

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

**MEMOIRIST:** HELEN EISEMANN ALEXANDER  
**INTERVIEWER:** SANDY LEFF  
**DATE:** NOVEMBER 29, 1993; DECEMBER 28, 1993  
**LOCATION:** HOME OF HELEN EISEMANN ALEXANDER  
**TRANSCRIPTIONIST:** RUTHANNE WARNICK

**INTERVIEW BEGINS**

<Begin Tape 1, Side 1>

**Sandy:** This is Sandy Leff, and I am interviewing Helen Eisemann Alexander. E-I-S-E-M-A-N-N. This is for the Jewish Oral History Project of Atlanta, co-sponsored by the American Jewish Committee, the National Council of Jewish Women, and the American Jewish Federation. The date is November 29, 1993, and we are currently in Helen's home at 267 Rivers Road in Northwest Atlanta [Georgia]. Let me start, Helen, by asking you where you were born.

**Helen:** I was born in New York City [New York], in Manhattan. I was born at home actually, which they did in those days. January 13, 1922 is the date. It was about a few minutes before midnight, and the doctor said to my mother, "Josephine, just wait a few more minutes, and it will be on the fourteenth, not Friday the thirteenth." She said, "Absolutely not," and she went on . . .

**Sandy:** . . . and had that baby.

**Helen:** . . . and had that baby, right.

**Sandy:** Friday, the thirteenth. I bet you heard that story a lot when you were growing up.

**Helen:** I did.

**Sandy:** You were a lucky baby, born on Friday the thirteenth.

**Helen:** I think so.

**Sandy:** Did you have sisters and brothers?

**Helen:** I have one brother, Alex, Alexander Eisemann, Jr. He lives in Westport, Connecticut, and he is two and a half years younger than I am.

**Sandy:** You were the first baby.

**Helen:** Yes.

**Sandy:** Was he born at home, too?

**Helen:** Yes.

**Sandy:** Do you remember anything about his birth?

**Helen:** No. I remember what happened shortly thereafter. I started limping. I don't know if you want stories like this in here?

**Sandy:** Sure.

**Helen:** Alright. My parents dragged me from one doctor to another. One wanted to operate, and another one said, "Oh, that's terrible. We need to do something drastic." They had a friend who was a psychiatrist, a close friend. His name was Richard Hoffman, and he said, "Josephine and Alex, let's just take Helen out to the country to her grandfather's house and with my son, and let's just watch them and see what happens." Sure enough, young Richard took my bicycle, and I started running after him, no limp. That was the last of that. They decided the best thing to do was just forget about it, and it went away.

**Sandy:** I think you were an actress even then.

**Helen:** Right.

**Sandy:** That was your first . . .

**Helen:** . . . way of getting attention, they said.

**Sandy:** Yes. This doesn't follow exactly, but when did you return to Atlanta to live?

**Helen:** In 1947. My mother had to come back down to Atlanta, which was her place of birth, to take care of some business. Dad felt that it would be best if I went with her. I said, "But, dad, I've got this film coming up with Victor Mature<sup>1</sup> with a good part, and besides I'm not interested in any Southern man." He said, "Go on anyway," so I did. We took the . . .

**Sandy:** You were 25 at that time. Is that right?

**Helen:** That's right. We took the Crescent<sup>2</sup> down. My mother was talking perfectly normal English when we left New York. I was in the upper berth and she was in the lower berth. Early in the morning I hear this voice. She said, "Darling, look out that window. What am I seein'?" Some

---

<sup>1</sup>Victor John Mature (January 29, 1913 – August 4, 1999) was an American stage, film, and television actor who starred most notably in several movies during the 1950s.

<sup>2</sup> The *Crescent* is a daily long-distance passenger train operated by Amtrak in the eastern United States. The National Railroad Passenger Corporation, doing business as Amtrak, is a passenger railroad service that provides medium- and long-distance intercity service in the contiguous United States and to nine Canadian cities. The Crescent operates daily between Pennsylvania Station in New York City and Union Passenger Terminal in New Orleans, Louisiana. Atlanta, Georgia is one of its major service stops.

of that good old red clay." [Helen uses a Southern accent.] She had changed overnight when she crossed that border.

**Sandy:** When she crossed that Mason Dixon line.<sup>3</sup>

**Helen:** She loved Atlanta. She really did. That's when I first came down.

**Sandy:** You actually had been down here to visit . . .

**Helen:** Never.

**Sandy:** . . . your grandparents before?

**Helen:** No. My grandparents lived on Long Island [New York]. The relatives that I have here were my mother's. Both my mother's brothers had died. Max Lowenstein . . . my mother's name was Lowenstein . . . had died, and Frank Lowenstein had died. Frank Lowenstein's wife was Marcelle Lowenstein, and she lived here at that time. She was president of the Norris Candy Company,<sup>4</sup> which was a family business, and we stayed with her.

**Sandy:** That was in 1947, so you really don't know anything about Atlanta until 1947.

**Helen:** It was February. I brought a tennis racket and a bathing suit, so I did not really know very much about Atlanta, no.

**Sandy:** You had high hopes.

**Helen:** It was the South, so it should be hot.

**Sandy:** That is a great story. Let me start a little bit with your early life anyway, before you came to Atlanta. Your father's name was . . .

**Helen:** Alexander Eisemann.

**Sandy:** E-I-S-E-M-A-N-N. Where was he from?

**Helen:** New York City.

**Sandy:** Oh, he was born in this country.

**Helen:** Yes.

**Sandy:** Was he of German background?

**Helen:** His parents, my grandparents, came over when they were young, seven or eight, from

---

<sup>3</sup>The Mason-Dixon Line was surveyed between 1763 and 1767 to settle a border line dispute between Pennsylvania, Maryland, Delaware, and West Virginia (then Virginia), setting their borders officially. Until about the mid-eighteenth century it was regarded as a cultural boundary between the North and the South, but after Pennsylvania abolished slavery in 1780 it became the demarcation line for the legality of slavery.

<sup>4</sup>Norris Candy Company in Atlanta, Georgia, was founded by Arthur Leland "Buddy" Norris in 1905. The company was located in the Norris Building on Peachtree St. near Davison's Department Store. The business was purchased by the Lowenstein family.

Frankfurt am Main<sup>5</sup> in Germany.

**Sandy:** Did you know your paternal grandparents?

**Helen:** Oh, yes. I used to go down there every weekend.

**Sandy:** Now you say down there.

**Helen:** Long Island.

**Sandy:** Down to Long Island.

**Helen:** Right.

**Sandy:** To visit. Your mother, her name was . . .

**Helen:** Josephine Lowenstein.

**Sandy:** She was born in Atlanta. Is that right?

**Helen:** Yes.

**Sandy:** Do you remember what year she was born in Atlanta?

**Helen:** I will get back with you on that. I don't.

**Sandy:** Did she talk about Atlanta?

**Helen:** All the time. They lived on Washington Street. There were many brothers, about four brothers, and two sisters. She was the youngest of the family. Her dad, my grandfather . . . I never met those maternal grandparents. They had died, and so the brothers took over the rearing of . . .

**Sandy:** . . . the younger child.

**Helen:** My mother. Yes. They would not let her do anything. She was very fun loving. She got married very young the first time and left Atlanta. I think she was 18.

**Sandy:** So she lived in Atlanta until she was about 18.

**Helen:** Right.

**Sandy:** She had fond memories of this city.

**Helen:** She loved it.

**Sandy:** What did she tell you? What kinds of things?

**Helen:** She came down here one time. On one of her trips, she said, "Honey, let's drive down Washington Street, and let's see if we can find the house." We did, and she said, "Oh, stop! That's it. Look. See on that porch? That's where mama sat, and she held me, I'm sure, and Uncle

---

<sup>5</sup>The city of Frankfurt, Germany is officially Frankfurt am Main, meaning Frankfurt on the Main, referring to the Main River.

Will and Uncle Frank and Uncle Ike and Jeanette and Sadie." She went through the whole family. She started crying. After about five minutes, I said, "Okay, darling, that's enough. We better go on." We drove for a couple of blocks, and she said, "Oh, Helen, stop. That wasn't it at all. This is it." That doesn't really tell you much about the life. It was as if those who lived on Washington Street at that time were like one family. They would go in and out of one another's houses, and everybody knew one another. All the photographs that I see of her, she is just acting up and having a great time.

**Sandy:** Was she a real Southern belle?<sup>6</sup>

**Helen:** She was a beautiful woman. She was too impetuous. Not too impetuous. I wouldn't say that she went along with the social world, in that sense. I never heard stories about that.

**Sandy:** She got married at 17 and left Atlanta. For New York at that time?

**Helen:** Right. That marriage didn't last, I think, six months.

**Sandy:** Did she marry a Jewish man from Atlanta?

**Helen:** I know his name. I don't know if he was from here or not. His name is Harry James. He was not the orchestra leader.

**Sandy:** Not Betty Grable's<sup>7</sup> Harry James.<sup>8</sup>

**Helen:** Right. I never heard a lot about that.

**Sandy:** That's when she moved up to New York.

**Helen:** That's right.

**Sandy:** Then she met your father.

**Helen:** Some years later she met my dad, and he really ran after her, as it were. I remember a story they used to tell. She went to Europe with a friend, "chaperone." I don't know if she was older than my mother. Dad followed her over there. I guess it was the same ship. She was an exciting lady. I don't know exactly when they got married.

---

<sup>6</sup>The Southern belle (derived from the French word *belle*, 'beautiful') is a stock character representing a young woman of the American South's upper socioeconomic class. The image of the Southern belle developed in the South during the antebellum era. It was based on the young, unmarried woman in the plantation-owning upper class of Southern society. Southern belles were expected to marry respectable young men and become ladies of society dedicated to the family and community and characterized by Southern hospitality. During the early 20th century, the release of the novel *Gone with the Wind* and its film adaptation popularized the image of the Southern belle.

<sup>7</sup>Elizabeth "Betty" Ruth Grable (December 18, 1916 – July 2, 1973) was an American actress, pin-up girl, dancer, model, and singer. The U.S. Treasury Department in 1946 and 1947 listed her as the highest-salaried American woman. She was married to musician and band leader Harry James from 1943 to 1965.

<sup>8</sup>Harry Haag James (March 15, 1916 – July 5, 1983) was an American musician who is best known as a trumpet-playing band leader who led a big band from 1939 to 1946.

**Sandy:** You didn't know your grandparents in Atlanta at all.

**Helen:** No, I did not.

**Sandy:** You knew your uncles, your mother's older brothers?

**Helen:** I met both of them one time. They died very young, also.

**Sandy:** Their names were Lowenstein.

**Helen:** Yes, Max Lowenstein and Frank Lowenstein. They lived on South Ponce de Leon [Avenue]. Max's house is now the Paideia School.<sup>9</sup> It's the building next to the large building. Frank's home was . . . The boys choir is in there.

**Sandy:** Are you friendly with that family now? Do you see . . .

**Helen:** I am friendly with . . . Billy Lowenstein is Max's son, and Betty Lowenstein. Betty lives in Cleveland [Georgia], and that is Max's daughter. The rest of them are not living. Marcelle Lowenstein is living. That's Frank's sister, but I don't know where she is.

**Sandy:** What do you remember about your father's grandparents? They were of German extraction.

**Helen:** They were just a wonderful couple, warm, loving. He was, anyway. He was in the ostrich feather business. He started it himself. In those days . . . This was the late 1800's . . . the women would wear ostrich feathers on their hats, on the sleeves of their dresses, and around the hem. It was a big business. He had very loyal employees. He retired at age 50, and when he retired he gave the business to his employees . . . I think about that frequently . . . because, he said, "They are the ones that helped me create it," . . .

**Sandy:** . . . build it up.

**Helen:** . . . and he gave it to them.

**Sandy:** You had an unusual spirit of giving in your family . . .

**Helen:** Right, and trusting.

**Sandy:** . . . very early on, didn't you, that you followed. A good role model to follow. Your father, what did he do?

**Helen:** In 1922, my dad started the Freed-Eisemann Radio Corporation.<sup>10</sup> They manufactured

---

<sup>9</sup>The Paideia School is a private independent school in the Druid Hills neighborhood of Atlanta, Georgia, which enrolls students pre-kindergarten through twelfth grade.

<sup>10</sup>Freed-Eisemann Radio Corporation was founded in 1921. After receivership in 1929, another company was formed, the Freed Television and Radio Corporation, which in 1940 became the Freed Radio Corporation.

some of the first radios in this country. At that time, there was Emerson,<sup>11</sup> Freed-Eisemann, and RCA.<sup>12</sup>

**Sandy:** He wasn't interested in that ostrich business.

**Helen:** No. He had already given that away, and it was . . .

**Sandy:** Did your mother work?

**Helen:** No. She should have. She was so talented, but in those days women just didn't have the training. At least many of them didn't. She could have been a dress designer. She could have been an interior designer. She didn't work, no.

**Sandy:** What is your earliest memory as a child in New York City, besides the one that you told me about with an injured hip, with a limp.

**Helen:** I remember children in New York City had a bit of a difficult time, because we weren't really free to run and go out because of traffic and fears of kidnapping. Those were the days of the Lindbergh kidnapping.<sup>13</sup> Do you remember that?

**Sandy:** Yes.

**Helen:** There was a lot of fear about that. Don't let your children run loose and so on. We always had someone, a governess, that was with us, my brother and myself. We went to Central Park.<sup>14</sup> We were all dressed up with gloves and leggings. I have seen the way children are brought up here, and it is much better. They are free to go out and be with your friends without always having somebody watch over you.

**Sandy:** What about Jewish holidays? Do you have memories of celebrating the Jewish holidays?

---

<sup>11</sup>Emerson Radio Corporation is one of the United States' largest volume consumer electronics distributors and has a recognized trademark in continuous use since 1912. Emerson Radio Corp. was incorporated in 1915 as Emerson Phonograph Co., based in New York City, by an early recording engineer and executive, Victor Hugo Emerson.

<sup>12</sup>The RCA Corporation was a major American electronics company, which was founded as the Radio Corporation of America in 1919. RCA was at the forefront of the mushrooming radio industry in the early 1920s and was initially a wholly owned subsidiary of General Electric (GE). In 1932, RCA became an independent company and was the dominant electronics and communications firm in the United States for over five decades. Today, RCA exists as a brand name only.

<sup>13</sup>On March 1, 1932, Charles Augustus Lindbergh Jr., 20-month-old son of aviator Charles Lindbergh and Anne Morrow Lindbergh, was abducted from the crib in the upper floor of his home near Hopewell, New Jersey. On May 12, the child's corpse was discovered off the side of a nearby road. In September 1934, Richard Hauptmann was arrested for the crime, and, after a trial that lasted from January 2 to February 13, 1935, he was found guilty of first-degree murder and sentenced to death.

<sup>14</sup>Central Park is an urban park in Manhattan, New York City, covering 843 acres. It is the most visited urban park in the United States. Central Park was designated as a National Historic Landmark in 1963 and as a New York City scenic landmark in 1974.

**Helen:** I remember that my grandfather, my father's father, in his home we did Hanukkah<sup>15</sup> and we had a *seder*,<sup>16</sup> which was really a wonderful memory to have and sort of a role model for the *seder* that we do now. I will say this. We had a *seder*, and my mother also had one of the biggest Christmas trees you ever saw. It was one of those strange times when your identity was without doubt Jewish, but your behavior sometimes was not totally the way the strict Judaism would advocate. I remember when my children went to Sunday school and we had a Christmas tree, because I never thought of it as a Christian thing but more of an American way of celebrating that season.

**Sandy:** You had a Christmas tree because that's the way you were brought up.

**Helen:** That's right. In fact, this tree that my mother had was so large that it had to be hauled up the outside of the building on Park Avenue, if you can imagine. That's one of my first memories. I remember going into that room and just the thrill of seeing that beautiful . . . It was just gorgeous, and it took up almost the whole room.

**Sandy:** Was it confusing to you in any way to have that Christmas tree and still to know you were Jewish and having Passover and other Jewish holidays?

**Helen:** It wasn't really. We went to Sunday school in New York City, and my father . . . I remember in later years coming home, and there was something so serious you could feel it. The atmosphere was very intense. He said, "Helen, I'm having serious conversations in this room. I'll tell you about it later." It turned out that Fritz Kuhn<sup>17</sup> . . . He was an antisemite who was German.

**Sandy:** How do you spell that name?

**Helen:** K-U-H-N.

**Sandy:** Fritz, F-R-I-T-Z K-U-H-N.

---

<sup>15</sup>Hebrew for 'dedication.' An eight-day festival of lights usually falling around Christmas on the Christian calendar. *Hanukkah* celebrates the victory of the Maccabees in 165 BCE over the Seleucid rulers of Palestine, who had desecrated the Temple. The Maccabees wanted to rededicate the Temple altar to Jewish worship by rekindling the *menorah* but could only find one small jar of ritually pure olive oil. This oil continued to burn miraculously for eight days, enabling them to prepare new oil. The *Hanukkah menorah*, or *hanukiah*, with its nine branches, is used to commemorate this miracle by lighting eight candles, one for each day, by the ninth candle.

<sup>16</sup>*Seder* (meaning "order" in Hebrew) is a Jewish ritual feast that marks the beginning of the Jewish holiday of Passover. It is conducted on the evening of the fifteenth day of *Nisan* in the Hebrew calendar throughout the world. Some communities hold *seder* on both the first two nights of Passover. The *seder* incorporates prayers, candle lighting, and traditional foods symbolizing the slavery of the Jews and the exodus from Egypt. It is one of the most colorful and joyous occasions in Jewish life.

<sup>17</sup>Fritz Julius Kuhn (May 15, 1896 – December 14, 1951) was the leader of the German American Bund before World War II. He became a naturalized United States citizen in 1934, but his citizenship was cancelled in 1943, and he was deported in 1945. He was an American supporter of the German Nazi government led by Adolf Hitler that ruled Germany from 1933 to 1945.

**Helen:** Yes. He was speaking on 86<sup>th</sup> Street, which was the German section, and he was a rabble-rouser.<sup>18</sup> All these organizations tried to find out his . . . to get him on income tax and different things to stop him, but they couldn't find anything. Finally, and I suppose this is alright to tell now, this organization, which is a well-known one, hired a boxer to break his jaw so he would stop. It was before World War II, just at the edge of World War II.

**Sandy:** A Jewish organization.

**Helen:** Yes. They had to stop him. That story is still with me today. It says without doubt you are Jewish, and stand up for what you believe in. I have always . . .

**Sandy:** How old were you at that time?

**Helen:** I must have been about . . . World War II would have been early 1940. [It was] probably 1938, so I was 22.

**Sandy:** Did you have Jewish holidays in your house? Did you light the Hanukkah *menorah*?<sup>19</sup> Did you observe *Shabbat*?<sup>20</sup> in any way?

**Helen:** My brother and I did light the Hanukkah candles, but I cannot say that we formally did. They were not Jewish in a religious sense, but they were certainly Jewish in an ethnic sense.

**Sandy:** Do you remember going to synagogue on the High Holidays?<sup>21</sup> Did you belong to a synagogue?

**Helen:** We belonged to Temple Emanu-El<sup>22</sup> in New York City.

**Sandy:** You went for the High Holidays? Do you remember?

**Helen:** At that time of our life we spent three months in Florida. I believe we were away, as my father's business took us down there.

**Sandy:** Did your mother dress in ostrich feathers?

---

<sup>18</sup>A person who makes a group of people angry, excited, or violent (such as by giving speeches) especially in order to achieve a political or social goal.

<sup>19</sup>The *menorah*, which has seven branches, is an ancient symbol of the Jews. It has come to be connected with *Hanukkah*. The *Talmud* states that it is prohibited to use a seven-branched *menorah* outside of the Temple, so the *Hanukkah menorah* (*hanukiah*) has nine branches.

<sup>20</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>21</sup>The two High Holy Days are *Rosh Ha-Shanah* (Jewish New Year) and *Yom Kippur* (Day of Atonement).

<sup>22</sup>Temple Emanu-El of New York was the first Reform Jewish congregation in New York City and, because of its size and prominence, has served as a flagship congregation in the Reform branch of Judaism since its founding in 1845.

**Helen:** She had some of them because really it would have been my grandmother's era.

**Sandy:** Was your brother bar mitzvahed?<sup>23</sup>

**Helen:** No. In those days the temple just did confirmations.

**Sandy:** You went to Sunday school.

**Helen:** Yes.

**Sandy:** Did you read Hebrew?

**Helen:** They did teach us Hebrew.

**Sandy:** You had some Hebrew background.

**Helen:** Yes.

**Sandy:** How about Yiddish? Did your grandparents speak Yiddish as you remember?

**Helen:** No. I remember hearing a lot of German in the family. [German, sentence: 19:30] I can understand, but I really can't speak it.

**Sandy:** Did you live in a Jewish neighborhood in New York?

**Helen:** No.

**Sandy:** You lived on Park Avenue, I heard you say.

**Helen:** Yes, 62<sup>nd</sup> Street and Park and then 78<sup>th</sup> Street and Park. At one point I came home from boarding school to find that we had moved to a hotel, the Hotel Pierre, when my mother just got sick of housekeeping. They had the front apartment at the Pierre Hotel with two terraces, one for the dog and one for us.

**Sandy:** It sounds like you had a fairly nice existence.

**Helen:** We did. My brother and I would come home from school, and they would say, "What do you want for dinner?" We would say, "Order three creamed spinaches." We would call room service and ask for them. [It was] sort of an unusual childhood, more like *Eloise*<sup>24</sup> I suppose.

**Sandy:** That's what I thought about. What were your parents' ambitions for you?

**Helen:** I wanted to be an actress so badly, so I thought that that was what they wanted for me. I

---

<sup>23</sup>*Bar Mitzvah* is Hebrew for 'son of commandment' and is 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 he may be counted to the *minyan* quorum for public worship. He celebrates becoming a *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. The term *bar mitzvah* often is used to describe the celebration itself, i.e. "had my *bar mitzvah*" or "was bar mitzvahed."

<sup>24</sup>*Eloise* is a series of children's books written in the 1950's by Kay Thompson and illustrated by Hilary Knight. Eloise is a girl who lives in the "room on the tippy-top floor" of the Plaza Hotel in New York City with her Nanny, her pug dog Weenie, and her turtle Skipperdee.

don't know, but they certainly went along with it. In those days I don't know whether many parents would have been happy with their daughter zipping off, going on the road in the theater. I really respect them for <unintelligible 20:52>.

**Sandy:** When did you decide to be an actress? Do you remember? Was there something, some pivotal thing that . . .

**Helen:** What comes to mind, and I don't know if this made up my mind for me, but my father used to keep a diary, like Samuel Pepys.<sup>25</sup> He wrote that at the age of four this child must be an actress because she veritably behaves like one, or something like that. I remember reading that many times, so I don't know if they expected that or not.

**Sandy:** A self-fulfilling prophecy.

**Helen:** Perhaps.

**Sandy:** Did you have role models at that time, actresses that you aspired to emulate?

**Helen:** I remember going to Radio City [Music Hall]<sup>26</sup> the first time and seeing Elissa Landi<sup>27</sup> in a wonderful film.

**Sandy:** How do you spell Elissa?

**Helen:** E-L-I-S-S-A L-A-N-D-I.

**Sandy:** That was a little bit before my time.

**Helen:** Yes, I'm sure it is. Also Greta Garbo<sup>28</sup> and all these wonderful, sad ladies, tragic figures. Some of them were delightful.

**Sandy:** Did you start acting when you were at private school?

**Helen:** I went to . . .

**Sandy:** I am going to ask you about your education, and probably this would be a good time to start. You went to public school at first?

**Helen:** First I went to . . . It was called Lincoln School of Teachers College.<sup>29</sup> It was the first

---

<sup>25</sup>Samuel Pepys FRS (February 23, 1633 – May 26, 1703) was an administrator of the navy of England and Member of Parliament who is most famous for the diary he kept for a decade while still a relatively young man.

<sup>26</sup>Radio City Music Hall is an entertainment venue at 1260 Avenue of the Americas, within Rockefeller Center, in midtown Manhattan, New York City. It is the headquarters for the Rockettes, the precision dance company.

<sup>27</sup>Elissa Landi (born Elisabeth Marie Christine Kühnelt, December 6, 1904 – October 21, 1948) was an Italian-born Austrian actress and novelist who was popular as a performer in Hollywood films of the 1920's and 1930's.

<sup>28</sup>Greta Garbo (born Greta Lovisa Gustafsson, September 18, 1905 – April 15, 1990) was a Swedish-American film actress during the 1920s and 1930s. Garbo was nominated three times for the Academy Award for Best Actress and received an Academy Honorary Award in 1954. In 1999, the American Film Institute ranked Garbo fifth on their list of the greatest female stars of classic Hollywood cinema.

<sup>29</sup>The New Lincoln School was a private experimental coeducational school in New York City enrolling students

progressive school in New York City. One of the reasons we went there was that my father felt that it would be good if we were indeed in with a mixed group of students. There were all nationalities, all races, all economic groups. That's what I remember.

**Sandy:** Then you went from there . . .

**Helen:** My last year, I decided I really wanted to go away. I think I was in love with a boy at Harvard [University]. I went to Dana Hall<sup>30</sup> which is a prep [preparatory school] for Wellesley [College].<sup>31</sup>

**Sandy:** That was in your last year of high school that you went to Dana Hall.

**Helen:** Right.

**Sandy:** Did that relationship thrive when you went there?

**Helen:** No. I could not even get out to see anybody. It was a very strict boarding school.

**Sandy:** Did you start to do some theater, any acting?

**Helen:** Yes. I started the Dramatic Club at Dana Hall.

**Sandy:** You started the Dramatic Club.

**Helen:** Yes.

**Sandy:** Women didn't do that at that time? There was no drama department at the girls school?

**Helen:** There wasn't. No. We had a wonderful English department, but there was no drama club, as it were.

**Sandy:** Did you put on a performance that year?

**Helen:** I don't remember. I'll try to remember.

**Sandy:** Were you leading plays all the time? Was that the kind of thing that you liked to do, or did you go to shows on Broadway?<sup>32</sup> You said Radio City Music Hall.

---

from kindergarten through grade 12. Its predecessor was founded as Lincoln School in 1917 by the Rockefeller-funded General Education Board as "a pioneer experimental school for newer educational methods," under the aegis of Columbia University's Teachers College. In 1941, Teachers College merged Lincoln School with Horace Mann School, which it operated as a demonstration school. When Teachers College closed down the combined school in 1946, parents of Lincoln School enrollees established the New Lincoln School in 1948 to carry on the tradition of progressive, experimental education, concentrating on the individual child, offering an interdisciplinary core program as well as electives in elementary grades, and emphasizing the arts. In 1956, the school acquired the former Boardman School. The school merged with the Walden School in the fall of 1988 to become the New Walden Lincoln School, which ultimately closed in the summer 1991.

<sup>30</sup>Founded in 1881, Dana Hall School in Wellesley, Mass., is an independent boarding and day school for girls in grades 5-12.

<sup>31</sup>Wellesley College is a private women's liberal arts college in Wellesley, Massachusetts.

<sup>32</sup>Broadway theatre, also known simply as Broadway, refers to the theatrical performances presented in the professional theatres located in the Theater District and Lincoln Center along Broadway in midtown Manhattan, New York City, New York.

**Helen:** Yes. We went to quite a few shows on Broadway and summer stock.<sup>33</sup>

**Sandy:** Did you experience any antisemitism as a child?

**Helen:** I don't really remember that I did.

**Sandy:** The reverse of that, did being Jewish affect your pursuing a career as an actress?

**Helen:** It had no connection.

**Sandy:** No connection?

**Helen:** No.

**Sandy:** Do you think being Jewish helped you with this kind of flamboyant personality that you have in any way? You mentioned your mother was very much a very vivid personality, I guess.

**Helen:** Who knows where that comes from, but it did help me solidify who I was when I moved to Atlanta, who I felt I was.

**Sandy:** You went to Dana Hall, and then for college . . .

**Helen:** I wanted to leave Dana. My fantasy was I would leave the minute it was over, which I did. I went into summer stock that summer at Ivoryton, Connecticut. In fact, my husband and I went back to see Ivoryton. The theater is still there. It really looked so different.

**Sandy:** Did you act in summer stock?

**Helen:** Oh, yes.

**Sandy:** What were some of the first plays or parts that you remember?

**Helen:** I just remember being in plays with . . . Celeste Holm<sup>34</sup> was there that summer, and Buddy Ebsen.<sup>35</sup> This was the theater where Katherine Hepburn<sup>36</sup> got her start. I think two or three years before I was there she went up to Milton Steifel, who was the owner and director of

---

<sup>33</sup>In American theater, summer stock theatre is a theatre that presents stage productions only in the summer and is often viewed as a starting point for young actors.

<sup>34</sup>Celeste Holm (April 29, 1917 – July 15, 2012) was an American stage, film and television actress. Holm won an Academy Award for her performance in *Gentleman's Agreement* (1947) and was nominated for her roles in *Come to the Stable* (1949) and *All About Eve* (1950). She originated the role of Ado Annie in the Rodgers and Hammerstein musical *Oklahoma!*

<sup>35</sup>Buddy Ebsen (born Christian Ludolf Ebsen Jr., April 2, 1908 – July 6, 2003) was an American actor and dancer whose career spanned seven decades. His most famous role was as Jed Clampett in the CBS television sitcom *The Beverly Hillbillies* (1962–1971). Afterwards he starred as the title character in the television detective drama *Barnaby Jones* (1973–1980).

<sup>36</sup>Katharine Houghton Hepburn (May 12, 1907 – June 29, 2003) was an American actress who was a leading lady in Hollywood for more than 60 years. She appeared in a range of genres, from screwball comedy to literary drama, and she received a record four Academy Awards for Best Actress. In 1999, Hepburn was named by the American Film Institute as the greatest female star of classic Hollywood cinema.

the theater and producer. She said, "Milton, I will fill your house for you. Just hire me." She explained why. Her family is from there. He hired her, and she did fill the house. That was her first theatrical experience to my knowledge.

**Sandy:** Milton Steifel, S-T -

**Helen:** S-T-E-I-F-E-L.

**Sandy:** When the transcriber does this tape, they are going to need to . . . Katherine Hepburn, I think, they will know how to spell, but Milton Steifel they might not be familiar with. You acted in summer stock that summer.

**Helen:** Yes, and then I had planned to go the American Academy of Dramatic Arts<sup>37</sup> the next fall. My parents said you really need to go to college. The only place I could get in, in August of that year, was Briarcliff College.<sup>38</sup>

**Sandy:** Which is where?

**Helen:** Briarcliff Manor, New York. It is still in existence. It is a rather fine school. I was there for three months and it simply wasn't what I wanted to do. I left in December and then went to the American Academy of Dramatic Arts in New York in January of that year.

**Sandy:** Did you live by yourself?

**Helen:** No. I could live at home because my parents lived in New York. I had no way of supporting myself then.

**Sandy:** Tell me how things started to happen for you.

**Helen:** At the end of the year, we put on a play called *Flowers of the Forest* by John Van Druten,<sup>39</sup> V-A-N D-R-U-T-E-N. It was a lovely play. My parents invited someone who worked for RKO<sup>40</sup> films. He came to see it, and he told them I was wonderful and all this stuff, which probably pushed me even more.

**Sandy:** Did you have to work hard, or did it come naturally to you?

**Helen:** You have to work. It is so complicated. You have to dissect a part. You have got to

---

<sup>37</sup>The American Academy of Dramatic Arts (AADA) is a two-year performing arts conservatory, with two locations: Manhattan, New York City, New York and Los Angeles, California.

<sup>38</sup>Briarcliff College was a women's college in Briarcliff Manor, New York. The school was founded as Mrs. Dow's School for Girls in 1903 at the Briarcliff Lodge. After Walter W. Law donated land and a building for the college, it operated at its location at 235 Elm Road in Briarcliff until 1977, when the school closed due to low enrollment and financial problems and was sold to Pace University.

<sup>39</sup>John William Van Druten (June 1, 1901 – December 19, 1957) was an English playwright and theatre director. He began his career in London and later moved to America becoming a U.S. citizen.

<sup>40</sup>RKO Pictures is an American film production and distribution company.

know what is being said when a character is silent. You have to know what the character really means. When they are saying this, do they mean that or something else? You take all this apart and understand it and also give that character a beginning. You have to know about the childhood. If you don't know it, you make it up, just so you can build a really full real character. Then, if it calls for laughter, tears, or whatever, sometimes you are lucky, and it comes naturally. If it doesn't, you have to know how to sustain it without it coming naturally. If you do it over and over and over again, it's not as <unintelligible 29:42>

**Sandy:** You were successful in that.

**Helen:** Yes.

**Sandy:** Then where did you move to?

**Helen:** I lived in New York for five years. After that, I went to summer stock every summer. Hartford, Connecticut, Show Shop Theater . . . It doesn't exist now . . . Montclair Theater in Montclair, New Jersey, and others. Then also in New York. It was a very good lesson. I did the rounds. That means you go from one producer to another to see if you can get an audition. It taught me never to give up. It really did.

**Sandy:** You weren't exactly out there pounding the pavement.

**Helen:** Yes, I was.

**Sandy:** You were?

**Helen:** Oh, yes. I could live at home, but I got up every morning and started at eleven o'clock because nobody got up until then. I went from office to office to office. There was a newspaper that was printed who was casting what. Sometimes they had the wrong information, but most times it was correct.

**Sandy:** You went for readings very often.

**Helen:** I tried to get readings, tried to get auditions. If you are beginning, it is hard to break in. Then in later years I had an agent, so that made it easier.

**Sandy:** Is that when you met your husband?

**Helen:** No. When I came down here with my mother on that train, it was a fateful trip.

**Sandy:** You were 25, and you said you had just had a good offer with . . .

**Helen:** . . . with a movie. I think it was with RKO. Victor Mature was going to star in it.

**Sandy:** You left all that to come down here.

**Helen:** I came on what I thought was going to be a short trip, and stayed with Marcelle

Lowenstein.

**Sandy:** Why did your mother come down again?

**Helen:** Family business. Marcelle introduced me to every eligible bachelor in Atlanta. One of them happened to be Arthur Harris, whom I married about three weeks later.

**Sandy:** Three weeks?

**Helen:** Yes. Maybe two and a half.

**Sandy:** He must have swept you off your feet . . .

**Helen:** He did.

**Sandy:** . . . or else you were very ready. Did you move to Atlanta at that time?

**Helen:** I never went home. We went to Florida, Miami, and got married. His parents were down there. My parents came down and my brother. [We] came back here after we were married, after honeymooning in Jamaica. He had an apartment at Baltimore Block.<sup>41</sup> Are you familiar with that?

**Sandy:** No. Baltimore Block, where is that?

**Helen:** It's off of West Peachtree [Street]. It's between West Peachtree and Spring Street. It is one block of Baltimore type houses. Evidently the story is that some years ago a gentleman from Baltimore moved down here, and he was so homesick for what he could . . . used to see up there. He built . . . They are still there. In fact, now they have added on to the back. Frank Howington<sup>42</sup> added on to the back, so it is sort of a big complex.

**Sandy:** It's West Peachtree and . . .

**Helen:** Between West Peachtree and Spring. It is one block. The expressways are just south of there.

**Sandy:** Is it near Rhodes Hall?

**Helen:** It's further downtown.

---

<sup>41</sup>Baltimore Block is a series of rowhouses in the SoNo (South of North Avenue) district of Atlanta, Georgia. In 1885, Baltimore native Jacob J. Rosenthal introduced the architectural style of Baltimore to the booming railroad town of Atlanta. By 1907, the apartments had lost their luster. Some were abandoned and four were torn down in the 1920s. In the next decade, they got a new life with some modern renovations, and many of the rowhouses were split up into smaller apartments. The Baltimore Block was recognized with placement on the National Register of Historic Places in 1976. In 1989, the rowhouses were brought under single ownership and converted to office space. An L-shaped addition was wrapped around the back and side of the original façade, providing the property with its atrium, lofts, and additional office space. Today, most of the original 1885 structure still stands, with the modern renovations working to preserve the character that makes the Baltimore Block unique.

<sup>42</sup>Frank Howington was an Atlanta real estate developer. In the late 1980s, E.R. Howington Associates bought the Baltimore Block in Atlanta and renovated it into office space.

**Sandy:** You came in 1947, and you got married, and you moved to Baltimore Block. How long were you married?

**Helen:** Ten years.

**Sandy:** During those first ten years, did you do any acting?

**Helen:** The first ten years I remember going to an audition on Peachtree Street at the Woman's Club.<sup>43</sup> I forget who held the audition, but she said, "Let me see your Equity card."<sup>44</sup> I had one, but I didn't have it with me because I didn't think that that would be necessary here. I went home and got it. I thought that it was a really strange thing, sort of showing off that she knew that you needed to have an Equity card, but not in Atlanta in those days. Equity is the actors' union.

**Sandy:** Yes.

**Helen:** My first real involvement with the theater was . . . There were three theater groups in Atlanta. I forget their names. None of them were making it financially. A group of us got together, and we made one theater group out of the three. It was called Theater Atlanta.

**Sandy:** Theater Atlanta. I know on your resume that you gave me you were . . . It says founder, board member, officer, that you helped implement the merger of three existing theater groups into one group.

**Helen:** Right.

**Sandy:** This was 1953.

**Helen:** Yes.

**Sandy:** You moved here in 1947.

**Helen:** Yes.

**Sandy:** Did you have children right away?

**Helen:** In 1948, Arthur, Art Harris, was born. In 1949, Alex Harris was born. In 1951, my daughter Jill was born.

---

<sup>43</sup>The Atlanta Woman's Club is one of oldest non-profit woman's organizations in Atlanta, organized November 11, 1895. It is a non-profit philanthropic organization made up of professional women of all ages, races and religions who share a common goal: to work together to improve our local community, socially, physically, culturally and educationally. The Atlanta Woman's Club is a member of the Georgia Federation of Women's Clubs, as well as the General Federation of Women's Clubs

<sup>44</sup>An Equity card is proof of membership in the Actors' Equity Association of the United States or Equity in the United Kingdom. A major benefit to having an Equity card, as an actor, is that many professional auditions are Equity-only calls. Once an individual is a member of Actor's Equity, they may not rehearse or perform in a non-equity production without written permission from Equity. Children under the age of 14 may temporarily withdraw membership in order to perform in a non-equity production such as a school play.

**Sandy:** You had three children.

**Helen:** Three wonderful children right away.

**Sandy:** Are the children living here in Atlanta?

**Helen:** Yes. Actually I have four children, but three of them . . . Of those ones we mentioned, two of them live in Atlanta, and Alex lives in Durham, North Carolina.

**Sandy:** Your second son, Alex. . . Alex lives in Atlanta.

**Helen:** Alex lives in Durham.

**Sandy:** In Durham, right. You have three children by . . .

**Helen:** . . . Arthur Harris, and then I married again to Marshall Mantler<sup>45</sup> in . . . I guess it was 1958. We have a daughter Sophie who lives in Atlanta.

**Sandy:** Aren't you lucky to have so much family here.

**Helen:** I am very lucky. Very, very lucky. They are all very successful at what they are doing and enjoy what they do.

**Sandy:** We're going to get into that as we go along. What were your first impressions of Atlanta? Do you remember your coming down on the train with your mom?

**Helen:** When you come some place, when you travel to a city or a town, and you think you are just going to be there a little while, you have one reaction. It was sort of exciting then. When you decide you are going to stay permanently, that is a whole other thing. What really bothered me terribly was the segregation, the drinking fountains, everything. It was just . . .

**Sandy:** This was 1947, so there were going to be many more years of that.

**Helen:** That's right. I was pretty depressed in general about it. The whole culture was different from what I knew in New York. In the theater, you would live with black, white, and green, and on the road, so it was just a whole other thing.

**Sandy:** You even went to an elementary school where you had every ethnic group.

**Helen:** That's right. After a year or so feeling really down about it and not understanding what it was . . . I understood it later. It was all fear, I think, mainly. Fear from ignorance.

---

<sup>45</sup>Marshall "Bud" J. Mantler (1918 – 2008) was a long-time Atlanta resident who was born in Bridgeport, Connecticut. In 1949 he became the executive director for the National Association of Women's and Children's Apparel Salesmen Guild (NAWCAS). He was an aide to General George Patton during World War II, attaining the rank of Major. He was one of the liberators of the Buchenwald and Dachau concentration camps and was the recipient of a Bronze Star and the French government's Croix de Guerre. He was given the Lion of Judah Peace Award from the Atlanta State of Israel Bonds Committee in 1971.

<End Tape 1, Side 1>

<Begin Tape 1, Side 2>

**Sandy:** This is Sandy Leff, and I am interviewing Helen Alexander. We are talking about Helen's first impression of Atlanta and her early years here in the city. You came here in 1947, and you met this man who swept you off your feet. Can you tell us a little bit about your first husband?

**Helen:** Arthur was a brilliant man and attractive, urbane. That was it. He decided he wanted to marry me, and we went to Florida, to Miami. His parents were in Miami at the time, and we got married on the roof of the . . . What is the name of the big hotel in Palm Beach? I'll think of it. A very small wedding. We came back to Atlanta, and we lived in Baltimore Block for about a year until our son was born. That area was a great area to live but not with children. There would be drunken people on the street and that kind of thing. I would be wheeling my son down the street, and he would say, "Hi, mister." The man would stop and talk to us. I thought that we better move out into the country.

**Sandy:** What did your husband do?

**Helen:** His family had a business called the Atlanta Paper Company, which in later years became Mead Packaging.<sup>46</sup>

**Sandy:** Mead, M-E-A-D?

**Helen:** M-E-A-D, yes, which was an international concern.

**Sandy:** He responded to your need to leave downtown Atlanta, where you were leaving.

**Helen:** Yes. We bought a house on Paces Ferry [Road], 3780 Paces Ferry, which has since been doubled in size by other owners.

**Sandy:** Do you know anything about Arthur's background?

**Helen:** He went to [Phillips Academy] Andover<sup>47</sup> for education, and Yale [University]<sup>48</sup> and Harvard Law School.<sup>49</sup> He was with a law firm here, Hirsch [Hirsch, Smith, and Kilpatrick] . . . I

---

<sup>46</sup>The Mead Paper Company was established in Dayton, Ohio in 1847 and is now known as MeadWestvaco. It acquired Atlanta Paper Company in 1957.

<sup>47</sup>Founded in 1778 by Samuel Phillips, Phillips Academy in Andover, Massachusetts is an independent, coeducational secondary school and is the oldest incorporated boarding school in the country. Andover is the older of the two Phillips Academies, which are independent of each other. Phillips Exeter Academy, located in Exeter, New Hampshire, was founded three years later by Samuel Phillips's uncle, John Phillips.

<sup>48</sup>Yale University is a private Ivy League research university in New Haven, Connecticut. Founded in 1701, it is the third-oldest institution of higher education in the United States and one of the nine Colonial Colleges chartered before the American Revolution.

<sup>49</sup>Harvard Law School is one of the professional graduate schools of Harvard University in Cambridge,

don't know the complete name. I will have to find out.

**Sandy:** He was a lawyer, but he was running the family business?

**Helen:** Right. They needed him there, and his dad was getting older. This was a paper business where they manufactured corrugated board and packaging of all kinds. The building was downtown Atlanta, and it was on four floors. This was not economically viable to compete with other companies who were on one floor. He built a plant on Marietta [Street] and Ashby Street. Mills Lane loaned him the money. He was the only one that would.

**Sandy:** What was that again?

**Helen:** Mills B. Lane, who was known as a very . . . was a foresighted banker. Herb Milkey designed the building. He was successful.

**Sandy:** Were you involved with the business at all?

**Helen:** I was involved in some of his projects. He was very interested in [the] corporate world backing the art world, which today is more . . . In those days it was sort of a new thing. He started an annual Southeastern show. He didn't know a lot about the art world. I remember on the board he had a group of judges. He had a writer. He had Ralph McGill<sup>50</sup> who was head of the newspaper, editor of the newspaper. People like that. Very few artists. At that time, I was attending the High Museum of Art as an art student. I would hear all this . . . They didn't know my name. I would hear all this complaining about, "Oh, this is awful. They are having this art show, and what we need, we need artists on there." There was a lot of this going on, so I came home and I told Arthur about it. He said, "Well, what will we do?" I said, "Well, you can't fire the people who are on it, but maybe you can dilute it." He did fill it with a lot of artists who knew what they were doing. One of the winners one year was George Beattie, who has since become a very well-known artist.

**Sandy:** B-E-A . . .

**Helen:** . . . T-T-I-E

---

Massachusetts. Established in 1817 in Cambridge Massachusetts, Harvard Law School is the oldest continuously operating law school in the United States. The law school is generally considered one of the most prestigious in the world.

<sup>50</sup>Ralph Emerson McGill (February 5, 1898 – February 3, 1969) was an American journalist, best known as an anti-segregationist editor and publisher of the *Atlanta Constitution* newspaper. He won a Pulitzer Prize for editorial writing in 1959. He became friends with presidents John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson, acting as a civil rights advisor and behind-the-scenes envoy to several African nations. After his death, Ralph McGill Boulevard in Atlanta (previously Forrest Boulevard) was named for him.

**Sandy:** George Beattie. You were telling me there was a very interesting Neel Reid<sup>51</sup> home . . .

**Helen:** That is much later.

**Sandy:** That is your home later, but your in-laws had an interesting home?

**Helen:** That's right. Arthur's parents, Arthur and Irma Harris, lived on South Ponce de Leon also, as did my uncles. It is a large home on the corner of Fairview [Road] and South Ponce de Leon that became the first building for Paideia School. They bought it after the HARRISES no longer lived in it.

**Sandy:** Is that building still there today?

**Helen:** Oh, yes.

**Sandy:** What is it used for?

**Helen:** The Paideia School.

**Sandy:** For the Paideia School today.

**Helen:** Right.

**Sandy:** Were you close to your husband's family?

**Helen:** Yes, I was.

**Sandy:** You got very much involved with them and their lifestyle?

**Helen:** I liked not so much the style, but she loved to garden and was really a very bright woman who read a lot. We shared this love of flowers and gardening.

**Sandy:** Did you become involved with a synagogue here?

**Helen:** Yes. The Temple.<sup>52</sup>

**Sandy:** Your son was born. Was he born at Piedmont Hospital or . . . He was not born at home.

**Helen:** No, he was not born home. He was born at St. Joseph's [Hospital] downtown.

**Sandy:** Were you members of The Temple at that time? Do you remember?

**Helen:** Yes.

**Sandy:** Who was the rabbi?

---

<sup>51</sup>Joseph Neel Reid (October 23, 1885 – February 14, 1926) was a prominent architect in Atlanta, Georgia in the early 20th century for his firm Hentz, Reid and Adler.

<sup>52</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 Atlanta on Peachtree Street was dedicated in 1931. The main sanctuary is on the National Register of Historic Places. The Reform congregation now totals approximately 1,500 families (2015).

**Helen:** Jack Rothschild.<sup>53</sup> It was shortly after Rabbi Marx<sup>54</sup> left.

**Sandy:** Were you involved with Jewish life at that time?

**Helen:** I was involved with the [National] Council of Jewish Women.<sup>55</sup> We put on a play at the old Standard Club.<sup>56</sup>

**Sandy:** You were acting in it?

**Helen:** Yes. We had acting and dancing. We wore these Fulton Bag & Cotton<sup>57</sup> bags. We got them from the Elsas family, who owned Fulton Bag. They were free, and they looked it.

**Sandy:** What were you doing in the bags?

**Helen:** Dancing. A whole bunch of us.

**Sandy:** Did you write any of the music?

**Helen:** I don't remember. I don't think so.

**Sandy:** Who were the other people? Do you remember the people that were active with you those early years in Atlanta?

**Helen:** Elaine Lang was in that. **Brenna** Frye.

**Sandy:** F-R-Y?

**Helen:** F-R-Y-E. I have a photograph of everybody, and I will try to find it.

**Sandy:** That would be fun.

**Helen:** I will never forget, in the real theater if you drink when you are backstage you are out. I

---

<sup>53</sup>Rabbi Jacob Rothschild was rabbi of the city's oldest Reform congregation, the Temple, in Atlanta, Georgia from 1946 until his death in 1973 from a heart attack. He forged close relationships with the city's Christian clergy and distinguished himself as a charismatic spokesperson for civil rights.

<sup>54</sup>Rabbi David Marx was a long-time rabbi at the Temple in Atlanta, Georgia. He led the move toward Reform Judaism practices. He served as rabbi from 1895 to 1946. When he retired, Rabbi Jacob Rothschild took the pulpit that Rabbi Marx had held for more than half a century.

<sup>55</sup>The National Council of Jewish Women is an organization of volunteers and advocates, founded in the 1890's, who turn progressive ideals into advocacy and philanthropy inspired by Jewish values. They strive to improve the quality of life for women, children and families.

<sup>56</sup>The Standard Club is a Jewish social club that started as the Concordia Association in 1867 in downtown Atlanta. In 1905, it was reorganized as the 'Standard Club' and moved into the former mansion of William C. Sanders near the site of Georgia State Stadium (formerly Turner Field). In the late 1920's the club moved to Ponce de Leon Avenue in midtown Atlanta. Later, the club moved to what is now the Lenox Park business park and was located there until 1983. In the 1980's, the club moved to its present location in Johns Creek in Atlanta's northern suburbs.

<sup>57</sup>Fulton Bag and Cotton Mills is a formerly-operating mill complex located in the Cabbagetown neighborhood of Atlanta. The beginnings of the company can be traced to 1868, when Jacob Elsas, an immigrant of German Jewish descent who had recently arrived in Atlanta from Cincinnati, began work in the rag, paper, and hide business. Elsas soon recognized the need for cloth and paper containers for their goods. Within two or three years Elsas had switched to manufacturing cloth and paper bags and joined forces with fellow German Jewish immigrant Isaac May. Construction of the complex began in 1881 on the south side of the Georgia Railroad line, east of downtown Atlanta. The site now includes apartments and condominiums. (2015)

saw an actress fired for drinking. This was a show that was put on for fun and a fund raiser, and I was shocked that backstage there was a lot of drinking going on. I said, "You can't. You are not supposed to do that." Quite a different situation.

**Sandy:** You brought your professional standards with you.

**Helen:** Right.

**Sandy:** Did you ever regret having left New York and the life of an actress there?

**Helen:** Not really. Not after four or five years, when I really got involved with Atlanta and people in Atlanta. It was a real growth experience to become part of the Civil Rights [Movement]<sup>58</sup> and see all the changes and be a part of that.

**Sandy:** Were you active in the Civil Rights Movement?

**Helen:** Yes, I was.

**Sandy:** What kind of action did you take?

**Helen:** I will tell you a personal thing that happened, and then I will tell you about the community. My children were going to Lovett School,<sup>59</sup> and Martin Luther King<sup>60</sup> had applied to get into Lovett, and they turned him down. They said he was not in the diocese and that's why, but that wasn't why.

**Sandy:** How old was he when he applied?

**Helen:** This would have been in the late fifties, I suppose.

---

<sup>58</sup>The American Civil Rights Movement encompasses social movements in the United States whose goal was to end racial segregation and discrimination against black Americans and enforce constitutional voting rights to them. The movement was characterized by major campaigns of civil resistance. Between 1955 and 1968, acts of nonviolent protest and civil disobedience produced crisis situations between activists and government authorities. Noted legislative achievements during a phase of the Civil Rights Movement were passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, the Immigration and Nationality Services Act of 1965, and the Fair Housing Act of 1968.

<sup>59</sup>A private school in Atlanta founded in 1926 by Eva Edwards Lovett in which progressive education is stressed and where children learn by doing. Today the school has an enrollment of more than 1,000 students. (2015)

<sup>60</sup>Martin Luther King, Jr. (1929-1968) is best known for his role as a leader in the Civil Rights Movement and the advancement of civil rights using nonviolent civil disobedience based on his Christian beliefs. A Baptist minister, King became a civil rights activist early in his career. He led the 1955 Montgomery Bus Boycott and helped found the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) in 1957, serving as its first president. With the SCLC, King led an unsuccessful struggle against segregation in Albany, Georgia, in 1962, and organized nonviolent protests in Birmingham, Alabama, that attracted national attention following television news coverage of the brutal police response. King also helped to organize the 1963 March on Washington, where he delivered his famous "I Have a Dream" speech. On October 14, 1964, King received the Nobel Peace Prize for combating racial inequality through nonviolence. In 1965, he and the SCLC helped to organize the Selma to Montgomery marches, and the following year he took the movement north to Chicago to work on segregated housing. King was assassinated on April 4, 1968 in Memphis, Tennessee, followed by riots in many United States cities. King was posthumously awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom and the Congressional Gold Medal. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day was established as a holiday in numerous cities and states beginning in 1971 and as a United States federal holiday in 1986.

**Sandy:** He was born in 1929. Are you talking about his son? He was only two years . . .

**Helen:** I am sorry. I am talking about his children.

**Sandy:** Yes, his children. He wanted his sons to go to Lovett.

**Helen:** That's right. The next year, they tried again. Someone else tried again, and they were in the diocese. This was an Episcopal school. They were not granted admission. A telegram came to the house. All the parents got telegrams saying, from the then Chairman of the Board, "Don't worry. We will not integrate. Have no fears." The assumption that everybody felt that way was just . . . It was outrageous. I sent a hot telegram back saying, more or less, "You can do what you feel is right, but I do not feel it is right, and I am afraid we are just going to have to leave the school," which we did. There were about forty parents that removed their children.

**Sandy:** Did you spearhead that movement?

**Helen:** It was sort of everybody got together. I will never forget it. About forty parents. My present husband, Cecil Alexander, was on the board of Lovett, and he resigned. It was an interesting time.

**Sandy:** You were not married.

**Helen:** Not to Cecil, no.

**Sandy:** How old . . . I am trying to figure out what year that would be if your . . . Your son was born in 1948, right?

**Helen:** Yes. 1948 and 1949 and 1951, so it must have been the early sixties.

**Sandy:** They were just in the elementary grades at Lovett when that happened?

**Helen:** Yes.

**Sandy:** You pulled them out. Did they understand?

**Helen:** I think so, because judging from their behavior ever since then they . . . It was a . . .

**Sandy:** . . . an impressionable thing.

**Helen:** Right. Something else happened at Lovett that helped to solidify their sense of themselves as Jews. Before all this happened, I called Jack Rothschild one day, Rabbi Rothschild, and said, "There's a problem that I don't quite know how to deal with. The children are kneeling in chapel because they are told they have to. Is this appropriate?" He said, "Helen, they should not kneel. They should not worship in another religion. It's alright to pay respect to it, but no, they should not." I told my children this, and this started a whole kind of subculture about the Jews who did not kneel and the Jews who did kneel. My kids stopped kneeling then,

but then some others went along and did. That was another thing that solidified their awareness. Three of my four children have intermarried and are bringing their children up as Jews at The Temple.

**Sandy:** Even though they married out of their religion, they felt strongly enough that they wanted to.

**Helen:** Right.

**Sandy:** Did their spouses convert?

**Helen:** No, they did not convert, but they supported them in every way. Early on, when they were married, I sensed that there was some need for some kind of a group experience with other people who were also going through this. People at religious institutions did not accept non-Jews. I am talking about their spouses. I was on the board of the American Jewish Committee [AJC],<sup>61</sup> and we were talking about an agenda. I said, "Wouldn't it be wonderful if we could have an agenda for intermarrieds?" The first year it did not go through, but the second year it did. I forget the name of the couple, but there was a couple who have intermarried. She is Christian and he is Jewish. They go all around the country, and they have groups that they deal with, people who are intermarried. We did one of those groups here in Atlanta through the auspices of the American Jewish Committee. It was very helpful to all of them. They met other people, and they talked about all the problems that they are having and how to resolve them, and so on and so forth. I will try to find out. This couple was so wonderful. Their names should be on this.

**Sandy:** I will try to remind you, too. It's a couple that did something on intermarriage.

**Helen:** Yes. They did a therapy group.

**Sandy:** Your children went to Lovett, and you pulled them out of Lovett. Where did they end up going to school then?

**Helen:** My sons went to Andover.

**Sandy:** In Massachusetts.

**Helen:** My daughter went to Birney, which was a public school.

**Sandy:** How do you spell that?

**Helen:** B-I-R-N-E-Y. It's not there today.

---

<sup>61</sup>The American Jewish Committee (AJC) was founded in 1906 to safeguard the welfare and security of Jews worldwide. It is one of the oldest Jewish advocacy organizations in the United States.

**Sandy:** It was near where you lived.

**Helen:** Yes.

**Sandy:** In other words, it was a neighborhood school then.

**Helen:** Right.

**Helen:** Then she went to Dykes High School and ended up being the vice president of her class. There were a lot of children that came to school who did not have breakfast at home because they could not afford it. She started having coffee and doughnuts. She got the school to do it somehow, the principal. There was that public spirited feeling.

**Sandy:** That you instilled in the children.

**Helen:** Yes.

**Sandy:** I am trying to figure where it came from in you.

**Helen:** Probably from my dad. He was one of the founders of the Anti-Defamation League.<sup>62</sup>

**Sandy:** Up in New York?

**Helen:** Yes.

**Sandy:** Then we have to go back and talk a little more about him.

**Helen:** I don't know a lot about that, but I know that he was very active against antisemitism.

**Sandy:** You had mentioned that earlier, and you remembered when you were very young certain times when there were meetings in your house and when he was involved with that kind of thing. When you came down here, you became active with the National Council of Jewish Women.

**Helen:** Yes.

**Sandy:** Then what?

**Helen:** The American Jewish Committee, also.

**Sandy:** What did you do first for the American Jewish Committee, or how did you become involved?

**Helen:** I went to meetings and . . . I forget. It is so long ago.

**Sandy:** Do you remember your first impression?

---

<sup>62</sup>The Independent Order of B'nai B'rith, a Jewish service organization in the United States, founded the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) in October 1913. It is an international Jewish non-governmental organization based in the United States. Describing itself as "the nation's premier civil rights/human relations agency," the ADL states that it "fights anti-Semitism and all forms of bigotry, defends democratic ideals and protects civil rights for all," doing so through "information, education, legislation, and advocacy."

**Helen:** I was on the board.

**Sandy:** You knew this was a place for you with your feelings.

**Helen:** Right, I did. My first impression was there was a fear of making a big commotion about anything. They just wanted it all done very quietly, which was the way AJC really handled things in those days. I think today they would be much more up front.

**Sandy:** Who were the other people in the American Jewish Committee? Were there any role models for you, anyone you remember that was president that you looked up to?

**Helen:** I don't recall.

**Sandy:** [Were there] any projects in particular that they were working on that you joined in on?

**Helen:** There was this constant argument about clubs, what to do about the Piedmont Driving Club<sup>63</sup> and this club and that club. It was very difficult to resolve for some people because they said, "Look, the Standard Club was restricted, also," so that was the end of it. What I did had nothing to do with them. Any organization that I belonged to, if they wanted to have a gathering or party at a restricted club, I would say, "Well, go ahead and do it, but I think it is the wrong thing. Let's hold it at a hotel or someplace where everyone in public can attend."

**Sandy:** You did not become president of the American Jewish Committee until 1968. Is that right?

**Helen:** Right.

**Sandy:** Were you the first woman president?

**Helen:** I think so, and it was a big surprise. I think what happened was the year before they wanted to double the membership, and somehow or other I was given the job. I had a technique that I worked out that worked fairly quickly and effectively without having dinner at this one's house and dinner at that one's house. Instead we did it all by mail, and it worked out beautifully.

**Sandy:** You had a very successful tenure.

**Helen:** Yes. We got four hundred members, which was . . . They had had two hundred.

**Sandy:** This was after, of course, the Civil Rights Movement really.

---

<sup>63</sup>The Piedmont Driving Club is a private social club in Atlanta, Georgia with a reputation as one of the most prestigious private clubs in the South. Founded in 1887 originally as the Gentlemen's Driving Club, the name reflected the interest of the members to 'drive' their horse and carriages on the club grounds. The club later briefly used the adjacent grounds as a golf course until it sold the land to the city in 1904 to create Piedmont Park. The club's facilities include dining, golf, swimming, fitness, tennis, and squash. Well into the twentieth century, the club unofficially did not allow minorities to have memberships. In May 2000, the club built an 18-hole championship golf course and Par 3 course several miles away on Camp Creek Parkway.

**Helen:** Yes.

**Sandy:** This was after the bombing of the synagogue.<sup>64</sup> Do you remember that in 1958?

**Helen:** Oh, I do. I really do. I had a call that morning from my good friend and neighbor, Hermi Alexander, my present husband's former wife. She said, "Helen, I am supposed to call you because you are in a car group. Do not take your children to Sunday school. Do not drive the group today, and will you call so and so, whoever else was supposed to drive?" I said, "I will be glad to do that, but why, Hermi, why? What's going on?" She said, "They told me that the boiler blew up, and I don't believe it." I cannot describe that feeling. It was like . . . It was just a terrible feeling. <inaudible 21:18>

**Sandy:** You were fairly friendly with the rabbi, Rabbi Rothschild.

**Helen:** Yes.

**Sandy:** I said synagogue, but I know it is The Temple. Did you often discuss the civil rights situation with him?

**Helen:** Let me back up a little bit about The Temple. That Friday, we went to services.

**Sandy:** The Friday before the Sunday that this . . .

**Helen:** It was afterwards. The Friday after the bombing. We went that night, and it was packed. Rabbi Rothschild, with some levity, stood up at the podium, and he said, "Is this what it takes to get you here, a bombing?" Friday nights were not always that full.

**Sandy:** Not that well attended. I thought I heard that the church across the street offered space.

**Helen:** Yes.

**Sandy:** Was it for services or only for the school children?

**Helen:** I don't know. Actually, the damage was . . . That night, I saw they had covered a window on the . . . It was facing the pulpit on the left. It was this huge window that had been blown out, and it was covered with cloth. I don't know whether they had to leave the building or not. I don't know what else was damaged. I don't remember.

**Sandy:** Did you know Alfred Uhry<sup>65</sup> or his family at all?

---

<sup>64</sup>The Temple on Peachtree Street in Atlanta, Georgia was bombed in the early morning hours of October 12, 1958. About 50 sticks of dynamite were planted near the building and tore a huge hole in the wall. No one was injured in the bombing as it was during the night. Rabbi Jacob Rothschild was an outspoken advocate of civil rights and integration and friend of Martin Luther King Jr. Five men associated with the National States' Rights Party, a white separatist group, were tried and acquitted in the bombing.

<sup>65</sup>Alfred Fox Uhry was born December 3, 1936 in Atlanta. Uhry is a playwright, screenwriter, and member of the Fellowship of Southern Writers. He is one of very few writers to receive an Academy Award, Tony Award (2) and

**Helen:** Yes, well. Very well.

**Sandy:** Yes because you lived in that North Druid Hills neighborhood, or not yet. No, you were down . . .

**Helen:** Actually, Alfred's mother, Ilene Uhry, lived right next door on Paces Ferry, so I have known her for years. I knew Alfred. In fact, both my husband and I were in that film.<sup>66</sup>

**Sandy:** Were you in that film? I was going to ask you.

**Helen:** Briefly I was in it. The director lived next door. We lived in Druid Hills at that time, a few years ago. The director, Bruce Beresford, B-E-R-E-S-F-O-R-D, lived next door and rented the house. Instead of sending a head shot and resume, which is customary, I brought a . . . What is customary is if a neighbor moves in, you bring apple pie or cake or whatever. Instead I brought my resume and head shot, and I said, "Mr. Beresford, I am an actress. I live next door. I would like to have your consideration being in this film." I also went through the normal channels with agents and so on. I had a small part right in the beginning. I was the neighbor next door. Then my husband . . .

**Sandy:** You mean you went walking down the street?

**Helen:** No. In the beginning, Miss Daisy is in the garage in the car. The car backs up and crashes. Then there is a shot of the neighbors next door, and I was in it and the director's wife. It was like that. <Helen snaps her fingers, indicating a very brief time.> I would not say it was a big role, but he had another part in mind for me. I was hiding behind some bushes as they were driving down the street, Miss Daisy and the chauffeur.

**Sandy:** Morgan [Freeman].<sup>67</sup>

---

the Pulitzer Prize for dramatic writing. Uhry's early work for the stage was as a lyricist and librettist for a number of musicals. *Driving Miss Daisy* (1987) is the first in what is known as his Atlanta Trilogy of plays and earned him the Pulitzer Prize for Drama. He adapted it into the screenplay for the 1989 film which was awarded the Academy Award for Writing Adapted Screenplay. The second of the trilogy, *The Last Night of Ballyhoo* (1996), received the Tony Award for Best Play when produced on Broadway. The third was a 1998 musical called *Parade*. The libretto earned him a Tony Award for Best Book of a Musical. Uhry wrote the screenplay not only for the film version of *Driving Miss Daisy* but also for the 1993 film *Rich in Love*. He co-wrote the screenplay for the 1988 film *Mystic Pizza*.

<sup>66</sup>*Driving Miss Daisy* (1987) is the first in what is known as Alfred Uhry's 'Atlanta Trilogy' of plays, which earned him the Pulitzer Prize for Drama. Uhry adapted it into the screenplay for the 1989 Academy Award winning film of the same name. The film starred Jessica Tandy (Daisy Werthan), Morgan Freeman (Hoke Colburn), and Dan Aykroyd (Boolie Werthan). The story of 'Miss Daisy,' a Southern Jewish widow and Hoke, her black chauffeur, is set in Atlanta between 1948 and 1973 as their 25-year friendship reflects the social changes in the American South.

<sup>67</sup>Morgan Freeman (June 1, 1937 – ) is an American actor, film director, and film narrator. Freeman won an Academy Award in 2005 for Best Supporting Actor with *Million Dollar Baby* (2004), and he has received Oscar nominations for his performances in *Street Smart* (1987), *Driving Miss Daisy* (1989), *The Shawshank Redemption* (1994), and *Invictus* (2009). He has also won a Golden Globe Award and a Screen Actors

**Helen:** Right, Morgan. He told me some lines that I was going to say, and all of a sudden this terrible thunder storm came up and wind started blowing. He said, "It's a wrap," so that was it.

**Sandy:** That was the end?

**Helen:** Yes, but Cecil . . . The man who owned the house in which the director lived next door got involved with this film. He said, "Helen, they are really looking for a business-type man. Quick, get me a copy of Cecil's photograph." I remember I xeroxed [photocopied] his photograph because I remember getting it out, and I put it in the mailbox. That ended up Cecil being . . . helped him get in the film. He was in the scene where Boolie got the award. He is sitting next to Patty LuPone,<sup>68</sup> and he spent, he said, six hours just clapping. He said it was very boring work. Being an extra is, but he got paid, and he enjoyed it.

**Sandy:** Exciting in some ways.

**Helen:** Yes. People around the country who knew him go to this movie innocently, and all of a sudden there is your friend.

**Sandy:** Getting back to your involvement with the rabbi. You knew Rabbi Rothschild fairly well.

**Helen:** Janice and Jack, friendly with, yes.

**Sandy:** Can you share any of his feelings about the whole situation with Martin Luther King and then the bombing?

**Helen:** I am sure he acted on his feelings, and his behavior was exemplary. He made all the right, to me, steps. He reached out to the community, and he just was wonderful. I know that is not telling you what you want to hear, but . . .

**Sandy:** Do you remember any little stories or anything about . . . You did remember the one after the bombing when he was happy that people were in synagogue.

**Helen:** I remember the whole city rising up, and people from all over the country contacted him and shared their deep feelings about the tragedy of this. I don't think they ever found the men who . . . They found them, but they couldn't prove that they did it.

**Sandy:** When were you divorced from your first husband?

**Helen:** Ten years after we got married, so it would have been 1957.

---

Guild Award.

<sup>68</sup>Patti Ann LuPone (April 21, 1949 – ) is an American actress and singer, best known for her work in stage musicals. She has won two Grammy Awards, two Tony Awards, and two Olivier Awards. She is also a 2006 American Theater Hall of Fame inductee.

**Sandy:** You were with your three children, divorced.

**Helen:** Yes.

**Sandy:** You moved out . . . You said you built the home . . .

**Helen:** I built a house, after I got divorced from Arthur.

**Sandy:** You and Arthur were living . . .

**Helen:** . . . at 3780 Paces Ferry Road.

**Sandy:** Did you stay in that house?

**Helen:** No, I built a house right next door. It is now 3790. The reason I mentioned Herb Milkey earlier as the designer of the Atlanta Paper Company plant, he was the architect who designed the house that I built, which was a great experience.

**Sandy:** What kind of house did you build? What style?

**Helen:** I wanted a country French house, but he was big on contemporary, and he snuck in all these contemporary features. It was a wonderful house.

**Sandy:** How long did you live there?

**Helen:** I lived there another ten years.

**Sandy:** Were you divorced all that time?

**Helen:** No. I got married about three years later to Marshall Mantler.

**Sandy:** He moved into the house with you.

**Helen:** Right.

**Sandy:** You had one child together?

**Helen:** Then after that, we had one child. She was born in 1960, so we had four children.

**Sandy:** Then were you divorced?

**Helen:** Then ten years later, I got divorced from Bud.

**Sandy:** From Bud. His name was . . .

**Helen:** . . . Marshall Mantler. We called him Bud. Friendly divorces, but nevertheless divorces. I am sure they were difficult on the children as well as myself.

**Sandy:** All this while, the one constant in your life, would you say, was it synagogue in any way?

**Helen:** Children.

**Sandy:** Your children.

**Helen:** Yes.

**Sandy:** Your children was the one constant.

**Helen:** Yes. They went to Sunday school, so that was . . .

**Sandy:** The boys were away at private school by that time.

**Helen:** Yes.

**Sandy:** Did you do more acting once you got divorced or did you get more involved with volunteer activities?

**Helen:** I can't . . . I have to think about the dates when all this came.

**Sandy:** You were married from 1947 to 1957 to Arthur Harris, right?

**Helen:** Yes.

**Sandy:** Then . . .

**Helen:** Several years later . . .

**Sandy:** About three years later, you said?

**Helen:** 1959.

**Sandy:** In 1959 you married for ten . . . 1959 to 1969.

**Helen:** Right.

**Sandy:** You lived in that lovely Country French . . .

**Helen:** . . . somewhat contemporary . . .

**Sandy:** . . . somewhat contemporary home that was right down at . . .

**Helen:** . . . Paces Ferry. That was right next to Ilene Uhry, next door.

**Sandy:** Then in 1969, after you were divorced, did you move from that home or did you stay?

**Helen:** A year later. I couldn't afford to keep that house, and so a year later it was sold. I had gone into the real estate business and made enough money that first . . . I guess it was the second year . . . to buy a house on Forest Lake Drive that I lived in for a long time.

**Sandy:** Not Lake Forest but Forest Lake.

**Helen:** Forest Lake. Yes.

**Sandy:** Where is Forest Lake Drive?

**Helen:** It runs off of Lake Forest and goes into Mount Paran [Road] and has a lake in the back yards.

**Sandy:** You lived there . . .

**Helen:** . . . about sixteen years, actually.

**Sandy:** You have been married to Cecil Alexander . . .

**Helen:** It will be eight years.

**Sandy:** That was in . . . just trying to get my time reference. That was 1986?

**Helen:** Yes, that's right.

**Sandy:** By now your kids, of course, were all grown up, living here, and some had probably grandchildren, right?

**Helen:** Seven of them.

**Sandy:** You have seven grandchildren.

**Helen:** Yes.

**Sandy:** How wonderful. Getting back, though, a little bit to Atlanta when you came here in 1947, what was the ethnic composition of the neighborhoods where you lived, down on Paces Ferry or . . .

**Helen:** It was all white.

**Sandy:** All white

**Helen:** In those days, speaking of antisemitism, yes, I did have . . . not in the theater but in looking for houses. In those days, there were some streets that were . . . It was deeded. It was in the deed that Jews could not live there.

**Sandy:** Jews could not live there.

**Helen:** That's right. This came out as a result of a project with the American Jewish Committee. I was asked to speak to the U.S. [United States] Commission on Human Rights when they came to Atlanta and talk about antisemitism in this field. I had the help of real estate agents who really told me the straight story.

**Sandy:** Were they Jewish real estate agents?

**Helen:** Yes. I did attend that meeting. It was downtown, I guess at City Hall. There were many blacks there who, of course, had their problems, and they were talking about their problems. This did not make theirs any less, but this is the same kind of problem. It is all discriminatory. If it hurts one, it is going to hurt everybody. Of course, after the Civil Rights Bill [Act]<sup>69</sup> was passed, it was no longer . . . You could not legally do that anymore. That was done away with, for the most part. I remember way back, when we left Baltimore Block, the real estate agent took me out to see the houses. I was pregnant, and she said, "Here's this

---

<sup>69</sup>The Civil Rights Act (PL 88-352) was enacted on July 2, 1964. It outlawed discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin. It ended unequal application of voter registration requirements and racial segregation in schools, at the workplace and by facilities that served the general public.

house." I said, "I better not walk up that driveway because I am not supposed to do that kind of exercise." She got furious. Evidently she had made an appointment at this house, and she said, "You can't live there anyway." I started crying, and she said, "Get out of the car." It was just awful. I walked to the nearest shopping center, which was quite some distance away, and called my husband. He was furious, to say the least. That was the kind of . . . Agents knew that they would not sell to Jews.

**Sandy:** Yet she was going to show it to you.

**Helen:** That's right. She would have probably talked them into it if we wanted it.

**Sandy:** If it meant money for her, right?

**Helen:** Exactly.

**Sandy:** My goodness.

**Helen:** It was really shocking.

**Sandy:** That didn't keep you from becoming a real estate agent yourself and entering that vicious world, because sometimes I think it can be a vicious world.

**Helen:** It can be. It depends how you look at it. They can't do that now. In fact, the firm I was with, Buckhead Brokers, the government would monitor to see how many people would have . . . if the blacks called and asked for a house, to see whether you were breaking the law or not.

**Sandy:** Just to make sure that you were abiding by . . .

**Helen:** The firms would do that. I wanted to blockbust<sup>70</sup> in the worst way.

**Sandy:** It was after 1969, then, that you decided to go into real estate. How did you decide to go into that as opposed to something else?

**Helen:** I needed to make money, but, really, Marshall Mantler, my former husband, had started a . . . He built some houses. I thought why not have a real estate license, and we can work together. I had the license. I think I got it in 1963 and didn't really use it. When I finally went with Buckhead Brokers, there were five of us. It was a tiny company.

**Sandy:** Was it a Jewish person that started Buckhead Brokers?

**Helen:** No, Doug Elan.

**Sandy:** Doug . . .

**Helen:** Elan, E-L-A-N, and his wife Rae, who has since died. There were two or three other

---

<sup>70</sup>Blockbusting is a business process of United States real estate agents and building developers to convince white property owners to sell their house at low prices, which they do by promoting fear in those house owners that racial minorities will soon be moving into the neighborhood.

agents. One is still living.

**Sandy:** Are you still working as a real estate agent?

**Helen:** I still have my license with Coldwell Banker, but I have one client, and that is Cecil. I don't really <unintelligible 36:59>.

**Sandy:** Did you do mostly commercial real estate?

**Helen:** In those days, and this is one reason I got out of it, then you could sell anything. You could sell farm land. You could sell commercial. You could sell residential. Today it is very structured. You can sell only residential or commercial, and I did not want to do that. Also I got burned out, and my brother said . . . I talked it over with my brother. I said, "What do you think? I don't want to be in the real estate business for the rest of my life, and this is it." He sent me a photograph of a woman in Westport, Connecticut, who was about my age then, sixties, who had gone back to her earlier career in the theater, television actually, commercials and so on. He sent me this photograph, and he said, "Go." That gave me the push that I needed to change careers.

**Sandy:** I think that will probably be enough for today. When I talk to you next time, we will talk a little bit more about your children and what they accomplished. We will talk more about some of your other activities at the school that you started.

**Helen:** Yes.

**Sandy:** Your involvement at Spelman College,<sup>71</sup> and I see that was . . . From your first impression of Atlanta, it sounds like you were affected by the lack of freedom that blacks had.

**Helen:** Right.

**Sandy:** That seemed to have carried you through the years with your volunteer involvement.

**Helen:** The school started because a man who worked for us by the name of James Williams, a wonderful man . . . He worked for my former husband, Arthur, and then worked for me also at the same time.

**Sandy:** Worked for you as . . .

**Helen:** . . . in-house.[He was] very bright. He had been in the service.

**Sandy:** His name was James . . .

**Helen:** James Williams. His wife's name was Narvell, N-A-R-V-E-L-L. They had a son and a

---

<sup>71</sup>Spelman College is a liberal arts women's college in Atlanta. It was founded in 1881 as the Atlanta Baptist Female Seminary and is one of America's oldest historically black colleges for women. Spelman received its charter in 1924.

daughter. I will tell you about the son later. The daughter was what they call a blue baby, and she had . . . She was an aphasic.<sup>72</sup> In those days, there was no place that . . . The Junior League<sup>73</sup> was in existence then, and they did indeed help white children, but there was no facility where blacks could go.

**Sandy:** Aphasic refers to someone who cannot speak?

**Helen:** It has to do with hearing and speech, and they have to be retaught how to speak. They have difficulty . . .

**Sandy:** This baby was born that way.

**Helen:** That's right. They are born that way. We started a school. [Do] you want to go into it now?

**Sandy:** You can tell me just a little bit about it. You say we started a school.

**Helen:** We, Hermi Alexander, Phoebe then Franklin, later Phoebe Lundeen, and Eleanor Massell, and about a dozen other women and men. We raised money to send Irene Asbury . . . She is a very bright black woman who went . . . We sent her to Washington University<sup>74</sup> to get a degree in teaching, as a teacher of the deaf.

**Sandy:** You say you sent her. You financed her?

**Helen:** [We] financed her with the board of regents.<sup>75</sup> The board of regents in those days had to supply the money for . . . under the separate but equal law.<sup>76</sup> If there weren't courses in Georgia

---

<sup>72</sup>Aphasia is an acquired communication disorder that impairs a person's ability to process language. It affects the production or comprehension of speech and the ability to read or write, but it does not affect intelligence.

<sup>73</sup>Junior Leagues are education and charitable women's organizations aimed at improving their communities through voluntarism and building their members' civil leadership skills through training. It is an international organization with 293 different chapters.

<sup>74</sup>Washington University in St. Louis (also referred to as WashU) is a private research university located in St. Louis, Missouri. It was founded in 1853 and named after George Washington.

<sup>75</sup>All 50 states have governing bodies that oversee the administration of public education. A number of states call the body that administers the state college and university system the board of regents.

<sup>76</sup>Jim Crow laws were state and local laws in the United States enacted between 1876 and 1965. The name seems to have originated in the song "Jump Jim Crow," a song-and-dance caricature of blacks performed by white actor Thomas D. Rice in blackface in 1832. As a result of Rice's fame, "Jim Crow" became a pejorative expression meaning "Negro" by 1838, and the later segregation laws became known as "Jim Crow" laws. Jim Crow laws mandated racial segregation in all public facilities in the southern states of the former Confederacy, with a supposedly "separate but equal" status for black Americans, although in reality this was not so. Some examples of Jim Crow laws are the segregation of public schools, places, and public transportation and the segregation of restrooms, restaurants and drinking fountains for whites and blacks. Private businesses, political parties and unions created their own Jim Crow arrangements, barring blacks from buying homes in certain neighborhoods, from shopping or working in certain stores, from working at certain trades, etc. In the middle twentieth century, the Supreme Court began to overturn Jim Crow laws on constitutional grounds. Rosa Parks defied the Jim Crow laws when she refused to give up her seat on a bus to a white man, which became a catalyst to the Civil Rights Movement. Her actions, and the demonstrations that followed, led to a series of legislative and court decisions that

that a student might take, then they had to fund a portion of the tuition to go out of state. With the funding from the board of regents plus the money we raised, Irene Asbury got a two-year education and came back and was just incredible. We then also financed four or five teachers of speech and hearing, which does not take as long. That is a year course. Spelman and Atlanta University gave us the space. There are a lot of stories around that school.

**Sandy:** The school was at the Atlanta University complex?

**Helen:** They gave us the [space], yes.

**Sandy:** What was the school called?

**Helen:** The Speech and Hearing Clinic.

**Sandy:** Was it only for black children?

**Helen:** In those days, it had to be. That is the sad . . . That is the flip side of that coin. It was for people who could not get this education any place else, and they happened to be black.

**Sandy:** It was a group of you Jewish . . .

**Helen:** . . . mostly Jewish, not all . . .

**Sandy:** . . . mostly Jewish women that started this whole thing off and made it happen.

**Helen:** Right. It went on for about ten years. Linda Williams died, I think when she was about seven.

**Sandy:** That baby, you mean?

**Helen:** Yes. They don't have a very long life. The school got to be . . . It was successful, and the Junior League then did indeed come and help us and advised us. It was just getting bigger and bigger and more successful, and we felt it should be in the public domain. We went to the [Atlanta] Board of Education, and they said they would take our teachers. It was the first special education program in the state of Georgia.

**Sandy:** The first special education program.

**Helen:** Yes.

**Sandy:** For any kind of learning problem.

**Helen:** Yes, that's right.

**Sandy:** I know you were proud.

**Helen:** Yes. That felt good. That really was a good feeling.

---

contributed to undermining the Jim Crow system. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 officially ended Jim Crow laws.

**Sandy:** Then they moved it?

**Helen:** Then it was in public schools, and the teachers would go into the public schools and teach this.

**Sandy:** They just incorporated the way you did things into . . . or did they physically allow black children to go into the schools?

**Helen:** Yes.

**Sandy:** They helped them.

**Helen:** They were in the schools at that time. This was after integration.

**Sandy:** After integration. I see. I know I want to ask you more about that and some of your other involvements. We will save that until next time, okay?

**Helen:** Okay, Sandy. Thank you.

**Sandy:** Thank you.

<End Tape 1, Side 2>

<Begin Tape 2, Side 1>

**Sandy:** This is Sandy Leff, and I am interviewing Helen Eisemann Alexander for the Jewish Oral History Project of Atlanta, sponsored by the American Jewish Committee, the National Council of Jewish Women, and the Atlanta Jewish Federation. The date is Tuesday, December 28, 1993. This is our second interview, and we are at Helen's home on Rivers Road in Northwest Atlanta. Helen, I want to start by reviewing some information from last time, clarifying some information on your parents' backgrounds. You said your father's name was Alexander Eisemann.

**Helen:** Eisemann, yes.

**Sandy:** Eisemann, from Germany. You said from Frankfurt?

**Helen:** His father was from Frankfurt, and his mother.

**Sandy:** He [Alexander] was born in this country.

**Helen:** Yes, in New York City.

**Sandy:** His . . . he was from Frankfurt?

**Helen:** The family was from Frankfurt am Main, his parents. They came to America, as I understand it, when they were small children with their families.

**Sandy:** How do you spell the Frankfurt . . .

**Helen:** Frankfurt A-M-E-I-N [am Main]. I think that is probably a suburb. I'm not sure. I went

over there when I was a small child to meet this wonderful Uncle Yoseph, and I have memories of him as being a tall, dark, mysterious man.

**Sandy:** How old were you?

**Helen:** I must have been five.

**Sandy:** I was going to ask you. You speak French rather fluently.

**Helen:** Right.

**Sandy:** How did you learn French?

**Helen:** We had a dreadful French governess who . . . She made my brother and . . . both of us speak French period. If we didn't know the word, we had to ask it. I realized later . . . In later years, I went to Europe with my former husband, and we were sitting around a table in Switzerland, downstairs in a little restaurant. There were people sitting at that table from all over the world. Some spoke English. Some spoke French. Some [spoke] German. I was just . . . It is incredible what our brain holds. All of a sudden this French came out after a few glasses of wine. Then came the German. I am not fluent in German. I can understand some of it and say a few words, but I heard a lot of it when I was growing up at my grandfather's house.

**Sandy:** You appreciated the governess a little more.

**Helen:** Yes. We didn't at the time.

**Sandy:** After all those years. You said your father did not go into the ostrich feather business . . .

**Helen:** No.

**Sandy:** . . . but he manufactured radios?

**Helen:** That was one of his first . . . He was born in 1888 and died in 1953. He loved the romance of business, and in those days that was possible because your word was your bond. You didn't need contracts and all that. He started the Freed-Eisemann Radio business. It was one of the first radios in this country. There was Emerson and some others. There were about three or four large ones of which his company was one. I have a set downstairs. I will show you, Sandy, later. It's got these big dials on it. I now subscribe to a magazine for radio collectors, and I am trying to get one for each of my children. I found one for my . . .

**Sandy:** One of the old radios, you mean.

**Helen:** That's right.

**Sandy:** So they will have one.

**Helen:** Right.

**Sandy:** Now how did you spell Freeda Eisemann?

**Helen:** Freed. F-R-E-E-D.

**Sandy:** Freed.

**Helen:** Yes. Mr. Freed was the inventor. My father was the business person.

**Sandy:** It was Freed-Eisemann radios.

**Helen:** Yes. There's a photograph, I mean a lithograph of some of their advertisements.

**Sandy:** I see. You have a framed photograph there, and it says Freed-Eisemann, the radio of America's finest homes.

**Helen:** That was their marketing strategy.

**Sandy:** Would you say in the thirties and forties it was that every home had . . .

**Helen:** They first started in 1922. He got out in about 1925 because the market became glutted with many, many manufacturers. He did many other business ventures, as I remember. He bought the steel for the steamship Harris, if anybody knows what a steamship is anymore. Then he bought a seat on [presumably] the [New York] Stock Exchange<sup>77</sup> and had his own firm. That was about . . . he <unintelligible 5:30> for a long time.

**Sandy:** What interests us most is you said you had memories of certain meetings in his house and that he was the founder of the Anti-Defamation League?

**Helen:** I recall that he was one of the first people to start that.

**Sandy:** Did he talk to you about his feelings at that time?

**Helen:** Yes, he did.

**Sandy:** [Is there] anything that sticks with you?

**Helen:** He told me that the 86th Street area in New York City was known as German town. He thought it was just terrible that this man, Fritz Kuhn . . . I'm sure he did this with other people. He was concerned with antisemitism. In fact, he has a checklist for how to deal with antisemitism that he wrote, and I think the AJC was involved in that. On 86th Street, there was this man, and we were on the brink of World War II. Fritz Kuhn was spewing out all these dreadful antisemitic rabble-rousing kinds of things.

**Sandy:** Was he a Jewish man?

**Helen:** Fritz Kuhn? I don't think so. As I told you, they tried to get him on his income tax, but

---

<sup>77</sup>The New York Stock Exchange (NYSE) is an American stock exchange located in Manhattan, New York City, New York.

they couldn't. That was when, as I said before, they hired a boxer to break his jaw and silence him, I think, for six months. I knew that was a big impact. It left a big impact. We were not your traditional Jewish family with all the rituals, although my grandfather had wonderful *seders*, but my parents did not. It rubbed off on me, and we still do that and some of the others.

**Sandy:** Your mother, Josephine Lowenstein, who came from Atlanta, did you ever meet your maternal grandparents?

**Helen:** They had died long before I was born. My mother was born in 1901 and died in 1954. That's pretty young. They came from Germany, also, and they lived in North Carolina. As I understand it, he was a dentist, and he also was in some kind of distilling business, whiskey. They didn't like that there. They moved to Atlanta, and he started manufacturing not soft drinks but the syrups that go into the drinks. I have a photograph of the house that they owned where they lived on Washington Street when my mother was . . . Let's see. She was born in 1901, and there is a photograph of her as an infant being held in the arms of her older brother, who was a good deal older, and all the other family members. There must have been fifteen of them or so. My mother came down to visit. Did I tell you the story on Washington Street when we drove by the . . .

**Sandy:** . . . the house. Yes, you told me about that. The first house that she thought was it for sure. She waxed very sentimental over it.

**Helen:** That's right.

**Sandy:** That was a good story. You said you had photographs of her with her friends on Washington Street?

**Helen:** No. It was with the family.

**Sandy:** With the family on Washington Street. Do you remember any stories about Atlanta that she told you, that stick with you, about her childhood, about growing up in Atlanta?

**Helen:** I remember several. One, and this was more personal . . . She had four older brothers. Her father had died. My grandfather died. My grandmother's name by the way was Helen, which is my name and also my granddaughter's name, so it has gone on down into the family. I have lost my train of thought.

**Sandy:** You were telling me a story, a couple of stories that you remembered that she told you.

**Helen:** She said that her brothers just would not let her be on her own at all. They were overly protective, and I can understand that. There is a big difference in age, maybe fourteen, fifteen

years. Her brother Will Lowenstein . . . I'm digressing a little.

**Sandy:** That's okay.

**Helen:** He was on the school board as a volunteer. He was very civic minded. The others . . . Did I tell you about the Norris Candy Company?

**Sandy:** I want to know more about the candy company. You mentioned Max and Frank who had this, but I want to find out more about that. First, let's hear the story about their being protective of your mother.

**Helen:** I think that's one of the reasons that she eloped and went to New York. Not with my dad. This was a brief first marriage, and some years later, three or four years later, she married my dad.

**Sandy:** [Do] you think to get away from that protective vise?

**Helen:** I believe so. I really do. She had a real incredible energy and humor.

**Sandy:** Again, from a family that was very civic minded.

**Helen:** Yes.

**Sandy:** Both your mother's family and your father's family very early reached out into the community.

**Helen:** Right. Some members of those families did. Her older brother and my dad.

**Sandy:** Her older brother was Will. What do you remember about Will?

**Helen:** I never knew him.

**Sandy:** From stories.

**Helen:** Just that I have a reprint from the newspaper that describes his activity with the school board, and I think he was also active in the early [years of] The Temple.

**Sandy:** His name was Will Lowenstein.

**Helen:** Will Lowenstein, yes.

**Sandy:** Then the two other brothers, did they start a candy company?

**Helen:** Right.

**Sandy:** It was called . . .

**Helen:** Norris Candy Company. It was on the site on Harris Street. The Harris Building at Courtland [Street] was built there, and that's where the location was.

**Sandy:** On Harris Street.

**Helen:** At Peachtree Center.

**Sandy:** Where the new Peachtree Center is?

**Helen:** Right.

**Sandy:** That's where the Norris Candy Company started.

**Helen:** That's right, on Harris Street.

**Sandy:** I know the corner that you're talking about, Peachtree and Harris. Do you remember going to that candy company?

**Helen:** I don't, no. I don't think it was . . .

**Sandy:** You never came here as a little girl until you were 19 . . .

**Helen:** I was 25.

**Sandy:** In 1947, when you came down here on the train that first time.

**Helen:** You've got a good memory, Sandy.

**Sandy:** I want to talk to you when we finish the interview. Do you know that they are doing a collection at the Atlanta History Center for creating community. The Jewish community is doing an exhibit in October of 1994.

**Helen:** Really?

**Sandy:** You might want to share some of those wonderful pictures and articles that you have.

**Helen:** I would be delighted.

**Sandy:** We'll talk about that after. Getting back to your life a little bit, do you remember the name of the theater where you started doing summer stock?

**Helen:** Ivoryton, Connecticut. Cecil and I, my husband and I, went back there about three or four years ago. It looked so different. It was amazing. It was so exciting. I was in three or four of the plays, small parts. Celeste Holm was there that summer, and Buddy Ebsen. Those are the names that I recall. I remember Milton Steifel, the owner of the theater, coming back stage and just screaming at Celeste Holm saying, "You're sloppy. You need to dress better," and so on. He blessed me out one day in front of my parents. It was a matinee, and I had completely forgotten it. I had an invitation to go sailing with a boy up there, Joe . . . I forget his name . . . and I missed the matinee. You just don't do that. That evening before the show he said, "I want everybody on stage now." My parents came up to see this play, and, in front of them, he really let me have it for missing the show. You don't ever, ever do that.

**Sandy:** Wow.

**Helen:** I learned a lesson. It was good.

**Sandy:** What kind of part did you have in the show? You were not the lead.

**Helen:** Oh, no. Not at that time. I don't know. I was probably a maid or something like that. I just zipped in. I had a few words to say, so somehow they covered up.

**Sandy:** Did you actually know Celeste Holm?

**Helen:** Yes. I worked with her, and we were backstage together.

**Sandy:** When you went on Broadway, or when you went into New York, were you not in a show called *Junior Miss*?<sup>78</sup>

**Helen:** That's right. *Junior Miss* was written by Jerome Chodorov,<sup>79</sup> and I think his daughter is very well known today. I don't think I pronounced that name correctly.

**Sandy:** You wouldn't know how to spell it.

**Helen:** No. C-H-O-D-E-O-R-E . . . O-D-E-R-O-V, something like that. I'll give that to you later. They had cast the . . . Of course, the New York show had opened, and they had a Chicago company and another company, I think out west. The only company left that I could try out for was the U.S.O.<sup>80</sup> camp show company, but it was produced by Max Gordon who had produced the original show, and directed by . . . I forget the director, the same one who directed the New York company.

**Sandy:** Not Moss Hart.

**Helen:** Moss Hart was *Winged Victory*.<sup>81</sup> I did get the part of Lois, who was the older sister who went out with a lot of boys, and this worried her father. It was a very funny show. She had a younger sister named Fuffy Adams who just really . . . They were kind of in cahoots together, but it was very funny. We opened at the Max Gordon Theater in New York City and went on tour two or three days after that. We opened in Abingdon, Virginia. I remember going on that

---

<sup>78</sup>*Junior Miss* is a collection of semi-autobiographical stories by Sally Benson first published in *The New Yorker*. Doubleday published her *Junior Miss* collection in 1941. Benson's stories were adapted by Jerome Chodorov and Joseph Fields into a play, staged by Moss Hart, which had a successful run of 710 performances on Broadway from November 18, 1941, to July 24, 1943.

<sup>79</sup>Jerome Chodorov (August 10, 1911 – September 12, 2004) was an American playwright and librettist. He co-wrote the book for the musical *Wonderful Town*.

<sup>80</sup>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.

<sup>81</sup>*Winged Victory* is a 1943 play by Moss Hart, created and produced by the U.S. Army Air Forces during World War II as a morale booster and as a fundraiser for the Army Emergency Relief Fund. Hart adapted the play for a 1944 motion picture directed by George Cukor.

train. It was the most exciting adventure that I think I felt at that time I had embarked on. I was free. I was getting away. I was doing what I wanted to do. That show lasted for about ten weeks.

**Sandy:** It got good reviews.

**Helen:** We played Army bases. The U.S.O. camp shows had the red, white and blue circuit. The larger bases were either the red or the blue, and we played the larger bases and stayed in these places all over the country on base. Usually we lived on the base from one to three nights. That was the longest stay. I remember there were two older people in the show, and I really felt for them because it was quite a rigorous experience. We traveled by bus, by train.

**Sandy:** You were all of maybe what, in your early twenties when this is happening?

**Helen:** That's right.

**Sandy:** It was indeed exciting for you.

**Helen:** It was great. I remember my parents and my friends were in New York for the opening night. The thing I really appreciate most about my parents was that they . . . I think in those days for a young, Jewish girl to go off like this was not really usual. They said, "Go to it," but my father had spoken, I found out later, to the stage managers to look after me, which was alright.

**Sandy:** You had a younger brother.

**Helen:** Right.

**Sandy:** What did he end up doing?

**Helen:** His name is Alexander Eisemann, and he is in business now in Connecticut. He puts businesses together.

**Sandy:** Are you close?

**Helen:** Very. We speak frequently.

**Sandy:** Tell me about *Winged Victory*. Was that your next big show that you got after *Junior Miss*?

**Helen:** That's right, it was. I think there was summer stock in between, but that was in the summer. I don't know how much I told you of this before, but . . .

**Sandy:** You didn't tell me much about the show. You said that there was a reunion that you had recently, but we haven't really talked about the show, and Karl Malden.<sup>82</sup>

---

<sup>82</sup>Karl Malden (born Mladen George Sekulovich, March 22, 1912 – July 1, 2009) was an American film and television actor. He acted in many films, including *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1951), for which he won the Academy Award for Best Supporting Actor. From 1972 to 1977, he portrayed Lieutenant Mike Stone in the television crime drama *The Streets of San Francisco*. He later became the spokesman for American Express.

**Helen:** Oh, yes. I'll start at the beginning. An agent, Sylvia Hahlo, H-A-H-L-O, called me and she said, "Helen, Moss Hart is casting *Winged Victory*. Go on over there at such and such a time." Well, I got there, and I see maybe twenty, thirty girls, women my age, who Moss Hart is saying, "Thank you, ladies. Come back. I'll be in touch with you." I was in shock because I wanted to be in this show in the worst way. It was war time and there were so . . . Everybody in the entertainment industry was going to be in it, and there were like three hundred men in this show, and directed by Moss Hart. It seemed at that time exactly what I wanted to do, so I went up to him . . . I am really a shy person, but something propelled me. I went up to Moss Hart, and I said, "Mr. Hart, I just arrived here, and everybody is leaving." He said, "Well, my dear, you're about an hour late." Two hours late, whatever it was. I said, "Isn't there anything in the show that I can do?" He said, "Well, we are going to read for understudy. Have your agent send you, and next time you be on time." I decided that all these women are the ones that did not get anything. There were only five parts in the show. They were all going to be wanting to be in this show, probably. I decided I had to make him know who I was before that time, that reading. Poor Mr. Hart. I wrote him a note every other night. I sent him little tiny gifts, like shells or a pencil or . . . ridiculous little . . . anything to . . . With the pencil, I think I said, "Use this to write my name, so when I get there . . .". A month passes, and the agent calls and says, "Go in for the audition." He's sitting at this table on stage with his assistant and the usual green light, the little shade. It's on a stage, and there's the empty theater out there. He looked up, and he said, "Who the hell is Helen Eastman?" That was my stage name.

**Sandy:** Eastman, E-A-S-T-M-A-N.

**Helen:** Right. I raised my hand in a very . . . "I am," [I said] in a meek, shy way. He said, "You want this part so badly, come here and read." I did, and then he told everybody to leave, and that was the first . . . It was a two-year job, and it was really an experience. I think most of the people who were in that would say that.

**Sandy:** *Winged Victory* was a story about . . .

**Helen:** It was the Army-Air Force show that . . . The proceeds went to Air Force Aid Society<sup>83</sup>

---

<sup>83</sup>Research shows that the show benefited Army Emergency Relief (AER), not the Air Force Aid Society (AFAS). This is likely a mistake in the interviewee's memory. Army Emergency Relief, often referred to as Army Emergency Relief Fund, is a non-profit, charitable organization independent of, but closely associated with, the United States Army, founded in 1942. The mission of the AER is to help U.S. Army soldiers and their dependents, by providing emergency aid, in the form of either a direct grant (a cash gift, not to be repaid) or an interest-free loan, and by giving college scholarships to children of soldiers. Under Army regulations, officers must recommend whether their

for widows and children.

**Sandy:** Even when you were doing something you loved, it was for the good of others.

**Helen:** I can't take credit for doing it. I would have wanted to be in that no matter what.

**Sandy:** Did you sing and dance in it?

**Helen:** No. I was an actress.

**Sandy:** You were strictly dramatic.

**Helen:** Right. There were five actresses in it, and they were the wives of the men who had been trained. This show was about being trained as an Air Force pilot or whatever they were, bombardier and so on, and took it all through training school. Also, there was a scene in the South Pacific, and so on and so forth. We had a reunion. Anyway, we played for almost two years.

**Sandy:** Where did you play?

**Helen:** New York City for maybe eight or nine months.

**Sandy:** On Broadway?

**Helen:** Yes, at the 44th Street Theater. It's been torn down for a hotel, which I'm distressed about. We played the large cities. We played Chicago, and we would be there for three weeks, four weeks. That was a magical place with the snow and everything. We played the Civic Opera House in Chicago. I will never forget, whoever it was that operated the scenery back stage took some of us up in the lofts where you could . . . He said, "We've got every back drop for operas that you could imagine." He showed, "This is for *La Traviata*. This is for . . ." It was incredible. It was there that on stage in the middle of winter that I started speaking whatever my lines were, and . . . I forgot to say that I was understudy in New York, but on the road I did play several roles.

**Sandy:** You were understudy initially.

**Helen:** In New York, yes. I was on the stage saying whatever I was supposed to say, except nothing came out. I realized then that smoking was just ruining my voice, and I had a cold. The other actors rescued me by filling in. I never forgot that, and I haven't . . . I think I took it up

---

soldiers deserve aid.

The Air Force Aid Society (AFAS) is the official charity of the United States Air Force (USAF) and has been meeting the unique needs of airmen and their families since 1942. AFAS works to support and enhance the USAF mission by providing emergency financial assistance, educational support, and community programs.

once again, but that was it. We toured. We came back. We ended in Washington, DC. The show closed there, and everybody was quite sad. We had our fiftieth reunion about six weeks ago in New York City.

**Sandy:** Just six weeks ago.

**Helen:** Yes.

**Sandy:** It's a fiftieth reunion, so that means the show debuted in . . .

**Helen:** In 1943. I learned then . . . There were several people who could not come to this wonderful party put on by Kitty Carlisle,<sup>84</sup> Moss Hart's widow. She paid for it. She got everybody together. There were about eighty, ninety people there out of the three hundred. A lot of people they couldn't find, but Kitty Carlisle and . . . The military doctor of the show was Bill Kahan, who at the time of the show was married to Gertrude Lawrence's<sup>85</sup> daughter.

**Sandy:** Bill Kahan.

**Helen:** K-A-H-A-N. He is now married to a lady who is the editor of *Mirabella*.<sup>86</sup> He and Kitty Carlisle got this incredible happening together. Cecil and I arrived there by taxi, and outside Mortimer's<sup>87</sup> restaurant in New York she had taken the whole place over for these Klieg lights,<sup>88</sup> like they have at the openings. It was really exciting before you even got in there. When you opened the door and walked in, the energy level of the place was incredible. They sent us to get name tags, and unfortunately our names were in very small type. Later on, when you went up to somebody very closely and you looked to see who that was, there were all these voices saying, "Oh, my God." You would look up, and you would put the name with the face.

**Sandy:** You saw people you hadn't seen for so many years.

**Helen:** That's right. I know Barry Nelson<sup>89</sup> was there. Red Buttons<sup>90</sup> put on a show for us.

---

<sup>84</sup>Catherine Conn (September 3, 1910 – April 17, 2007), better known professionally as Kitty Carlisle and also billed as Kitty Carlisle Hart, was an American stage and screen actress, singer and spokeswoman for the arts. She is best remembered as a regular panelist on the television game show *To Tell the Truth*.

<sup>85</sup>Gertrude Lawrence (July 4, 1898 – September 6, 1952) was an English actress, singer, dancer and musical comedy performer known for her stage appearances in the West End of London and on Broadway in New York.

<sup>86</sup>*Mirabella* was a women's magazine published from June 1989 to April 2000. It was created by and named for Grace Mirabella, a former *Vogue* editor in chief, in partnership with Rupert Murdoch.

<sup>87</sup>Mortimer's restaurant was a favorite among Manhattan socialites since 1976. It closed in 1998 after the sudden death of its owner, Glenn Bernbaum.

<sup>88</sup>A Klieg light is a carbon arc lamp that emits an intense light especially used in filmmaking. It is named after inventor John Kliegl and his brother Anton Kliegl.

<sup>89</sup>Barry Nelson (born Robert Haakon Nielsen, April 16, 1917 – April 7, 2007) was an American actor, noted as the first actor to portray Ian Fleming's secret agent James Bond.

<sup>90</sup>Red Buttons (born Aaron Chwatt, February 5, 1919 – July 13, 2006) was an American actor and comedian, whose career included Broadway, film, and television. Among Buttons' accomplishments was his appearance in 1943 in

**Sandy:** How exciting.

**Helen:** Some people couldn't come. Louie Nye,<sup>91</sup> who was an incredible comedian and who I knew pretty well. He was on a Steve Allen<sup>92</sup> show for quite a while. Karl Malden. They videotaped these people.

**Sandy:** With messages for you to view.

**Helen:** That's right, yes. Sorry I can't come. That sort of thing, but more than that. John Forsyth,<sup>93</sup> with whom I worked at the Show Shop Theater in Hartford, Connecticut, in the middle forties, he was also in *Winged Victory*. He couldn't come. Who else? Then Irving "Swifty" Lazar,<sup>94</sup> who anyone in the entertainment industry will know who he was. He was a very busy and successful agent, actors' agent. Before the play, it was war time, 1942 or 1943, he was given the task, he told us . . . This was a message. He told us the whole story of *Winged Victory* on . . . We saw it on television in this restaurant. There were sets all over the place. He said, "They came to me and the colonel said that I should put on a show to raise money for the Air Force Aid Society." He said, "I said to myself, if you do that kind of thing, I guess you really have to know what you're doing." He said, "I better get somebody to help me." It was so incredibly elemental. He asked Joshua Logan,<sup>95</sup> L-O-G-A-N, who was a well-known producer at that time. He said, "I'd like to help, but not that way. I really don't want to write a play and produce it." He was at Sardi's<sup>96</sup> [restaurant] the next day, and someone came up and said, "Swifty, I know you're looking for somebody to put on a show, to write it and produce it. There's Moss Hart over there. Just go

---

the Army Air Forces' Broadway show *Winged Victory*, along with several future stars, including Mario Lanza, John Forsythe, Karl Malden and Lee J. Cobb. A year later he appeared in Darryl F. Zanuck's movie version of *Winged Victory*.

<sup>91</sup>Louis Nye (May 1, 1913 – October 9, 2005) was an American comedic actor. He was an entertainer to the troops during World War II and is best known for his work on countless television, film and radio programs.

<sup>92</sup>Stephen "Steve" Valentine Patrick William Allen (December 26, 1921 – October 30, 2000) was an American television personality, radio personality, musician, composer, actor, comedian, and writer. In 1954, he achieved national fame as the co-creator and first host of *The Tonight Show*, which was the first late night television talk show. He went on to host numerous game and variety shows, including his own *The Steve Allen Show*, *I've Got a Secret*, and *The New Steve Allen Show*, and from 1977 until 1981 he wrote, produced, and hosted the award-winning public broadcasting show *Meeting of Minds*, a series of historical dramas presented in a talk format.

<sup>93</sup>John Forsythe (born Jacob Lincoln Freund, January 29, 1918 – April 1, 2010) was an American stage, film, and television actor, producer, narrator, drama teacher, and philanthropist whose career spanned six decades.

<sup>94</sup>Irving Paul "Swifty" Lazar (March 28, 1907 – December 30, 1993) was an American talent agent and dealmaker, representing both movie stars and authors.

<sup>95</sup>Joshua Lockwood Logan III (October 5, 1908 – July 12, 1988) was an American stage and film director, producer, and writer.

<sup>96</sup>Sardi's is a famous restaurant located in the Theater District in Manhattan, New York City. Known for the hundreds of caricatures of show business celebrities that adorn its walls, Sardi's opened at its current location on March 5, 1927.

over there and tell him. He'll help you." He gets up, and he goes over to his table and says, "Mr. Hart, I'm Irving Lazar, and I have a task of putting on a show for the Air Force Aid Society. Will you help me?" Moss Hart looks at him and says, "Certainly, I'll do whatever you want. Just call me at my office." The next day he called him at his office, and Moss Hart had a different tune. He said, "I want to tell you something, young man, that when I'm eating lunch or dinner and someone comes over and asks me something, I always say yes because then they don't hover." He said after Irving told him about it, he said, "I'm interested, but the general has to ask me."

**Sandy:** The general . . .

**Helen:** General Hap Arnold<sup>97</sup> was the name of the general at that time, on the jurisdiction of this show. I'll find out for you what branch of the [military] service. I don't know how long it took, but he did get them together. General Arnold came to New York, and they met. Moss Hart then did agree to do it. He observed the training of the cadets and so on, the Air Force cadets. He found out that this didn't work, just observing, so he entered basic training himself.

**Sandy:** Moss Hart did?

**Helen:** He did. He was in basic training for . . . I don't know how long it was. Whatever the usual time is. Months. When he came out, six weeks later, Irving told us on the video TV [television] that the play was ready to be produced and cast. That's a wonderful story to hear.

**Sandy:** That's a good story. How about acting in Atlanta. When you came here, you were very busy as a young mother.

**Helen:** Right.

**Sandy:** You were married. You were busy as a young mother. Was that your final . . . Before we leave New York City . . . You had just gotten a wonderful part, you told me, when your mother . . .

**Helen:** In a film. Victor Mature was going to be in it. No, I did many other things. I did film shorts in New York. I was in *Stage Door Canteen*<sup>98</sup> in Hollywood. It's still playing, and friends call me up at three [o'clock] in the morning. Charles Massell used to do that, "Helen, you're on

---

<sup>97</sup>Henry Harley "Hap" Arnold (June 25, 1886 – January 15, 1950) was an American general officer holding the grades of General of the Army and General of the Air Force. Arnold was an aviation pioneer, Chief of the U. S. Army Air Corps (1938–1941), Commanding General of the U.S. Army Air Forces, the only U.S. Air Force general to hold five-star rank, and the only officer to hold a five-star rank in two different U.S. military services. Arnold was also the founder of Project RAND, which evolved into one of the world's largest non-profit global policy think tanks, the RAND Corporation, and one of the founders of Pan American World Airways.

<sup>98</sup>*Stage Door Canteen* is a 1943 American World War II film with some musical numbers and other entertainment interspersed with dramatic scenes by a largely unknown cast.

television." I would say, "It could wait until the morning."

**Sandy:** What is it called?

**Helen:** *Stage Door Canteen*. It's the story of an actual canteen that existed in New York, and there was another one in Washington, where women who were interested in working there, helping, belonged to this American Theater Wing, which still exists. We were trained . . . had some training on how to deal with situations if they came. For instance, if a black soldier was dancing with a white girl, sometimes there were white Southerners who would be upset by that. We were trained in how to defuse these situations. You would go down there, and you danced with the soldiers and sat down and talked with them. It was a canteen, where they could come when they had nothing to do, and it was incredible. All the Broadway shows brought their people there and performed.

**Sandy:** That was live. You also did some films at that time?

**Helen:** I did film shorts, famous jury trials, *March of Time*,<sup>99</sup> and many others in New York.

**Sandy:** Then you had an offer for this part in . . .

**Helen:** I was in summer stock for six or seven years, but different companies. Then there was this movie. I don't remember much about it, perhaps because I didn't do it. I came here with my mother on this supposedly short trip, and I met Arthur Harris through my aunt, Marcelle Lowenstein, who was then president of Norris Candy Company. Did I tell you any of this before?

**Sandy:** No. You did just tell me a little bit, but if there is anything else you want to add about Marcelle and the candy company.

**Helen:** She was Frank Lowenstein's wife. She ran the company after he died, and she was a very effective business woman. My mother and I stayed at her house on . . . Little Ponce de Leon was its name.

**Sandy:** Little Ponce de Leon?

**Helen:** It is now . . . The Atlanta Boy Choir<sup>100</sup> has added onto it.

---

<sup>99</sup>*The March of Time* is an American short film series sponsored by Time Inc. and shown in movie theaters from 1935 to 1951. It was based on a radio news series broadcast from 1931 to 1945.

<sup>100</sup>The Atlanta Boy Choir is a renowned choral group for boys and men in Atlanta, Georgia. The Atlanta Boy Choir was founded as part of the music program for the Atlanta City School System in 1946. That early boy choir gave annual concerts locally and was composed of boys with unchanged voices. In 1953, another boy choir, known as the Atlanta Boy Choir was founded by George Crawford. That choir met at a local church. When Mr. Crawford relocated to Alabama, parents of the members of that early choir formed a new choir and chose Fletcher Wolfe as the founding director. That choir was legally incorporated as the Atlanta Boy Choir, Inc., in November 1959. The

**Sandy:** The Atlanta Boy Choir has that house now?

**Helen:** That's right.

**Sandy:** They have added onto it.

**Helen:** Yes.

**Sandy:** His brother lived down the street in the house which is now Paideia.

**Helen:** You have a good memory. That's right. Max lived down there.

**Sandy:** You were visiting at this house on Little . . . called Little Ponce de Leon.

**Helen:** It is really South Ponce de Leon, but people called it Little. She made it her business to introduce me to every single male in Atlanta, my age, Jewish, and so on. One of them was Arthur Harris, and he decided he was going to marry me. I must say, it was pretty quick. It was like two and a half weeks.

**Sandy:** That's what you said last time, and you honeymooned in Florida.

**Helen:** My father came down. Did I tell you about the newspaper publicity?

**Sandy:** No.

**Helen:** My father, when they came down, said, "Helen, I would like to help you with some of the details." He had quite a sense of humor, I must say. He said, "I will help you with the publicity." I said, "Okay." He said, "Give me some photographs," so I did. In one of the morning newspapers, I guess it was *The Constitution*<sup>101</sup> then, there was a photograph of me with long black hair, which I did indeed have at that time. The evening paper, however, had a photograph of me with short blond hair, which was a Hollywood still. People were saying, "Who is this woman?" That was tongue-in-cheek humor, I suppose. I don't know.

**Sandy:** Now were you Helen Eastman when you got engaged?

**Helen:** Eisemann. I used that name.

**Sandy:** If we wanted to catch you in any of your old films or the credits or anything, it would say Helen Eastman.

**Helen:** Right. I didn't do that many films.

**Sandy:** On the theater marquees or anything like that, in the programs, you would always be

---

choir is an ambassador internationally, performing across North America and Europe in many of the most renowned concert halls and cathedrals in the world.

<sup>101</sup>*The Atlanta Journal-Constitution (AJC)* is the only major daily newspaper in the metropolitan area of Atlanta, Georgia. The *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* is the result of the merger between *The Atlanta Journal* and *The Atlanta Constitution*. The two staffs were combined in 1982, and separate publication of the morning *Constitution* and afternoon *Journal* ended in 2001 in favor of a single morning paper under the *Journal-Constitution* name.

Helen Eastman.

**Helen:** Eastman, in the programs. I wish I had been on a marquee, but I didn't stay with it long enough.

**Sandy:** You came here, and you got married and quickly became an Atlanta mother.

**Helen:** It wasn't so . . . a mother yes. That was wonderful. The shock . . . Did I speak with you of my early reactions?

**Sandy:** You told me about your feelings about segregation, but tell me more.

**Helen:** I guess I was pretty depressed that first year. Coming to Atlanta in those days compared to living in New York was just a totally different culture, different lifestyle. The social life consisted of going to different homes on weekends and getting all dressed up and playing cards. I didn't play cards. I would rather talk. They asked me one time, some lovely hostess said, "What do you play, Helen?" I said, "Tennis and golf," I was serious. I used to sit in another room reading the New York Times or whatever. Then I decided I would learn some game. I would learn gin rummy. They put me in with all these card sharks, like Slick Selig and Louis Regenstein. I played with them maybe five or six different nights. They would remember every single card that they dropped, and I didn't. I just would . . . sort of random, because I really didn't want to play. I would beat them until finally they caught on that I really did not know what I was doing, or care. There was one restaurant, Hart's. Did I tell you about it?

**Sandy:** No.

**Helen:** Hart's on Peachtree. H-A-R-T-S. There were one or two others, but mostly we would go to Hart's if we went out. It was not legal to sell mixed drinks at that time. Legally, I believe you could drink . . . Well, it wasn't even legal.

**Sandy:** This must have all been in the late forties, early fifties.

**Helen:** That's right. The restaurant would get tipped off. The police, they would call and say, "We're coming over to raid you." It was unbelievable. We had things like Bloody Mary soup, disguised. They would quickly pour the whiskey into tea cups or whatever. Coming from New York and the Stork Club<sup>102</sup> and the El Morocco,<sup>103</sup> where I used to go out on dates, and all this

---

<sup>102</sup>The Stork Club was a world-famous nightclub in Manhattan, New York City, in existence from 1929 to 1965. A symbol of café society, during the years of its operation the club was visited by many political, social, and celebrity figures and was popular among the wealthy elite.

<sup>103</sup>El Morocco was a Manhattan, New York City, nightclub frequented by the rich and famous from the 1930s until the decline of café society in the late 1950s.

wonderful jazz on 52nd Street. We would go from one place to another and hear wonderful music. Mable Mercer<sup>104</sup> was one of my favorites. She's quite a cult. She was quite a cult figure.

**Sandy:** Did you ever go down to Auburn Avenue and that area?

**Helen:** Oh, yes. We did. There was one night club . . .

**Sandy:** Royal Peacock?

**Helen:** No. That was not the one we went to.

**Sandy:** You were telling me that you got depressed because all they did was go out to dinner or play cards.

**Helen:** It was just totally . . . I had to totally readjust to this new culture and a new way of thinking, but I didn't adjust to the new way of thinking. Segregation was a real problem for me. I had lived and worked with people of all colors. That was the way I grew up. I told you my father's house one day . . . We lived at the Hotel Pierre for a while. My mother got sick of housekeeping, and we had an apartment there. My dad said, "Helen, come in. I want you to meet your uncle, Uncle . . ." whatever his name was. "Uncle Albert," he says, "The King of Siam." He was black, and my father . . . This is the kind of . . .

**Sandy:** . . . humor that you told me about.

**Helen:** Humor, but also we are all alike. We are all one group. I don't want to overly romanticize it, but that's . . .

**Sandy:** That's the way you grew up.

**Helen:** Right. I've got other stories about that, but I think we can go on to other things. I remember two plays. I have mentioned being in two shows for the [National] Council of Jewish Women. I remembered some of the people that were in that. We borrowed . . . We didn't borrow. They gave us bags at Fulton Bag & Cotton, and we each had these bags which were very colorful and different patterns. The reason, I found out later, was that they would sell . . . Farm ladies would buy these and use it to make dresses out of them or quilts or whatever. Other people in that show that I recall were Daisy Bell Selig . . . She was married to Albert Selig . . . Herbert Cohen's wife, Jean Cohen, Elaine Montag who was then married to Bud Weiss and she's now Elaine Lang, my dear beloved friend **Brenna** Feldman Frye, and Barbara Levy. We had a lot of fun with that show. I think I did tell you about my disillusion with the drinking that went on back

---

<sup>104</sup>Mabel Mercer (February 3, 1900 – April 20, 1984) was an English-born cabaret singer who performed in the United States, Britain, and Europe with the greats in jazz and cabaret.

stage.

**Sandy:** Yes, you did.

**Helen:** There was another show at the Progressive Club that [the National] Council [of Jewish Women] did. I was in one scene where we sang . . . I never sang, but it was the most wonderful experience. I did a duet with DeJongh Franklin, who was an attorney then and married to my friend Phoebe. It was called *Buttons and Bows*. At the end of the duet, Bob Gerson who now is married to Michelene Gerson and lives in Ansley Park, came on . . . He had on a tiger suit. He came on, and he carried me off the stage. It was just fraught with drama.

**Sandy:** What was the name of that show?

**Helen:** I just remember the . . .

**Sandy:** It was just one of the shows that National Council . . .

**Helen:** Right. This was a review, different things from . . . I remember . . . Maybe I'm jumping around too much.

**Sandy:** That's okay.

**Helen:** I got involved with the Atlanta Symphony. I remember they had a meeting at my house, and I would go to their houses. All these ladies, proper ladies, who loved music. I loved music, but I did not love the tea and cookie stage of helping. At any rate, I did put on a television show at . . . I think it was WGST. It was then on Peachtree Road . . . for the benefit of the Atlanta Symphony. I had not asked the conductor's permission. The radio station . . . The television . . . It was television and radio . . . loved the idea. The idea was that we had all these different groups from high schools in Atlanta. There were groups that played harmonicas, and there were two or three people who did something different. We did this show. I put it together, and I was the MC [Master of Ceremonies] that hosted it. It was a lot of fun. They had a lot of calls about the show, how much the people liked it and so on, but one person that did not like it was Henry Sopkin,<sup>105</sup> who was the then conductor. Atlanta Symphony had been a youth orchestra before they became . . . I guess it was still on the edge of being thought of that way, and he said, "Helen, this cannot go on. It is too close to being a youth orchestra, and it reminds people of that." I didn't agree with

---

<sup>105</sup>Henry Sopkin (October 20, 1903 – March 1, 1988) was an American conductor. He founded, and for 21 years, from 1945 to 1966, led the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra. Before that, he taught conducting at the American Conservatory of Music in Chicago and led the Conservatory Symphony Orchestra. The Atlanta Music Club hired him in 1944. Under the patronage of the Atlanta Music Club, founded in 1915, the Atlanta Symphony emerged in 1947 from a successful Atlanta Youth Orchestra conducted by Sopkin. When he retired in 1966, the Symphony became fully professional.

him, but what could I do. That was the end of that. I also taped a . . . This was for public relations for the symphony . . . a behind-the-scenes of the Atlanta Symphony. I remember we taped their rehearsals, and Henry would really . . . He was very dramatic. He would bless his people out, and we had to edit a lot. That was okay with him, and so that did go on the air. The other was on the air also, but it was short-lived.

**Sandy:** You were involved with that. Did you get into acting with the Alliance Theater?<sup>106</sup>  
You did something to start . . .

**Helen:** It was Theater Atlanta. There were three theater groups here, but none of them were really making it financially. A group of us got together. My memory isn't that good on who was involved at that time. I think Helen Bullard was. She was definitely involved. She was very active with political campaigns, with Ivan Allen's campaign. She thought for a long time before she said anything, and when she said anything it was just really pretty heady stuff. We succeeded in putting these three companies together, and they became Theater Atlanta. I remember sitting in on a casting of one of the sessions when Frank **Whitell and Daryl** Goldberg, who is now deceased, tried out for the part in *Inherit the Wind*. It just blew my mind. They were incredible, the force and energy and the talent of these two men. I was in some of the productions at Theater Atlanta. Somebody tried to start a theater before then, and I remember she asked me did I have my Equity card. I was a member of Equity, but I didn't think I would need it on Peachtree Street. Atlanta has come a long way since then with a lot of good so-called off-Broadway theater now. Of course the Alliance [Theater] is excellent.

**Sandy:** We're going to take a little break and then we will start again in a couple minutes.

<End of Tape 2 - Side 1>

<Begin Tape 2, Side 2>

**Sandy:** This is Sandy Leff, and I am interviewing Helen Eisemann Alexander on December 28, 1993. You were telling me about the theater in Atlanta. Do you do anything today in the theater?

**Helen:** I don't do theater. I really have some difficulty remembering lines at this point in my

---

<sup>106</sup>*Inherit the Wind* is an American play by Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee, which debuted in 1955. The story fictionalizes the 1925 Scopes "Monkey" Trial, which resulted in John T. Scopes' conviction for teaching Charles Darwin's theory of evolution to a high school science class, contrary to a Tennessee's Butler Act, which had made it unlawful to teach human evolution in any state-funded school. The American Civil Liberties Union financed a test case in which John Scopes, a Tennessee high school science teacher, purposely incriminated himself and agreed to be tried for violating the Act.

life, but I do television commercials and industrial films and training films. I'm registered with all the agents, and I have one agency in particular, Atlanta Models and Talent. They have been in business for many, many years, and I have been with them for a long time. They call me for auditions. Sometimes you get them, and sometimes you don't. I also do voice-over tapes. Some. Not a lot.

**Sandy:** Tell me what voice-over tapes are.

**Helen:** Voice-over is when you listen to the radio and you hear somebody telling you about a wonderful product or about a public service advertisement. They are voice that gives you messages about what to buy. Also, on television sometimes you don't see anyone, but you just hear the voice, as opposed to an announcer, someone who describes the product.

**Sandy:** Last time you told me about being in [*Driving*] *Miss Daisy*. Tell me quickly about your other hobbies that you are involved with now.

**Helen:** I like exercise, mostly stretching and aerobic classes. I was very athletic, and I still enjoy that. I like to dance. I like art. I am interested in art.

**Sandy:** Last time you started telling me about the Speech and Hearing Clinic that you started for blacks.

**Helen:** Sandy, I have the . . . may I get it? I have the brochure downstairs with names. Can we turn this off for a minute?

**Sandy:** Sure.

<Interruption in tape; interview resumes>

**Helen:** How much did I tell you about?

**Sandy:** You could almost start at the beginning with it. You have a brochure with pictures of . . .

**Helen:** This is a newspaper . . .

**Sandy:** . . . a newspaper article.

**Helen:** We had a brochure. We had been in business for . . . not business, but we had been operating for, I guess, three years, and we really needed to raise some larger money. This brochure was donated by the Atlanta Paper Company, now Mead Corporation. That was my husband's family business. This brochure did win an award, the artist who did it for free.

**Sandy:** This newspaper article is 1952.

**Helen:** There's a photograph. It starts, "New clinic for deaf children." There are two photographs. One that says, "Time for Bernard to give his vocal cords a workout." One is of a

little black child and Hermi Alexander . . .

**Sandy:** How do you spell Hermi?

**Helen:** H-E-R-M-I. That's my husband's former wife . . . and Irene Asbury who was the teacher that we sent away to Washington University in St. Louis.

**Sandy:** You started telling us about her.

**Sandy:** Is this you?

**Helen:** That's me <unintelligible 4:17> Arthur Harris at the time. Here is another photograph of two children, two students. One is Linda Williams. She is about three years old, and she is the reason the school started. She was the child of James Williams and Narvell Williams. She had aphasia, which means that you need specialized training to reroute the way you hear and the way you speak. In those days, all those children were just sent to Grace. I think it was called Grace. [It was] a place for mentally retarded children, but they weren't mentally retarded. We were given space by Atlanta University and Spelman College alternately. One year one of them would give us and another year the next one.

**Sandy:** Did you arrange all that?

**Helen:** Oh, yes. Phoebe Franklin and I and . . . Let me give you some of the names of women who were involved in this. I say women because they really were mostly women.

**Sandy:** You really started it because you got interested through this Linda Williams' parents who worked for you.

**Helen:** Right. He worked for us. It just didn't feel right that this child could have no place to go because she was black. That was basically the issue because the Junior League at that time had such a speech school, but they only took white children.

**Sandy:** Because Atlanta was very segregated in terms of education.

**Helen:** Right. Today, that's not so. They have moved ahead with the times. They did help us in an advisory capacity. Were you interested in other names?

**Sandy:** Yes.

**Helen:** The most active were Phoebe Franklin and Hermi Alexander and myself, Mrs. Arthur Harris, Helen Harris, Mrs. Calvin Sanderson, Mrs. James Williams, Mrs. Robert Ferst, Mrs. David Hein, and Mrs. Eleanor Massell, Mrs. Charles Massell. We were only known by our husbands' names.

**Sandy:** At that time.

**Helen:** Yes, right, at that time.

**Sandy:** Was everyone Jewish?

**Helen:** No.

**Sandy:** It was a mixed . . .

**Helen:** It was mixed, a community effort. Then we had lots of names on our stationary to give us credibility.

**Sandy:** How long did this school exist on its own, apart from anything else? Eventually the program was adopted and became part of the special education program in the Atlanta . . .

**Helen:** It was the first one, right.

**Sandy:** The first . . .

**Helen:** They did not have any special education in the schools at that time. I think they were planning to go into this, but they didn't have the . . . I am surmising they did not have the trained teachers. We were able to give them one trained teacher for the deaf and quite a few black teachers who were trained for speech, speech training, and that takes one year. Teaching of the deaf is master's [degree] level.

**Sandy:** Did you send other teachers up to . . . was it University of Washington [Washington University]?

**Helen:** Yes. Irene Asbury went for two years, and I think maybe four or five people. One man, and then there were four women.

**Sandy:** You had to raise money to send these people?

**Helen:** That's right. I think I told you about the board of regents. It was law then, under separate but equal, that they had to, by law, if a resident of the state of Georgia could not find the education they wanted in the state, if it was there but they weren't accepted or it wasn't there, one of those two things, they had to give us some of the funding. I think they paid forty percent, and we raised the rest.

**Sandy:** Are you currently on the board of Spelman College?

**Helen:** No.

**Sandy:** You were involved?

**Helen:** I was involved with Friends of Spelman, which was a very lovely experience. We would meet two or three times a year, and we would raise money for <unintelligible 8:26>.

**Sandy:** Did you know Martin Luther King?

**Helen:** I did. <unintelligible 8:35> I know him. I had an experience. Did I tell you about that?

**Sandy:** No.

**Helen:** The day that the schools were going to open, desegregate, the first day, he had asked a friend of ours, Carolyn Ottinger, whose daughter is Janice Rothschild, married to Rabbi Rothschild . . . She had a house on Kingswood Lane.

**Sandy:** Her name was . . .

**Helen:** Carolyn Ottinger.

**Sandy:** Carolyn O-T-T-I-N-G-E-R?

**Helen:** I believe that's it. It was a wonderful place from which to watch what was going on at Northside High School. Martin Luther King called her up and asked if he could stand there and observe. She was just delighted, thrilled, and she called me and my then-husband Marshall Mantler, known as Bud, [and asked] if we would like to come over and experience this also with him.

**Sandy:** To watch the schools being integrated.

**Helen:** Right. That one school.

**Sandy:** What year was it, do you remember, when the schools integrated here?

**Helen:** I don't remember.

**Sandy:** Well, it was in the sixties already.

**Helen:** No, fifties, wasn't it?

**Sandy:** Fifties?

**Helen:** I'm not sure. We need to really pin that down. Yes, it was in the sixties. It was 1964.

**Sandy:** It was shortly before Martin Luther King won the Nobel Peace Prize<sup>107</sup> and . . .

**Helen:** Right, yes. That is another story. I'll finish. I do have that story. He is standing there watching keenly, and I remember he was talking to us and really made us feel comfortable. I remember that about him. That was a special quality. I don't know how to explain it, and I don't think I'm romanticizing. I think some people leave big footprints, and he was one of them. You spoke about the Nobel Peace Prize. Lyndon Johnson could not attend, and he sent someone who

---

<sup>107</sup>The Nobel Peace Prize is one of the five Nobel Prizes created by the Swedish industrialist, inventor, and armaments manufacturer Alfred Nobel, along with the prizes in Chemistry, Physics, Physiology or Medicine, and Literature. According to Nobel's will, the Peace Prize shall be awarded to the person who in the preceding year "shall have done the most or the best work for fraternity between nations, for the abolition or reduction of standing armies and for the holding and promotion of peace congresses."

my former husband knew quite well, a black gentleman from Washington [DC]. I can't remember his name. They had difficulty . . . The function took place at the Dinkler Plaza. Maybe it was just called the Dinkler Hotel then. They had difficulty filling the tables. The story that Cecil, my husband, tells is that . . .

**Sandy:** This is a dinner to commemorate his winning the Nobel Peace Prize.

**Helen:** Yes. It had just happened. He is from here and they wanted to . . . My husband tells a story that Bob Woodruff<sup>108</sup> told all the big banks and the larger businesses that, if they did not attend, Coca-Cola could function any place. They did not have to stay in Atlanta. The place was filled. I remember Vernon Jordan<sup>109</sup> was there. He is now advisor to Clinton and, of course, has his own law firm.

**Sandy:** You were at that dinner that commemorated . . .

**Helen:** Right.

**Sandy:** You heard Martin Luther King speak personally several times.

**Helen:** Right. It was incredible.

**Sandy:** Do you remember when he was assassinated and the mood here in Atlanta? That was in 1968.

**Helen:** It was just so sad and such shock. I don't recall that too well.

**Sandy:** You do recall The Temple bombing.

**Helen:** Oh, yes.

**Sandy:** I remember you told me all about that. Do you know Johnetta Cole?<sup>110</sup> Are you involved with . . .

**Helen:** We know her. My husband knows her better than I do. My husband, Cecil, was on the board of Clark Atlanta University<sup>111</sup> and was instrumental in putting Clark and AU [Atlantic

---

<sup>108</sup>Robert Winship Woodruff (December 6, 1889 – March 7, 1985) was the president of The Coca-Cola Company from 1923 until 1954. With a large net worth, he was also a major philanthropist, and many educational and cultural landmarks in Atlanta, Georgia, bear his name. Included among these are the Woodruff Arts Center, Woodruff Park, and the Robert W. Woodruff Library.

<sup>109</sup>Vernon Eulion Jordan Jr. (August 15, 1935 – ) is an American business executive and civil rights activist in the United States. A leading figure in the Civil Rights Movement, he was chosen by President Bill Clinton as a close adviser.

<sup>110</sup>Johnetta B. Cole (October 19, 1936 – ) is an American anthropologist, educator and museum director. She was the first African-American female president of Spelman College, a historically black college, serving from 1987 to 1997. She was president of Bennett College from 2002 to 2007. From 2009 to 2017 she was Director of the Smithsonian Institutions' National Museum of Africa Art in Washington, DC.

<sup>111</sup>Clark Atlanta University is a private, historically black university in Atlanta, Georgia. It was formed in 1988 with the consolidation of Clark College (founded in 1869) and Atlanta University (founded in 1865). Clark Atlanta

University] together, helping them work out those difficulties.

**Sandy:** I was going to ask you more about your involvement with the American Jewish Committee. Are you involved with the Black-Jewish Coalition?<sup>112</sup>

**Helen:** Cecil started that, my husband did.

**Sandy:** Your husband did start it?

**Helen:** I am not [involved].

**Sandy:** He was the first president, I think.

**Helen:** Yes, and John Lewis.<sup>113</sup> You know John Lewis?

**Sandy:** Yes.

**Helen:** We were involved in John's campaign, which was really exciting.

**Sandy:** It was an exciting campaign. Do you feel in some ways that he is like Martin Luther King in that you really can talk to him?

**Helen:** You can talk to him.

**Sandy:** And he listens.

**Helen:** Right.

**Sandy:** Do you have any observations you would like to share about John Lewis?

**Helen:** I think he is a fine man. Maybe he is a little . . . I think that what goes on in Washington is a little difficult for him, particularly the NAFTA<sup>114</sup> business, the deal wheeling and dealing. I guess that's part of our politics.

**Sandy:** How were you involved with his campaign?

**Helen:** Really it was Cecil who has backed him, and I went with him. I remember the night he was elected. We were in a small campaign office downtown, and there was a lady bending over a desk with a pencil. She would be talking to the county, or the city rather, that had the votes. As she wrote down, we would all watch. There wasn't any big high tech thing. Perhaps this was

---

University is a member of the United Negro College Fund (UNCF) and is the largest collegiate institution in the Atlanta University Center Consortium which included Atlanta University, Morehouse College, Spellman College, Morris Brown College, and the Interdenominational Theological Center.

<sup>112</sup>The Atlanta Chapter of the American Jewish Committee (AJC) formed the Atlanta Black-Jewish Coalition (ABJC) in 1982 to build support for the reauthorization of the Voting Rights Act. After the Act was passed, the ABJC continued its work with the purpose of strengthening relationships between the Black and Jewish communities.

<sup>113</sup>John Robert Lewis (February 21, 1940 – ) is an American politician and civil rights leader. He is the U.S. Representative for Georgia's 5th congressional district, serving since 1987. The district includes parts of Fulton, DeKalb, and Clayton counties, including most of the City of Atlanta.

<sup>114</sup>The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) is an agreement signed by Canada, Mexico, and the United States, which came into force on January 1, 1994.

even more exciting. It was. When she wrote that final number, everybody knew that he had won. It was really wonderful. I remember John Lewis coming back to Atlanta from . . . I think they have some sort of training . . . not training, but . . .

**Sandy:** Up at Harvard [University], is that what you're talking about?

**Helen:** Yes, right.

**Sandy:** I know in Boston they all are trained at the [Harvard] Kennedy School.<sup>115</sup>

**Helen:** Right, exactly. He came back from that, and he said, "There must be a hundred phone calls I have to return." To me, that would be just awful. I said, "John, how can you do that?" He said, "I think it's wonderful." He really was just so excited about this broadening experience. He is a wonderful man.

**Sandy:** Do you still stay in touch with him?

**Helen:** We see them from time to time, around.

**Sandy:** You say them. His wife, Lillian, and . . .

**Helen:** Yes, at events mostly. He has a birthday party once a year, and we go to that.

**Sandy:** Any other observations about the black community?

**Helen:** I have a particular observation . . . It's not my observation but my son Alex's observation. This is maybe four or five years ago. Longer ago, maybe ten years ago. I was living at Forest Lake Drive in the home that I bought, and he had an exhibit. He is a documentary photographer, and there are many books to his credit. He had been in a show in Washington and then a gathering afterwards of folks, then one in New York, and one here. Cecil and I got the one here together. I used my husband's contacts. I remember many folks from the black community came to my home, and also whites. There was no awareness of color, of course, and my son made this observation. He said, "Mom, this would not have happened in New York or Washington. It is just astounding, and it is wonderful." There is a real meshing of the community here, and perhaps it is because we are in business together or they are, and we need one another.

**Sandy:** You do think Atlanta is a unique or unusual kind of city in terms of the mixing of the races.

---

<sup>115</sup>The John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University (also known as Harvard Kennedy School and HKS) is a public policy and public administration school of Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts. The school offers master's degrees in public policy, public administration, and international development, grants several doctoral degrees, and offers many executive education programs. It conducts research in subjects relating to politics, government, international affairs, and economics.

**Helen:** Andrew Young<sup>116</sup> said that we have gone through the process, and I think that is vital. You cannot achieve a goal without going through the various steps, and that has happened.

**Sandy:** Do you go down to the Martin Luther King Center?<sup>117</sup>

**Helen:** Not really. I go occasionally with Cecil.

**Sandy:** Do you bring guests down there when they come to visit you and that kind of thing?

**Helen:** Yes.

**Sandy:** They just got a big grant . . .

**Helen:** I heard that.

**Sandy:** . . . for the museum down there, which is wonderful.

**Helen:** Yes.

**Sandy:** Any thoughts on Black-Jewish relations and where they are going, or how, today?

**Helen:** I don't know today. I did tell you that the housing . . .

**Sandy:** Yes. [Do] you mean when you first wanted to move into an area, and it was restricted to Jews?

**Helen:** When I spoke to the U. S. Commission on Human Rights.

**Sandy:** Yes.

**Helen:** There was concern that if, to answer your question, the problems of Jews vis-a-vis not being allowed to buy would be brought up, the blacks would really not like that because theirs was really a worse cause. It was much more difficult for them to get into neighborhoods. I felt if there is prejudice against one group, it's going to spread and go to another group. It really is one problem. I told you about that.

**Sandy:** Yes, that incident. What changes have you seen in the Jewish community since moving

---

<sup>116</sup>Andrew Jackson Young (March 12, 1932 – ) is an American politician, diplomat, activist and pastor from Georgia. He has served as a Congressman from Georgia's 5<sup>th</sup> congressional district, the United States Ambassador to the United Nations, and Mayor of Atlanta. He served as President of the National Council of Churches USA, was a member of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) during the 1960's Civil Rights Movement, and was a supporter and friend of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

<sup>117</sup>The Martin Luther King Jr. Center for Nonviolent Social Change (The King Center) is a nongovernmental, not-for-profit organization founded in 1968 by Coretta Scott King. King started the organization in the basement of the couple's home in the year following the 1968 assassination of her husband, Martin Luther King Jr. In 1981, the center's headquarters were moved into the Martin Luther King Jr. National Historic Site, a multimillion-dollar facility on Auburn Avenue which includes King's birth home and the Ebenezer Baptist Church, where he preached from 1960 until his death. In 1977, a memorial tomb was dedicated, and the remains of Martin Luther King Jr. were moved from South View Cemetery to the plaza that is nestled between the center and the church. Mrs. King was interred with her husband on February 7, 2006.

here? When you first came here, you said people were very social. That's what the women did.

**Helen:** Yes.

**Sandy:** They played cards. They had little dinner parties. Do you feel differently about the Jewish community today here?

**Helen:** I don't want to denigrate the Jewish community at that time and what women did. There was a service club that many women belonged to. I was not very active with it. It handled the Council, and in fact my older children's grandmother was one of the first presidents of the [National] Council of Jewish Women, Irma Harris, Irma **Reidman** Harris. Today, we all know women are in business, some, and . . .

**Sandy:** Do you have any observations on the difference between Northern Jews and Southern Jews?

**Helen:** No, not really.

**Sandy:** Because there have been more Northerners that have come down and maybe changed, a little bit, the Atlanta community.

**Helen:** That's right. We have grown. There were, I think, a hundred thousand people in greater Atlanta when I moved here in 1947. I think that's correct. I'm not certain. Now there are, what, <unintelligible 20:15> .

**Sandy:** In the greater area. What are the biggest issues in the Atlanta Jewish community today? What do you think some of the problems are?

**Helen:** I am sure what is going on in Europe is of great concern, and what is going on in Germany.

**Sandy:** The antisemitism.

**Helen:** Yes, and what is going on in Russia. We were just seeing this replay. It looks like . . . It's scary.

**Sandy:** On a local level, you mentioned intermarriage at one point. Do you feel that is one of the problems that is facing the Atlanta or American Jewish community today?

**Helen:** I think if they don't . . . Three of my children have intermarried. One has not. All of my grandchildren are being raised as Jews. That's what they wanted, and they had great difficulty in the beginning with the religious institutions accepting non-Jews. I think this is happening. I don't know because I'm not really in the inside of it. I think there is more acceptance and more helping and a more human attitude towards it. The children will be mostly brought up as Jews. Now

there is . . . I know The Temple will marry intermarried couples, but you have to promise to bring your child up as a Jew. For some non-Jewish parents, it is hard to have a contract for that kind of thing. It is a process. My oldest son . . . and I'll tell you the truth about them.

**Sandy:** We are going to start talking about your son. Just one question before. You said there was a wonderful woman that did a seminar on intermarriage.

**Helen:** Their name is Cowan. I don't know their first name. I think it was Jerry Cowan.

**Sandy:** C-O-W-A-N?

**Helen:** I am sure the AJC or the . . . There are other Jewish organizations that would know of them. They came here and did this . . . It was a group where they invited . . . I think there were ten couples, mixed marriages. It was like group therapy for intermarrieds.

**Sandy:** This was when your children started to marry, at that age?

**Helen:** My daughter had been intermarried, and she was having difficulty in her heart and in her mind. I felt that she needed some larger experience. Very selfishly, I think I told you, I sat on the board of the AJC when they were determining issues to bring up each year and to put on the agenda. Each year I put down intermarriage. The first year they didn't have any program. The second year they did, and that is when I jumped in and really helped. I did it selfishly for my own kids, but many people benefited from that.

**Sandy:** There is more and more intermarriage.

**Helen:** Right. I don't mind. There are different views on whether it is harmful. I think we are a different society today. People go to universities and schools with all, blacks, whites, pink, green, Jewish, non-Jewish, Muslims, so we are bound to have a certain percent of those people intermarry. I think how we accept them and how we deal with it and how the Jewish institutions deal with it is going to tell the story. Of course the very Orthodox will not hear of it. I know the Cowans, when they came down here, they spent, I think, one or two days with the group, the intermarried group. Then they spent another day with all the rabbis. Later they told the group how different it was with the very Orthodox. Everybody has a right to their feeling or opinion. They would not hear of intermarriage. This was against everything they learned. I think the

Conservative<sup>118</sup> and Reform<sup>119</sup> are different.

**Sandy:** Tell me about your children because I know you are very proud of all that they have accomplished.

**Helen:** I really am.

**Sandy:** Start at the beginning and . . .

**Helen:** I was thinking of when my oldest son . . . I have four children. We'll start with his wedding. It was really incredible.

**Sandy:** Your oldest son's name is . . .

**Helen:** Arthur Harris III. Now I'll go back. He married Mynel Yates, who was a wonderful woman.

**Sandy:** Mynel is . . .

**Helen:** M-Y-N-E-L.

**Sandy:** Yates.

**Helen:** Y-A-T-E-S. She wanted to get married in a church, and her church was St. Luke's [Episcopal Church], which is a very liberal Episcopal church.

**Sandy:** Here in Atlanta.

**Helen:** Right. This was long before anything like this was done. No rabbi in Atlanta would marry them in a church, or probably would not marry them. I know he would not. We asked Dr. Rothschild. He would not, could not. I don't know if they get their . . . This wonderful rabbi from Montgomery, Alabama . . . I'll think of his name as we speak . . . came over, and a priest and rabbi performed the ceremony.

**Sandy:** This rabbi from Montgomery, was it at St. Luke's Church?

**Helen:** It was at St. Luke's. It was really brave of St. Luke's. They had never done this kind of thing before. They taped it because they were concerned that there might be some problems because of it.

---

<sup>118</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, with mixed seating, women rabbis, and *bat mitzvah* celebrations.

<sup>119</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.

**Sandy:** How did you feel about your son marrying out of the religion?

**Helen:** What I felt was that they . . . I didn't feel he was marrying out of his religion. He was Jewish, and he had somebody there representing his being Jewish. They broke the glass, and they used many of the traditions. Their sons go to Sunday school, to The Temple. I didn't want to play God. I loved this woman that he married.

**Sandy:** How did he meet her? He went away to Andover, you said.

**Helen:** Right. Actually they were in school together. They went to Lovett School together.

**Sandy:** They met when they were at Lovett that short time.

**Helen:** When they were very young. Then she went on to Westminster,<sup>120</sup> and I really don't know how they met. They went together for a while. The church was full, and it was a happening. It really was. It was the first time, I think, this had happened in Atlanta to my knowledge.

**Sandy:** Did you walk your son down the aisle?

**Helen:** I did, and his father was there. You asked me how I felt about them intermarrying. I think as long as they stay true to their own selves in whatever they do, that is the main issue. I think they have in every respect. He is Jewish. There's no doubt about it. She goes to both. She goes to her church and she goes to . . .

**Sandy:** How old are their children?

**Helen:** Josh is going to be eight, and Adam is six. He was just six.

**Sandy:** Do the children come here for the holidays?

**Helen:** Oh, yes.

**Sandy:** Do you have *seder* and that kind of thing?

**Helen:** I do have *seder*, and all the <unintelligible 27:48>. I have seven grandchildren. One does not live here. My son Alex lives in Durham. Cecil's daughter has a little boy named Jed, and he is about five. There are all these little ones that come for all the holidays here, and they sit at the table and eat together. It's wonderful. Then they run around and make a lot of noise, but

---

<sup>120</sup>The Westminster Schools is a private Christian day school in Atlanta, Georgia that originated in 1951 as a reorganization of the North Avenue Presbyterian School, a girls' school and an affiliate of the North Avenue Presbyterian Church. Dr. William L. Pressly served as Westminster's first president. In 1953, Washington Seminary, another private school for girls founded by two of George Washington's great-nieces in 1878, merged with Westminster. The resulting school was co-educational until the sixth grade, with separate schools for boys and girls continuing through the twelfth grade, a practice that continued until 1986 and provided the basis of Westminster's plural name.

mostly it's really a wonderful thing to be able to do and experience, to me.

**Sandy:** You don't have a Christmas tree though, now.

**Helen:** Yes.

**Sandy:** You do.

**Helen:** I always did.

**Sandy:** You always did. That's what you told me.

**Helen:** Yes.

**Sandy:** So you still have one in this house. I still do, and it is just . . . Again, there are many different attitudes. Some people would think it's horrible. I'm as Jewish as you can get in my own feelings and heart, and . . .

**Sandy:** You do light the Hanukkuh *menorah*.

**Helen:** Yes. All my children do. My daughter had a birthday party for her daughter. It was also on the last night of Hanukkah, and everybody brought gifts. There is not one way to do something.

**Sandy:** You have an older son, Arthur Harris. What does he do?

**Helen:** He is now with CNN. He is a writer. He was with *The Washington Post*<sup>121</sup> for . . . First of all, he went to Duke [University],<sup>122</sup> and he was in the service, in the Navy, on board a carrier. He was the interpreter . . . He speaks French fluently . . . for the admiral. After graduation, he went to Harvard Business School, and he hated it. [He] couldn't stand it. He came back to Atlanta, and he started writing. He wrote a piece that appeared in *Georgia Magazine*,<sup>123</sup> and then he had three job offers. One was from the *The Constitution*, which he accepted, then one from *Georgia Magazine*, and I don't know, another one. He was a headline writer, which is how they start all their writers. They have to just write headlines. After about ten months of this, he said, "Ma, if they don't change me, I can't stand it. I'm going to quit." They did change him. He told a story which is . . . The then editor . . . I can't remember his name . . . who was not very beloved by the people who worked there . . .

---

<sup>121</sup>*The Washington Post* is a major American daily newspaper published in Washington, DC, with a particular emphasis on national politics and the federal government.

<sup>122</sup>Duke University is a private research university located in Durham, North Carolina. Founded by Methodists and Quakers in the present-day town of Trinity in 1838, the school moved to Durham in 1892.

<sup>123</sup>GEMC [Georgia Electric Membership Corp.] *Georgia Magazine*, established in 1945, is the largest monthly circulation magazine in Georgia. Celebrating the Georgia lifestyle, the spirit of its people, and the flavor of its past, it is published by the state's electric cooperatives.

**Sandy:** I think I know who you mean.

**Helen:** I want to talk to all of you individually, and you lined up. The question was to find out how much they made, what they earned. When it was Arty's turn, he said, "Okay, Art, how much money do you earn from us?" Art said, "I really don't know, sir," and that just threw him. That just stuck in my mind.

**Sandy:** Today he writes for CNN?

**Helen:** He writes, and he is on camera, and he works with . . . It's called special assignment, where they interview people. One of the things he did was for David Duke,<sup>124</sup> which was incredible. They interviewed David Duke, and David Duke threatened . . . Arty interviewed him on camera and interviewed lots of people who worked around him in the legislature. It was maybe a ten-minute piece on CNN. Duke kept threatening to leave the room, and Arty would pin him down. That was one. Recently he did one on these dreadful child murders in St. Louis. They think it's serial murders. It's like what happened in Atlanta.

**Sandy:** He is based in Atlanta, but he does stories out . . . He travels when necessary.

**Helen:** Right. Then they put them together, and they air them. There's no special time slot for this, but he loves that. He was with *The Washington Post* for many, many years, maybe fourteen, fifteen years.

**Sandy:** [He] lived in Washington?

**Helen:** Yes, and then moved here and was with *The Washington Post* and wrote for them. He understands the South. He grew up here. To bring a Northerner down here to really understand the South, I don't think they would as much as he does, but having grown up here . . .

**Sandy:** Is he involved with the Jewish community?

**Helen:** Their writers can't really be involved in any . . . He goes to Sunday school with his kids. He takes them.

**Sandy:** They belong to The Temple?

**Helen:** The Temple, yes. At one point, his younger son didn't want him to leave, so while he was there he started teaching a little bit. He's not on their staff or anything. Again, he is what he is.

**Sandy:** I know you are very proud of him.

---

<sup>124</sup>David Ernest Duke is a prominent American white supremacist, white nationalist politician, white separatist, antisemitic conspiracy theorist, Holocaust denier, convicted felon, and former Grand Wizard of the Ku Klux Klan.

**Helen:** I am.

**Sandy:** Your second son who lives in Durham . . .

**Helen:** His name is Alex Eisemann Harris. He went to Andover and Yale. When he graduated from Yale, Joel Fleishman, who was then with Duke . . . I think he was a dean at that point. He said, "Alex, why don't you . . ." Alex had studied photography with a famous photographer who taught up there, Walker Evans.

**Sandy:** Who taught at . . .

**Helen:** . . . at Yale. Alex evidently was pretty good at that, and Joel Fleishman said, "Alex, I've got a grant for you if you will take it to travel North Carolina and document, photograph, the rural poor." Alex did that, and he had a show at the University of North Carolina where they had a symposium on the South once a year, which was incredible with writers, directors. Everybody in the creative media was there. Robert Coles, C-O-L-E-S, happened to be there at that time. Alex had an exhibit of his photographs, and Dr. Coles, who was a very shy man, went around looking at these and he said, "Alex, you tell in one photograph what it would take me a thousand words to say." This was the beginning of a relationship with Alex and Dr. Robert Coles, who was then a psychiatrist at Harvard and with many, many, many . . . a very prolific writer . . . many, many books to his credit. They didn't work together in a sense, but Alex would . . . He went to Alaska and photographed, and Dr. Coles would go to Alaska another time and write. They put together a book called *The First and Last Eskimos*. I'll show it to you, Sandy. I have it downstairs. This is one of many, many books that Alex has done, and he is now with and without Dr. Coles. They started a Center for Documentary Photography at Duke, and it's funded by a foundation. They now have started the Center for Documentary Studies, which is much broader than photography. I think it includes English and history and many different things, and they will have people working in documentary tradition coming down there to work and study. That means that the library is not your only resource that you've got in the community <unintelligible 35:44>. That's funded for life, and he's now involved . . . beginning a national magazine from this foundation, on writing and photography.

**Sandy:** You think he will stay in Durham?

**Helen:** I think so.

**Sandy:** He married a girl from . . .

**Helen:** Monroe, Louisiana. Margaret Sarter. Margaret was a student of Alex's. I know you are

not supposed to date your students, I don't suppose. Anyway, he married her. She is a lovely girl, and she is . . .

**Sandy:** Do they have children?

**Helen:** They have one little boy named Will. Alex was just <unintelligible 36:20>. Margaret is a photographer also and just had a show in New York. She edits his books, works with him, and went to South Africa and did a collection of South African photographers at the time before this apartheid<sup>125</sup> thing was settled.

**Sandy:** You have a daughter?

**Helen:** I have two daughters.

**Sandy:** Two daughters.

**Helen:** Jill Harris Brown.

**Sandy:** The last name is . . .

**Helen:** Brown.

**Sandy:** B-R-O-W-N.

**Helen:** Right.

**Sandy:** She lives . . .

**Helen:** She lives in Atlanta. She has two wonderful little children, David Brown who is trying to decide if he's going to be bar mitzvahed or not, so that's . . . I don't know if he is . . . and Alexandra, who is a delightful child.

**Sandy:** What is your daughter Jill . . . Where did she go to school?

**Helen:** She went to . . .

**Sandy:** Did she go to Lovett, too?

**Helen:** She went to Lovett. Then when the crisis happened, she went to Birney, which was a public school then, and then on to Dykes, which was the public high school. She went to Dennison University in . . .

**Sandy:** Ohio?

---

<sup>125</sup>Apartheid (Afrikaans: apartness) was a system of institutionalized racial segregation that existed in South Africa from 1948 until the early 1990's. It was the ideology supported by the National Party (NP) government and sanctioned racial segregation and political and economic discrimination against nonwhites. In basic principles, apartheid did not differ that much from the policy of segregation of the South African governments existing before the Afrikaner Nationalist Party came to power in 1948. The main difference is that apartheid made segregation part of the law.

**Helen:** Ohio. She went for a year abroad, some year abroad program, to France. She was there for three months, and she felt it was really a “rip-off.” They weren't learning anything. She went to Holland on a visit, and the next year she wanted to go back to Holland to study at the Rietveld Academie,<sup>126</sup> which was an artist connected with the University of Amsterdam. R-E-I-T-V-E-L-T. I believe that's the way it's spelled. She didn't get in the first year because you have to speak Dutch fluently. She went back that one year, and she learned Dutch fluently. In fact, coming back on one flight, she was sitting next to an American, and she spoke both Dutch to the stewardesses who came on the flight and English to him. He said, "You speak English very well." He thought she was Dutch. She stayed in Holland for seven years, and asked me at one point, "Mom," . . . I waited for this question . . . "do you think I should come home?" I rarely say what I think they should do, but I said, "Honey, maybe it's time." She must have been ready to come home and ready to ask that question. She did come. She had her own business in Holland. She and a friend, whose father was like the Walt Disney<sup>127</sup> of Holland, the two of them had a graphic design studio, and they did work for television stations. They would do the graphics.

**Sandy:** Is she involved with a business here in Atlanta?

---

<sup>126</sup>The Gerrit Rietveld Academie (Rietveld School of Art & Design) is a Dutch academy for fine arts and design in Amsterdam, Netherlands. The Gerrit Rietveld Academie has its origins in the 1924 merger of three schools, which then became known as the Institute of Applied Art, or simply the Applied Arts School. In 1967, the school moved to its current academy building, which was designed by architect and furniture designer Gerrit Rietveld. When in 1968 the school became part of the system of the Higher Vocational Education system, receiving the status of an Academy of Fine Arts and Design, its name was changed to Gerrit Rietveld Academie as a tribute to the recently deceased Rietveld.

<sup>127</sup>Walter Elias Disney (December 5, 1901 – December 15, 1966) was an American entrepreneur, animator, voice actor and film producer. Through technological innovations and alliances with governments and corporations, he transformed a minor studio in a marginal form of communication into a multinational leisure industry giant.

A pioneer of the American animation industry, he introduced several developments in the production of cartoons. Disney developed the character Mickey Mouse in 1928, his first highly popular success. He introduced synchronized sound, full-color three-strip Technicolor, feature-length cartoons and technical developments in cameras, furthering the development of animated film. New animated and live-action films followed after World War II, including the critically successful *Cinderella* (1950) and *Mary Poppins* (1964), the latter of which received five Academy Awards.

In the 1950s, Disney expanded into the amusement park industry, and in 1955 he opened Disneyland in California. To fund the project he diversified into television programs, such as *Walt Disney's Disneyland* and *The Mickey Mouse Club*. He was also involved in planning the 1959 Moscow Fair, the 1960 Winter Olympics, and the 1964 New York World's Fair. In 1965, he began development of another theme park in Florida, Disney World, the heart of which was to be a new type of city, the "Experimental Prototype Community of Tomorrow" (EPCOT). Disney died in December 1966 before either the park or the EPCOT project were completed. Disney's plans for the futuristic city of EPCOT did not come to fruition. After Disney's death, his brother Roy took control of the Disney companies, and he changed the focus of the project from a town to an attraction. At the inauguration in 1971, Roy dedicated Walt Disney World to his brother, and in 1982 Walt Disney World expanded with the opening of Epcot Center in 1982.

**Helen:** She has her own graphic design business, and she worked exclusively for KLM Airlines, and doing all their newsletters and their design. KLM, like the others, has cut back, so Jill is now very involved with doing work for the Friendship Force,<sup>128</sup> which is her husband's company. She could make a big business, but she doesn't want to. She has two children, and that's really her priority.

**Sandy:** Is she involved in synagogue life at all?

**Helen:** She is. She started, as I believe, the outreach program there.

**Sandy:** The outreach . . .

**Helen:** Outreach for mixed marriages.

**Sandy:** She married a local fellow?

**Helen:** Yes, George Brown. George was born in Korea. His parents were missionaries there, missionaries in the sense that they raised money for hospitals, that kind of thing. George moved here . . . No, I think he went to school in Korea, maybe until he was six or seven. I'm not exactly certain of the age. She met George when he was working for . . . not the CDC [Centers for Disease Control] . . . I'll think of it. I can see the building. Diller International. He had an international kind of interest, and he's a professor. When Jill came back, she missed this sort of international connection with the people that she knew. She started working for . . . not the language <unintelligible 41:00>, but what's the group here that has a language <unintelligible 41:05>. They called her one day . . .

**Sandy:** <unintelligible 41:13>Alliance?

**Helen:** It's a broad group that deals with people that come to Atlanta from all over the world and they put them in homes . . .

**Sandy:** It's not the Friendship Force.

**Helen:** No. I'll think of it later. Hopefully not too later. They called Jill. She was a volunteer with them. They said, "We want you to go to Perimeter Mall and help George Brown. He's setting up an international show there." She went out and met George Brown. He invited her for lunch, and one thing led to another, and some years later they got married. That was troubling to

---

<sup>128</sup>Friendship Force is a non-profit cultural exchange organization focused on promoting understanding, cultural education, and citizen diplomacy through homestay Journeys and personal friendships. Friendship Force is based in more than 60 countries and in six continents, with 15,000 active members and over 300 Journeys taking place each year. Friendship Force Greater Atlanta is one of approximately 360 clubs around the world that make up The Friendship Force.

her. George is not actively religious. His family, his parents, are Presbyterian.<sup>129</sup> Jill was determined to bring her children up as Jews. He was delighted. He said, "I have my religion, and she should . . ." He has two older daughters that Jill helped raise, Beth and Amy. They are Presbyterian. She takes her children to The Temple, and George goes. It's a shared experience.

**Sandy:** Your younger daughter is . . .

**Helen:** Her name is Sophie Mantler Joel. Sophie went to public school in Atlanta. I'll think of the name in a minute. She went to the University of Georgia.

**Sandy:** Sophie Mantler, and her last name is . . .

**Helen:** Joel, J-O-E-L.

**Sandy:** She is married to a Jewish fellow.

**Helen:** Right.

**Sandy:** They belong to the Temple?

**Helen:** Yes, they do. In fact, Alan is on the building committee.

**Sandy:** Is she in a business or anything here?

**Helen:** No. Sophie is in the volunteer business, and she's excellent at it. She works for many organizations, and she has two little children. Both my daughters have decided that that is their priority. She got her master's [degree] in . . . not a master's. She went two years after college and has a nursing degree.

**Sandy:** Your children have accomplished lots. They had a good role model.

**Helen:** Thank you. They are their own people, which is really . . .

**Sandy:** You have had a wonderfully enriching life. You have done so many interesting things, and it was a joy to talk to you. I want to ask you, would you change anything in your life if you could do it over? How would you make changes?

**Helen:** I would get wisdom earlier perhaps, but then we all experience that.

**Sandy:** We always ask who else do you think we ought to interview for this Jewish Oral History Project?

**Helen:** I wish you had interviewed Phoebe Franklin, but you can't. She died. I wish I had known of this. I would think about it <unintelligible 44:28>.

**Sandy:** Has your husband been interviewed? I'm sure.

---

<sup>129</sup>The Presbyterian Church (USA) is a mainline Protestant Christian denomination in the United States. Part of the Reformed tradition, it is the largest Presbyterian denomination in the United States and is known for its relatively tolerant stance on doctrine.

**Helen:** I believe he has. Maybe you should interview him again because he's got . . .

**Sandra:** . . . new stories to tell?

**Helen:** Yes, particularly since he's been active with Clark Atlanta University, and he's had some real influence. I think that would be a very worthwhile project.

**Sandy:** Anybody else? What about your first husband? Is he still active in the community?

**Helen:** No. He married a French lady, and he lives in France part of the time, part of the time in Florida. My second husband lives in Florida also. He was with Patton.<sup>130</sup> I've got a delightful story about that, if I had time to tell it.

**Sandy:** Yes, let's see if we can have time.

**Helen:** All right.

**Sandy:** His name, your second husband . . .

**Helen:** Marshall Mantler. A very bright man. The army did not know what to do with him. He scored off the board. They finally put him with General Patton. On his whatever it is you fill out on your abilities and talents he wrote down that he spoke French. He speaks like two or three words. The first assignment when he is over there is to go with General Patton to a small village and help him with the tailor, a French tailor. He thought, "Oh, my God, I'm going to be kicked out of the service." He gets there to the little village, and Patton walks in <unintelligible 45:58>, and Bud is standing behind him. He goes and talks to the tailor. It's a little Jewish tailor from Brooklyn.

**Sandy:** He could speak Yiddish?

**Helen:** Yes, and English.

**Sandy:** That is a cute story.

**Helen:** Sandy, you've been wonderful to . . .

**Sandy:** It has been a joy interviewing you.

**Helen:** Thank you.

**Sandy:** There are so many areas that I could have pursued because you have had so many interesting aspects of your life. We had to hone in on your Atlanta Jewish connections.

**Helen:** Right.

**Sandy:** You have so much to be proud of, your achievements as a young actress, and then when

---

<sup>130</sup>George Smith Patton, Jr. (November 11, 1885 – December 21, 1945) was a United States Army general, best known for his command of the Seventh United States Army and later the Third United States Army in Europe during World War II.

you came to this city you didn't let the fact that most people just played a lot of cards influence your . . .

**Helen:** Thank you. I'm sure that lots of other people did many things.

**Sandy:** I appreciate your sharing your stories with us.

**Helen:** Thanks, Sandy.

(End Tape 2, Side 2)

Cuba Family Archives