INTERVIEW BEGINS

<Merna: This is Merna Alpert interviewing Gertrude Diamond on the 30th of September, 1994 for the Oral History Project of the Atlanta Jewish Federation,¹ the American Jewish Committee,² and the National Council of Jewish Women.³ We are in Mrs. Diamond's home. My first question to you is how did your parents meet?

<Gertrude: Actually, I don't know. I think it probably was arranged but I really don't know. She must have moved here as a child because her mother passed away when she was quite young and her father moved back to Atlanta because he had relatives here. She was, from the few times that my mother discussed it, she said that she was raised in the home of an aunt and uncle.

<Merna: Do you know their names or remember them?

<Gertrude: I think it was Mr. and Mrs. Kay Koplin.

<Merna: And those were your father's relatives?

<Gertrude: No, those were my mother's relatives.

<Merna: Oh, your mother's relatives.

<Gertrude: Because they were her father's... Mr. Koplin was the brother, from what I gather, of my mother's mother.

¹ The Atlanta Jewish Federation was formally incorporated in 1967 and is the result of the merger of the Atlanta Federation for Jewish Social Service founded in 1905 as the Federation of Jewish Charities; the Atlanta Jewish Welfare Federation founded in 1936 as the Atlanta Jewish Welfare Fund; and the Atlanta Jewish Community Council founded in 1945. The organization was renamed the Jewish Federation of Greater Atlanta in 1997.

² 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.

³ The National Council of Jewish Women is an organization of volunteers and advocates, founded in the 1890's, who turn progressive ideals in advocacy and philanthropy inspired by Jewish values. They strive to improve the quality of life for women, children and families.
Merna: So, you're a real Atlantan.
Gertrude: Oh, yes.
Merna: All the way back.
Gertrude: There are some Koplins still here. But families are not together and I don't know them and they don't know me. They might have heard the name, just like I did. The ones that I grew up with passed away. I don't know the others any longer.
Merna: Alright, when your father and mother were alive, did they keep an orthodox home?
Gertrude: Oh yes, my mother particularly was very much interested in it.
Merna: And you belonged to, or they belonged to AA [Ahvath Achim]?\(^4\)
Gertrude: They belonged to Ahvath Achim all their lives.
Merna: And you went to Hebrew school?
Gertrude: I went to Hebrew school there.
Merna: And public school, also.
Gertrude: Oh, yes. Commercial High School.\(^5\)
Merna: I'm keeping you back then now, and then we'll move forward. When you were young, do you remember any particular anti-Semitic acts or things against your family or you?
Gertrude: No, I don't.
Merna: Okay.
Gertrude: I don't think there was any at school that I can think of. Then again, the community here was sort of together, the whole community, all of our activities were centered around the Jewish Educational Alliance\(^6\) or the congregation for which we belonged. Our social

\(^4\) Ahavath Achim Congregation (often referred to as “AA”) was organized in 1886 as Congregation Ahawas Achim (Brotherly Love) and is Atlanta’s second oldest Jewish congregation. Organized by Jews of Eastern European descent, the congregation’s founding members felt uncomfortable in the established Hebrew Benevolent Congregation (The Temple) comprised primarily of Jews from Germany, who by the late 1800s had begun to liberalize their Orthodox doctrine. By 1952, Ahavath Achim joined the Conservative Movement, with the most noticeable shift from Orthodoxy being the gradual change to mixed seating. Today, Ahavath Achim Congregation is the largest Conservative congregation in Atlanta.

\(^5\) Commercial High School began as a department of Girls’ High School in 1889 for girls who wanted to learn business skills. They taught bookkeeping, typing, math and history. It expanded to a four-story brick building on Pryor Street, and in 1910 became Atlanta’s first coed high school. It closed in June 1947.

\(^6\) The Jewish Educational Alliance (JEA) operated from 1910 to 1948 on the site where the Atlanta-Fulton County Stadium was located. The JEA was once the hub of Jewish life in Atlanta and stayed at that site until the late 1940’s, when it evolved into the Atlanta Jewish Community Center and moved to Peachtree Street. It stayed there until 1998, when the building was sold and the center moved to Dunwoody. In 2000, it was renamed the ‘Marcus Jewish Community Center of Atlanta.’
activities were around that, and our Sunday school was there, and even the Hebrew school before it was moved over to the congregation, it was then there. Everything was there. There was a big gym. <interview pauses, interview resumes> So, in school, the only place that I know of that there could have been as far as I was concerned, <interview pauses, interview resumes> when they opened up in Atlanta and because I had done volunteer work at the Jewish . . .

Merna: Alright, and you said after high school your work was started at . . .
Gertrude: Sears Roebuck when they first opened here in 1928.
Merna: In the office?
Gertrude: Yes.
Merna: And from there?
Gertrude: I worked there for about a year and then from there I went to work at the Jewish Educational Alliance when the executive director asked me to. [He] gave me the job, so, I took it. It was located a couple of blocks from where we lived at the time, and it was a little more money than I was earning at Sears Roebuck. I was there as a registrar in the clinic.

Merna: The clinic?
Gertrude: Morris Hirsch Clinic, which was in back of the Jewish Educational Alliance.

That was part of my job. Plus secretary to the social worker at the Jewish Educational Alliance. That was all during the depression. In 1934 I got married.

Merna: How did you meet your husband?
Gertrude: There was organized here, my father was a member of the Arbeiter Farbund.

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7 An American chain of department stores founded by Richard Sears and Alvah Roebuck in 1886. It began as a mail order catalog company and opened retail locations in 1925. Kmart bought it in 2005. Sears was the largest retailer in the United States until October 1989 when it was surpassed by Walmart.

8 A registrar is an official responsible for keeping a register or official records.

9 The Morris Hirsch Clinic was founded in 1915 by an Atlanta businessman of the same name (founded Hirsh’s, a men’s clothing store, and was a founder of The Temple) to serve the community.

10 The Great Depression was a severe worldwide economic depression in the decade preceding World War II. The time of the Great Depression varied across nations, but in most countries it started in about 1929 and lasted until the late 1930’s or early 1940’s. It was the longest, most wide spread, and deepest depression of the twentieth century.

11 This sounds a lot like arbeitsgeherverband, A German term for worker’s association, but it is unclear. It could also be another term for the Arbeiter Ring (Workmen's Circle), a Yiddish language-oriented American-Jewish organization committed to social justice, Jewish community and Ashkenazi culture. It provides old age homes for its aging members, as well as schools, camps, affordable health insurance and programs of concerts, lectures and holiday celebrations. It was founded in 1900 and was strongly socialist politically. It has moved more to the right on the American political spectrum in modern times.
that is the Paole Zion\textsuperscript{12} Zionist party. The labor Zionists,\textsuperscript{13} They had an organization here, Arbeiter Farbund, and they had rented, or had their own little club house on Crew Street. There we had a Yiddish\textsuperscript{14} Dramatic Club in that building. A group of us sort of, who were interested, got together and formed a Yiddish Dramatic Club, and my husband was a member of that club. That was it.

Merna: And that's how you met. Great. Did you continue with that group after?
Gertrude: No, it fell apart.

Merna: I don't mean the drama group itself, I mean the Farbund.
Gertrude: No, the Farbund may still be in existence. I think the group is still, as a national organization, I think it's still in existence but whether there's a group here in Atlanta now or not, I don't know. I don't think so, because most of their members have passed away.

Merna: And new ones did not come in?
Gertrude: As far as I know. As far as Arbiter Farbund is concerned. Now, there is the Na’amat Women's Organization,\textsuperscript{15} further back, which is the workers and volunteers of Israel, which is functioning here in Atlanta. I happen to be a member of that group. Plus a member of Hadassah,\textsuperscript{16} plus a member of [the National] Council [of Jewish Women].

Merna: You join things, don't you?
Gertrude: I'm a joiner. Isn't that awful?

\textsuperscript{12} Paole Zion ("Workers of Zion") was a Marxist-Jewish workers movement founded in various cities of the Russian Empire in about the turn of the twentieth century. They believed a Jewish proletariat would come into being in the land of Israel and would then partake in the class struggle. It has since morphed into political parties in Israel.

\textsuperscript{13} Labor Zionism or socialist Zionism is the left-wing of the Zionist movement. For many years, it was the most significant tendency among Zionists and Zionist organizations. Zionism is a movement that supports a Jewish national state in the territory defined as the Land of Israel.

\textsuperscript{14} Yiddish is the common historical language of Ashkenazi Jews from Central and Eastern Europe. It is heavily Germanic based but uses the Hebrew alphabet. The language was spoken or understood as a common tongue for many European Jews up until the middle of the twentieth century.

\textsuperscript{15} Na’amat had its origins in 1925 with the formation of the Women’s Organization for the Pioneer Women of Palestine, commonly referred to as “Pioneer Women.” Na’amat is the largest Jewish women’s organization in the world, counting more than 300,000 members in Israel and 9 sister organizations worldwide. It operates approximately 250 daycare centers in Israel and provides funding for technological and agricultural high schools, a women’s shelter, legal aid bureaus, educational scholarships, women’s rights centers and women’s health centers. It is also a powerful voice in advocating for equal rights, religious freedom and world peace. During the 1930’s Pioneer Women changed its name to Na’amat, an acronym for Nashim Ovdot U’Mitnadvot (Hebrew: Working and Volunteering Women.). Na’amat is affiliated with the Labor Zionist Movement in Israel and the World Labor Zionist Movement.

\textsuperscript{16} Hadassah, the Women’s Zionist Organization of America, is a volunteer organization founded in 1912 by Henrietta Szold, with more than 300,000 members and supporters worldwide. It supports health care and medical research, education and youth programs in Israel, and advocacy, education, and leadership development in the United States.
Merna: Why is that awful?
Gertrude: I don't know. You want to be active in things, but you can't be active in everything.
Merna: That's true. You have to select. And you selected the things that interested you?
Gertrude: Yes, more or less. I belong to the Ladies Auxiliary Jewish War Veterans. My husband was a veteran.
Merna: Of World War II.
Gertrude: Yes. What else?
Merna: Did he have the grocery business when you first got married?
Gertrude: Yes.
Merna: Then he went into World War II. And you worked with him?
Gertrude: I worked in the store with him. After he was drafted, we gave up the store and I went to work as a secretary for a wholesale liquor store here. I worked there until the children were born. When he got out of the service, in 1945, I think, the children were born in 1948. My children came about 14 years after we were married. Then we went back into the grocery business, but in 1972 we retired from the grocery business because, at that time . . . If you've never heard about it, I'll tell you: a series of violence started with the hold ups. You know what the Koreans are getting now with their mom and pop stores? Most of the Jewish stores that were in existence at that time got it.
Merna: That I did not know.
Gertrude: Oh, it was terrible. The Federation even called a meeting of all the grocers here to see if they could help us in any way to stop all the hold ups that were going around. We were held up four or five times in one year. So, we actually gave the store away just to get out of it. In 1972 I went back to work for the same liquor company that I had worked at originally. I stayed there until 1987.

\[\text{17} \text{ The National Ladies Auxiliary of the Jewish War Veterans of the United States is a volunteer organization of Jewish women aimed at supporting veterans and the US military as well as the Jewish faith.}\]
\[\text{18} \text{ World War II was a global war that lasted from 1939 to 1945, although related conflicts began earlier. It involved the vast majority of the world's countries—including all of the great powers—eventually forming two opposing military alliances: the Allies and the Axis. It was the most widespread war in history, and directly involved more than 100 million people from over 30 countries. Marked by mass deaths of civilians, including the Holocaust (in which approximately 6 million Jews were killed) and the strategic bombing of industrial and population centers (in which approximately one million were killed, and which included the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki), it resulted in an estimated 50 million to 85million fatalities. These made World War II the deadliest conflict in human history.}\]
Merna: Wow, so, you went back in 1974 . . .?
Gertrude: 1972 or 3, one or the other.
Gertrude: No. We closed the store in 1972, and I went back to work. My husband went to
work, too, for a while but, unfortunately, he was not well, so he didn’t stay very long, working.
Merna: Is he deceased now?
Gertrude: Yes.
Merna: When did he die?
Gertrude: In 1990.
Merna: Oh, my.
Gertrude: I worked for the liquor company from 1972 or 1973, I’ve forgotten, it doesn’t
matter, and I retired in 1987, that I know.
Merna: My goodness, you’ve had a long work history then.
Gertrude: I don’t mind working. I tell anybody, if they can work, work.
Merna: Right. But all the while, when you were working, you were volunteering. First
you were active as a volunteer in the Educational Alliance.
Gertrude: Yes.
Merna: As a young woman, and then you worked there. When did you start your other
volunteer activities?
Gertrude: Well, let me see now. In the 50’s, I forgot to tell you, I did help with the Council’s
New American group because I was speaking Yiddish, and these people were coming over who
could not speak English and a friend of mine who was very active in Council insisted that I join
Council and help her with some of these people who could not speak English, so, I did. I left the
store a couple of hours when it was convenient, and did a little work with them.
Merna: When did you get active with the women’s auxiliary of the Jewish War Veterans?
Gertrude: That’s just recently. I joined them but I didn’t do anything until the last . . . you
see, I have a problem with transportation. When this woman who lives in my neighborhood tells
me, "Gertrude, play bingo with us on Wednesday night for the Veterans," I said, "Fine, you pick
me up." We go one night a month. This was a recent thing.
Merna: Do you drive, or did you drive?
Gertrude: No I don’t. Never.
Merna: Never. So, in the 1950's when you started being active in the National Council of Jewish Women, how did you get there?

Gertrude: This friend of mine would take me, or there was a cousin of ours who was also doing the same sort of thing, so, we manipulated that way. Then, on Thursday afternoons, their children were quite young, so, we used to take off Thursday afternoons whenever possible. Not all the time. [We] had little parties for them at the Jewish Educational Alliance, when the maids were off. You see, my maid was off on Thursday afternoons at that time, so, I had to be off.

Merna: Right.

Gertrude: The kids were about six or seven years old. Anyway, we'd have little birthday parties for them there. That's what happened. I'm only dependent on people who can take me. Of course, at the center they have a bus that will pick you up.

Merna: Yes, now they do. Right. It seems to me, as a newcomer, Atlanta is made for automobiles rather than for pedestrians or even for public transportation, although that's gotten better since I've been here, what with MARTA\(^1\) and all, but you still have to live close to it.

Gertrude: That's right and I don't. You see, I have a terrible hill up here, and unfortunately, in the last few years I have not been able to walk it because I have a shortness of breath. The doctor said, "Well, if you feel like walking it, take it very slowly." In other words, I'd have to start out a half hour earlier to get a bus to go wherever I wanted to. I don't think it's worth it.

Merna: Right.

Gertrude: I didn't want to buy the house because of the hill, but my husband loved it. He thought it was the most beautiful thing that he'd ever seen and it probably was!

Merna: It has an interesting layout of rooms.

Gertrude: It was not brand new, but the people who lived in it had only one daughter and they were away from home all of the time, too, and it would just sparkle because it was almost new. So, he loved it and we got it. I used to schlep\(^2\) that hill, though, plenty of time and I was fifty pounds heavier than I am now.

Merna: Did you lose [that weight] by choice or by necessity?

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\(^1\) MARTA is the common term for the Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority, which was created in 1965. During the 1970’s, MARTA began acquiring land in and around the city of Atlanta, Georgia for construction of a rapid rail system. Today, MARTA operates a rail system with feeder bus operation and park-and-ride facilities throughout the metropolitan Atlanta area.

\(^2\) Schlep is a verb meaning to make a tedious or difficult journey, or to haul or carry something, usually something heavy or awkward.
Gertrude: I had tried several times to lose it, really. I think when I met my husband I wasn't that heavy. I met him when I was heavy but I lost weight and then I gained it again. I was sick about three or four years ago and for a whole month I couldn't eat, so, I guess it came off.

Merna: Oh, that'll do it every time.

Gertrude: That'll do it every time.

Merna: Was it a serious sickness?

Gertrude: Thank goodness, it was not. At that time, it was [more] serious then, I had a bleeding ulcer and a virus. I think what happened was I had taken some very strong medicine to cause the ulcer to bleed. I think I had a misplaced right vertebrae, I bumped into something. It was very painful. So, it just caused me to be in bed.

Merna: You had to get straightened out.

Gertrude: I couldn't look at food, not only not eating, I couldn't look at it. That was a horrible thing for me, especially bread. I love bread.

Merna: Alright.

Gertrude: I think you know enough about me.

Merna: Wait a minute, we're just beginning, really!

Gertrude: Oh, really?

Merna: Oh, yes. So, when you started with the New Americans, you were asked to do so because of your Yiddish, and you continued with that for how long?

Gertrude: As long as I could get to meetings, you see. Of course, now, people are younger and all that kind of thing. All they know me is by name, that's all. I continue that because of my friend who was in there, she's gone also now.

Merna: Do you remember, was it five years, ten years?

Gertrude: At what?

Merna: When you were going to the National Council to help the new Americans because of your knowledge of Yiddish? For how long?

Gertrude: I don't know really. Must have been five years. Approximately five years, because then they became integrated. My group of refugees became integrated a whole lot faster than the Russians became integrated.

Merna: Where did they come from?

Gertrude: They came from Poland, the refugees from the Holocaust.
Merna: Yes, as distinct from the newer ones.
Gertrude: This was just in the 1950's when the Holocaust people came over. I'm not doing any volunteer work with the Russian emigration. I don't know Russian. Few of them speak Yiddish. Those that came over spoke Yiddish but these don't.
Merna: You said that you've been active with Hadassah?
Gertrude: We had it one time, before Hadassah became like it is today, with just four or five groups. They broke it up, there was a group for everything. I belonged at one time to the B & P which was a Business and Professional. But then, later on, when they decided, when Israel became a state$^{21}$ that it should have a Hebrew name, we changed over to Bat Amid. Now it's non-existent because most of the people are not there. They've gone over into different groups. Bat Amid was what it was called, that B & P. The education program then, I guess a study group or something, study group program. I did that.
Merna: Do you, approximately when, in the 1950's?
Gertrude: That was the late 1950's. In fact, I found a card, a post card that had been sent out to the group. I still have it. I think it was the late 1950's, early 1960's. Wait a minute, 1955, I found that card.
Merna: Wow.
Gertrude: Yes, I'm . . . what do you call it, a rat pack?
Merna: A what?
Gertrude: A pack rat, I'm a pack rat.
Merna: Oh, because you keep everything.
Gertrude: I keep everything and then when I need it I can't find it. But I did come across one of those cards recently. I think it was late 1950's or early 1960's.
Merna: Do you have any idea how long you continued with that group?
Gertrude: As long as the B & P, as long as the Bat Amid was in existence.
Merna: Alright.
Gertrude: Several years, I don't know. I think they had elections every year or so. Maybe two or three years. Because they had new people in all the time.
Merna: Also, you've been active with the Jewish Home, William Breman Jewish Home.$^{22}$

$^{21}$ Israel’s nationhood was established in 1948.
$^{22}$ A nursing home in Atlanta providing short and long-term dementia, Alzheimer’s, and nursing care. Formerly the Jewish Home, it first opened in 1951 at 260 14th Street, NW, on land that had been donated by real estate developer.
When did that start, and how do you get there from here?

**Gertrude:** That's because the same people who get me to play bingo volunteer there every Thursday. Since they lived in the neighborhood and they do need volunteers, they take me. Then on Saturday, when I go, I try to get to the synagogue in the morning and from the synagogue, which is close to it, I try to get a ride over there. I just had to maneuver it around. My husband, you know, was in the Jewish Home for five and a half years.

**Merna:** Oh, I didn’t know.

**Gertrude:** Of course, I didn't get to see him but once a week, when I wasn't working. After that, two weeks after he passed away, I decided that I should go back and do what I had to do there when these people offered me the ride. So, I go down Thursday mornings and go there Saturday afternoons. That is really a gratifying piece of work. You want to come over there and volunteer? We need volunteers.

**Merna:** I volunteer at other places.

**Gertrude:** Oh, you do.

**Merna:** I do.

**Gertrude:** That's good.

**Merna:** And when you volunteer, do you do work in the gift shop, or do you visit with the patients?

**Gertrude:** No, I visit with the patients, I help pass juices. It's a one to one thing. Sometimes I transport a resident from one department to another if necessary. On Saturday afternoon, I participated in what we have a Shmooze and Sing program.

**Merna:** That can be fun.

**Gertrude:** Yes, we dance and we sing and we have some people who come in and play. He plays his cassettes. You should see some people who are ninety years old get up and dance.

**Merna:** Terrific!

**Gertrude:** And people who have Alzheimer’s who come in and enjoy. But we help fix up snacks for them and pass them around. It's a gratifying program. Thursdays it's just been, more or

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Ben J. Massell. The Home’s growth called for a larger, updated facility, leading to the construction of a new building at 3150Howell Mill Road, NW. The second Jewish Home opened on February 16, 1971. In 1991, it was renamed the William Breman Jewish Home to honor and recognize its third president, Bill Breman, as the prime motivator of the modern day facility.

23 Shmooze means to converse informally or chat in a friendly and persuasive manner especially so as to gain favor, business, or connections.
less, one to one.

Merna: Sunday recreation really of all kinds, right?
Gertrude: Well, I don't do much recreation work.
Merna: Saturday afternoon is recreation.
Gertrude: Yes, more or less.
Merna: Singing and dancing and schmoozing, and laughing, hopefully.
Gertrude: Oh, yes, when there's something to laugh about! Especially when this man who has a cassette with Charlotte Cooper the comedian, have you ever heard of her?
Merna: No. I may have, but I don't recall.
Gertrude: I'm telling you, that cassette with him, I just devour it whenever [he plays it]. What he does is wonderful. He makes up his own program during the week. He has any number of tapes, and he gives a different program every week, and when he brings that Charlotte Cooper, you can just eat it up. I do, anyway. I enjoy it.
Merna: When was it, you said your husband was in the Jewish home for five years?
Gertrude: Five and a half years.
Merna: And then he passed away. When was that?
Gertrude: He passed away in 1990.
Merna: Is that when your son and daughter-in-law came back to live with you?
Gertrude: No, no. My son came back to live with me about three years ago. About three years ago they came back. No, I have rented out a room here all the time. I was able to get people through the Housemate program. I had one from the Housemate program and then from the Federation, I had my name registered at the Federation before the Housemate program came into existence. I was able to get some people here.
Merna: Did that work out for you, the Housemate program? Because, I'm trying to remember her name now, she consulted with me before she started it . . .
Gertrude: Rita, the one who's in charge?
Merna: No, the one before. I think she's an administrator now at the JCC [Jewish Community Center]. I should know her name.
Gertrude: Was it Sandra Crane?

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24 A Jewish community center (JCC) is a general recreational, social, and fraternal organization serving Jewish communities in the United States and Canada, as well as in the former Soviet Union, Latin America, Europe, and Israel.
Merna: Before her.
Gertrude: Churniak?
Merna: Yes.
Gertrude: I didn't know Churniak, she knew my mother.
Merna: She consulted with me about that program before it started. I was wondering how, now that I'm speaking with somebody who participated in it, how did it work out?
Gertrude: It worked out very well. I have a friend who is always getting somebody from them.
Merna: Good. Why did your son and daughter-in-law move back?
Gertrude: He moved back because he divorced. His ex-wife has custody of the children. After he moved back, about a year later, he got married again. They may as well live here as anywhere else.
Merna: Why?
Gertrude: It's easier for him, since he has big support after all. I need him now, too, very frankly, because I have arthritis and it's very difficult for me to open cans and to cook and to do some of the things that I've always done. It's a help both ways.
Merna: I'm sure that it's a help for them financially.
Gertrude: Oh, yes.
Merna: And also if they can do some of your errands and things.
Gertrude: They do. Mickey\textsuperscript{25} goes to the bank for me. In fact, he's gone to buy stamps for me today and to pick up a package, a coat that I bought and all that kind of stuff. So, it works both ways. It's not the easiest time to get him because, after all, he's working and he's working on his PhD, and he's got to satisfy [his superiors]. He says he's in a war zone.
Merna: What's his PhD on?
Gertrude: 16th and 17th century British history. Figure that one out. You going to have to put all that in?
Merna: It's on here.
Gertrude: It is? Oh, my goodness, live. I have another son who I haven't spoken about at all but he lives in Roswell [Georgia].

\textsuperscript{25} This may be her son Marvin.
Merna: Is he also interested in ancient history?\textsuperscript{26}
Gertrude: No, no, he works for a publishing company, advertising for a publishing company.
Merna: Are either of them active in the Jewish community?
Gertrude: No, unfortunately not. I wouldn't want that on tape, but they're not. They both married non-Jewish girls.
Merna: That happens.
Gertrude: That happens too many times.
Merna: In a sense, it must be nice, though, to have your family around for holidays and things.
Gertrude: Yes, we celebrate Hanukkah\textsuperscript{27} and Pesach\textsuperscript{28} together. Some of the other holidays have to go by the wayside, you know, that's the way it is with all of us. Some of them had to go by the wayside when I was working, too, you know how it is.
Merna: Yes.
Gertrude: You can't always get away.
Merna: Yes. Tell me, are there other things that you've been active in? We've got the Jewish Home, the Hadassah, we have AJCW [Association of Jewish Center Workers] and the AJCC [Atlanta Jewish Community Center] for the Yiddish Club.
Gertrude: Let's see what else. I don't know whether it's significant or not . . .
Merna: What's that?
Gertrude: The Na’amat. I don't do too much for Na’amat because I don't get to meetings anymore. It used to be pioneer women here in Atlanta. I think that's about enough, isn't it?

\textsuperscript{26} The 16\textsuperscript{th} and 17\textsuperscript{th} century are, of course, not really ancient history. Merna seems to be kidding, but just to be clear.  
\textsuperscript{27} Hanukkah [Hebrew: dedication] is 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 rules of Palestine, who had desecrated the Temple. The Maccabees wanted to re-dedicate the Temple altar to Jewish worship by rekindling the menorah but could only find one small jar of ritually pure olive oil. This oil continued to burn miraculously for eight days, enabling them to prepare new oil. The 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.  
\textsuperscript{28} Pesach is the Hebrew name for Passover, the anniversary of Israel’s liberation from Egyptian bondage. The holiday lasts for eight days. Unleavened bread, matzah, is eaten in memory of the unleavened bread prepared by the Israelite during their hasty flight from Egypt, when they had not time to wait for the dough to rise. On the first two nights of Passover, the seder, the central event of the holiday is celebrated. The seder service is one of the most colorful and joyous occasions in Jewish life. In addition to eating matzah during the seder, Jews are prohibited from eating leavened bread during the entire week of Passover. In addition, Jews are also supposed to avoid foods made with wheat, barley, rye, spelt or oats unless those foods are labeled ‘kosher for Passover.’ Jews traditionally have separate dishes for Passover.
Merna: Well, it's your life, I don't know all what's in it, unless you share it.
Gertrude: That's what's in it now, more or less.
Merna: When your husband was alive, were you able to do any traveling of any sort?
Gertrude: No.
Merna: Too busy making a living.
Gertrude: Well, trying to make a living, because we were not one of the fortunate grocers that came out ahead. We were one of the people who found it very difficult to pay a $100 mortgage.
Merna: I'm sure you are not alone.
Gertrude: Probably not. When it happens to you, you feel . . .
Merna: It hurts.
Gertrude: You think you're the only one.
Merna: Sure. When I interview people like this, I learn things about Atlanta that I never knew. For example, someone told me about a big fire. You must have been a very, very little girl then.
Gertrude: 1917, or 1916, something like that?
Merna: Did it effect you or your family at all?
Gertrude: Well, we were living, at that time, on Moore Street which was near the Atlanta Paper Company. I don't know whether the Atlanta Paper Company is still in existence, I don't know. That fire broke out then and I can remember, very vaguely, of my mother running on the outside. I do remember some of the people who lived across the street from me, if you're interested in that.
Merna: Yes.
Gertrude: There was the Stone family, and the Dricker family living across the street from us at that time. They were Jewish people, the Stone family. In fact, Rosilyn Stone now is married to Meyer Balser. I guess you've heard of Meyer Balser? Her family lived there at that

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29 The Great Atlanta Fire of 1917 began just after noon on Monday, May 21, 1917. It blazed all day and was finally brought under control by 10 p.m. This fire started in a warehouse at Fort and Decatur Street and rapidly spread. It burned whole blocks of homes so quickly that people couldn't even get anything out of the buildings. Soldiers arrived to dynamite buildings to try to stop it. Fire fighters came from cities in Tennessee, Florida, South Carolina, and across Georgia. The area continued to burn and smolder for a week. 300 acres had been burned, 1,938 buildings were destroyed and 10,000 people (mostly African-American) were made homeless. Property loss was $5,500,000.
30 Atlanta native Meyer Balser (1908-2004) was a business and civic leader. He served as chairman of the Red Cross and Community Chest (predecessor to United Way) campaigns. He was twice named ‘Man of the Year’ of
time. I guess I was about five or six years old, something like that. I remember that, and I can see a picture of that house that we lived in. Isn't that strange, at that time?

Merna: Can you describe it?

Gertrude: I think it was sort of a black two story house, or something, with a white porch, from what I can remember. I can remember mama running outside to see what was happening. You could see all the flames from the Atlanta Paper Company.

Merna: Wow. Was that close to where you lived?

Gertrude: Not too far. It wasn't that close, but not too far, because everybody ran out. I think there was a railroad. The paper company, I think, was right at the railroad, and we were near the tracks there somewhere. What else did you find out? Maybe I can . . .

Merna: This, I think, was before your time even: I found out more about the Leo Frank\(^{31}\) situation. That was earlier.

Gertrude: Oh, yes, 1912 or 1913. My mother used to talk about that. That was the antisemitic thing of that day.

Merna: It was a big thing.

Gertrude: Oh, yes, that was the thing of that day. He was hanged. They lynched him at Marietta. That was really something. People were afraid. Just think of what Marietta has grown up to be now, such a big Jewish community there! People were actually afraid to go to Marietta. It's really something else. Mama used to talk about that. Really afraid. I do remember that in 1916, 1917, 1918. Right at the beginning of . . . was the Spanish American War\(^{32}\) then?

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\(^{31}\) Leo Frank (1884-1915) was a Jewish factory superintendent in Atlanta, Georgia. In 1913, he was accused of raping and murdering one of his employees, a 13-year-old girl named Mary Phagan, whose body was found on the premises of the National Pencil Company. Frank was arrested, tried, convicted and sentenced to death for her murder. The trial was the catalyst for a great outburst of antisemitism led by the populist Tom Watson and the center of powerful class and political interests. Frank was sent to Milledgeville State Penitentiary to await his execution. Governor John M. Slaton, believing there had been a miscarriage of justice, commuted Frank’s sentence to life in prison. This enraged a group of men who styled themselves the “Knights of Mary Phagan.” They drove to the prison, kidnapped Frank from his cell, and drove him to Marietta, Georgia where they lynched him. Many years later, the murderer was revealed to be Jim Conley, who had lied in the trial, pinning it on Frank instead. Frank was pardoned on March 11, 1986, although they stopped short of exonerating him.

\(^{32}\) The Spanish–American War was an armed conflict between Spain and the United States in 1898. Hostilities began in the aftermath of the internal explosion of USS Maine in Havana harbor in Cuba, leading to U.S. intervention in the Cuban War of Independence.
Merna: No, it was before, First World War.\textsuperscript{33}

Gertrude: First World War. My mother sent me up to the grocery store, my sister and I, to get her ration of sugar, on a Friday when she was baking, and we went up to the store to get our ration. She and I . . . \textit{swapp!} The sugar fell out of our hands.

Merna: It spilled?

Gertrude: It spilled. We got it but good. She was cooking for \textit{Shabbos}\textsuperscript{34} on Friday.

Merna: In other words, sugar and other things were rationed in the first World War? I know there were ration coupons in the second World War.

Gertrude: The first World War there were also some rations. We were living not too far from the first Ahvath Achim congregation \textit{shul}.\textsuperscript{35} We were living next door to my father's uncle. That's how he came here, to his uncle.

Merna: And his uncle's name was?

Gertrude: Tontak, \textit{William Tontak} was his name. We were living, at that time, if you're interested, about a block and a half, or two blocks, from the Grady\textsuperscript{36} Hospital on Butler Street. We were right there.

Merna: I see. Was your father's uncle also in the grocery business?

Gertrude: No, he was in the bottle business. What they call junk business, bottle business. He was considered, at that time, to be having some money. So, my father came here and was in business with him, or he wanted him to work with him. He was disillusioned because he had to do that kind of work. He was more of an idealist. Anyway, he worked with him for a while.

Merna: Did he feel the same way about selling food, being in the grocery business?

Gertrude: He didn't like it. He was in the grocery business later on. He and my mother's

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\textsuperscript{33} World War I, also called the First World War or the Great War, was an international conflict that in 1914–18 embroiled most of the nations of Europe along with Russia, the United States, the Middle East, and other regions. The war pitted the Central Powers—mainly Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Turkey—against the Allies—mainly France, Great Britain, Russia, Italy, Japan, and, from 1917, the United States. It ended with the defeat of the Central Powers.

\textsuperscript{34} \textit{Shabbat} (Hebrew) or \textit{Shabbos} (Yiddish) is the Jewish day of rest and is observed on Saturdays. \textit{Shabbat} observance entails refraining from work activities, often with great rigor, and engaging in restful activities to honor the day. \textit{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 \textit{Havdalah} blessing.

\textsuperscript{35} \textit{Shul} is a Yiddish word for synagogue that is derived from a German word meaning “school,” and emphasizes the synagogue's role as a place of study.

\textsuperscript{36} Grady Memorial Hospital, frequently referred to as ‘Grady Hospital’ or simply ‘Grady,’ was founded in 1890. It is the public hospital for the city of Atlanta, serving a large proportion of low-income patients. Grady is the largest hospital in Georgia and has come to be considered one of premier public hospitals in the Southeast.
brother had a grocery store. He didn't like it much, but he worked in it. We were not money people at all. My uncle did save some money and was considered, at that time, sort of rich but, unfortunately, when the depression came, he went down with the depression, with real estate and all that.

Merna: When the depression hit, you were sort of just married?

Gertrude: The depression hit, in 1929 is when I went to work, either 1929 or 1930, when I went to work for the Associated Jewish Charities. That, I could tell you. I won't mention names, but it was really something. There were quite a number of Jewish people here who were receiving . . . they didn't have food stamps at the time, but were receiving checks from the Federation and all that kind of thing. And the clinic that we had in the back of the building where most of the kids in the city had their tonsils taken out, their adenoids taken out, dental work done, we even had a gynecologist and an internist there. I was a registrar. We had a nurse and the doctors gave their time free. The Goldstein brothers were active in the clinic. Who else was active? The Blasts, Nathan Blast was active there. I suppose there was somebody else who's name I can't recall now. I remember the man who did all the tonsillectomies because every kid in the city had a tonsillectomy there. Dr. Roblin who passed away. There was a Dr. Summerfield, I think, who was the internist. There was a Dr. Matthews who was the gynecologist. Gosh, how can I remember those names?

Merna: That's alright, it's good that you can because they may ring a bell, and they, if they're living, or relatives, can be interviewed for this. It sort of builds up a whole tapestry and that's what this is all about. So, the more that you can remember, the better.

Gertrude: I can see the building on Capitol Avenue, the Alliance building. I remember the late Mrs. Ida Levitas when she became engaged. We had Sunday school there at that time. I

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37 The adenoids are glands located in the roof of the mouth, behind the soft palate where the nose connects to the throat. The adenoids produce antibodies, or white blood cells, that help fight infections. Typically, the adenoids shrink during adolescence and may disappear by adulthood.

38 An internist, also called a general internist or doctor of internal medicine, is a medical doctor that specializes in the diagnosis and medical (nonsurgical) treatment of adults. Internists provide long-term, comprehensive care and manage both common and complex diseases.

39 Irving H. Goldstein (1905-1979) and Marvin C. Goldstein (1917-1997) were prominent dentists and businessmen in the Atlanta area. Together, they built the Atlanta Americana Motor Hotel, Atlanta’s first integrated hotel, which opened in 1961.

40 Ida Goldstein Levitas was born in Bialystok, Poland and grew up in Atlanta. Ida was active in the Jewish Educational Alliance and served as an Atlanta Hadassah chapter president from 1929 to 1931. Her son Elliott Levitas was a Congressman from the 4th Congressional District in the United States House of Representatives from 1975 to 1985.
remember her standing up in front of our assembly like this. She was going to get married, engaged.

**Merna:** That must’ve been exciting.

**Gertrude:** She mentioned the name of her fiancée at that time. I can remember that, and I remember the social worker, the late Rose Goldstein who was her sister, Ida Levitas' sister. Then the secretary for Mr. Kahn[^41] is now living. She's living, and she lives at the Renaissance[^42].

**Mrs. Rose Sunshine.** Her name is Harris now.

**Merna:** Rose Harris . . . I'm not familiar with her but, of course, I've heard of Mr. Kahn.

**Gertrude:** She was a very efficient secretary. I had lost contact with her for a long time until not too long ago she was admitted to the Jewish Home. Unfortunately, she didn't like it, so, she was able to go to the Renaissance and was capable to take care of herself, so, she moved to the Renaissance. But I hadn't seen her in a number of years.

**Merna:** And she's living now at the Renaissance, and she is Rose Harris?

**Gertrude:** She might be able to tell you something, I don’t know.

**Merna:** That's why I'm putting it down, in case somebody else is interested.

**Gertrude:** She might be able to tell you some more. She lived on Capitol Avenue, too, when she was young. Way down towards Georgia Avenue is where she lived. She's also a widow, now. What else do I know? What else can I remember? I have to see the Alliance, I spent so much time down there. The late Mr. Kahn's wife just passed away a couple of weeks ago.

**Merna:** Really? I think I may have met him once.

**Gertrude:** Short, brilliant man.

**Merna:** He was kind of elderly when I met him. I've been here for 16 years and it was the first year.

**Gertrude:** He was ill, I think, too, about that time, wasn't he? I know, at one time, he was at

[^41]: Edward M. Kahn (1895-1984) was an immigrant from Bialystok, Poland. He became a leader in Atlanta’s Jewish community and served as executive director of several organizations including the Jewish Educational Alliance (presently: Atlanta Jewish Community Center), the Atlanta Jewish Welfare Fund, and the Atlanta Federation of Jewish Social Service (presently: Atlanta Jewish Federation of Greater Atlanta), an earlier incarnation of the current Jewish Federation of Greater Atlanta and the Morris Hirsch Clinic (presently: Ben Massell Dental Clinic). Mr. Kahn also became Executive Secretary of the Atlanta Jewish Welfare Fund and of the Atlanta Jewish Community Council. He held these various positions until his retirement in 1964. Kahn was prominent in both local and national social work organizations as well as in Jewish organizations such as B’nai B’rith, the Jewish Children’s Bureau, the Jewish Home and the Atlanta Bureau of Jewish Education. He also worked with Southern Israelite as a writer and adviser.

[^42]: The Renaissance on Peachtree is an independent and assisted living community for senior citizens located in Atlanta, Georgia.
some nursing home, and later on he came to the Jewish Home. He was a brilliant man. In fact, when I graduated high school, he sent me two books which was very nice.

**Merna:** Lovely.

**Gertrude:** Who else do I remember down there? My father used to love to stand outside on Sunday morning with his cronies. My father was not a very talkative person and he didn't laugh too much, but I can see him sometimes when I was down there on Sunday morning and he was talking to his cronies and somebody made some satirical remark, or had said a good joke, and he would just bubble all up. But he himself just stood there and didn't say a word. Just listen.

**Merna:** Some people are good audiences and some people are good story tellers.

**Gertrude:** He used to love to go downtown on Sunday nights and listen to the Salvation Army\(^43\) singers. That was one of his pastimes.

**Merna:** Did the family go with him?

**Gertrude:** No, he used to go by himself. My mother had her interests, and he had his interests, and that's what he used to do. That's what he loved. I think he only saw one movie and that was either *Mr. Smith goes to Washington* or Mr. Deeds goes to Washington,\(^44\) what was that movie? **Dennis Duit**? One of those that he thought was the best movie, and that was the only one he used to talk about.

**Merna:** What were your mother's interests?

**Gertrude:** She was doing volunteer work too. She was doing some sewing, at that time, for Hadassah, they had a sewing circle. She used to go to the Community Center. And taking care of four children with just a maid that came in to do a little bit of housework.

**Merna:** Kept one busy.

**Gertrude:** There were nights, when we belonged to Young Judaea,\(^45\) we had our club

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\(^{43}\) A Christian organization founded by William and Catherine Booth in 1852 in London, England. The Booths worked among the poor in the East End, seeking to bring salvation to the poor, destitute and hungry by meeting both their physical and spiritual needs. Today it is in 126 countries, running charity shops, operating shelters for the homeless, and providing disaster relief and humanitarian aid to developing countries. They have been known more recently for discriminatory practices including refusing service to LGBTQ+ people in the name of religious ideology.

\(^{44}\) *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* is a 1939 film starring Jimmy Stewart. A naive man is appointed to fill a vacancy in the United States Senate and struggles against the corruption and greed of his peers in the senate. The film was originally going to be a sequel to the 1936 movie *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town*, starring Gary Cooper, though that was not the film’s only inspiration. It was changed from Mr. Deeds to Mr. Smith when Gary Cooper was unavailable and the leading role was given to Jimmy Stewart.

\(^{45}\) Young Judaea is a peer-led Zionist youth movement founded in 1909 for Jewish youth in grades 2–12. Its programs include youth clubs, conventions, summer camps and Israel programs that provide experiential
meetings once in a while. Each girl had to have one meeting.

Merna: Rotated.

Gertrude: That’s right. She would make a cake and have the girls come over for our turn. She was kept pretty busy.

Merna: Especially with three daughters!

Gertrude: That's right. Three of us, and then the baby came after. I can see her sitting there. She always had time for everything that you wanted to do. I don't know how she did it. She just had energy.

Merna: You did pretty well, I think, to raise twins at the same time that you worked.

Gertrude: Well, that's what they're doing now, people are doing now the same thing.

Merna: I know. And you started to be active when they were still small, as a volunteer. You were doing triple duty, right?

Gertrude: Anyhow, there were some things I probably should not have done but I did.

Merna: What kinds of things should you not have done?

Gertrude: Maybe I shouldn't have started doing volunteer work when they were just small. But, anyway, it was just something that I wanted to do, and I did it at the time that I thought I could do it.

Merna: Did you find it stimulating?

Gertrude: What, to do volunteer? I always find it stimulating. I do. It's gratifying when someone who, unfortunately, is not able to do something, and she'll come over and kiss you and hug you. That doesn't happen very often because some of them don't do that. Some of them are not expressive.

Merna: Right.

Gertrude: I'm not a very expressive person myself as far as that goes, but it is gratifying to know that they do appreciate it when they're able to. Of course, we have people who, unfortunately, are on the verge of Alzheimer’s, and they can't . . . but it's nice. Even if they don't, it's just gratifying to know that you're helping somebody. That's the way I think about it, I don't know.

Merna: That’s all I ask for.

programming through which Jewish youth and young adults build meaningful relationships with their peers, emphasize social action, and develop a lifelong commitment to Jewish life, the Jewish people, and Israel.
Gertrude: We need volunteers at the Jewish Home, we really do. Have you visited the Jewish Home?

Merna: Oh, yes, I've been there. As a matter of fact, I visited somebody who's there, as a resident. I've forgotten her name now.

Gertrude: I know the names of most of them.

Merna: I've forgotten her name now. I think when people have to move from their own homes, they're always unhappy. No matter how good a place is.

Gertrude: Of course, absolutely. It's not healthy until you get used to the idea.

Merna: I don't know if it's not healthy, but that's another discussion, not for today.

Gertrude: I thought my husband would have a hard time coming into the home because he was not a very sociable person. He had a much better personality than I did when he met people, he was always smiling. But unfortunately he did not know the language too well for one reason, so, that may have hampered him a little bit. But I thought, well, I had to work and I had nobody to take care of him at home. So, he went into the home and the first day he was alright. I never saw anything like it in my life. Maybe because he had people around him.

Merna: And he was relieved of most responsibility.

Gertrude: I suppose. Well, he had Alzheimer's. Fortunately, it didn't... about a year later you could really tell the difference. He seemed to be doing fairly well there.

Merna: Good.

Gertrude: Fortunately, he did not have to suffer when he passed away.

Merna: That's good.

Gertrude: He went very early.

Merna: For him it's good. It may have been harder for you, but for him it's good. We've been here for quite a while now, and I would like come to a close right now. I will go home and I will listen and I will think of all of the things I did not ask you, and I want to make another appointment to come back. I want to thank you very much, and I want to ask you to sign the papers I have to ask you to sign and do you have a photograph that you can share with us for the library?

Gertrude: I've given my son a couple of photographs lately to look at, I'm not sure what he did with them...

<interview pauses, interview resumes>
Merna: Actually, we kind of passed over your husband, which we shouldn’t have done!
Gertrude: You've got to sneak it in. Otherwise, how could I have the children? Well, you can have children these days without a husband.
Merna: Yes, but I'm sure you didn't. So, if you'll tell me his first name, and when and where he was born?
Gertrude: He was born in Dubrowna, Russia.46

<End Tape 1, Side 1>

<Begin Tape 1, Side 2>

Merna: This is the second side of the first interview. We were speaking of your husband, Alex Diamond. He was born in 1906 and came to the United States.
Gertrude: In 1926, to a brother.
Merna: His brother was here.
Gertrude: He had a brother here. His relatives here are the Merlin family. Do you know any of the Merlins?
Merna: Yes. His brother was a Merlin?
Gertrude: No, his brother came here before him. He came here with a sister, who was Dora. When she married her name was Koshkin. K-O-S-H-K-I-N. She married while she was here in Atlanta.
Merna: If your husband was Alex Diamond, how is he related to the Merlins?
Gertrude: He is a cousin, first cousin to . . . I think the older Merlin's already gone now.
Merna: Possibly.
Gertrude: The families are here, second and third cousins are here, but when he came here, they were all alive. In 1926, L.A. Merlin had a delicatessen store on Capitol Avenue. There was a Mrs. Nathan Masier who lived on Pulliam Street. They were his first cousins. Then, there was a Morris Merlin, who's also a first cousin. There was a Mitchell Merlin47 who was a first cousin. There were a lot of family members.
Merna: Sounds like it.

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46 Dubrowna, or Dubroŭna, is a small town on the Dnieper River in Belarus, which was part of Russia prior to 1917. In the 19th century Dubroŭna was a centre for weaving. The town had a significant Jewish community that in 1898 formed more than half of its population.
47 Mitchell (also known as Michel) Julius “M.J.” Merlin (1885-1969) was an Atlanta grocer who was born in Dubrono in the Russian Empire (now Dubrowna, Belarus). He was one of the founding members of the Arbeiter Ring (Workmen’s Circle) in Atlanta, Georgia.
Gertrude: And his brother was here at that time. And I think [the Merlins] brought his brother over, the older brother. I have his family picture up of them up there, from Russia.

Merna: Alright, we'll look at it later. That's something. Did he know any English when he came?

Gertrude: No, not at that time.

Merna: Did he know Yiddish?

Gertrude: Yes, some Yiddish. That's about all they spoke at that time, Russian and Yiddish. I don't know how much schooling he had over there. I don't think very much because as far as I know they were poverty stricken, I don't know. I can't tell. That was that. He was an estie\textsuperscript{48} by nature.

Merna: An estie?

Gertrude: He was sort of, what I would call a person who could have but didn't. He was a musician at heart. He had a tremendous ear for music and a photographer which he didn't practice because his sister-in-law, unfortunately, thought that he was going to make millions in photography and she stuck him out in the neighborhood where he didn't know the language and they didn't know his language. It was a barrier. So, they stuck him later in the grocery business. He and his sister worked together until we got married.

Merna: Did he play any instrument?

Gertrude: Yes, he played violin, mostly by ear.

Merna: That's fabulous!

Gertrude: He had a tremendous ear for music, very little formal training. In fact, I think he told me that when they were on their way to the United States, he was in a quota, at that time there was a quota, you know, and he and his sister had to stop off in Riga, Latvia,\textsuperscript{49} the port there, and he joined an orchestra group there. He played, got a little formal education there, but not much because after that the quota, the number came up and they came to some relatives in Canada and from Canada they came on down.

Merna: How long did they have to stay in Riga?

Gertrude: I think they were there about a year.

Merna: Oh, that long? That's amazing.

\textsuperscript{48} By Ms. Diamond’s own definition this seems to mean a person with squandered potential, or who took the road most traveled by, but the origins of the term are unclear.

\textsuperscript{49} Riga, Latvia’s capital, is set on the Baltic Sea at the mouth of the River Daugava.
Gertrude: I think I still have his violin here.
Merna: Oh, my.
Gertrude: He wouldn't let me sell that old piano. He said as long as you can pick out one note, it's okay. I can't play piano. We took lessons, my mama saw to that, but we were not musicians.
Merna: You took piano lessons, were there other lessons that you took as well?
Gertrude: No, just piano lessons. Plus the Hebrew, that was enough to keep me busy, but we were not musicians. As a family some people will sing and dance and play even when it's the direst poverty. Unfortunately, we were not in the dire poverty, we didn't have any money but we were not in dire poverty, but we were not people who would sing and dance at every opportunity. You played the piano when you had to.
Merna: Well, some people do.
Gertrude: Anyway, it was nice, nice to get something extracurricular.
Merna: Oh, yes. Did your husband play for himself?
Gertrude: He played for himself, that's all.
Merna: Did he ever play in a little trio?
Gertrude: No, he said that when he was in Russia, he was a klezmer. He used to play with a group that probably had as much music training as he did, nothing, all by ear, and they went from village to village, shtetl to shtetl. They played for a Bar Mitzvah, or a wedding, or something. Whether they got paid for it or not, he never said. Anyway, he had a tremendous ear for it.
Merna: I'm glad that we didn't have to wait for the second interview to get your husband in.
Gertrude: I thought it was about time that you knew what his name was, anyway.

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50 **Klezmer** is a Hebrew word, a combination of the words "kley" (vessel) and "zemer" (melody) that referred to musical instruments in ancient times. It became colloquially attached to Jewish folk musicians sometime in the Middle Ages.

51 A **shtetl** was a small town with a large Jewish population, which existed in Central and Eastern Europe before the Holocaust. Shtetlekh and shtetls were mainly found in the areas that constituted the 19th century Pale of Settlement in the Russian Empire, the Congress Kingdom of Poland, Austrian Galicia and Romania.

52 A **bar mitzvah** (Hebrew: son of commandment) 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 may be counted to the minyan quorum for public worship. He celebrates the bar mitzvah by being called up to the reading of the Torah in the synagogue, usually on the next available Sabbath after his Hebrew birthday.
Merna: None of us is perfect and we all forget something, that's why I say I'll review the tape, and note down the things I forgot for the next time I come.

Gertrude: I'll probably forget next time anything that I said.

<Interview pauses, interview resumes at a later date>

Merna: Alright, today is October 4. It is the second interview with Mrs. Diamond in her home. There were some things that, perhaps, should have been done in the first interview and I would like to continue with them. For example, when you were active in the National Council of Jewish Women, you said a friend involved you. Who was that?

Gertrude: Mrs. Lilo Meyer.

Merna: Lilo Meyer? M-E-Y-E-R?

Gertrude: Yes, now deceased.

Merna: You said you had a cousin who was there?

Gertrude: Mrs. Morris Merlin, Bessy Merlin is what she was called. She's also now deceased.

Merna: Alright. You were active in that, you've been active in Hadassah, you've been active in other things, maybe in the AA Synagogue as well. Were you ever an officer in any of them?

Gertrude: In Hadassah I was the program chairman for study groups, educational programs. In fact of the matter, I found this morning, a pamphlet from the national Hadassah called Education Tips, 1954. It was back in that period of time.

Merna: Do you remember any of the programs that you helped develop during that period when you were program chairman?

Gertrude: Well, we had Sunday afternoons once a month study groups, in which we had invited various people from the community to address us and to give us little lectures. One of which I remember was somebody, one of the rabbis came in and talked about the Shulchan Aruch, do you know what that is?

Merna: No.

Gertrude: That's the Jewish code of law. It's our customs and our ceremonies, and that kind of thing. We had someone come in and talk about our democracy and Hebrew democracy. Our

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53 The Shulchan Aruch, sometimes dubbed in English as the Code of Jewish Law, is the most widely consulted of the various legal codes in Judaism. It was authored in Safed by Joseph Karo in 1563 and published in Venice two years later.
Hebrew roots and democracy.

Merna: Stop, excuse me.

<interview pauses, interview resumes>

Merna: Alright, we're now back in it, and you were telling me the kinds of programs that you developed while you were program chairman in *Hadassah*.

Gertrude: That was part of, that was one or two of them that I can remember but there were others. People came in to talk about things that they were interested in, and so forth.

Merna: Do you remember whether or not you ever included any of the labor Zionist things as part of the educational program?

Gertrude: It seems that the labor Zionist group, the Pioneer Women, at that time it was called, now it's called Na’amat, had their own educational programs. They also sent out various kits that for their educational programs. But I suppose in the course of their producing educational programs, any one of the Zionist organization had to include all the various Zionist groups that are connected with the Zionist organization, so they can get their background, their leaders and how they were formed, etc.

Merna: Were you an officer in any of the other organizations, including the synagogue?

Gertrude: In the Ahabba, which is our senior citizens group. I'm what they call the telephone chairman. And I taught Sunday school at Ahavath Achim during one period. That was probably during the 1940's or 1950's. I taught Sunday school for a while. As far as being an officer, no. I am, now, a secretary in the volunteer corps of the William Breman Jewish Home, just the volunteer corp.

Merna: Well, that's how come you know that the need for volunteers is great.

Gertrude: Absolutely.

Merna: But I think I read somewhere that you were recently appointed to the board of directors there?

Gertrude: Yes, as an honorary director of the William Breman Jewish Home. Just recently. In fact, I think we have our first meeting sometime this month, in October.

Merna: Congratulations! Talking about the Jewish Home, you mentioned last time that when you go on Saturday afternoons there's a man who brings cassettes and they're much fun. What's his name?

Gertrude: Mr. Jack Shenk and his wife Marci.
Merna: Marci Shenk, and they generally come together?

Gertrude: They come together because she entertains with her singing and helps him with his program.

Merna: It sounds fairly full. You know, I never did ask you your sons’ names? And you have twin sons, I understand.

Gertrude: By the way, if you want to go back a little bit to that volunteer business, I failed to mention several of the men who come in to relate the current events of the week to the residents. That's a very important part of that Saturday afternoon program.

Merna: That’s very nice.

Gertrude: Mr. and Mrs. Hi Letterman and Mr. and Mrs. Bob Kesreo and Harry Axlerod and Herman Lipschcob. Is that taking care of that? If I mention Jack, I want . . .

Merna: You want to mention the others, who also contribute in a different way. That is nice. Meanwhile, I was catching up on the fact that I failed to get your son's names.

Gertrude: The older one is Marvin G. Diamond and the younger one is Barrel I. Diamond.

Merna: Are they named after family members?

Gertrude: Yes, Marvin is named after his paternal grandfather and grandmother, and Barrel is named after his maternal grandfather. Is that the way it is?

Merna: You would know!

Gertrude: No, I mean I'm trying to get the maternal and paternal grandparents straight.

Merna: And you have how many grandchildren?

Gertrude: I have three.

Merna: Three!

Gertrude: Three girls.

Merna: They are how old, how young?

Gertrude: The oldest one is thirteen, and twelve, I believe, the other one, and nine.

Merna: Do you have contact with them now?

Gertrude: Yes.

Merna: I'm glad to hear that. Again, I'm still going back with my questions. You mentioned Grady Hospital when you were young, do you have any idea when it was started?

Gertrude: I really don't have any idea. I know that I was around seven or eight, maybe nine
years old when I was living around Grady Hospital, it was about a block or a block and a half from where we were living. I'm sure it must have been in existence much before 1910. I was born in 1910, so, it must have been in existence in that era.

**Merna:** Was it as big as it is now?

**Gertrude:** No, I'll tell you, several years ago I was riding with some people and we had to go near the Grady Hospital, and when we went by it and around it, I was amazed.

**Merna:** At how it had grown?

**Gertrude:** Oh, and now they want to expand it again. They have to.

**Merna:** It's a big complex now.

**Gertrude:** Yes. At that time, I don't know when the Steiner clinic was part of that, but one of my sisters was a pathologist there at one time.

**Merna:** I hope you haven't had to use it very much.

**Gertrude:** Thank goodness. I've used other hospitals but haven't had to use that.

**Merna:** Alright, you also mentioned that your father was an idealist. How did it show or in what way was he?

**Gertrude:** Well, I think. I don't know if idealist was the correct word or not, but he was always interested . . . I believe I was told that, at one time, when he was in Vilna, he belonged to a Zionist group which was called B’Nai Mush. Several months ago I read an article about that organization and, I cannot remember where that article . . . <interview pauses, interview resumes> But he had to do it at that time, until finally, after he married several years later, he went into a mom and pop grocery store.

**Merna:** Oh, like your husband and you.

**Gertrude:** Which I should have stayed out of. I guess marriage is a different situation.

**Merna:** Always. Was your husband also an idealist?

**Gertrude:** No, my husband was more of an aesthete because he loved beautiful pictures, he loved photography and he loved music. From that I gather that he was somewhat of an aesthete He was certainly not a business man.

**Merna:** Yes, that happens, too. Alright . . .

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54 Funds from the estate of Albert Steiner allowed Grady Memorial Hospital to add on the Steiner Clinic in 1922. The Steiner Clinic was dedicated to the research, study and special treatment of cancer and other allied diseases.

55 Vilna, now Vilnius, is Lithuania’s capital. It’s known for its baroque architecture, seen especially in its medieval Old Town.
Interview pauses, interview resumes

Gertrude: ... had our tonsils taken out, our adenoids ...

Merna: I remember you told me about that.

Gertrude: ... and then afterwards, during the depression, it played a very big part on the lives of the entire community. Jews and non-Jews. I was the secretary in Morris Hirsch clinic.

Merna: And you told me also that after your children were born, when they were ready to enter the Arbutureen ...

Gertrude: Yiddish school.

Merna: It closed, it folded. What caused it to close?

Gertrude: Finances.

Merna: That happens, unfortunately.

Gertrude: But they did go to Hebrew school.

Merna: Yes. Were your parents also Yiddish speaking?

Gertrude: I think my father was Yiddish speaking but my mother learned Yiddish from him. Because I had a grandmother who, my father's mother, who could not speak English at all, in fact she didn't ever learn it. My sister and I, that's my second sister to me, and I used to have to take my grandmother wherever she had to go, and accompany her.

Merna: To interpret.

Gertrude: Yes, to interpret what was going on. In fact, every Friday, from where we had our mom and pop store, we had to walk her to the bud. Do you know what the bud was?

Merna: No.

Gertrude: It's what we call the heat baths,\(^{56}\) that the people used to take every Friday. There was one in Atlanta run by Jewish people.

Merna: Do you remember, perhaps, the names of the people who ran it?

Gertrude: The time that I lived, they were Mr. and Mrs. Koen who were in charge of it.

Now, whether that was a community thing, whether it was paid for by the community or not, I don't know. I was just a child, I didn't ask those questions. But I know that Friday [everyone went there.] The bud was on Butler Street. I remember that, and we had to walk her to the bud. That was the weekly, what do you call, the heat baths?

\(^{56}\) A steambath is a steam-filled room for the purpose of relaxation and cleansing, similar to a sauna. It has a long history, going back to Greek and Roman times. Steam baths traditionally work by pumping already steaming water into a pool to steam a room, as opposed to saunas where water is thrown on a stove to create steam.
Merna: Alright, the weekly baths. This is the first I've heard of, should I say, a communal bath?

Gertrude: I don't know whether it was community. I know that the people went there for the Friday night baths. Now, how many went or what, I don't know. I know that that's where, heat baths, what do you call those things?

Merna: I don't know.

Gertrude: Just like they go to the . . .

Merna: Steam baths?

Gertrude: Steam baths, yes. They went to the bud, that's what we used to call it, the bud.

Merna: Good enough. Were your parents active in labor Zionist activities?

Gertrude: My father was not a person who was active.

Merna: Oh, and your mother was very involved with synagogue, you told me.

Gertrude: Not so much in the synagogue, no, she was involved with Hadassah sewing group, and she also, when the community center was established she also went to the senior citizens group. I think they called it Life of Fifty group at the Community Center, when it moved up here. What else did Mama do? We always used to have Young Judaea club, when it was our turn to have it at our house, mama used to always make sure that we had one Sunday for us.

Merna: Good. After your marriage, were you and your husband active in labor Zionist groups, before the children came?

Gertrude: No, my husband was also a person who was not active. He was very quiet. I couldn't get him to go anywhere. I was in Hadassah and I was with the Pioneer Women, Na’amat, as it's called now, and that's about it. I didn't do anything particular, except for Hadassah programing.

Merna: I haven't even asked you anything about World War II and the Nazis and, here you've been helpful to the refugees from the holocaust, was there much going on in the organizations to which you belonged prior to or during World War II?

Gertrude: No, not that I know of, not too much. There probably was, but sometimes I was not able to get to a meeting when it was going to be held. But I do remember a big community group, a big community affair where we were raising money for them. Not for the refugees, but for some particular thing that had happened, I don't remember what it was but some big event.

Merna: I'm sure there were many of them all over.
Gertrude: Yes, all over the country.
Merna: From your point of view, when Israel was established, in 1948, it was really right after World War II, were you happy? Were you disappointed at the way the land was partitioned out? How did you react to it is what I'm getting to?
Gertrude: I thought it was a wonderful achievement. Of course, we were interested in seeing that Truman had acknowledged the fact that Israel was a state, had become a state. That's it for personal reaction.
Merna: Were you glad to see the development of kibutz?57
Gertrude: The Kibutz movement was a very good movement. Unfortunately, now, I've been reading that some of the Kibutzim have become capitalist.
Merna: It seems like an oxymoron, doesn't it?
Gertrude: And they do bemoan the fact that Kibutzim may be dwindling out because, after all, modern times, you know, everybody wanting to be in a larger place, city atmosphere and that kind of thing. But the idea was wonderful.
Merna: It certainly helped get Israel started.
Gertrude: Absolutely.
Merna: You've never traveled to Israel?
Gertrude: Never have. I don't fly because I have an inner ear infection that the doctor said was, I can't look up, I can't look down, I can't look at the light. I get vertigo. There's one resident at the home, when she came in we started talking about our various illness and she was talking about vertigo. That's what I've got, vertigo. Now, when she sees me, "How's your vertigo?"
Merna: It's a point of contact between the two of you.
Gertrude: That's right.
Merna: I assume that you and your husband spoke Yiddish together at home, sometimes.
Gertrude: At times.
Merna: And I know you teach or lead a club, Yiddishist club, when did that start?
Gertrude: Well, the Community Center said that they were going to have a Yiddish club and I said, "I'll take it if you want me to." Just as an activity in the center, it really isn't an educational thing, but it's a conversational class and the few people who come in seem to enjoy it, whatever's

57 A kibutz (Hebrew: ‘gathering’ or ‘clustering’) is a collective community in Israel traditionally based on agriculture. They began as utopian communities that combined socialism and Zionism.
Merna: When was it started?
Gertrude: I think I've been doing it for a couple of years.
Merna: How did you keep Yiddish alive for yourself?
Gertrude: Didn't I talk about the Institute of Adult Enrichment?
Merna: Now you are.
Gertrude: In which I helped organize a course for eight weeks, one hour course, according to their schedule, and I knew several people who were interested. One would come in and do an hour of Jewish music, Yiddish music. Someone would come in and talk about the Yiddish authors and the development of Yiddish. Someone talked about the plays, the literature. That way, it kept going. Since that time, I've been doing the little Yiddish group at the center. Now there are centers organizing a beginners Yiddish class, and a Mr. McKemie will be teaching that class, the beginners class, and he's doing that at night. He told me about it and I had read about it, and I found out that they were charging for the class. I asked him if that was the thing to do, because Yiddish is not the most popular thing in the world. He said that he thinks that charging for it would make it more interesting for people that think they are really, you know, that it was an accomplishment. And it is an accomplishment.
Merna: Learning any new language is an accomplishment.
Gertrude: So, I hope that he has a group.
Merna: Did it surprise you to find a young person who was interested and able to teach it?
Gertrude: Well, I haven't met the young man myself, but he said he has three young children. One of whom I know the name of the child, is going to Yeshiva High School, so, it must be about thirteen. In a way, yes, [it surprised me,] but after I had been reading all about the work that's being done in New York, and Philadelphia, and California, and all the cities except Atlanta, that Yiddish seems to be alive, very much alive. If someone comes from another part of the universe and says something, then I’m just amazed. I don't know how they’ll do it but I just hope they'll be able to do something in Atlanta.
Merna: It's interesting. I've also been reading about this young man who's been collecting everything printed in Yiddish and asking for things.

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58 Yeshiva (Hebrew for “sitting”) is a Jewish educational institution for religious instruction that is equivalent to high school. It also refers to a Talmudic college for unmarried male students from their teenage years to their early twenties.
Gertrude: Right, I belong to that organization, the National Yiddish Book Center. Now he's making an appeal for lots of money because they bought acres and acres of more land in Amherst [Massachusetts] where they're building a tremendous complex for the storage of the books, for offices, for seminars. Things of that nature.

Merna: It's good to hear that it's growing in that way.

Gertrude: It's growing, yes. He's done a terrific job. He has over a million books or more because he's expanded his collection in Israel and also in South America. He's doing a great job. I don't know the young man, I just read, and he constantly is sending me for money which I can't give, unfortunately.

Merna: But you give other things that are also important, whether it's encouragement or perhaps, you're thinking of some of the books that you have that you may, eventually, if your own children aren't interested in them . . .

Gertrude: Apparently not. I think, deep down there's some interest, but they're not showing it at this point. Maybe after they retire, maybe somebody else will organize a Yiddish class and they'll go and learn. Sometimes parents can't teach their children.

Merna: That's true.

Gertrude: I tried to teach one of my grandchildren one afternoon. She seemed to be interested, and I was showing her the ‘Aleph Bet’s’ and she said, "I'm tired. I'm sleepy." That was the end of that. Although, a couple of weeks ago she produced some more interest, so, I said, "Alright," but then, "Oh, no . . ."

Merna: As if she can't make up her mind. But you might want to encourage her interest.

Gertrude: Oh, they did. They see it. The little eight-year-old child wanted to tell me, when we went to the graduation exercises at the elementary school, so, we went out to see the children. They asked us to come, so, we went. The older one, her sister, us studying the clarinet. The band was going to perform to let the parents see what they have done all year, naturally.

Merna: Sure.

Gertrude: So, we went. The teacher had tables spread out with names of the classes and the teachers, and you would go and sign your name, the teachers wanted to know who was interested

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59 The Yiddish Book Center, located on the campus of Hampshire College in Amherst, Massachusetts, United States, is a cultural institution dedicated to the preservation of books in the Yiddish language, as well as the culture and history those books represent.

in what child. So, I go up, Rachel, the younger one, takes me to her teacher and she says, "Now, you write your name but don't you write it in Jewish. She won't understand." So you see, there's something that lurks in that mind.

Merna: Right and the more contact they have, the more . . .

[Unintelligible, 31.20]

Gertrude: Yes.

Merna: The other questions that I have really relate to . . . unless I’ve forgotten something in the Yiddish area?

Gertrude: I don't know what else in the Yiddish area would be forgotten. I have some books here, if you want to come back.

Merna: Do you know how many?

Gertrude: No, I haven't counted them. I know that I have a set of Sholem Aleichem61 books.

Merna: In Yiddish?

Gertrude: Yes. I have some of [Unintelligible, 32.03, a name or title] in Yiddish. I think I even have a couple of [Unintelligible, 32.11, another name, sounds like “Mendel and Marcus Froen”] they're the three prominent . . .

Merna: What was the last one?

Gertrude: [Unintelligible, 32.17, same as above], he was one of the three. Mendel, he was the father, Mendel was the grandfather, I think. I'm trying to figure it out now, and [Unintelligible, 32.29] was the father, and [Unintelligible, 32.31, possibly Sholem Aleichem] was the child, I think. Of course, Yiddish literature started way back in the 1500's.

Merna: I'm well aware that you don't have something from year one.

Gertrude: No. I saw a book from the 1500s.

Merna: In Poland?

Gertrude: I don't remember exactly where it was. It probably was in the mid-Eastern Europe, a European country somewhere, or maybe in their transition period, traveling around from one place to the other.

Merna: The 1500's would have been a time when Jews who were excluded from Spain were traveling all over Europe.

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61 Solomon Naumovich Rabinovich, better known under his pen name Sholem Aleichem, was a leading Yiddish author and playwright. The musical *Fiddler on the Roof*, based on his stories about Tevye the Dairyman, was the first commercially successful English-language stage production about Jewish life in Eastern Europe.
Gertrude:  But you see, the Spanish Jews would have their own language, *Ladino*, the Ashkenazi from the German part of the Russian [Unintelligible, 33.26]. So, I don't know. I don't remember that. I've read about it but I can't remember.

Merna: We all forget. The other thing that I wanted to ask you about: you've lived in Atlanta all your life and there have been many changes in the Jewish community during this period. One of which is all the Jews are no longer in one little area of Atlanta. I was wondering, what you thought about it. Do you think the community is more cohesive now, or less cohesive?

Gertrude: It couldn't be more cohesive because we're so spread out. For instance, when I moved in this neighborhood there were many more Jews here than there are now. I think I can count on my fingers the number of Jewish families who are living here now. I think it's that way in the older communities. A lot of people are moving to the suburbs. Out in Dunwoody [Georgia] they have a big Jewish community now. Don't you think so?

Merna: I would guess so, certainly.

Gertrude: It's very much surprising that in Marietta [Georgia] there's a large Jewish community when at one time the Jewish community would not dare move in Marietta. That was where Leo Frank was lynched. The same thing in the other parts of town. Now, close to the southeast section is mostly where the blacks are now living. There are very few Jews now and I imagine some of the Koreans have their stores in that area, southeast and southwest I should say. Let me put it this way, at one time, the reformed or so-called German Jews at that time looked down at the East European Jews. In that time, even, I understand, [though] I didn't feel it myself, all the Jews looked down on the so-called Sephardic Jews. I didn't feel it myself, although, there were, in our neighborhood when we were children living in the area, there were some there.

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62 Also known as ‘Judeo-Spanish,’ *Ladino* is a Romance language derived from Old Spanish originally spoken in the former territories of the Ottoman Empire (the Balkans, Turkey, the Middle East, and North Africa) as well as in France, Italy, the Netherlands, Morocco, and the United Kingdom. Today, *Ladino* is spoken mainly by Sephardic minorities in more than 30 countries.

63 Ashkenazi is an ethnic division of Jews which formed in the Holy Roman Empire in the early 1000’s. They established communities in Central and Eastern Europe.

64 Reform Judaism is 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.

65 Sephardic Jews are the Jews of Spain, Portugal, North Africa and the Middle East and their descendants. The adjective “Sephardic” and corresponding nouns Sephardi (singular) and Sephardim (plural) are derived from the Hebrew word ‘*Sepharad,*’ which refers to Spain. Historically, the vernacular language of Sephardic Jews was *Ladino.*
There was a rumor around that we looked down on the so-called Spanish Jews, we called them at that time.

**Merna:** That I did not know.

**Gertrude:** This is what I learned later on, too. I didn't realize that it was so, but this is what I learned. Then, all of the sudden, when that monster, Hitler, came in, there was a community. We came together regardless of where they lived. You could see them going to the Temple or you could see them going to Ahvath Achim or . . .<Interview pauses, interview resumes> . . . didn't have as many Ashkenazi Jews in the Or VeShalom.

**Merna:** Let me ask you a question. Here where you live is comparably close to Shearith Israel, did it ever occur to you to switch from the AA to Shearith Israel?

**Gertrude:** It might have occurred [to me] because of my transportation.

<Interview pauses, interview resumes>

**Merna:** I didn't realize the pull of the family tradition, as it were.

**Gertrude:** As it were, for one thing, and then you know the rabbi there. Of course, this one I know a little bit, I know the assistant rabbi a little better. He's nicer, I think, than the other one.

**Merna:** It's what you're thinking that we're interested in. There's been, even since I've been in Atlanta there has been a mushrooming of new synagogues all over the place. Even in Snellville [Georgia] and all kinds of places. Also, the Chasidim came in with the chabad, which is another dimension. What do you think of that?

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66 The Temple, or ‘Hebrew Benevolent Congregation,’ is Atlanta’s oldest Jewish congregation. The cornerstone was laid on the Temple on Garnett Street in 1875. The dedication was held in 1877 and the Temple was located there until 1902. The Temple’s next location on Pryor Street was dedicated in 1902. The Temple’s current location in Midtown on Peachtree Street was dedicated in 1931. The main sanctuary is on the National Register of Historic Places.

67 Or VeShalom was established by refugees of the Ottoman Empire, namely from Turkey and the Isle of Rhodes. The Sephardic/Traditional congregation began in 1920 and was based at Central and Woodward Avenues until 1948 when it moved to a larger building on North Highland Road. The current building for Or VeShalom is on North Druid Hills Road.

68 Founded in 1904, Shearith Israel began as a congregation that met in the homes of congregants until 1906 when they began using a Methodist church on Hunter Street. After World War II, Rabbi Tobias Geffen moved the congregation to University Drive, where it became the first synagogue in DeKalb County. In the 1960’s, they removed the barrier between the men’s and women’s sections in the sanctuary, and officially became affiliated with the Conservative movement in 2002.

69 Hasidic Judaism (also sometimes called Chasidim [From the Hebrew word "Chasid" meaning "pious"]) is a Jewish mystical movement that was founded in eighteenth century Eastern Europe by Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov. It promotes spirituality through the popularization and internalization of Jewish mysticism as the fundamental aspect of the faith.

70 Chabad is a Hasidic movement in Orthodox Judaism. In Atlanta, Georgia, Congregation Beth Tefillah and Chabad Intown are affiliated with the movement.
Gertrude: It shows that there are more Jews in the community for one thing who are looking for things to do and possibly they're very religious, or they're observant, and they feel the necessity of it. When I was growing up, let's see, there was the Temple, Ahvath Achim, there was Or VeShalom, there was Anshi S'Fard and, let me see what else there was. I don't want to leave anybody out. And Shearith Israel, at that time it was called Hunter Street Shul.

Merna: So, that's four or five, and now there are eighteen.

Gertrude: Oh, eighteen, twenty-three aren't there? You could check the directory.

Merna: Yes, you're probably right about that.

Gertrude: There's Snellville, there's Dunwoody, there's an orthodox community there that organizes and Duluth [Georgia], and the Habad, and Beth Jacob and now the [Unintelligible, 38.45] want to organize . . .

Merna: Excuse me, Beth Jacob, when I came here was sort of the orthodox synagogue. Were they a comparatively new synagogue in Atlanta?

Gertrude: Yes, when Beth Jacob was organized they had their first synagogue on Boulevard, which was, at that time, a residential [street]. Well, it's residential now, too, but there were quite a number of Jewish people who lived on Boulevard way out, past Ponce de Leon. They bought a church there and converted it to a synagogue. Then I think their first rabbi was Rabbi Feldman, Emanuel Feldman. Then they moved over to where they are now on lavista road. At that time, Ahvath Achim, at one time, was orthodox. Then when Rabbi Epstein came in the conservatism arose and then the congregation swerved over to conservative. Or VeShalom is

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71 Congregation Ansh Sh'far is an Orthodox synagogue located in Atlanta. It was founded in 1911 to provide a home for Hasidic worship and fellowship for Jews from Poland, Galicia and the Ukraine who had settled in Atlanta. At first the congregation met in the Red Men’s Hall on Central Avenue, but by the end of 1913 a wooden building at the corner of Woodward Avenue and King Street was secured. A few years later the congregation moved to the corner of Woodward and Capitol Avenues. After 1945, the settlement of Jews where Anshi S’fard was located disappeared. Anshi S’fard moved to its present location on North Highland, in the Morningside area. It is the oldest Orthodox congregation in Atlanta.

72 Emanuel Feldman (b. 1927) is an Orthodox rabbi and Rabbi Emeritus of Congregation Beth Jacob of Atlanta, Georgia. He was born to a family of Orthodox rabbis dating back more than seven generations. During his nearly 40 years at Beth Jacob beginning in 1952, he nurtured the growth of Atlanta’s Orthodox community from a city with two small Orthodox synagogues to a community large enough to support Jewish day schools, yeshivas, girls’ schools and a kollel. He is a past vice-president of the Rabbinical Council of America and former editor of Tradition: The Journal of Orthodox Jewish thought published by the RCA. In 1991, his son, Rabbi Ilan Feldman, succeeded him.

73 Rabbi Harry Epstein (1903-2003) served as the rabbi of Ahavath Achim Synagogue in Atlanta, Georgia from 1928 to 1982. Under his leadership the congregation began to shift to Conservative, which they adopted in 1952. Rabbi Epstein retired in 1982, becoming Rabbi Emeritus and Rabbi Arnold Goodman assumed the rabbinic post.

74 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,
more or less orthodox. Then this one, of course, chabad, and of course the Hasidic. There was [another] one in Dunwoody that was supposed to be orthodox. Ariel, or something.

**Merna:** That's brand new, I believe.

**Gertrude:** Yes, in Dunwoody. I think the one in Duluth is reformed. Ahvath Achim is conservative. I don't know, there are about twenty-three [synagogues] now.

**Merna:** It's hard to keep track of them, almost.

**Gertrude:** There must be a lot of money in the community to keep up all these rabbis.

**Merna:** Some of the newer ones, of course, don't have big buildings yet. They haven't raised that kind of money for salaries and stuff.

**Gertrude:** . . . and then connected with the Beth Jacob, they have the Kollel\(^75\) group that meets there. Those are people who the community keeps up. We've got a bunch of rabbis, and I believe if you needed one, you could hardly get one. I've had meetings like that.

**Merna:** Really?

**Gertrude:** I did. I needed a rabbi for some reason, I don't know what it was for, I called our synagogue and our rabbi was out. I called some place else, and he was out. I called even Beth Jacob and couldn't get him. I finally had to end up with a chazzan\(^76\) and he gave me the information I wanted.

**Merna:** Interesting.

**Gertrude:** That's why I say, you just never know.

**Merna:** In the Jewish Times there's a lot of talk about “The Jewish community,” as thought it was one monolith, all together. Do you have a feeling that it is more unified? That we are more unified now?

**Gertrude:** In a way we may be. I don't know. I know that, as I say, the so-called German Jews, infiltration of all the reformed Jews.

**Merna:** Reformed Jews, they're not all German anymore.

**Gertrude:** I know. Reformed Jews and the conservative and the orthodox, we seem to be

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\(^{75}\) ‘Kollel’ in Hebrew means ‘gathering’ or ‘collection’ [of scholars]. It is an institute for full-time, advanced study of the *Talmud* and rabbinic literature. It is like a *yeshiva* but the student body are virtually all married men, who receive a regular monthly stipend to their members.

\(^{76}\) The chazzan, or cantor, is the official in charge of music or chants and leads liturgical prayer and chanting in the synagogue.
more together in certain things. I don't know. I can't tell. The Federation could give you a better answer on that because they probably have a mixture of the whole community.

**Merna:** Well, hopefully they do.

**Gertrude:** There seems to be a sort of a unity, because you come to the community center and you see people of all sects there. You go to the synagogue and you see, sometimes, people wander in from various synagogues and various things. The reformed, I understand, they have Bar Mitzvahs now, Bat Mitzvahs. I don't know. People are just doing what they want to do anyway. I guess that makes for some unity. I don't know.

*<End Tape 1, Side 2>*

*<Begin Tape 2, Side 1>*

**Merna:** This is a continuation of the second interview with Mrs. Diamond. We were really almost coming to an end, but I noticed you have some family pictures. I'd love for you to tell me about them, and also, in case I have forgotten anything, may I call you? Or can we make another interview? Or if you remember something that's important that somehow has slipped by me, you will call me?

**Gertrude:** Yes. I have something in mind that, about the time I told you my mom and pop had that grocery store. We played with these children, mostly hop scotch, all afternoon. Then we had a maid who went to Spelman College, at that time. She used to, on Saturday afternoons, when we weren't in the store, when mama was in the store and had to work, she would send us with Ima, that was her name, to Loew's Grand Theater and they let her in.

**Merna:** With you as children.

**Gertrude:** With us, she would sit behind the wire. But they let her in.

**Merna:** I'm almost surprised to hear of somebody going to college, a black person, or a person of color, who is also a maid in someone's house.

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77 A *bat mitzvah* (Hebrew: daughter of commandment) is a rite of passage for Jewish girls aged 12 years and one day according to her Hebrew birthday. Many girls have their *bat mitzvah* around age 13, the same as boys who have their *bar mitzvah* at that age. She is now duty bound to keep the commandments. Synagogue ceremonies are held for *bat mitzvah* girls in Reform and Conservative communities, but it has not won the universal approval of Orthodox rabbis.

78 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.

79 Loew's Grand Theater, originally DeGive's Grand Opera House, was a movie theater at the corner of Peachtree and Forsyth Streets in downtown Atlanta. It was most famous as the site of the 1939 premiere of *Gone with the Wind*. The Georgia-Pacific Tower was built on the former site of the theater.
Gertrude: At that time we called them maids, it could have been a sitter, I don't know. But anyway, Ima went with us.

Merna: And she was permitted into the Fox?\(^80\)

Gertrude: It was the Lowe's Grand at that time. Got to go to a relaxing movie.

Merna: Terrific!

Gertrude: Another interesting thing you might be interested in, when my husband and I were in the grocery business, there was a family who lived on the side street there, who you would think were white.\(^81\) One of the little boys would come in and say, "Oh, Mrs. Diamond, they let me into the Howard Theater!"\(^82\)

Merna: The Howard was another theater?

Gertrude: Movie theater. "They let me into the Howard theater."

Merna: That was something in those days, wasn't it?

Gertrude: That's right. Because their children, I think there were four or five children in their family, and as the children, the lower, younger, got a little more of the black gene than the other. It was interesting to see it.

Merna: I guess people of color come in all shades. And also people who are white.

Gertrude: That's right. When I was a child in the grocery business, back when I was, there was a family who lived in the black neighborhood, we were living on top of the store with three rooms and one bathroom and all that. But anyway, across the street there was living a family and the man who was living there was black because there was not integration at that time, but he was as white as you are and the rosiest cheeks and hair that was parted in the middle. I remember his name, Mr. Little. That's strange, it was so many years ago, to remember that.

Merna: Well, these things made an impression on you.

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\(^80\) The Fox Theatre is located on Peachtree Street in Midtown Atlanta. The theater was originally planned as part of a large Shrine Temple as evidenced by its Moorish design. The theater was ultimately developed as a lavish movie palace, opening in 1929. The auditorium replicates an Arabian courtyard under a night sky of flickering stars and drifting clouds. The Fox Theatre now hosts cultural and artistic events, and concerts by popular artists. It does not ever appear to have been affiliated with the Loew's Grand, as asserted here, though they may have been comparably large and popular theaters.

\(^81\) The one-drop rule is a social and legal principle of racial classification that was historically prominent in the United States in the 20th century. It asserted that any person with even one ancestor of sub-Saharan African ancestry ("one drop" of black blood) is considered black (Negro or colored in historical terms). This is likely how the family Ms. Diamond is referring to here, who she believes look "white" were still considered "black," potentially barring them from entry to various public spaces in Georgia pre-civil rights movement.

\(^82\) The Paramount Theater, located on Peachtree Street in downtown Atlanta, Georgia, opened in 1920 as the Howard Theater. In 1929, the name changed to the Paramount Theater. The building was demolished in 1960.
Gertrude: Probably for no reason. We didn't know the difference of segregation or not. We grew up in a neighborhood, and nobody harmed us, nobody did anything to us at that time. Of course, a little bit later on it was a different story.

Merna: You did tell me that the store that you and your husband had was robbed four or five times?

Gertrude: Oh, yes, the later part of us staying there. The late 1960's, around 1968, at the time that Martin Luther King had his dream.83

Merna: Were they people of color who robbed your store?

Gertrude: Yes.

Merna: You're sure of that.

Gertrude: Yes, I know that.

Merna: I'm just asking.

Gertrude: At that time, the Black Panthers84 were around and Jesse Jackson85 with his group, what was it called, I don't know. I don't remember. We had to be sure and mark certain prices the EPA86 needed, whatever they called it at the time, the prices were exactly right. It couldn't be this, it couldn't be that. Somebody who's more experienced in the grocery business,

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83 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. King was assassinated on April 4, 1968 in Memphis, Tennessee. His death was followed by riots in many United States’ cities. King was posthumously awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom and the Congressional Gold Medal.

84 The Black Power movement came to represent the demand for more immediate violent action to counter American white supremacy. Most of these ideas were influenced by Malcolm X's criticism of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s peaceful protest methods. The 1965 assassination of Malcolm X coupled with the urban uprisings of 1964 and 1965 ignited the Black Power movement. The movement saw various forms of activism, some violent and some peaceful, all hoping to achieve black empowerment. The cornerstone of the movement was the Black Panther Party, a Black Power organization dedicated to socialism and the use of violence to achieve it. After years of violence, many left the movement and the police began arresting violent actors in the movement.

85 Jesse Louis Jackson Sr. is an American civil rights activist, Baptist minister, and politician. He was a candidate for the Democratic presidential nomination in 1984 and 1988 and served as a shadow U.S. Senator for the District of Columbia from 1991 to 1997.

86 This is presumably the Environmental Protection Agency, an independent agency of the United States federal government for environmental protection. President Richard Nixon proposed the establishment of EPA on July 9, 1970 and it began operation on December 2, 1970, after Nixon signed an executive order.
we were in it for many years but they knew more about it. It was an interesting period. It was a
dreadful period in 1968 because, at that time, there were so many of our people who were in the
grocery business, like the Koreans are now, and the Federation called a meeting of all of us one
evening to see if they could help or do something about it. There was nothing they could really

**Merna:** It was also the time where some cities had race riots during the 1960's.

**Gertrude:** Sure.

**Merna:** Newark, New Jersey . .

**Gertrude:** It was a transition period and transition periods are always difficult.

**Merna:** Yes, that's true.

**Gertrude:** But it was interesting. We literally gave our store away. It was just impossible to
stay any longer. In fact, the broker, I called him up one day because he had some contacts who
wanted to buy, some black woman who wanted to buy it, he said, "I've got somebody who wants
the store. What do you want for it?" I gave him a price and I gave him a minimum price. He said,
"You mean, you're going to do it that way?" I said, "We have no alternative." That or not. I think
she's still in it, from what I know.

**Merna:** It must have been a good store to have lasted this long.

**Gertrude:** Yes, it was. We bought it from people who had it many years before and they had
done [well.]

**Merna:** Where was it?

**Gertrude:** It was on Erwin Street, not far from Boulevard. It was a nice neighborhood. When
we moved in there, there was no problem at all.

**Merna:** When you sold the store, you were living above it?

**Gertrude:** No. When we sold the store we were in an apartment, I think. Were we in an
apartment or were we already here? I can't remember now whether we were here. We sold the
store in 1972, so, we must have been here. Because in 1968 is when everything started, so, we
were here already. We moved in here when the children were about five months old.

**Merna:** It must have been hard to move with infants.

**Gertrude:** You manage, somehow. You don't think about it until afterwards. When you have

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87 The 1967 Newark riots was one of 159 race riots that swept cities in the United States during the "Long Hot
Summer of 1967". This riot occurred in Newark, New Jersey, between July 12 and July 17, 1967. Over the four days
of rioting, looting, and property destruction, 26 people died and hundreds were injured.
time to relax.

**Merna:** With infants it's not always easy. Anyway, I would like for you to tell me about the pictures that I see up there, okay?

**Gertrude:** Well, I don’t know how to tell you . . .

<Interview pauses, interviewer resumes at a later date>

**Merna:** After thanking Mrs. Diamond and completing the interview, as I was leaving . . . this is Merna Alpert speaking on the 9th of October . . . as I was leaving the house, Mrs. Diamond came up with a packet of documentation, which she showed me, which, I feel, belongs with the heritage library. 88 One of them is a marriage certificate, I believe, of her parents in Hebrew. Another is the naturalization papers of either her father or her husband, which indicates that he would not pledge allegiance to any foreign country or ruler and then hand written in it says, "And especially not to Czar Nicholas II." 89 It also includes the fact that her mother, although an American citizen, had to file naturalization papers because she married her husband who was then a non-citizen, and other material. Mrs. Diamond has given us permission to copy that which, hopefully, will be attached to this record. This is Merna Alpert. Thank you.

**INTERVIEW ENDS**

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88 In 1992, M. William Breman gave the lead gift, ensuring the creation of the William Breman Jewish Heritage Museum. In 1996, the museum opened at the Selig Center on Spring Street in Midtown Atlanta. The Museum features a permanent exhibit called Absence of Humanity: The Holocaust Years, 1933-1945 as well as exhibitions about Southern Jewish history and Jewish culture. The Breman Museum also includes the Cuba Family Archives for Southern Jewish History, the Weinberg Center for Holocaust Education, and a library of research materials.

89 Nicholas II or Nikolai II, known as Saint Nicholas the Passion-Bearer in the Russian Orthodox Church, was the last Emperor of Russia, ruling from 1 November 1894 until his forced abdication in 15 March 1917. Under his reign the Jewish population of Russia was frequently persecuted, and though he publicly denounced the actions Tsar Nicholas II was known in private to support the violence against Russian Jews.