council, district and state auditor for the PTA.

TOBY: She was also very active in the Temple. Didn’t she do a lot of their cooking and the catering for the Temple?

CECILE: Yes. They asked if she would be chairman of a project for, I don’t know whether it was chairman or what, but anyway, she inherited it. She put on one dinner and it turned out very good, so after that all the brotherhood and she supervised the whole works.

TOBY: And you were all raised in the Temple, all your brothers and sisters. You were confirmed. You went to confirmation?

CECILE: All the children except Lawrence. All the children except Lawrence were confirmed in the Temple. On our block we had some very nice people and my mother wouldn’t let us play with everybody. I mean, she was very cautious who we went with and wouldn’t let us, really kept us on that block. We had children on the block from... they were usually down at my house, there were so many of us.

TOBY: It was fun to be at your house because there were so many kids?

CECILE: Yeah. They’d always come to our house. Usually we played basketball in the Derby yard. Have a basketball court. Everybody on the block usually get together.

TOBY: What other things did you play in those days? Do you remember?

CECILE: Well, I was little. Oh, ring-around-the-rosy, pocket full of posy, all those. We played usually, when we got older, it was mostly the basketball. We all played together. Boys and girls.

TOBY: Boys and girls. That’s how you got so good? To be and then you learned all the rules to coach and referee?

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9 Confirmation marks the culmination of a special year in the life of Jewish students between ages 16 and 18; a period of religious study beyond *bar or bat mitzvah*. In some Conservative synagogues the confirmation concept has been adopted as a way to continue a child’s Jewish education and involvement for a few more years.
CECILE: No. I never refereed until one day when Mr. Bounds came out and said, “Miss Kelly, I want you to go over and referee a game at the Guards Armory.” Which was just around the corner on Abercorn. I said, “I can’t do that, Mr. Bounds.” He said, “Oh, yes, you can.” I said, “No.” He said, “Yes, you can do it.” So that’s when I got started refereeing.

TOBY: So you just went in and did it one night and that was the beginning…?

CECILE: It wasn’t at night, it was during the day.

TOBY: During the day.

CECILE: It was a school week.

TOBY: Oh, a school week.

CECILE: Savannah had all the high school games.

TOBY: For a long time then.

CECILE: Oh, yes.

TOBY: So pretty much everybody in that era knew who you were.

CECILE: That’s right. I mean, you see why I know so many people.

TOBY: Right, yeah. And so many families that remember you from the park and the high schools.

CECILE: Little brothers and sisters would grow up behind each other.

TOBY: Yeah, different generations. Now you said you also worked for Big Brothers and Big Sisters. Or Big Sisters, is it?

CECILE: Yes. I worked for the Council of Jewish Women,\textsuperscript{10} city project, which I understand, was the Council always took over some civic project.

TOBY: And which was that?

CECILE: Does that make sense?

TOBY: Yeah. They would do a community project in the City. So was that Big Sisters?

CECILE: That was the Council of Jewish Women’s project then.

TOBY: Was Big sisters?

CECILE: Yes. It was in the mornings.

\textsuperscript{10} The National Council of Jewish Women is an organization of volunteers and advocates, founded in the 1890s, who turn progressive ideals in advocacy and philanthropy inspired by Jewish values. They strive to improve the quality of life for women, children and families.
TOBY: And then did you also work out at Hunter? Did you work out at Hunter?
CECILE: Well, after I finished, after the war, I worked at, after I left the U.S. Marine Hospital, they had a cutback. The government cut back and I lost out because I was new. Same thing happened after I got the job at Hunter.

TOBY: What did you do at Hunter?
CECILE: Service ....

TOBY: So you’ve always been in the recreation field?
CECILE: Yeah, it all comes under that. Most of it.

TOBY: It's a great career you had. Is that where you were until you got married or then you had other jobs, too?
CECILE: No, I got cut off at Hunter because of the same thing. Normal cutback. It was just after the war.

TOBY: What did you do after that?
CECILE: Well, the boys would look me up when they came back on furlough and they would come to me to ask me where so and so and so was, and if I had seen so and so.

TOBY: You were the contact person for everyone to reunite with each other after the war? To help them reunite with their friends and things after the war? People would come to you to find out where so and so was?
CECILE: If I had heard from them.

TOBY: Have you heard from them. Yes.
CECILE: So the little brothers would come. I couldn’t run them out.

TOBY: This was the toy-lending library at Big Sisters?
CECILE: Yes. On Saturday mornings, I worked. One little boy looked up at my face and says, “You know what, Miss Kelly?” I said, “No.” He said, “Brought you an engagement ring.” That was a small boy. I said, “What have you got there?” He said, “I’ve got an engagement ring for you.”

11 Hunter Army Airfield, located in Savannah, Georgia, is a military airfield and subordinate installation to Fort Stewart located in Hinesville, Georgia. Founded in 1929, Hunter features a runway that is 11,375 feet long and an aircraft parking area that is more than 350 acres. The runway and apron, combined with the 72,000 square foot Arrival/Departure Airfield Control Group (A/DACG) Facility and nearby railhead, allow the 3rd Infantry Division from nearby Fort Stewart to efficiently deploy soldiers and cargo worldwide. NASA has identified Hunter as an alternate landing site for the Space Shuttle orbiters.
TOBY: Yeah, he was how old? He was little.

CECILE: I said, “Let me see that.” He had his mother’s school ring. I said, “You take this back to your mother.” He said, “No, she said I could give it to you.”

TOBY: That’s cute. All kinds of neat stories from working with these kids.

CECILE: Another little boy said, “You need me to walk,” He had to walk me from before the park to the end of the park—I told you this story—where I met my uncle to pick me up and lived next door to me. He took me home. They lived right next door on 48th and Habersham.

TOBY: Who was, which uncle was this?

CECILE: Eva’s husband. Eva Oppenheim Luckman. I said, “You shouldn’t be walking me through this park, it’s getting dark and you belong to go home.” I said, “You’d better run on home now.” He says, “My mother said I,” Anyway he said his mother said he could.

TOBY: You got married in January of 1952, right?

CECILE: I think it was January. I think I’ve got the right date. I’m not sure. I always knew it. I don’t have anything to look back on. Had all my books and all.

TOBY: You got married to Mike Arenson and then he took you to Delaware.

CECILE: Newark, Delaware.¹²

TOBY: Newark, Delaware. You worked in his family’s store at that point?

CECILE: A department store.

TOBY: How long, and his mother lived with you at that time?

CECILE: Yeah. About 8 years. Well, we all lived together.

TOBY: And then you moved down…

CECILE: …to Cordele, Georgia.¹³

TOBY: And opened up your own shop?

CECILE: Wait a minute.

TOBY: …opened up Arenson’s Shoe Store in 1960? That’s when you moved to Cordele? And then came back here in 1979.

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¹² Newark is a city in New Castle County, Delaware, 12 miles west-southwest of Wilmington. According to the 2010 Census, the population of the city is 31,454. Newark is the home of the University of Delaware.

¹³ Cordele is a city in Crisp County, Georgia, in the south-central part of the state. The population was 11,147 at the 2010 census. The city is the county seat of Crisp County. Cordele calls itself the “Watermelon Capital of the World.”
CECILE: Because of my rheumatoid arthritis.\textsuperscript{14}

TOBY: Because of your rheumatoid arthritis, right.

CECILE: The recreation leaders received $2.50 an afternoon for about, from 3 o’clock until dark.

TOBY: So, it’s two dollars and fifty cents for all those hours work from 3 o’clock in the afternoon until dark.

CECILE: No. Well, about 6:30.

TOBY: 6:30.

CECILE: You know how - stenographers were making $2.50.

TOBY: Two dollars and 50 cents.

CECILE: A day. Working 8 hours.

TOBY: A day, oh, my goodness. Working 8 hours and making $2 - what was this during the Depression or before the Depression?

CECILE: This was before.

TOBY: Before. That was the salary.

CECILE: And the maids, I think, at that time, made $2.50. A day.

TOBY: So, quite a difference. You started out, was that your salary, making $2.50 for an afternoon’s work at the Recreation Department?

CECILE: The first job they only had $9,000 for the whole City Recreation Department.

TOBY: That was the budget for the whole Department?

CECILE: For a year.

TOBY: For a year. That’s interesting.

CECILE: We started off in the shoe store, as far as I can remember, and made 80 cents. I’m not sure.

TOBY: What was that? 80 cents an hour? That was salary for a shoe store worker at that time. My goodness.

\textsuperscript{14} Rheumatoid arthritis (RA) is a long-term autoimmune disorder that primarily affects joints. It typically results in warm, swollen, and painful joints. Pain and stiffness often worsen following rest. Most commonly, the wrist and hands are involved, with the same joints typically involved on both sides of the body. The disease may also affect other parts of the body. This may result in a low red blood cell count, inflammation around the lungs, and inflammation around the heart. Fever and low energy may also be present. Often, symptoms come on gradually over weeks to months.
CECILE: Any worker?
TOBY: Any worker. That was the wage they made.
CECILE: I think, oh what was it?

INTERVIEW ENDS