Brian: Hello, this is Brian Silver. I am here with my grandfather on January 21, 2015 at the Breman Jewish Center. Thank you for agreeing to participate in this Taylor Oral History Project at the Breman Museum. Let me start with your family history, Grandpa. Who were your grandparents’ names?

Edwin: On my father’s side the name Berger is all I can remember. My grandfather and I’m sure his great . . . going from way back, they came from Poland, probably near Germany, because Berger is actually German. Berger means like ‘the cream of the crop’ or whatever. On my mother’s side they came from Russia, and their name was Sinkovitz. It was changed when they came over for fear that the family may be punished. Whether that was their original name, I am not sure. Then it was cut short from Sinkovitz to Sinko. My mother’s maiden name was Ethel Sinko. My father’s name was Isaac Berger . . . He was born in 1889 in Poland, but I don’t know the city. I don’t know the city that my mother was born in.

Brian: Do you know just since we are going over it about Grandma’s family? Do you know where her family was from originally?

Edwin: I know very little about Grandma’s family. They also came from—if I am not mistaken—from Russia . . . Her father was ahead of his time. He was started in real estate in a little town called Boone, North Carolina.¹ He was killed by lightning. He was in a tub, and he went to turn a light on and lightning hit the house. He was killed. His wife, my wife’s mother,

¹ Boone is a town located in the Blue Ridge Mountains of western North Carolina, United States.
was left with three young kids—three little girls—age one, three and five. Then she moved from Boone, North Carolina to South Georgia where her brother-in-law put her in business. She was very successful in business to the point where she moved to Atlanta, paid cash for her house in Druid Hills [neighborhood in Atlanta], sent all of her daughters to college, and gave them all beautiful weddings.

Brian: They were Davidson correct?

Edwin: They were named Davidson.

Brian: Okay. Was there another…

Edwin: My wife’s name was Dora. Her name . . . my wife’s mother’s name was Nellie Davidson.

Brian: What was the maiden name?

Edwin: That I don’t know.

Brian: When your family moved to Atlanta, where did they move from?

Edwin: I was born in North Carolina. My father owned four dry goods stores. He was highly successful financially. He had a store in Charlotte, [North Carolina], one in Gastonia, [North Carolina] one in Waynesville, [North Carolina] and one in Shelby, [North Carolina]. I was born in Shelby. I was the first person in my family to be born in a hospital. Then the [Great] Depression came. I was born in 1925. The Depression came in 1929, 1930, 1933, and by 1934 he was completely broke. We moved to Atlanta because we had relatives who lived in Atlanta. My mother came down with cancer and she passed away in 1935 at Georgia Baptist Hospital after we moved from Charlotte to Atlanta. My father raised the three of us. He hired a nanny or someone to take care of the three of us. I have a brother and a sister. My brother was eight years...

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2 Charlotte is a major city and commercial hub in North Carolina. Gastonia, Waynesville, and Shelby are towns outside of Charlotte located in western North Carolina, United States.

3 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 widespread, and deepest depression of the twentieth century.

4 Georgia Baptist Hospital was originally founded in 1910 as Tabernacle Infirmary. In 1913 it was sold to the Georgia Baptist Convention. In 1921, it moved to its present downtown Atlanta location at Boulevard and East Avenue, where it still operates today as Atlanta Medical Center.
older than me, and my sister was five years older. From that time he probably would have been successful again, but he passed away with cancer.

**Brian:** Your mother is buried in Oakland Cemetery?

**Edwin:** She is buried in Oakland Cemetery where we have like a six grave plot.

**Brian:** Who else is there?

**Edwin:** My grandfather is there. My grandmother is there. I had an aunt that had a little baby that was stillborn. She’s there. There was one other relative that was kin to my grandfather, and I don’t know who he was . . . That’s in Oakland. The rest of them are buried in Greenwood where we have like a 20 plot grave.

**Brian:** Wasn’t there a situation that your father ran into that made him move out of North Carolina quickly?

**Edwin:** Yes. In the 1920’s when he had his four stores, he was in one of the stores up in North Carolina in Waynesville, North Caroline which is up in the mountains. My daddy got into a fist fight with a man. My daddy wore a big diamond ring. The ring put the man’s eye out. My daddy didn’t know it, but the lady that worked for my daddy came in and said, “You’ve got to leave today. Get your family and leave. My husband is a Ku Kluxer, [member of the Ku Klux Klan] and they are going to tar and feather your whole family because you put another Ku Kluxer’s eye out.” So my father gathered his family took what cash he had. We all got in the car. He locked up his store, and we left town that day and went to Charlotte, North Carolina, which was a lot bigger. They had better police because the police were also Ku Kluxer’s in small towns.

**Brian:** When your family moved here, where did your family move first?

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5 Oakland Cemetery is the oldest cemetery and one of the largest green spaces, in Atlanta. Many notable Georgians are buried at Oakland including Margaret Mitchell, author of *Gone with the Wind*; Joseph Jacobs, owner of the pharmacy where John Pemberton first sold Coca-Cola as a soft drink; Bobby Jones, the only golfer to win the Grand Slam, the United States Amateur, United States Open, British Amateur and the Open Championship in the same year; as well as former Georgia governors and Atlanta mayors. Oakland is an excellent example of a Victorian-style cemetery and contains numerous monuments and mausoleums that are of great beauty and historical significance.

6 The Ku Klux Klan (or Knights of the Ku Klux Klan today) is a white supremacist, white nationalist, anti-immigration, anti-Jewish, anti-Catholic, anti-black secret society, whose methods included terrorism and murder. It was founded in the South in the 1860’s and then died out and come back several times, most notably in the 1920’s when membership soared again, and then again in the 1960’s during the civil rights era. When the Klan was re-founded in 1915 in Georgia, the event was marked by a cross burning on Stone Mountain. In the past, its members dressed up in white robes and a pointed hat designed to hide their identity and to terrify. It is still in existence.
Edwin: We moved near Piedmont Park\textsuperscript{7} on Parkway Drive near Ponce de Leon Avenue.\textsuperscript{8} The rent back in those days was . . . $41.50 a month. We lived there six months, and Daddy couldn’t afford it. We moved about six or eight blocks further up Parkway Drive to $29.50 a month—in other words, to save three dollars a week. Because in those days, Daddy only made about 25 dollars a week. Times were tough back in those days.

<interview pauses, then resumes>

Brian: You moved to Parkway Drive?

Edwin: We moved about six blocks further up the street. Went from $41.50 to $29.50 a month, and we stayed there a year or two and then we moved to a little bigger place. Then finally daddy began to make a little money, and we moved to a nice home. Then eventually, he bought a home.

Brian: What did he do when you first came to Atlanta?

Edwin: When he first came to Atlanta he got into the liquor business. He opened up a liquor store, and he had a partner because he didn’t have enough money to go in [to business] by himself. Eventually, he bought the partner out. Then as I grew up, I went to college at the University of Georgia.\textsuperscript{9} My father came down with cancer. He told me one day said, “You’re going to have to leave college and come work in the store. I can’t work there any longer and you need to make the living for the family.” I left the University of Georgia and took over his store, which was just an average store. It just made a living and that was about it in those days.

Brian: I am going to back up a second. When you were living in Atlanta you lived with just your brother and sister or were there other people living with you as well?

Edwin: No, just my brother, my sister and my father.

Brian: Didn’t you live with your grandparents at one point, too?

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\textsuperscript{7} Piedmont Park is a 189-acre park located just north of downtown Atlanta. It was originally designed by Joseph Forsyth Johnson to host the first Piedmont Exhibition in 1887.

\textsuperscript{8} Ponce de Leon Avenue often simply called “Ponce,” provides a link between Atlanta, Decatur, Clarkston, and Stone Mountain, Georgia.

\textsuperscript{9} The University of Georgia, founded in 1785, also referred to as UGA or simply Georgia, is an American public research university in the city of Athens in the U.S. state of Georgia.
Edwin: At one point . . . not really lived with them. When my grandfather died, my father came and told me—I was about 11 or 12 years old at the time—he told me, he said, “You are going to have to go sleep with your grandmother. She’s afraid to sleep by herself.” I went over. She had twin beds. My grandfather had lost a leg from diabetes. When I walked in the bedroom, I saw that great big leg standing there—which scared the hell out of me. I went to sleep that night, and I was very nervous and I wet the bed. I hadn’t wet a bed since I was a young kid. My grandmother called up my father and told him said, “Your son wet the bed.” Daddy said, “He’s probably nervous.” The next night I wet it again. That was the end of my staying with my grandma. She kicked me out and I went back home, which is what I wanted to do to start with.

Brian: You lived with them. Talk about your schooling. Where did you go to elementary school . . . middle school . . .

Edwin: When I first came to Atlanta in sixth grade I had gone to five grades in North Carolina. Little school called [Ella] Smillie, which is near North Avenue near Ponce de Leon, sixth grade there. Then seventh, eighth and ninth I went to a school called Bass Junior High, which is in Little Five Points. The building is still there. I think it is lofts now. Then I went to a school called Commercial High School to prepare me. I was not going to go to college. My father was not one that would come and still tell me I needed to go to college. He never mentioned anything so I was sort of on my own. I had no mother. Daddy really didn’t take charge of me. I went to this school called Commercial, which prepared me for business. It actually ended up good, because it did a good job on preparing me, and I ended up being a businessman. Then I went from high school into college. That’s when my daddy got sick and I came out of college, went to work for my daddy in his store. Then when he passed on, I kept his store and then eventually I opened up a second liquor store, which was really a good store. Then I opened up a third liquor store, which was even a better store.

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10 The Ella Smillie School was an elementary school on North Avenue in Atlanta’s Old Fourth Ward neighborhood.
11 Bass Junior High School was built in 1923 and served Atlanta’s Little Five Points neighborhood. By 1948 it was a high school. The school was closed in 1990 and later converted to into loft apartments.
12 Little Five Points is a neighborhood on the east side of Atlanta, Georgia that earned its name from an intersection where five streets came together. Little Five Points is now known around Atlanta as a center for bars, restaurants, shops, and alternative culture.
13 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.
Brian: When you were growing up as a young kid in Atlanta were there any issues as far as being Jewish? Were the people around you Jewish? Because you grew up in the Old Fourth Ward which is not so Jewish now, but what was it like back then?

Edwin: I grew up under a lot of antisemitism in that my wife and a friend of mine named Israel Nelkin and myself—we were about 16-17 years old and we . . . no, we had to be older than that, because I didn’t meet my wife until I was . . . about 18. We went to a private club on Ponce de Leon near the Druid Hills Golf Club and for a quarter you could go swimming. We walked in and the guy looked at me and said, “Are you Jewish?” I said, “Yes.” He said, “You can’t come in.” So we left there. I think my father at the time became a member of the Progressive Club. I know that we used to go swimming there on Sundays.

Brian: Where was that?

Edwin: The Progressive Club was over on Tenth Street.

Brian: Was your neighborhood growing up . . . you had a lot of Jewish friends, didn’t you? Was the crowd you hung out with Jewish?

Edwin: I only . . . I mainly . . . I had sort of two groups that I grew up with. One of them was all Jewish and the other was half Jewish and half Christian. The half Christian group . . . I finally broke off from that group. They ended up in trouble. Half of them went to jail and whatever and so forth. I went with the Jewish boys, and we all ended up being businessmen—every one of them.

Brian: Who were some of your close friends—specifically their names?

Edwin: I had four particular boys. One was named Saul Kurlat who lives in Boston, Massachusetts today. This is back in the 1930’s when we were all broke—not one person had a nickel. Everybody really . . . if you could get a dime, up on Saturday—if you could save a dime during the week or you could deliver newspapers or something—you could go to the theater.

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14 The Druid Hills Golf Club is a private country club located in the Druid Hills neighborhood of Atlanta, Georgia. Founded in 1912, the club’s facilities include golf, dining, tennis, fitness, and swimming.

15 The Jewish Progressive Club was a Jewish social organization that was established in 1913 by Russian Jews who felt unwelcome at the Standard Club, where German Jews were predominant. At first the club was located in a rented house until a new club was built on Pryor Street including a swimming pool and a gym. In 1940 the club opened a larger facility at 1050 Techwood Drive in Midtown with three swimming pools, tennis and softball. In 1976 the club moved north to 1160 Moore’s Mill Road near Interstate 75. The property was eventually sold as the club faced financial challenges and the Carl E. Sanders Family YMCA at Buckhead opened in 1996.
most cases the fathers didn’t even have an extra dime to give their children for a movie. One of them was . . . as poor as we were, he was that much poorer. Today, he is worth 100 million dollars. Another one is named Israel Nelkin, who had no money, once again being poor. Today he and his son own 2000 pieces of real estate in Atlanta. The third one was Melvin Warshaw, who lives in Florida—who is quite well to do. Then the only poor one in the family is me. I’m the poorest of the bunch.

**Brian:** It is pretty amazing that all four of them are still in good health.

**Edwin:** All four of us, we talk once a week. We talk at least once a week—all of us.

**Brian:** That’s great. Growing up, do you remember any landmarks that are still there today? I know that you told me before about the Highland Bakery, and going to the Majestic [Diner], and places like that. Are there some memories about any Atlanta landmarks that you remember?

**Edwin:** In my day on Sundays, most of the people went to the theater.

**Brian:** Fox Theater?

**Edwin:** Fox Theater. We could walk from where I lived. I lived on a little street called Argonne Avenue. We would walk to the Fox. For twenty-five cents you could get in and for a nickel you could get like an hour’s worth of candy or popcorn or whatever. We would get to see a feature. They had a live show with an organ on Sundays—singing and whatever and dancing. Then we would go out. If you had a date, you left the Fox Theater. You walk one block down Ponce de Leon. They used to have a big watermelon stand, and they’d cut you a huge piece of watermelon for a dime. If you had a car, you could go to the Varsity where you could get two chilidogs for fifteen cents, onion rings or fries and a drink for a nickel. For a quarter, you could eat all you wanted at the Varsity, and that’s usually what we would end up doing. We would go

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16 **The Highland Bakery**
17 The Majestic Diner is located on Ponce De Leon Avenue in Atlanta, Georgia. The 24-hour diner opened in 1929 and is known as a local landmark.
18 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.
19 The Varsity is an iconic chain restaurant serving burgers, hot dogs, fries, shakes, and other American classics. The original location was opened in 1928 but soon grew so popular it was relocated to its present location on North Avenue in Downtown Atlanta. Billed as America’s largest drive-in, the present structure covers two city blocks and has the capacity to accommodate 600 patrons and 800 cars. The catchphrase, "What'll ya have?" once used by frazzled employees has become part of modern Atlanta culture.
to the Fox, and either go down to the watermelon stand in the summertime or go to the Varsity in the wintertime.

**Brian:** As you were growing up, I know you have said you had a paper route. Did you have different jobs growing up to earn money?

**Edwin:** Yes. My first job would probably be . . . there was a Jewish man named Saul . . . I can’t remember his last name. He developed . . . he was the originator of the bicycle kickstand. That’s what holds—you put your foot down and you kick a little thing and it holds your bicycle from falling over. He had a manufacturing plant near the Georgia Baptist Hospital on Boulevard and Highland Avenue. I used to go in there after school on Friday night, and I’d work all night long after school . . . from five o’clock in the afternoon until eight the next morning. We’d get a quarter an hour. We were to assemble this particular thing. Put screws on it or bolts. I’ve forgotten how exactly it went. That’s where I would make my extra money.

Then I got a job in a store called Baker’s Shoe Store as a salesman. You could make about seven or eight dollars an hour working all day on Saturday. You would wait on young girls. You’d pick a real pretty girl, then you would ask her out for that Saturday night date if you liked her looks. I also had a paper route where I used to deliver 309 papers with a wagon. I had a number of jobs. I had more than that, but those were the main jobs I can remember right now.

**Brian:** That was over . . . when the big brick building . . . the Sears building was . . .

**Edwin:** Sears was on Ponce de Leon and across the street from Sears was the Atlanta Crackers. They had a ballpark there. One of the boys I was just telling you about, Melvin

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20 The first Bakers shoe store opened in Atlanta, Georgia, in 1924. Bakers grew to be one of the nation’s largest women’s moderately priced specialty fashion footwear retailers. At its peak in 1988, Bakers had grown to approximately 600 stores. In 1999, the company filed for bankruptcy and was acquired by Weiss and Neuman Shoe Co., which continue to operate approximately 200 stores (as of 2007) as Bakers Footwear Group, Inc.

21 The Sears Building was an eight-story building built in 1926 at 675 Ponce de Leon Avenue. It served as a warehouse facility and retail store for Sears and Roebuck for decades. It overlooked the grandstands and the baseball diamond of the Atlanta Crackers, predecessors to the Atlanta Braves. The City of Atlanta purchased the building in the late 1980’s for office space and the building became known as City Hall East. After decades of declining occupancy, the building was sold to a developer who reopened it in 2012 as Ponce City Market, a mixed use residential, office and retail space.

22 The Atlanta Crackers were minor league baseball teams based in Atlanta between 1901 and 1965. The Crackers were Atlanta’s home team until the Atlanta Braves moved from Milwaukee in 1966. The Crackers played in Ponce de Leon Park from 1907 until a fire destroyed the all-wood stadium in 1923. Spiller Field (a stadium later also called ‘Ponce de Leon Park’) became their home starting in the 1924 season. The new park was constructed around a magnolia tree that became part of the outfield.
Warshaw, that I grew up with, he and I would go about two hours early. They had big signboards with a fielder hit a ball it had to go . . . be a homerun . . . had to go over these big signboards. We used to climb them. It was very dangerous. We had to climb about three or four of them to get up real high . . . and then you let yourself down, and then you got inside the stadium in order to save yourself a quarter. I think it was a quarter to get into the Atlanta Crackers. We didn’t have the quarter so we would slip in that way.

**Brian:** Did you ever go to Piedmont Park or was that too far out to go to?\(^{23}\)

**Edwin:** No. Piedmont Park was within a 20 minute walk of my home. Every summer I would take a couple of peanut butter sandwiches—peanut and jelly—and maybe my daddy would give me a nickel for a drink. My friend, Saul Kurlat and I would walk to Piedmont to the swimming pool. We would stay in the pool all day, come out eat lunch, go back in the pool, and we’d come home about six o’clock at night. We were at the pool, inside the water the entire day just playing around, swimming.

**Brian:** With your family did they get involved in any local organizations or clubs? You had said the Progressive Club. Were there any other [clubs you were affiliated with]?

**Edwin:** Daddy—when he finally made a little money he was able to join the Progressive Club. We would go there on Sundays and go swimming. That was the main thing was swimming. You’d try to meet a girl and get a date or something of that nature. I really didn’t start dating that much until I met Dora, my wife. [She] was the first serious dating that I did. I had a lot of dates. I didn’t find any girl I was interested in.

**Brian:** Did you go to synagogue in those early days or no?

**Edwin:** Only on the High Holy Days.\(^ {24}\) When I first came to Atlanta, AA [Ahavath Achim] synagogue was on the south side of town, on Washington Street.\(^ {25}\) We lived on the north side of

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\(^{23}\) Piedmont Park is a 189-acre park located just north of downtown Atlanta. It was originally designed by Joseph Forsyth Johnson to host the first Piedmont Exhibition in 1887.

\(^{24}\) The two High Holy Days are *Rosh Ha-Shanah* (Jewish New Year) and *Yom Kippur* (Day of Atonement).
town, and for two or three years my father would make us walk. That got old in a hurry, because it was a long walk. The women would have to carry their high heels and put on tennis shoes to walk all the way across town. Then we would drive within about six blocks of the synagogue. Like everyone else you didn’t want to be seen in your car. You would park your car way away from the synagogue, and you would walk the last six blocks, and then go in the synagogue. You spent the High Holy Days. The Orthodox synagogue was also on Washington Street, and it was about six or eight blocks further down. My friend Israel Nelkin belonged to that synagogue.

**Brian:** What about the Temple? Was the Temple around?

**Edwin:** The Temple was for the German Jews and the rich Jews. We were not in that class.

**Brian:** You did not go there?

**Edwin:** No.

**Brian:** Now we are going to fast-forward a little bit. As you were getting older and just getting started in business, did you have . . . I know you said when you were younger you had some antisemitism. Did you find that with your store downtown and your various businesses?

**Edwin:** Yes. My first liquor store was sort of in a rough section. You would get in a lot of fights. People would get drunk, and they wouldn’t leave your store. You’d try to put them out of the store, because they were harassing other customers. If you put your hands on them to push them out, they would swing and hit you. It created a lot of fistfights which I was in. I never will forget I hit a man one day and gave him a black eye. That was on a Saturday. He came in my store on Monday morning with a black eye. I said, “What happened to you?” He says, “I don’t

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25 Ahavath Achim (also known as “AA”) was founded in 1887 in a small room on Gilmer Street. In 1920 they moved to a permanent building at the corner of Piedmont and Gilmer Street, near the Georgia State capital on Washington Street in Downtown Atlanta, approximately 2 miles or a 30 minute walk from the Old Fourth Ward neighborhood Edwin lived in. Ahavath Achim was founded as an Orthodox congregation, but began to shift to Conservatism, which they joined in 1952. To make way for construction of the Downtown Connector (the concurrent section of Interstate 75 and Interstate 85 through Atlanta), the synagogue moved to its current location on Peachtree Battle Avenue in 1958.

26 According to Jewish laws, driving on the Sabbath or High Holy Days is not allowed. Orthodoxy generally prohibits driving altogether, but some Conservative congregations make exceptions for attending synagogue.

27 The Temple, or ‘Hebrew Benevolent Congregation,’ is Atlanta’s oldest Jewish congregation. The cornerstone was laid on the Temple on Garnett Street in 1875. The dedication was held in 1877 and the Temple was located there until 1902. The Temple’s next location on Pryor Street was dedicated in 1902. The Temple’s current location in Midtown on Peachtree Street was dedicated in 1931. The main sanctuary is on the National Register of Historic Places. The Reform congregation now totals approximately 1,500 families (2015).
know. Somebody knocked [the] hell out of me.” It was me that had done it. <laughing> He didn’t even remember.

**Brian:** What was downtown like in the 1940’s and 1950’s?

**Edwin:** When I moved to Atlanta in 1935, Atlanta had 200,000 people. It was really a big country town. It was not sophisticated and did not have anything that it is today. You had the Fox Theater, The Paramount,28 Loew’s Grand,29 and the Rialto.30 You had maybe a half a dozen theaters, and other than that not a lot to do. If you drank you had a few taverns that you could go to. They had one where Grady High School31 is now, called Jennings Rose Room.32 If you were a beer drinker or something—I never went there—lot of people if they wanted to take a little drink of beer or whatever, they would go to a place like that. There was not a lot to offer. You occasionally would go out of town up the mountains in Tennessee. If you had a long—say you leave early on Sunday morning—cook your breakfast out, and then spend that afternoon and then you’d come back. That’d be your vacation. Nobody took a week off at a time back then, because no one had the money to do it.

**Brian:** What was considered the suburbs? If the city center . . . where were the city limits and where were the suburbs?

**Edwin:** If you went down Peachtree Street . . . My first liquor store—which was my father’s liquor store originally—was at Five Points. Five Points would be where Peachtree, Whitehall, Marietta Street all come in at Decatur Street . . . all come in together. If you went maybe six or eight blocks, all the buildings ended. If you went down to the Doctors Building, which was at Pine and Peachtree, then there was woods and big homes to the Fox Theater. After the Fox Theater, there was nothing but homes the rest of the way down. There was no city past that. If

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28 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.

29 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.

30 The Rialto Theater was built in 1916 and was the Southeast’s largest movie house with 925 seats. It was on Peachtree Street and stayed open during the Great Depression. At one point in its history it boasted the largest electric sign above a marquee south of New York City. More than one Hollywood movie was premiered at the Rialto. In 1962, the original Rialto was torn down and a larger Rialto was erected on the same site and remained open until 1989. Georgia State University renovated it into the Rialto Performing Arts Center in 1996.

31 Henry W. Grady High School is located in Atlanta, Georgia, United States. It is one of the first two high schools established by Atlanta Public Schools in 1872.

32 Jennings Rose Room was a large nightclub that opened in 1947 on Monroe Drive in Atlanta, Georgia.
you wanted to buy something you had to go downtown—women’s, children’s, men’s clothing stores—some expensive stores which I couldn’t afford like George Muse and a few others of that nature—Zachary’s [Men’s Clothing Store]. I couldn’t afford those clothes in those days. Then you had a lot of mediocre [stores]. You had a lot of women’s stores. Rich’s was the big store in those days, the main store. I would say that ninety percent of what people bought pertaining to clothing, furniture—things of that nature—they bought at Rich’s.

**Brian:** Downtown?

**Edwin:** Sears also, but you had to mail order at Sears. Sears had a huge business, but no retail at that time. There was retail on the bottom floor years later, but when I first came here you couldn’t walk in Sears for retail.

**Brian:** In the 1950’s and 1960’s segregation and civil rights were obviously rampant in the South. What were your associations with the black community? In your community, did you have a lot of interrelations with the black community or was it pretty segregated?

**Edwin:** A lot of my . . . I was really probably the very first check cashier in the city of Atlanta in the liquor business. Banks were the only place that you could get a check cashed. Banks all closed their stores, banks, on Saturday at 12 o’clock. Monday to Friday they would stay open from nine to five or nine to four, I think. Then they would stay open half a day on Saturday and close at 12. They had . . . Farmer’s used to come into Atlanta—Atlanta was just really a big country town—bring trucks with corn on there, and tomatoes, and cabbage, whatever they raised on their farm. They would bring it to the municipal market on Edgewood Avenue, which was

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33 The George Muse Clothing Company building was a department store (until 1992) at 52 Peachtree Street NE. The building, which was converted to lofts in the mid 1990’s, was the site of a Confederate Arsenal during the Civil War.

34 Rich’s was a department store retail chain, headquartered in Atlanta that operated in the southern United States from 1867 until 2005. The retailer began in Atlanta as M. Rich & Co. dry goods store and was run by Mauritius Reich (anglicized to ‘Morris Rich’), a Hungarian Jewish immigrant. It was renamed M. Rich & Bro. in 1877, when his brother Emanuel was admitted into the partnership, and was again renamed M. Rich & Bros. in 1884 when the third brother Daniel joined the partnership. In 1929, the company was reorganized and the retail portion of the business became simply, Rich’s. Many of the former Rich’s stores today form the core of Macy’s Central, an Atlanta-based division of Macy’s, Inc., which formerly operated as Federated Department Stores, Inc.
just three blocks from my liquor store. Then they would come to the bank. Somebody would give them a two dollar, five dollar check for whatever they bought. Banks were closed on Saturday at 12 [o’clock]. They started coming into my liquor asking me to cash it, which I turned them down. That was my father’s store, and he never did cash any checks. When he passed away, when I took it over, I would work that particular shift, the daytime shift. Finally, a man came in and kept begging me said, “I don’t have any gasoline to get home with. Please can I cash the check?” I made him buy a half pint of liquor and the check went through okay. The next Saturday he came back again, and then the next Saturday he brought a man in with him. That man, a couple of Saturdays later, brought two or three more, and it got started. I actually was the very first person in the liquor business to start cashing checks, and I ended up being known as “the King of the check cashers.” If I knew you, and I knew the company—I don’t care what size the check it would be fifty thousand dollars—I would cash it.

Brian: Black, white, green . . . it didn’t matter?

Edwin: Black, white . . . I don’t care. Most of the checks that I cashed were for black people. The white people that cashed checks were their personal, individual checks. These were all workers—cement workers—the people I cashed checks for would be cement workers, electrical workers, wood workers, cleaning jobs up, building bridges and houses and things of that nature. They were all blue collar workers.

Brian: Didn’t you have a relationship with Herman Russell, one of the most famous entrepreneurs?

Edwin: Herman Russell, who ended up being the richest or one of the richest black people in the United States, started as a plasterer . . . his father did. The father used to bring his sons in. He

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35 The Municipal Market of Atlanta is on Edgewood Avenue in Downtown Atlanta. It opened in 1924 with funds from the Atlanta Woman’s Club. Today it is known as The Sweet Auburn Curb Market, which reflects the segregation era, when blacks were only permitted to shop from stalls lining the curb outside, while whites shopped inside. The building houses twenty-four individual businesses, including produce and meat merchants, a full service bakery, a bookstore, pharmacy and eleven eateries.

36 Herman Jerome Russell (1930-2014) was born in Atlanta. He was the founder and former chief executive officer of H. J. Russell and Company and a nationally recognized entrepreneur and philanthropist, as well as an influential leader in Atlanta. In 1957 he inherited his father’s business and turned the small plastering company into a construction and real estate conglomerate. Some of the construction projects H. J. Russell and Company were a part of include Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport, the Georgia Dome, Philips Arena, and Turner Field. Russell became the first black member of the Atlanta Chamber of Commerce in the 1960’s, and later became the second black president of the chamber. When Russell stepped down in 2004 as head of the company, he handed leadership over to his two sons and daughter.
had about five or six sons, and they would cash their check. They were plasterers. Then he would pay each one of the sons. The father would save the money. Finally, he saved as much as fifteen thousand dollars which in those days was a million dollars. He came to me and said, “Mr. Berger, I’ve got fifteen thousand dollars. I want you to invest it for me.” I didn’t have five cents, but I didn’t let him know that. I told him, “I’m not the one to invest your money. If it went bad, I’d feel bad. But I will hold it for you if you want me to until you need it.” He did not trust the bank. He was old-fashioned type man, black fellow. I became to know the whole family. Then finally the father died, and Herman took over. Herman got into politics, and he ended up being the largest black owned construction company in the entire United States.

Brian: Now we are going to go into college years, which you went to the University of Georgia, and then you had to come home to help out your family, and then you met my grandmother. Why don’t we talk about how you guys met and start going down that road?

Edwin: After I graduated high school, I decided I really wanted to go into business. They had a school—Brown’s Business College, which prepared you for higher education in accounting. I wanted to be an accountant. The reason I wanted to be an accountant was I felt like I could go to work for an accounting company and they would give me half a dozen businessmen’s books. I would pick the most successful man who invested in stocks and bonds, and if he bought a thousand dollars’ worth of share A, I would buy ten dollars. I would just copy what he is making his money in, and that way by the time I am 65, I’ll have enough money to retire on. Then I decided that I did not want to be an accountant, and of course daddy got sick about that time. When I went to this after high school—when I went to this college to prepare to become an accountant—I was taking higher accounting at that time.

One day . . . No, one morning I went to school, and on my desk was a Valentine. [It] said “Happy Valentine” and it had something written on there . . . “Be my Valentine” or something . . . signed Dora. I kept looking at the name. I didn’t know who Dora was. I started looking around the school and then I turned to my right and there was a girl—big, beautiful smile—looking right at me, sitting right next to me. She says, “I’m Dora.” So at lunchtime I ran

37 Brown's Business College was a chain of business schools started in Illinois in the 1870’s by George W. Brown.
down to the drugstore, and they had one valentine left—I still have it in my book at home now—and I bought it without reading it. I came and signed it real quick and put it on her desk. She’d gone to have lunch. She came back and she looked at it. I was looking at her, and I noticed she had a confused look on her face. I said, “What’s wrong?” She showed it to me and it said, “To my wife.” Not knowing that a few years later that I would end up marrying her for the next 66 years or whatever.

**Brian:** She went to the University of Alabama, right?38

**Edwin:** She went to the University of Alabama.

<Video 1 Ends>

<Begin Video 2>

**Edwin:** For several years . . . and finally one day she came to me, and she said my mother has said if you don’t want to get married that I have to start dating other boys. So that shook me up. I went home to my father, and I said, “Dad, I want to get married.” He says, “You are too young. I wouldn’t do it.” I kept aggravating him and aggravating him, and finally after a few weeks, he says, “Okay, you can get married.”

**Brian:** Where did you guys get married?

**Edwin:** We got married . . . Daddy died from cancer unexpectedly, and we could not . . . we had already set a date. We followed through with the date. Instead of having a big wedding, we got married at her home, where only my grandmother, my aunts and uncles, and Dora’s sisters and mother were invited—about 20. We got married at her home then everybody drove to the Progressive Club where we had a luncheon for the 20 people. Then she and I went to the airport, and we both got on—it was our first flight. I’d never been a plane and she hadn’t either and I didn’t realize I was on the plane. We didn’t get nervous until after the plane was in the air. We both realized at that time. [We] flew to Savannah, [Georgia]. The liquor store happened to be closed on a Friday. My help worked all day Saturday. I only had a two-man liquor store which was my father’s store. The other person worked all day Saturday, so I was closed Friday,

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38 The University of Alabama is a public research university located in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, United States, and the flagship of the University of Alabama System. Founded in 1820, the University of Alabama is the oldest and largest of the public universities in Alabama.
Saturday. I got married Friday morning, and Monday morning I was back at work. I only had a two-day honeymoon. That’s how life got started.

Brian: Your children. I know this answer but talk about . . .

Edwin: We had one daughter named Iris Silver. She married Jerome Silver. We were married several years and we had her. Of course, she was the bright part of the life. My business began taking off just a little better. We began to make a little money. We moved to a bigger home.

Brian: Where was that home?

Edwin: We first lived on Morningside Drive—1510 North Morningside Drive. Then we moved to Lenox Road and we lived off Lenox Road for 25 years. Then we built a home where I presently live now and that’s in Dunwoody [Georgia].

Brian: As she was growing up, did you find the Jewish population was growing also and how was antisemitism in that period of your life?

Edwin: I don’t really remember antisemitism. It has always been there and always will be there, but I don’t know that it was any worse and maybe not quite as bad although maybe I was associating with a different type person than I did when I first went into the liquor business with the first liquor store. I don’t remember anything seriously happening back then. I remember naturally when the Temple was bombed and things of that nature. I’ve been in my time many a fistfight because of people calling me a ‘dirty Jew’ or whatever. That just sort of went with it. It didn’t bother me. I just kind of expected it.

Brian: Did your daughter have a bat mitzvah?

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39 Dunwoody is a city located in DeKalb County, Georgia, United States. It is a northern suburb of Atlanta.

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

41 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.
Edwin: She . . . I was probably more proud of Iris. Iris and her . . . went to Grady High [School], which was a tough school. She became valedictorian of the school. She won every award that you could possibly win including a trip to Washington, [D. C.] to visit Congress and talk with the Vice President or whatever. She also used to be with a singing group that did the same thing. I have never been more proud of anyone than I was of Iris. She . . . I think she especially tried hard to please her parents. Not too many people in my family are valedictorians. I didn’t even come close. She was an all “A” student all the way through school. Then she went to Emory [University], where she met her husband Jerry.

Brian: You guys went to the AA and you went there for years. Then you moved on to Etz Chaim and that’s when you became . . .

Edwin: What happened was that after Iris got married and had a couple of kids, Dora and I started talking and we decided that we’re going to AA and we’re not able to see our children at the High Holidays. So we resigned from AA. I don’t think we resigned, but we joined Etz Chaim, and we started going there on the high holidays. As the family grew, I started buying seats, and I would buy seats for the whole family to make sure my family was with me on the High Holidays.

<interview pauses, then resumes>

Brian: We are going to bring it back a little bit and ask what you remember about the war years in Atlanta. In particular with what you had to deal with and kind of what it was like.

Edwin: I was 16 years old in 1941 when [World War II] began. Too young . . . had to be 18 to get into the Army. I was two years . . . too soon. I did become what was called a [air raid] warden. They trained us . . . prepared us in case we were bombed in this country. People had to

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42 Henry W. Grady High School is located in Atlanta, Georgia, United States. It is one of the first two high schools established by Atlanta Public Schools in 1872.

43 Emory University is a private university in Atlanta. It was founded in 1836 by a small group of Methodists and named in honor of Methodist bishop John Emory. Today it has nearly 3,000 faculty members and is ranked 20th among national universities in U.S. News & World Report’s 2014 rankings.

44 Congregation Etz Chaim is a progressive, egalitarian Conservative synagogue established in 1975 in Marietta, Georgia, a suburb in north metropolitan Atlanta.

45 During World War II, the Office of Civilian Defense coordinated state and federal measures for the protection of civilians as a part of the "home guard" or "air raid warden" setup. It was a volunteer organization with no salaried personnel. Volunteers were trained to respond to attacks, conduct search and rescue, provide first aid, and other duties.
take and cover their windows with dark material, and you nailed it or stuck it together or something. You were not allowed to have any light period—zero. You had to—people used to stock up on sugar and coffee. I’ve forgotten the things—water. Things like that in case we actually had the bombings. My job as a warden was that I walked around and made sure that every house was blacked out and made sure that everybody was indoors. You weren’t allowed outdoors. Once the sirens went off you had to go in and stay until the all clear sirens came on. That was the only thing that I really did during World War II to participate in the Army. I had asthma. Finally, when I was able to go to the Army, I had asthma. I tried to get into the Marine Corps, and they turned me down because of my asthma. The Army also turned me down because of my asthma. I was classified as a 4-F, which meant something was wrong with you physically.

**Brian:** When you were in your teenage years did you know what was going on? Did the media talk about the extermination . . .

**Edwin:** They would talk about it and at 16 your mind just is so sharp. You didn’t have the full impact. You lived the time, but you really didn’t know what was really going on. At 16 years old your brain—my brain anyway—some boys are bright enough. You knew you had a war to win, and we would go to the movies. In those days there was no television so the only way you knew anything about what was actually happening you either listened to the radio or you went to the movies. On the movies on Sunday they would show you five minutes of all the fighting going on and bombers dropping bombs out and bombing the big cities and Germany and things of that nature. That was about as close as this country came to the war. We produced a lot of merchandise. I was too young to work in the factories in those days. I went to school. I did take a test as a senior. All seniors were required—boys—to take a test and if you passed within the top 90 percent you were able to go to OCS [Officer Candidate School] when you were 18.46 I passed the test. I was part of the 90 percent that passed it, but the war . . . I can’t remember what happened. Oh, my asthma kept me from going. I did go to be tested, but they turned me down because of asthma.

**Brian:** Did you have friends that went?

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46 The US Army established Officer Candidate Schools (OCS) beginning in 1941 as a means of generating large numbers of junior officers. OCS courses were designed to train, assess, evaluate, and develop civilians and enlisted personnel for commission as officers.
Edwin: Nobody. Just me. I’m the only one.

Brian: No [friends went] into the war?

Edwin: Yes, I had two friends of mine named Tanner, T-A-N-E-R—Christian boys. They were good friends of mine and they are the ones that came up and said, “Edwin, let’s go. We’ll forge our signatures. Let’s go join the Marines.” I’d mentioned before that I had tried to get in the Marine Corps. We went to the Marine Corps. They turned me down because of my asthma. There happened to be a Dr. Goldstein, a physician, who examined me. He was from New York and he said, “Edwin, I like Atlanta. I live in New York and after the war I think I’m going to come back because I’m crazy about Atlanta.” He was out at Fort Mac [Fort McPherson]. He said, “Jump on one foot. Jump on the other foot ten times.” He said, “Have you ever had asthma?” I said, “No sir.” I lied. He says, “Oh, yes you have it. You’re lying about it.” Rejected. He put a big reject stamp on there. That was as close as I came to entering and getting in anything was just going out to be examined.

Brian: It sounds like you wanted to go.

Edwin: Yes, I did. The two Tanner boys that enlisted with me . . . that I was going to enlist with them . . . they were both killed not too much longer. They went out in the Pacific on one of the islands—Iwo Jima or whatever it was. I’ve forgotten the island. Both were killed. I remember talking to their father, and the father knew that I had gone with them to try to get in. They had told him. He said, “Edwin you’re very lucky. You’re still living. My boys are dead.”

Brian: Now we are going to start wrapping this up. Now what do you see as the biggest change in Atlanta from when you were growing up? Obviously it is much bigger now, but what are some of the bigger things that you notice about Atlanta now as compared to when you were growing up?

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47 Fort McPherson was a U.S. Army military base located in East Point, Georgia, on the southwest edge of Atlanta, Georgia. During World War II, Fort McPherson served as a general depot, where thousands of men were processed for entry in the army. Fort McPherson was closed down in 2011. The property is now owned by actor/producer Tyler Perry, who redeveloped the site into Tyler Perry Studios.

48 Iwo Jima is an island in the Volcano Islands. The Allies invaded Iwo Jima on February 19, 1945. The battle lasted until March 26, 1945 and was one of the fiercest battles in the Pacific, as the Japanese were all dug in underground. This was the island that had Mount Suribachi, a volcanic peak, on one end on which the Americans raised the flag on the fourth day of battle. This event is an iconic image of the war. Iwo Jima was occupied by the United States until 1968 and then was returned to Japan. Some 6,800 American marines died.
Edwin: The biggest change that I have seen is sort of multicultural. When I grew up everybody here was an American. I find now that wherever I go, I don’t care where it is, that this country has accepted other people trying to help out other countries and take their people. It has become a . . . I don’t see too many Americans anymore. I see other people which has made the United States go. When I came . . . first, I remembered the United States had 120 million people, Now it is probably 350 million. It’s much more crowded now. I think crime is worse now, much worse than when I was younger. I don’t know that it is better to live here now. I think it was better to live here when I was younger. I found very little crime in the younger days. It probably would be a lot easier to make a living in the younger days. I don’t know if I would have been as successful if I were born today as I did. I had more opportunity to go into businesses that had not opened up yet.

Brian: Would you like to say some final words on the legacy that your great-great-great-grandchildren are going to be watching this one day? What do you want them to remember you for?

Edwin: I hope I am a good grandfather, a great-grandfather, a father . . . The thing that has hurt me so much is that I lost my wife a year ago. That set me back quite a bit, but I’ve tried to be very good and encourage my grandchildren to do well, and to become good citizens, make a living—which is important. It keeps the divorce rate down. When I pass on, I feel like I have lived a very successful and happy life. I’ve done—Dora and I—very few places in this whole world that we have not traveled to. I traveled even before I retired which it was not easy to leave my business. Once I retired we did a lot of traveling. We’ve traveled all the way from China. We saw China when China was China. We saw it thirty years ago when it was very rural and a lot of Chinese people most Chinese people had never seen an American. We were the second group of outsiders to go into China. This was in the 1970’s. I think 1972, 1973—somewhere along in there. Henry Kissinger [US Secretary of State] and [President Richard] Nixon opened up

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49 Henry Alfred Kissinger is an American diplomat and political scientist. He served as National Security Advisor and later concurrently as United States Secretary of State in the administrations of presidents Richard Nixon and Gerald Ford. Kissinger was born to a Jewish family in Germany in 1923. The family fled to England in 1938 and then the United States.
China.\(^{50}\) [The Chinese] had no rooms set up for visitors so we stayed where [Nixon and his staff had] stayed. The same rooms they stayed in, we stayed. We lived in caves. We were there in China for 30 days. We saw quite a bit of it. It was a hard life, but at least I saw it when they had the old rickshaws and things of that nature. Your father went there recently and it is just as modern. Beijing, [China] is just as modern as New York [City, New York], I guess right now. I have no regrets, because we have been all over Europe. It is hard to name a country we’ve not been in.

**Brian:** Was that your favorite thing—to travel?

**Edwin:** Probably was. We used to also not only travel there, most people have not ever seen this country. We traveled . . . we got into a car with another couple, and we spent two months driving around the entire United States. We may have missed one state or two states, but we went into every single state and saw all the highlights of that particular state with this other couple. The main thing we never had a fight among the four of us which is unusual when you are together that close for a couple of months. I think some of the highlights . . . Canada. Western Canada is probably the prettiest place I have been in. Northern Europe is very nice where the water is clear up around Finland, Sweden, [and] places like that. That is a beautiful area. I have been in the Mediterranean several times. Italy, France . . . you name it we’ve been there.

**Brian:** That’s great. I think we are good.

**Jeremy:** Thank you so much for everything.

**Brian:** We’re signing off.

<Video 2 Ends>

**INTERVIEW ENDS**

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\(^{50}\) Richard Nixon (1913-1994) was the 37th President of the United States, serving from 1969 to 1974, when he became the only president to resign the office in the wake of the Watergate Scandal. In 1972, President Nixon traveled to the People’s Republic of China (PRC). The weeklong visit in Beijing was an important step in formally normalizing relations between the United States and communist China.