Ann: This is Ann Hoffman Schoenberg interviewing Bertram Adolph Ehrlich in his home at the Atrium in Atlanta, Georgia, on September 23, 1998. We will be talking primarily about his home of Bainbridge, Georgia. This is for the Jewish Oral History Project of Atlanta, co-sponsored by the American Jewish Committee, the Atlanta Jewish Federation, and the National Council of Jewish Women. This is the first tape, the first side. We’ll get started. I think I’ll just start chronologically with you telling me when and where you were born?

Bertram: I was born in Bainbridge, Georgia, September 28, 1913. I will be 85 years old in just a very few days. All my family, father and mother, were born in Bainbridge. In fact, my grandmother was born in Albany, Georgia, so my family has been there for quite a while.

Ann: Which grandmother was that?

Bertram: Sarah. The earliest grandmother. She was a Breitenbach.

Ann: Could you spell Breitenbach?


Ann: Where were they originally from before they were in Georgia? Did they live somewhere else in the United States?

Bertram: . . . a short time in Savannah [Georgia]. Father’s parents, the earliest family, came in from Savannah. They were in Savannah just a very short time. The Kwilecki family, my mother’s family . . .
Ann: . . . you’re going to have to spell Kwilecki.

Bertram: K-W-I-L-E-C-K-I . . . Kwilecki. They came in through Tampa [Florida]. Some of them [came up] through Pensacola [Florida]. They came up from Florida. They all came there just practically teenagers or a little older than teenagers.

Ann: They originated in Germany?

Bertram: Both families. They originated in Germany.

Ann: Do you know the names of the towns in Germany?

Bertram: I’ve heard so much discussion . . . there’s two or three different ones claiming it.

Ann: It’s hard to pinpoint?

Bertram: Yes. The name Aachen [Germany] . . . [my] grandfather came from. Another historian said that wasn’t where he was living. That was where he left to sail from. There’s a good bit of work done by Dr. Louis Schmier, Valdosta [Georgia]. You probably know him. He’s the one who has the most historical records of the family.

Ann: It’s interesting they would have come in through Florida. That’s somewhat unusual. That was not a common port of entry.

Bertram: No, it wasn’t. In fact, some think they came in at Apalachicola, Florida, because one of them was mayor of Apalachicola.

Ann: One of the Ehrlich . . .

Bertram: . . . no, Kwilecki. It wasn’t Kwilecki, it was Brash . . . grandmother on the other side.

Ann: Her name was?


Ann: In what year did the Ehrlich part of the family settle in Bainbridge?

Bertram: Best of my knowledge, it was early or around 1876.

Ann: Eighteen hundred seventy-six?

Bertram: The first one who came in was an uncle. He came in about 1872, Abraham Ehrlich. He was in the [Civil War].

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1 Dr. Louis Schmier (b. 1940) taught history at Valdosta State University (Valdosta, Georgia) for more than 40 years until he retired and worked with the Southern Jewish Historical Society. He is the author of several books including *Jews of the South* and *Reflections of Southern Jewry: The Letters of Charles Wessolowsky*. The Breman Museum houses Dr. Schmier’s papers, MSS 213.
Ann: He fought in the Civil War?

Bertram: Yes. Abraham fought in the Civil War. He was injured in the war. He came back to Bainbridge and opened a general merchandise store. He died from the effect of his injuries. My grandfather came, his oldest brother, and took over his business. That was the beginning of the Ehrlich family into Bainbridge. In fact, when I left in April a year ago, I was the last Ehrlich. The Ehrlich family had been there 132 years. I was the last Ehrlich to leave. There’s a plaque on my wall up here they gave me. The local paper carried . . . wrote an editorial about no more Ehrlichs in Bainbridge. They gave me a dinner, and declared it ‘Bertram Ehrlich Day.’ They gave me a big plaque that’s framed on my window, the Key to the City. I think it’s the key to the county jail, but it’s all framed up there very attractively.

Ann: You’re welcome back is what they’re trying to say.

Bertram: Yes.

Ann: Any time you care to come back. That’s wonderful, what a thrill . . . You had two sons, I know. Neither of your sons wanted to stay in Bainbridge?

Bertram: No. The oldest son, Irvin . . . because all the children went off to college. That’s what all of them did. One of them didn’t. He went to HUC [Hebrew Union College—Cincinnati, Ohio]. He went to Florida and Georgia and finally around through HUC. [He] graduated a rabbi, after about two or three years with congregations, went into military service and became a chaplain. He served 20 years as a chaplain. His last post was the Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs [Colorado]. He loves Colorado Springs. He has a new congregation there that’s doing wonderfully. He just built a new home in Colorado Springs.

My other son went to Auburn [University—Auburn, Alabama]. He always wanted to be a pharmacist. I was a pharmacist. My father was a druggist. He wanted to be a pharmacist. He

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2 The American Civil War, widely known in the United States as simply the ‘Civil War’ or the ‘War Between the States’ was fought from 1861 to 1865 to determine the survival of the Union or independence for the Confederacy. In January 1861, seven Southern slave states declared their secession from the United States and formed the Confederate States of America. The Confederacy, often called the ‘South,’ grew to include 11 states, and although they claimed 13 states and additional western territories, the Confederacy was never diplomatically recognized by a foreign country. The states that did not declare secession were known as the ‘Union’ or the ‘North.’ The war had its origin in the issue of slavery. Four years of combat, which left over 600,000 Union and Confederate soldiers dead and destroyed much of the South’s infrastructure, the Confederacy collapsed and slavery was abolished.

3 Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion (HUC-JIR) is the oldest Jewish seminary in the Americas and the main training seminary for rabbis, cantors, educators and communal works in Reform Judaism. It has campuses in Cincinnati, New York, Los Angeles and Jerusalem.
went to Auburn and graduated in Pharmacy. He came back for a short time and he had to go into service . . . military. As soon as he got out of the military service, he came back and went into business with me for a number of years.

Ann: What year would that have been when he came back?
Bertram: My memory just doesn’t go with these dates.
Ann: When did he serve in the military? Was it during the Vietnam War?
Bertram: No, during Korea.  
Ann: During Korea, so he’s older
Bertram: Yes. In Korea.
Ann: It was in the 1950’s sometime when he came back.
Bertram: He served in [unintelligible: 6:40: possibly Hokkaido, Japan] . . . He came back. He went in with me, but then he had other ideas. He married a Christian girl and accepted the Christian religion. He wanted to go into religion. He left . . . all of us. He left and went into Baptist seminary, studied and became a minister. They lived in Birmingham [Alabama] and Jackson, Mississippi. When his mother died—Bernice—he realized that I needed him, so he moved back to Bainbridge. He went there for me until I sold the house.
Ann: He did come back eventually?
Bertram: Yes, he came back and lived . . .
Ann: . . . he’s no longer there, though?
Bertram: No. That’s when I had to sell the house and move up here. He was transferred. He was with the Revco chain and then it became CVS chain. He was transferred to Mobile, Alabama.
Ann: That’s where he is living now.
Bertram: That’s . . .

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4 The Korean War began when North Korean forces invaded South Korea on June 25, 1950. American troops entered the war in defense of the Republic of Korea to the south against the Soviet-backed Democratic People’s Republic of Korea to the north. Fighting ended on July 27, 1953, when an armistice agreement was signed maintaining a border between the Koreas near the 38th Parallel and creating the Korean Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) between the two Korean nations that still exists today.

5 Revco Discount Drug Stores (known simply as ‘Revco’) was a major drug store chain operating through the Ohio Valley, the Mid-Atlantic states, and the Southeastern United States. When it was sold, the chain had over 2,500 stores.

6 CVS Health is an American retailer and health care company operating 7,700 CVS Pharmacy and Longs Drugs stores.
Ann: His name?

Bertram: Melvin Ehrlich. He was transferred to Mobile, so that left no family with me. That’s when they came to me and said, “When he leaves, you’re going too.” I sold the house and moved here.

Ann: That’s hard after all those years.

Bertram: It was, but I knew it was coming.

Ann: Your only daughter, Sarah Gail . . .

Bertram: . . . Sarah Gail . . .


Bertram: She is very active in the Temple.

Ann: Yes, Temple Sinai . . .

Bertram: Temple Sinai, right.

Ann: What was Sarah Gail’s training? What’s her background?

Bertram: She’s a school teacher. She graduated from Huntington College in Montgomery [Alabama] and became a school teacher. She taught in Columbus [Georgia] for a short time. When she met Allan [Hytowitz] and married . . .

Ann: . . . where did they meet? Do you know?

Bertram: They met in Columbus. He was in Reserve training.

Ann: Fort Benning [Georgia]?

Bertram: Met at the Jewish chapel there. They married and they moved to Atlanta.

Ann: How many grandchildren do you have?

Bertram: Seven.

Ann: Your son Irvin . . .

Bertram: . . . Irvin has two boys and a girl.

Ann: Are any of those children married?

Bertram: The two boys are married. One of them has a new . . . my first great-granddaughter. <shows picture of great-granddaughter>

Ann: Is she adorable! A beautiful child.

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7 Temple Sinai was founded as a Reform congregation in 1968 and met in a variety of locations before establishing a synagogue on Dupree Drive in Sandy Springs, north of Atlanta. Rabbi Richard Lehrman was chosen as the congregation's founding rabbi. The current rabbi is Rabbi Ron Segal (2016).
Bertram: Just got the picture yesterday.
Ann: There’s another girl in the Ehrlich family, then.
Bertram: Yes. After all these years. I’ll go back to that. The two sons are married. One of them has this child and the other one is pregnant, expecting. Not too long I’ll have another great-grandchild.
Ann: Marvelous.
Bertram: Sarah has two boys. One of them was adopted in infancy. The other one was Neil. That’s Alex. Neil is here. He was just bar mitzvahed, so he’s in junior high. Melvin has a boy and a girl. The boy is studying. He’s a musician. He’s at University of Florida [Gainesville, Florida]. He is studying organ at University of Florida on a scholarship. The girl just graduated this week with her Master’s degree in social work from the University of Alabama [Tuscaloosa, Alabama].
Ann: You have to be very proud.
Bertram: I am. In fact, I’m on the web, Internet, Web-TV. Last night, I got a message from her, “Hurray, I passed my exam. I am now a licensed social worker. I’m through working on degrees.” I shot her back another . . .
Ann: . . . email? . . .
Bertram: . . . reply, “There’s one more degree now you can start to work on, the M-R-S [marriage].” She came back and said, “I got a little time for that yet.” We go back and forth.
Ann: That’s great. You’re involved in the Internet and all of that.
Bertram: I am. I don’t have a ton of computers. Just a little web . . . all I can do is . . .
Ann: . . . send messages.
Bertram: I can do a lot more. I can go into Weather Channel, go anywhere on the Internet. But just a little keyboard thing . . . $200 outfit. They’re all on computers. So when I never heard from my children . . . normally my boys would write me twice a year, “Thank you for the birthday check.”

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8 Hebrew for ‘son of commandment.’ 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.
Ann: And their Hanukkah\(^9\) check?

Bertram: Yes, that’s it. Now, almost daily or at least four or five times a week . . . they always used to call me every week. Now, they still call me every Saturday but . . .

Ann: You’re communicating more frequently.

Bertram: Yes, we get back and forth on there.

Ann: That’s wonderful. That is absolutely wonderful. I’m glad to hear it.

Bertram: It’s really been a . . . it brought the family together. We never were apart, but I mean it kept us together so much better to have this complete correspondence all the time. Whatever comes up . . . my youngest, Melvin, he is very interested in sports. I can go on the Internet and find all kinds of things about sports that I send him. If I find anything that I think Irvin would be interested in, I send it to him. Shoot back and forth.

Ann: Absolutely marvelous.

Bertram: I’m rambling probably too much.

Ann: No. That’s perfectly fine. I think that that’s an important part of your life. I think it is unique enough to think that a man who is on the cusp of being 85 years old is communicating by the Internet with his children and grandchildren.

Bertram: I never thought I would get into anything like this.

Ann: I imagine when you stop and think about it and look back to your childhood, and think of all the things that didn’t exist 85 years ago . . .

Bertram: . . . a lot . . .

Ann: . . . it’s pretty incredible.

Bertram: I’ve written in that book\(^{10}\) so many things that I recall. In fact, I just saw last night . . .

<phone rings, interview stops, then resumes>

Ann: The phone call was from his son-in-law. The reason Allan called you was . . .

Bertram: . . . he got the fax from the local paper [Bainbridge Post-Searchlight]\(^{11}\) . . .

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\(^9\) Hebrew for ‘dedication.’ An eight-day festival of lights usually falling around Christmas on the Christian calendar. Hanukkah celebrates the victory of the Maccabees in 165 BCE over the Seleucid rulers of Palestine, who had desecrated the Temple. The Maccabees wanted to 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 menorah with its eight branches commemorates this miracle.

\(^{10}\) He is referring to his autobiography, I Remember Life in a Small Southern Town, Bainbridge, Georgia, 1913 to 1985 The Reminiscences of Bertram Ehrlich.

\(^{11}\) The newspaper is now published twice a week online.
Ann: . . . down in Bainbridge. They fax you every day?
Bertram: Yes. He reads anything of interest. He always gives the weather, which I’m not interested in, but if anybody dies or anything like that.
Ann: Human interest kinds of things.
Bertram: It’s just a short thing that I get.
Ann: They only publish twice a week you said?
Bertram: Paper only comes out twice a week.
Ann: They obviously are continually updating their information every day.
Bertram: Every day. This is just what . . . as they put it in the paper, they put the basic stuff on the fax. It’s not for general publication. It’s sent to the advertisers.
Ann: Have you written for the paper in the past?
Bertram: Yes, I have for years. In fact, everything in that book . . .
Ann: . . . we ought to explain when you refer to the book. There is a book which I have at my feet. It’s known as I Remember Life in a Small Southern Town, Bainbridge, Georgia, 1913 to 1985. The Reminisces of Bertram Ehrlich. Mr. Ehrlich put this together, put some stories and reminiscences together, he told me, for his grandchildren basically.
Bertram: I started off ‘as I remember,’ and I wrote these things and kept enlarging on them. I did make three copies, one for each child, and one for myself, four copies. I showed it to some people. The editor of the Bainbridge paper who is Sam Griffin—Marvin Griffin’s 12 son—he saw it and asked to use it. We red-lined it [edited it]. Personal things in there I eliminated. He published it over about a two-year period. Every Wednesday he published a section.
Ann: It was actually published in the newspaper originally?
Bertram: Yes, it was published. Actually, the response was so fantastic—we didn’t dream it would be—they kept after me to publish it. I wasn’t interested in getting published, so I just gave it to the Friends of the Library, a non-profit. I told them they could publish it and they could keep the money. I told them they’d get the first $100,000, and I’d take all over that. Sam Griffin liked it enough that he printed it free for them. They’re still selling them at $7 a copy. At last report,

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12 Samuel Marvin Griffin, Sr. (1907-1982) was an American politician from Bainbridge, Georgia. He served as the 72nd Governor of Georgia from 1955 to 1959, where he supported educational segregation and opposed the integration of Georgian schools. After the end of his gubernatorial tenure, he returned to Bainbridge and entered the real estate business, helping to found Bainbridge College in 1970.
they’ve sold over 2,000 copies.

Ann: That’s not a bad little income for the Friends of the Library.

Bertram: They’re a little library. They’re very, very pleased with it.

Ann: I’m sure. Let’s see. We have gotten a little bit astray here. I think what we need to do is go back and pick up the family history. We started talking about both the Kwilecki and Ehrlich families who are old, old Southern Jewish families. I know you’ve already talked about them to some of the people from the Jewish history museum\(^\text{13}\) down in Mississippi as well as to UAHC [Union of American Hebrew Congregations]\(^\text{14}\) who has interviewed you. For our purposes, I am going to ask you once more if you will go over the same material. The Ehrlichs came originally . . . your dad came in the 1870’s after . . .

Bertram: . . . my grandfather.

Ann: Your grandfather came, and his first name was?

Bertram: Henry.

Ann: Henry. His brother who had been there and died?

Bertram: Abe . . . Abraham.

Ann: They had a general purpose store?

Bertram: Yes. Another interesting thing . . . when he died from infection in his wounds, he left no will. They had to inventory stock. He left no will, but grandfather and his oldest son took it over. I have seen the record of the stock. He had a number of cases of fresh strawberries and a number of barrels of live lobsters. In those days in Bainbridge, Georgia . . .

Ann: I’m wondering where in the world he was getting lobsters. I can understand . . .

Bertram: Everything came up the river from Apalachicola [Florida]. That was the only transportation. The river was navigable. Railroad hadn’t come in there yet.

Ann: Bainbridge is on the . . .

Bertram: . . . Flint River . . .

Ann: . . . on the Flint. How far is it from the coast?

\(^{13}\) Founded in 1986 as the Museum of the Southern Jewish Experience, the Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life is a non-profit Jewish organization based in Jackson, Mississippi that provides a variety of educational, cultural and religious services to underserved Jewish communities throughout the South.

\(^{14}\) The Union for Reform Judaism, formerly known as the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (UAHC), is an organization which supports Reform Jewish congregations in North America. In 1875 they created the Hebrew Union College (HUC) in Cincinnati, Ohio to train rabbis and later cantors and other Jewish professionals.
Bertram: One hundred miles, basically.
Ann: He was keeping lobsters alive . . .
Bertram: . . . in barrels. They shipped them in barrels of salt water, I guess.
Ann: Amazing. That’s really interesting.
Bertram: He must have had a sale for them in Bainbridge.
Ann: I guess there must have been somebody who wanted them.
Bertram: Somebody wanted to buy lobster. We were a little amazed.

<End Tape 1, Side 1, 01>
<Begin Tape 1, Side 1, 02>

Ann: Where had Abraham served in the army during the Civil War?
Bertram: I have no records. He’s buried in Savannah.
Ann: Was he buried in a Civil War cemetery or Jewish cemetery?
Bertram: It’s a Jewish cemetery. That’s also a matter of dispute. Louis Schmier’s records . . .
he published an article, “An Unknown Jew in the South,” in which he said that his grave was in
one place and deserted. Another historian has come back and said he’s wrong, it’s another
cemetery. It is a Jewish cemetery, I’m pretty sure.
Ann: He was never married, Abraham?
Bertram: No.
Ann: Grandfather Henry—tell me about him and his wife.
Bertram: Henry came there in general merchandise. He became a cotton broker\(^\text{15}\) and had a
general merchandise store. He was very active. He founded one of the first banks and served as
its president. He never involved himself in any politics or anything like that. Other families came
in. He had relatives, the Gans family.
Ann: G-A-N-Z?
Bertram: G-A-N-S. The Zacharias family went into business with him. A Zacharias
granddaughter and I—whom I didn’t know until a few months ago—have become close friends
on the Internet. We are corresponding every week.
Ann: Where does she live?

\(^{15}\) Also called a ‘cotton factor.’ Cotton brokers sold a cotton planter’s crop for them. They purchased the cotton from
the plantation owners and re-sold it for them, sometimes even handling the shipping and other services.
Bertram: In Kansas City [Kansas].
Ann: Her married name is?
Bertram: Betty . . . It’s not Zacharias any longer, I’ve forgotten what her . . .
Ann: . . . what her married name is?
Bertram: Yes, because I . . . on the Internet, I don’t use a name.
Ann: Right, just say, “Dear Betty.”
Bertram: Yes. That’s my grandfather’s side.
Ann: Was he married when he arrived or . . .
Bertram: No.
Ann: . . . did he find his wife after?
Bertram: No, she was born in Albany [Georgia]. They married in Albany.
Ann: What was her name?
Ann: How many children did they have?
Bertram: Four boys and two girls.
Ann: I was looking at a photograph of the family. You said that there’s a picture of their fiftieth wedding anniversary, the grandparents’ anniversary. In the picture, there are no daughters because both daughters had died.
Bertram: Both daughters died. One daughter married and lived in New Orleans [Louisiana].
Ann: What was her name?
Bertram: Mindel. She had a son, Myron. He came . . . after she died, he had been raised in Bainbridge. He left. Last I heard, he’s still living. I’ve had contact with him occasionally in California. The others came back here.
Ann: The other daughter was never married?
Bertram: No. Mindel had never [re-]married. Let me get this. I can read this. <Bert retrieves a reference sheet>
Ann: Let’s see. These are the names of the sons of Henry.
Bertram: There was Bartow [Ehrlich].
Ann: B-A-R-T-O-W.
Bertram: Blanche and Sigo [Ehrlich].
Ann: S-I-G-O.
Bertram: I’ll tell you just a little bit about them. Bartow moved to New York. He was in manufacturing of medicines. Blanche died in 1914 . . . born in 1879 . . .
Ann: Eighteen seventy-nine.
Bertram: Eighteen seventy-nine. Sigo was a physician, a surgeon. He died in 1937.
Ann: Where did he practice medicine?
Bertram: He practiced medicine in Bainbridge.
Ann: He was there. You knew him?
Bertram: Yes. My other son, Irvin . . . his middle name is ‘Sigo.’ Then there was Abe, in New Orleans. He married late in life to a girl named ‘Gertie Breaux.’ Then there was Mindel; that was the one in New Orleans [Louisiana]. She married Sylvan Kronheim. There was Louis. Louis was an electrical engineer. He lived in Toledo, Ohio most of his life. He married late in life to Amelia Beckerschief but then . . . she died very shortly . . . later [he married] Dorothy Blanke. They retired and moved to Florida. Dorothy just died last year.
Ann: Fairly recently.
Bertram: My father’s was Julian. He was born in 1884 and died in . . . 1958. My mother was born in 1882.
Ann: Her name was Rosalie?
Bertram: Rosalie.
Ann: Kwilecki?
Bertram: Kwilecki. The other Ehrlich brother was Mortimer. He was also a doctor. He came back and the two boys practiced together in Bainbridge.
Ann: Did they get their medical training at the University of Georgia in Augusta [Georgia]?
Bertram: No, both graduated from Vanderbilt [University—Nashville, Tennessee]. In those days, they didn’t have very long medical training. They both went to Auburn and studied chemical engineering for a year. Then they went to Vanderbilt. In three years they had a medical degree. The older one, Sigo, went to war and served overseas.
Ann: In World War I [1914-1918]?
**Bertram:** World War I. Mortie served in Carolina. He had three years of study and a one-year internship in New York. That was his medical training. He was a damn good surgeon . . .

**Ann:** It’s amazing.

**Bertram:** . . . and pediatrician . . . treated all my kids; delivered two of them.

**Ann:** Here we put these guys and girls through all the rigorous training, four years of undergraduate and four years of graduate, and then all of the . . .

**Bertram:** . . . it was a different story then . . .

**Ann:** . . . all the residency, and all the rest of it.

**Bertram:** You want to get the Kwilecki family?

**Ann:** Yes, I’d love to have the Kwilecki family. We’re talking about Louis Ehrlich.

**Bertram:** Louis Ehrlich. He was an electrical engineer. He was the first person who invented putting an ignition key on the dashboard of a Chrysler.\(^16\) He also . . .

**Ann:** He had the patent for that?

**Bertram:** His company had the patent. He didn’t. The Electric Auto-Lite Company\(^17\) down there, but he didn’t get any of the patents. He also served as advisor both for World War I and World War II. In World War I, he worked on radio. He said he was the first person to speak on a radio from the plane to the ground. That was his . . . In World War II, he worked on the navigation system for the bombsight.

**Ann:** Was it Norden?\(^18\)

**Bertram:** That was his.

**Ann:** The bombsight was in large part his . . .

**Bertram:** No, he didn’t anything to do with the sight, but something to do with the navigation system connected to it. I don’t know too much.

**Ann:** Interesting.

**Bertram:** You want to go to the Kwilecki family next?

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\(^16\) Chrysler is an American automobile manufacturer. It sells vehicles worldwide under its flagship Chrysler brand, as well as the Dodge, Jeep and Ram. (2015)

\(^17\) The Electric Auto-Lite Company was incorporated in Ohio in May 1922. They made parts, equipment, and accessories for cars from Chevrolet, Durant Motors and others.

\(^18\) The Norden bombsight was a tachymetric bombsight used by the United States Army Air Forces (USAAF) and the United States Navy during World War II, and the United States Air Force in the Korean and the Vietnam Wars to aid the crew of bomber aircraft in dropping bombs accurately. The Norden bombsight was designed by Carl Norden, a Dutch engineer educated in Switzerland who emigrated to the United States.
Ann: Yes.
Bertram: All right. They go back to Solomon Brash.
Ann: That was the grandmother’s . . .
Bertram: . . . this is grandmother . . .
Ann: . . . father, yes.
Bertram: Her name was Bertha [Brash]. She married Isidore Kwilecki.
Ann: She was born in . . .
Bertram: She was born in 1860 and died in 1923.
Ann: In what city?
Bertram: She was born in Germany. All of these died in Bainbridge. All are buried in Bainbridge in the Jewish cemetery. Sarah has five generations. [Unintelligible: 8:38] has six generations buried [unintelligible: 8:40] died. She married Isidore. They had Frances, the oldest who never married. She died in 1954. Adolph who was a young boy, he was killed. He just lived about four years. He was killed in an accident. A piece of machinery fell on him. Ralph was a bachelor. All the Kwileckis were in the hardware business. Ralph moved to Quincy, Florida . . . they had branch stores in different places. Isidore founded the hardware business—that was his. He was basically in the hardware business. Ralph was a bachelor. He moved to Quincy and ran a store there. Max was born in 1885. He married late in life to Grace Rice Baggs, and he died in 1960. Max was very active in public works. He was on the City Council and also very active in banking.
Ann: Did he remain Jewish? It sounds as if his wife’s family was maybe not Jewish.
Bertram: No, by the time he married her . . . he didn’t marry her until the 1960’s . . .
Ann: Shortly before he passed away?
Bertram: By then . . . no, he never married her because his family objected to him courting this woman since she was not Jewish. His family objected, and he never married until after the family all died.
Ann: But they eventually made it legal.
Bertram: They eventually made it legal. My mother was Rosalie. She was born in 1882 and

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19 Oak City Cemetery in Bainbridge is one of the largest cemeteries in Southwest Georgia. It has served as the city’s public burial grounds since 1852. In 1878, the west section of the cemetery was deeded to Temple Beth-El and became one of the first Jewish cemeteries in South Georgia.
died in 1974.

Ann: That’s a nice long life.

Bertram: She married my father Julian. The youngest girl was Grace. She married Alfred Kohnke.

Ann: Spell that last name.

Bertram: K-O-H-N-K-E . . . Alfred Kohnke. As a young lady, she went to visit relatives in Germany. She met this man over there, fell in love with him, married him, and brought him back. He moved back and worked in the hardware store here in Bainbridge.

Ann: For her family.

Bertram: She had one son.

Ann: Who is still living?

Bertram: No, he is not living. He committed suicide years ago. I’m very close to his family. His wife and I are very close friends.

Ann: Does she remain in the area down there?

Bertram: Yes. She still lives there. She’s got eight children. She’s Catholic. We are on the web every day. When I was in Bainbridge . . . she lives in Quincy [Florida], 25 miles from Bainbridge. When I lived in Bainbridge, she came every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. She drove up to the YMCA20 where she was a volunteer instructor for aerobics.21 After she got out of the swimming pool, she came to my house. We’d fix lunch and play Scrabble.22 That’s Grace.

The next son was Julian. Julian married Pearl Myers. All these were active in the Temple [Beth-El]. Julian was . . . the boys were all in the hardware business. Julian became very active in local politics. He served three or four terms as Mayor. He founded one bank and was chairman of the board of the other one. He ended up quite well-off. He had two sons.

Ann: Did they stay within Judaism? The children?

Bertram: They were raised in Judaism. One of them married a Christian girl and got away from Judaism. One son is still . . .

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20 Commonly known as the ‘YMCA’ or the ‘Y.’ The ‘Y’ is a worldwide organization founded in 1844 that aims to put Christian principles into practice by developing a health body, mind and spirit. They offer recreational facilities, parent/child education programs, youth and teen development with after school programming, etc.

21 A form of exercise that involves light to moderate intensity activities that are performed for extended periods of time that are deemed to be beneficial to the heart, such as running/jogging, swimming, cycling and walking.

22 Scrabble is a word game where points are scored by placing tiles, each bearing a single letter, onto a game board to form words.
Ann: Active.
Bertram: He’s not active any more. He’s active in one way. He doesn’t come to Temple but he’s a main financial supporter of the congregation, so we consider him pretty active.
Ann: I was going to say, you’ve got to bless that too.
Bertram: Yes.
Ann: The name of the congregation?
Bertram: Temple Beth-El.23
Ann: Beth-El.
Bertram: It was founded . . . that’s a whole other story.
Ann: Have you about finished with the Kwilecki family?
Bertram: One more, William. The youngest boy was William. He married a Louise Reid but he didn’t marry until later in life, either. He moved to Mobile [Alabama].
Ann: Did you think that the reason many of them . . . I’ve noticed in the Ehrlich family, you mention the fact that several people did not marry until late in life. Was it because of the intermarriage and the family didn’t approve?
Bertram: Yes. The family objected . . . they objected to this girl because she wasn’t Jewish. Mama and Daddy, they followed in their dictation.
Ann: People listened to their parents in those days, too.
Bertram: Me, too. My son married a Christian girl. We accepted it. We knew we either had to accept him or lose him. We are very close to him and very close to her to this day.
Ann: To the children, of course.
Bertram: Of course, the children. We didn’t want to lose those children, and we didn’t. We never fought his marriage. Although we would have preferred him to marry a Jewish girl, he didn’t. That’s his decision.
Ann: That was his choice.
Bertram: We are very close. He called me last night. He was coming tomorrow. Last week was

23 Temple Beth-El is home to Bainbridge’s small Jewish community, and is located on the corner of Broad and Evans Street. Founded in 1902 when the group acquired a Torah, Temple Beth-El initially met in private homes and the Elks Lodge. In 1909, the small congregation hired Rabbi Edmund Landau, of Albany, Georgia’s Temple B’nai Israel to come lead services in Bainbridge. Since Rabbi Landau served his own congregation on Friday nights and Saturdays, he would travel to Bainbridge on one or two Sundays a month to lead services. In 1914, the congregation bought land to build a synagogue. The Neoclassical Revival-style building was dedicated on December 19, 1916. A photograph of the temple can be found here: http://bainbridgega.com/chamber/heritagetour.shtml#&panel11-12
my birthday, but he can’t come. Her mother is in very critical condition.

**Ann:** How many families at one time . . . when the congregation was founded in what year? This is a Reform\(^{24}\) Jewish congregation?

**Bertram:** Yes, ultra-Reform Jewish.

**Ann:** Really? Classical Reform?

**Bertram:** Classical Reform. Rabbi Edmund Landau.\(^{25}\)

**Ann:** In what year?

**Bertram:** Actually, the congregation started with my mother. She was educated. After high school, she went to a Catholic convent in Macon, Georgia. There were no colleges around here that would take women. She was educated in a Catholic convent in Macon. That was one of the restrictions there. They had to go to temple. She was modern in her Judaism. She came back and formed a Sunday school to teach her siblings. That was the beginning of the congregation. The congregation was actually . . .

<i>interview stops, then resumes></i>

**Bertram:** My mother started this Sunday school. Actually the congregation was formed in the early 1900’s . . .

**Ann:** . . . before you were born.

**Bertram:** Yes.

**Ann:** You were born in 1913. It was already in existence.

**Bertram:** I was born in 1913. It was formed about 1909 actually. Rabbi Edmund Landau began to come there. In about 1920, they decided to build a temple. They built a gorgeous beautiful temple.

**Ann:** Who funded the building?

**Bertram:** Actually, the whole congregation could not . . . the few families could not raise that

\(^{24}\) A division within Judaism especially in North America and the United Kingdom. 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.

\(^{25}\) Rabbi Edmund A. Landau (1898-1945) was the first permanent rabbi of Temple B’nai Israel, a Reform congregation in Albany, Georgia. He was born in Ontario, Canada and raised in Michigan. His family was originally from East Prussia. In 1909, the congregation of Temple Beth-El hired Rabbi Edmund Landau to lead services in Bainbridge, Georgia on every other Sunday.
money for that kind of temple. They were not bashful. They wrote letters all over the United States to rich Jews. You’d be surprised. They got . . . of course, they raised the basic money. They got some very . . . from some families, I don’t know now, some of the famous Jewish families.

Ann: Like up in New York or someplace?
Bertram: Up in New York, and through connections with the family with some of these other families, they got some contributions, built it completely, and paid for it. It was even designed by Willie Kwilecki. He was the architect.

Ann: Interesting.
Bertram: That congregation was founded by Rabbi Edmund Landau. He served until his death. Landau was ultra-Reform. There was no . . . he never heard of a bar mitzvah. Our service was done 99 percent in English.

Ann: I guess you did the Sh’mah and that was about it?
Bertram: That’s about it.

Ann: That era, when you stop and . . .
Bertram: We had to affiliate . . . we couldn’t afford our rabbi, so we affiliated with whatever town was nearby . . . Albany [Georgia] and Dothan [Alabama]. That’s a whole other story about the formation of the congregation, but the congregation is active today.

Ann: How many families are left?
Bertram: Are left? None of the original families. The Kwilecki family is still there and the Nussbaum family is still there. There are two of the old families and five or six more that came in. I got a letter from them yesterday, from some friends down there. The president of the congregation wishes you a happy new year. She said they’ve just had major repairs. They’ve put a new roof on the Temple, repainted completely, and did some other work. I’m happy to see that they are financially still viable. Services will start . . . we have service on Sunday night. Always

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26 Sh’mah is the title of a prayer that serves as a centerpiece of the morning and evening Jewish prayer services. The full title of the prayer is Sh’mah Yisrael, two Hebrew words meaning “Hear, O Israel.” Sh’mah Yisrael is often considered the most important prayer in Judaism. The first verse affirms the monotheistic essence of Judaism: “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our G-d, the Lord is one.”
between *Rosh Ha-Shanah*\(^{27}\) and *Yom Kippur*\(^{28}\) ... the rabbi from Albany is [intelligible: 19:00].

**Ann:** I was going to say, who conducts services?

**Bertram:** The rabbi from Albany comes twice a week.

**Ann:** For the High Holy Days\(^{29}\) do you hire someone?

**Bertram:** We don’t have High Holy Day services because we have no regular rabbi. We always went . . .

**Ann:** . . . over to Albany or somewhere?

**Bertram:** We had some too at . . . some of the families moved in, before the more Orthodox\(^{30}\) service. They went for High Holy Days to other towns—Tifton [Georgia], Fitzgerald [Georgia]. Some went to Atlanta and Savannah, where their family was. We usually went to wherever our rabbi was serving—either Albany, Dothan, or Tallahassee [Florida]. Only twice did we have High Holy Day services . . . during the war [when] we had a military base there, an air base. We had enough boys to manage. We raised enough money to bring a student rabbi from HUC [Hebrew Union College]. We were lucky. He was one of the most brilliant men we’ve ever known. You may have heard of him. His name was Rabbi [Philip N.] Kranz.\(^{31}\)

**Ann:** That’s wonderful.

**Bertram:** That was his first congregation he ever walked in.

**Ann:** Rabbi Phil Kranz, for the purposes of this tape, is the senior rabbi of Temple Sinai here in Atlanta, Georgia, and has been here for about 20 years now.

**Bertram:** That was his first congregation. He walked in there. In fact, I’ll say this. He spent most of the ten days in my house. He lived in the hotel two blocks away, but we loved him so

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\(^{27}\) Hebrew for ‘head of the year’, i.e. New Year festival. The cycle of High Holy Days begins with *Rosh Ha-Shanah*. It introduces the Ten Days of Penitence, when Jews examine their souls and take stock of their actions. On the tenth day is *Yom Kippur*, the Day of Atonement. The tradition is that on *Rosh Ha-Shanah*, G-d sits in judgment on humanity. Then the fate of every living creature is inscribed in the Book of Life or Death. These decisions may be revoked by prayer and repentance before the sealing of the books on *Yom Kippur*.

\(^{28}\) Hebrew for ‘Day of Atonement.’ The most sacred day of the Jewish year. *Yom Kippur* is a 25-hour fast day. Most of the day is spent in prayer, reciting *yizkor* for deceased relatives, confessing sins, requesting divine forgiveness, and listening to *Torah* readings and sermons. People greet each other with the wish that they may be sealed in the heavenly book for a good year ahead. The day ends with the blowing of the *shofar* (a ram’s horn).

\(^{29}\) The two High Holy Days are *Rosh Ha-Shanah* (Jewish New Year) and *Yom Kippur* (Day of Atonement).

\(^{30}\) Orthodox Judaism is a traditional branch of Judaism that strictly follows the Written *Torah* and the Oral Law concerning prayer, dress, food, sex, family relations, social behavior, the Sabbath day, holidays and more.

\(^{31}\) Rabbi Philip Kranz was the senior rabbi at Temple Sinai in Atlanta from 1980 until 2006. Prior to that, he served as rabbi of the Chicago Sinai congregation. He continues to serve the Atlanta Jewish community today and Temple Sinai as rabbi emeritus. (2014)
much, my wife had decided right away that he was a man who should marry Sarah Gail.

**Ann:** He didn’t know that, however.

**Bertram:** He knows it now. In fact, he mentioned it when he had his *bar mitzvah* on Sarah’s son. He knows it. We kept up with him. It happened when he came to Atlanta, she was one of the few people who knew him. She was president of the Jewish women’s organization at the Temple. When you find [Rabbi] Phil Kranz, they are still close friends today socially as well as in Temple.

**Ann:** That’s wonderful. I didn’t realize.

**Bertram:** Again, I’m deviating.

**Ann:** That’s all right. That’s part of Beth-El’s history. That’s part of Bainbridge’s Jewish history. The other families you’ve mentioned, the Nussbaum family was an old family. Were they there before yours?

**Bertram:** No. They came in the same time. The Nussbaums came in the same time with Abe and then went in business together for a short time.

**Ann:** What was their business after that?

**Bertram:** After that, they were manufacturers. They manufactured bottle washing machines to wash Coca-Cola bottles. They got one of the largest manufacturing plants in the area.

**Ann:** What was the basis of the economy?

**Bertram:** The basic economy in Bainbridge was lumber and farming.

**Ann:** Were there any Jews involved in those industries?

**Bertram:** There were Jews involved . . . not involved in, but my grandfather was a cotton broker. He bought it . . .

**Ann:** . . . and processed it.

**Bertram:** He didn’t process it. He just bought it and re-sold it . . .

**Ann:** He didn’t have a [cotton] gin?32

**Bertram:** . . . and shipped it, that’s all. The lumber business . . . he also had interest in the lumber mill, indirectly, but they were not involved . . .

**Ann:** The reason I ask . . . Sarah Gail asked me to ask you something about the

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32 A cotton gin is a machine that quickly and easily separates cotton fibers from their seeds, a job that otherwise must be performed painstakingly by hand. The first modern mechanical cotton gin was invented by American inventor Eli Whitney in 1793.

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plantation. I didn’t quite know what plantation we were talking about here.

Bertram: Henry Ehrlich had large holdings of land.

Ann: This is your Grandfather Henry.

Bertram: Henry. He was the one who was a cotton broker. He had large holdings of land. He had two very large tracts of land north of Bainbridge. It was a plantation. It was run as a plantation. Of course, he didn’t live there. He had overseers who took care of it. It was just farming. He had just a little small house. We went up there on Sunday sometimes.

Ann: Did they have tenant farmers?

Bertram: Tenant farmers, yes.

Ann: Were they doing sharecropping? Tenant farmers and sharecroppers are different. Tenant farmers usually paid the landowner rent for farmland and a house. They usually needed credit form a local merchant until harvest tie. They owned the crops they planted and made their own decisions about them. After harvesting the crop, the tenant sold it and received income from it. From that income, he paid the landowner the amount of land owed. This system was distinct from sharecropping in which the sharecropper did not own the land, house, food, tools, equipment, or seeds and had no control over what they planted. The landowner sold the crop and applied its income toward settling the sharecropper’s account.

Ann: Which county?

Bertram: Baker County and Mitchell County, mainly. It was sold during the [Great] Depression. The boys couldn’t afford to pay the taxes. The taxes were $200 or $300 a year on that thing. They didn’t have the money. It was sold for less than ten cents an acre.

Ann: What a shame.

Bertram: I know my father got about $6,000 for his share. That was a fortune for him at that particular time. Later on, I had a man value it ... it would have been $20,000,000 ten years ago.

Ann: Yes, lots more than that I’m sure today. What was the main crop that they grew?

Bertram: Cotton. In those days, practically all cotton.

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33 A plantation is a large piece of land where crops are specifically planted for commercial sale and which are usually tended by resident laborers. Slave labor was used extensively to work on early plantations (such as tobacco, rice, cotton, and sugar plantations). Plantations were an important aspect of the history of the American South, during the antebellum (pre-American Civil War) period.

34 Tenant farmers and sharecroppers are different. Tenant farmers usually paid the landowner rent for farmland and a house. They usually needed credit form a local merchant until harvest tie. They owned the crops they planted and made their own decisions about them. After harvesting the crop, the tenant sold it and received income from it. From that income, he paid the landowner the amount of land owed. This system was distinct from sharecropping in which the sharecropper did not own the land, house, food, tools, equipment, or seeds and had no control over what they planted. The landowner sold the crop and applied its income toward settling the sharecropper’s account.

35 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.
Ann: What was the relationship with the black community?
Bertram: In Bainbridge?
Ann: Of the Jewish population, primarily.
Bertram: Relations were very good. We had no . . . basic relation in Bainbridge was not just to the Jews, but . . .
Ann: Black-white.
Bertram: Black-white basically was good. Of course, we had the Ku Klux Klan. We had a few lynchings. That element . . . the Ku Klux did not bother Jews. They were after the blacks.
Ann: Interesting.
Bertram: I was invited to join.
Ann: The Ku Klux Klan?
Bertram: I got a card asking if I’d join. I kept it for years. They met right across the street from my father’s store. He knew everybody that went to meetings. In later years, when I bought my first home after Sarah was born, the Grand Wizard lived next door to me. Every time they had a meeting over there, they’d knock on my door, the wrong door. I got a plaque made to go on my door with my name so that nobody . . .
Ann: . . . the one that’s on the outside of your door here?
Bertram: That was the plaque, so they’d know not to . . .
Ann: . . . not to keep bothering you.
Bertram: His family and I have been close friends all our lives.
Ann: What was his name?
Bertram: O’Neal [sp]. His family and I . . . his boys and I were close friends all of our lives. One of them just died recently. His grandchildren and Sarah Gail are very close today.
Ann: Are they still prejudiced?

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36 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 the died out and came 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 it members dressed up in white robes and a pointed hat designed to hide their identity and to terrify.
37 ‘Grand Wizard’ was the title given to the head of the Reconstruction-era Ku Klux Klan which existed from 1866 to 1871. In 1915, the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan were created along the lines of a fraternal organization. The highest-ranking leader of the latter organization was the ‘Imperial Wizard.’ Following World War II, people have assumed the ‘Wizard’ title as leaders of the numerous, independent, Klan organizations.
**Bertram:** No, there’s never been any prejudice in the family. That was just him. He wasn’t prejudiced. He was a shyster lawyers lawyer. He was in it for the money. There was never . . . the Jewish relationships in Bainbridge . . . because it was such a Reform congregation, we really weren’t set aside. The more Orthodox Jews came in early and did maintain their ways. They talked a little different and all. They became outstanding examples. We . . . my family and all those born and raised there, they were part of the community and they were never . . . some towns, like Thomasville [Georgia], they ran the Jews out, even in late years. No Jewish person could be in the chamber of commerce, in the country club, or in anything like that.

**Ann:** Any of the civic associations.

**Bertram:** Civic associations. Bainbridge was the opposite. Jews founded the country club and they founded the Rotary. They founded the Lion’s Club. They were leaders in all of them. We did not have any . . . we had a very good relationship.

**Ann:** O’Neal . . . you say who was the Wizard. That sounds to me as if it were a Catholic-type name, does it not?

**Bertram:** They were not Catholics.

**Ann:** That certainly sounds like it may have been.

**Bertram:** I don’t know where . . . I never knew his background.

**Ann:** That’s very interesting though.

**Bertram:** No, that family was not prejudiced. Like Sarah was with his granddaughter just this summer. They went down to the beach. They’re still close and correspond frequently.

**Ann:** What kinds of associations did you have with the non-Jewish community? Was it just totally . . .

**Bertram:** . . . just associated with anyone.

**Ann:** Was your social life as much with them as with the Jewish?

**Bertram:** Social life? We had our Jewish affairs. We had our Jewish friends. We had a few Jewish friends. In later years, we had what we called the Temple Beth-El . . .

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38 “Shyster” is a slang word for someone who acts in a disreputable, unethical, or unscrupulous way, especially in the practice of law, politics or business. The etymology of the word is not generally agreed upon. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary says it is based on the German Scheißer (used to refer to deceivers).

39 A chamber of commerce is a local association to promote and protect the interests of the business community in a particular town or state.

40 Rotary and Lions Club are service clubs. The members meet regularly to perform charitable works either by direct hands-on efforts or by raising money for other organizations.
Ann: This is Ann Hoffman Schoenberg interviewing Bertram Adolph Ehrlich in his home on September 23, 1998 at the Atrium in Atlanta, Georgia. This is the first tape, the second side. We were right in the middle of talking about the Jewish group of friends, nine couples, who were known as the ‘Booze Club.’ Is that what you said?

Bertram: ‘Beth-El Youth Group and Booze Club’ was our name. You had to be 65 or older to be a member. We met socially. They’re all gone. There’s one man left yet. He remarried. As younger children, we had our poolroom parties and things like that. Otherwise, the social group . . . I was a member of the Lions Club. Most of the men were either Lions or Rotarian or Kiwanis—all civic affairs. We were all part of social affairs, dances, country clubs, and things like that. There’s no difference.

Ann: Who were your closest friends? Your wife and your closest friends?

Bertram: In Bainbridge, our closest friends were Joe and Rose Grollman . . . G-R-O-L-M-A-N. His son is here. He’s a dentist . . . they were our two closest friends; and the Kres family. They have both died now. Then we had . . . as far as . . . the whole group stuck together.

Ann: Yes, that whole nine couples.

Bertram: That nine of us stuck together. We were not bosom friends, but . . . of course, of the Christians, we had our friends, too.

Ann: I was going to ask you, among the non-Jewish friends?

Bertram: We had many non-Jewish friends. There’s only one or two now that were in my group that are living.

Ann: Are they on the Internet too?

Bertram: No. None of those that are of that original group are . . . there are none of them left. There’s only about two or three of them left.

Ann: What was your relationship with Marvin Griffin’s family?

Bertram: I have known Marvin all his life.

Ann: Marvin, by the way, we should say for the purposes of the tape was Governor of Georgia at one time.

Bertram: Yes. Marvin was three years older than I am. We had known each other. When he
married, he married a girl named [unintelligible: 2:50]. Our first apartment, where Sarah was born, there were three apartments in the building. He, his wife, and a son were in the next one. We were right next door. His son, who is now the one I mentioned . . .

Ann: . . . Sam?

Bertram: . . . Sam, the editor of the paper, he loved to spend his time over there because he liked my mother-in-law’s cooking. He spent a lot of time with us. We became close friends. Then Marvin was Governor [of Georgia]. He invited Bernice to the Governor’s Mansion, and things like that. He spent a lot of time just holding . . . I might bring out something. Marvin politically was a racist. He thought the blacks would never integrate. Marvin was not an integrationist. He was not a racist. That was a political ploy. He sat in my . . . I wish I had the tape, I’ve lost it. He sat in my kitchen one night at the table. He could tell the damnedest stories. He could tell a really good spiel. He was getting ready to run . . . he was going to run for Lieutenant Governor. He said, “Bertie, I’m going to leave this race business alone. The blacks are going to vote. I’m going to just leave it alone. I’m not going to mention it.” Two days later, he opened this campaign for Lieutenant Governor and he jumped on the blacks. I came . . . and said, “What the hell is going on? You told me you were going to let it alone.” He said, “I checked with my friends. There ain’t enough of them—so I’ve got to do this if I want to get elected.” He was elected. He served as Governor. He got a lot of flak for it. After he got out of the race . . . he retired . . . was defeated actually for the second term . . . he spent a lot of his time on race relations.

Ann: Interesting.

Bertram: He conducted meetings with the blacks, trying to straighten things out.

Ann: His reputation, if you read Georgia history . . .

Bertram: . . . he was a segregationist! He was not. He was a close friend of [George] Wallace. In fact, he was . . .

Ann: . . . he was very obstructionist to integrating schools.

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41 Marvin Griffin had two wives: Mary Elizabeth ‘Lib’ Smith and Laura Jane Gibson ‘Lollie.’ He had two children (Patrician and Samuel Marvin Griffin, Jr.) by Mary, so that is probably the woman to which Bert is referring.
42 Yiddish: ‘Extravagant talk or speech.’
43 George Corley Wallace, Jr. (1919-1998) was an American politician and the 45th Governor of Alabama, having served two nonconsecutive terms and two consecutive terms as a Democrat: 1963-1967, 1971-1979 and 1983-1987. He made unsuccessful runs for the presidency in 1964 and 1968. He is remembered for his segregationist attitudes during the mid-20th century period of the civil rights movement. A 1972 assassination attempt left Wallace paralyzed, and he used a wheelchair for the remainder of his life.
Bertram: Yes. In fact, he . . . when Wallace first ran for president, the first time, Marvin was on the ticket as vice-president. That first one never materialized [unintelligible: 5:20] . . . Another thing you might mention about integration in Bainbridge were the blacks. We were lucky to have . . . we had very high quality, some well-educated black people who kept things quiet. They would not let the rabble-rousers\textsuperscript{44} come down there. We had, in politics, my Uncle Julian among them. We had several other men there. There were two or three influential black men. They would keep the rabble-rousers out. We didn’t have . . . Albany and this fighting and all that.

In fact, they had one or two from [unintelligible: 6:18]. One time, this rabble-rouser came in, and the blacks came to the mayor and said, “We don’t want him here. What can we do?” He said, “We’ll arrest him.” They arrested him and put him in jail. He said, “That’s what I want. I’ll call the Atlanta [news]papers. When they get here and find out you arrested me.” He said, “You don’t understand, you’re not talking to anybody. They’re not arresting you for this. We’re arresting you because you look just like this man that robbed the grocery store. We have suspicion of robbery. You’ll just have to stay in jail until the next bench [unintelligible: 7:00] convenes next September. However, if you’d like to leave town, our sheriff’s car will take you to the county line.” He got out of town. That kept things smooth. For the integrated school, they just drew a line right down this street. All on this side go to one school and all on the other side, and there will be no changes. They had some of them fuss, “I want my child with my friend across the street.” They said, “No.” They integrated in one year without any problem. We’re deviating from family history.

Ann: That’s perfectly fine, because this is part of your history as well. I think it is very important that this kind of material be included. It’s showing the kind of milieu in which you were living, the kind of attitudes that prevailed. I think it interesting that in a small, very Southern Georgia community, you had in many ways better race relations . . .

Bertram: . . . we did . . .

Ann: . . . than perhaps many Northern communities had.

Bertram: We did. The reason Bainbridge was so much better than the others was the fact that the families had come in so early. They were born and raised there. The Jewish families . . . my

\textsuperscript{44} A person who makes a group of people angry, excited, or violent (such as by giving speeches) especially in order to achieve a political or social goal.
parents and my grandparents . . . my parents were born and raised in Bainbridge. They were part of the town. They didn’t come in as carpetbaggers\footnote{In United States history, a carpetbagger was a Northerner who moved to the South after the American Civil War, especially during the Reconstruction era (1865-1877), in order to profit from the instability and power vacuum that existed at that time. The term ‘carpetbagger’ was a pejorative term referring to the carpet bags (a form of luggage at the time) which many of the newcomers carried. The term came to be associated with opportunism and exploitation by outsiders.} or . . . outsiders.

\textbf{Ann:} . . . outsiders . . . they were definitely a part of the community, right?

\textbf{Bertram:} They were part of the town.

\textbf{Ann:} What I was referring to was not only that, but the fact that in that timeframe of the 1950’s and 1960’s so many other communities—particularly even Northern communities—were undergoing all this tumult that the . . .

\textbf{Bertram:} . . . some of the neighborhoods in Albany, Georgia, haven’t integrated yet. They’re still fighting.

\textbf{Ann:} That’s because of an element . . .

\textbf{Bertram:} . . . the town is going to pot.\footnote{An American expression meaning ‘to deteriorate’ or ‘to decline.’}

\textbf{Ann:} Albany is really the closest larger town to you all?

\textbf{Bertram:} In Georgia. Albany was the ‘metropolitan’ of the South. They even had a six-story building in Albany. We went to Albany for our dental work, our clothes, for temple. After all of this, Bainbridge pulled away. There was nothing left in Albany. We were closer actually to Tallahassee, Florida. Tallahassee is such a cosmopolitan [city]. Albany had not grown. Tallahassee has become really a big city now with three major universities . . .

\textbf{Ann:} . . . and the capital . . .

\textbf{Bertram:} . . . and the capital . . .

\textbf{Ann:} . . . of the State of Florida.

\textbf{Bertram:} The state, naturally, is very cosmopolitan. They have everything, religious or social or entertainment anything, but they were things we could enjoy—we did for many years—full concert series and things.

\textbf{Ann:} Tell me about moving around in that part of the State of Georgia in the early days. There probably weren’t good road networks?

\textbf{Bertram:} There were no good road networks at all. In fact, in the book I tell about a friend of
mine—a fellow I knew—that claimed he drove all the way to Albany, 60 miles, and he drove to Albany another three miles and had a single flat tire. Bainbridge to Atlanta was 250 miles. We had no pavement except downtown Albany and downtown Macon. From Griffin [Georgia] to Atlanta was paved. We usually made a two-day trip . . . go to Macon to spend the night, come to Atlanta, spend two or three nights, and go back spend the night in Macon. Later, most of the travel was by train. We had a train that went from Tallahassee to Atlanta every day. Came through Bainbridge. You could get a Pullman at night and go to sleep. It would switch to other trains, to other different lines and hooked onto a train from Florida. You wake up in the morning and you were in Atlanta. At night, you leave Atlanta and go to sleep; you wake up the next morning . . .

Ann: . . . in Bainbridge?

Bertram: . . . in Bainbridge.

Ann: What was the fare? Do you remember?

Bertram: Yes, very much. The fare was about for a round trip I think . . . you’re testing my memory. The railroad fare was about $6. It was $3 more if you wanted the Pullman . . . a berth.

Ann: You got . . .

Bertram: It was $3 for a lower and $2 for the upper, if you rode in the Pullman. If you rode in the coach, you had to get up during the night and change trains. If you rode in the Pullman . . .

Ann: . . . they switched . . .

Bertram: . . . they took you on through. All our travel was by train. I’m a train buff. We had trains . . . that was the north/south line into Atlanta. We rode the east/west line between Montgomery [Alabama] and Savannah, or Montgomery and Jacksonville [Florida]. We had six to eight trains through there every day: Chicago [Illinois] to Miami [Florida], local trains . . . When we went to Savannah or to Montgomery, we always took the train.

Ann: You mentioned at one point that during World War II there were sufficient numbers of Jewish soldiers stationed near Bainbridge to warrant having High Holy Day services in town. What were the camps located near you or . . .

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47 This makes no sense but it is what he said. In his book he recounts the incident briefly, stating that: “I REMEMBER when everyone in Bainbridge was surprised to learn that Walter Brackin had driven his new Buick to Albany in under two hours without a single flat tire and that he had witnesses to prove it.” Page 6.

48 In the United States, ‘Pullman’ was used to refer to railroad sleeping cars which operated on most United States railroads by the Pullman Company (founded by George Pullman) from 1867 to 1968.
Bertram: Seven miles away, it was an air force basic flying school. Actually, it was operated by Southern Airways. They were operating it for the Army.

Ann: For the Army Air Corps?

Bertram: For the Army Air Corps. It was strictly for the Air Force. We never knew how many Jewish boys . . . several hundred at a time. We formed our Jewish Welfare Board. Most of the times we’d have . . . quite often we’d conduct services in the chapel at the base. No rabbi, just one of our . . . we had . . .

Ann: . . . lay leadership?

Bertram: . . . we had laymen that could read a little Hebrew. The rest of us would read the English part. We’d put a little service on about once a month out there. We’d always order some deli from Savannah.

Ann: That’s why they came.

Bertram: Yes. That’s why they came. We had the Jewish Welfare Board and we had an organizer come down from the head office to tell us. We said, “What do these boys want?” He said, “There’s two things they want. First, they’ll want girls. Second of all, they’ll want food.” That was the second thing. We had services and Oneg Shabbats afterwards in which we served them. We put on the seder every year.

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49 Bainbridge Air Base was established in 1942 in Decatur County, seven miles north of Bainbridge. After the United States entered World War II, it was used by the Army Air Forces Flying Training Command, Southeast Training Center for flight training, both by military and contract civilian air instructors. After World War II it was closed and the land turned over to the city and the county. However, as a result of the Korean War, which began in 1950, it was reopened and Southern Airways took over the flight training instruction. The base was deactivated in 1961 and again turned over to civilian control. It is now Decatur County Industrial Air Park. (2015)

50 Southern Airways was a regional airline founded in 1949. They merged with another airline and became ‘Republic Airlines,’ which then was merged into Delta Air Lines in 2008. The corporate headquarters was at Hartsfield International Airport in Atlanta, Georgia.

51 The United States Army Air Corps (USAAC) was the military aviation arm of the United States between 1926 and 1941, and was the United States Army. In 1947 it renamed the United States Air Force and became its own entity.

52 The Jewish Welfare Board is an agency providing for the religious, educational, and morale needs of Jewish military personnel. The National Jewish Welfare Board (JWB) was formed on April 9, 1917, three days after the United States declared war on Germany, in order to support Jewish soldiers in the United States military. The organization was also charged with recruiting and training rabbis for military service, as well as providing support materials to these newly commissioned chaplains. The JWB also maintained oversight of Jewish chapel facilities at military installations. In 1921, several organizations merged with the JWB to become a national association of Jewish community centers around the country in order to integrate social activities, education, and recreation.

53 Literally ‘enjoyment of the Sabbath.’ Originally it referred to social and cultural activities on Saturday afternoon. In the United States it is known as ‘Oneg’ and refers to the social activity following a Friday night or Saturday morning service.

54 Hebrew for ‘order.’ The ritual family meal eaten at home on the first and second nights of Passover, accompanied by the retelling of the story of the Israelites’ exodus from Egypt.
Ann: How many people would you have at the seder?

Bertram: Couple hundred.

Ann: Where would you hold them?

Bertram: One of them we had catered at the hotel. I’ll never forget that. My mother and two of the ladies made the *matzah* balls.\(^{55}\) They worked hard to make that many *matzah* balls.

Ann: I bet. For 200 people.

Bertram: They took them to the kitchen and told them how to serve them with soup. They misunderstood. They deep fat fried them. In lard.\(^{56}\)

Ann: In lard?

Bertram: The boys were throwing them back and forth across the table. One seder was there. One seder we put on, we had an officer’s club at the base and we used that for one seder. I think we put on about . . . three or four years seders. Yes, we had seders.

Ann: Did you normally have community seders within the Jewish community of Bainbridge, other than during war years?

Bertram: No. We had our seders.

Ann: You did family.

Bertram: We did family seders. Sometimes two families would get together as we do here. No, most . . . some of us had seders. These were just family seders.

Ann: Did you always celebrate all of the holidays in your family?

Bertram: My mother—and my wife, Bernice—you didn’t know her, of course.

Ann: No.

Bertram: Yes, we were very observant. When there were services there, you were supposed to go.

Ann: You didn’t have a choice. Is that what you’re trying to say?

Bertram: That’s right.

Ann: If your mother said you were going.

Bertram: We were raised that way. There were so few people in that congregation, they all felt obligated . . . they had to attend. When we went to services, even when I was a child, if

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\(^{55}\) A dumpling made from *matzah* meal, an Ashkenazi custom. The balls are dropped into chicken soup or boiling water. They are popular during Passover.

\(^{56}\) Kosher foods cannot include pork products, including lard, which is rendered pig fat.
somebody wasn’t there, we called to see what was the matter.

Ann: Figured they had to be sick.

Bertram: Yes. Later on, my mother, as long as she lived, and Bernice, of course, with her religion . . . We had all the basic services in our home, or went to Albany or Tallahassee or Dothan.

Ann: Tell me about your wife. You haven’t told me anything about your wife. What was her maiden name?

Bertram: Her name was Bernice Jacobs.

Ann: Where was she born and raised?

Bertram: She was born in Kentucky, but she was raised in Tennessee. Her parents were . . . her father was a tailor. He moved up to Middlesboro, Kentucky, where he was a tailor.

Ann: When did they settle in Kentucky?

Bertram: . . . Bernice was born in 1912. She was never there then. She had two more . . . they came . . . one son was born in Europe. They came in about 1910 or 1911, into Middlesboro. He bought . . . as the children got older he wanted to have some Jewish connections. So they moved to Knoxville [Tennessee], and he opened a tailor shop in Knoxville. He first joined an Orthodox congregation. He said he didn’t think that’s what his children wanted. He joined a Reform congregation and they were raised in it. I met her at a Hadassah dance.

Ann: In Knoxville?

Bertram: In Knoxville. These money raising things they were putting on. I was a young druggist working for a chain store. They looked me up. They were looking for boys, of course. They gave us a [dance] program. I had a dance with every girl.

Ann: You had a dance program.

Bertram: I had a dance program. As I danced with them, I had to [unintelligible: 18:20] . . .

Ann: . . . the ones that had possibilities?

Bertram: Yes. Two of them I gave an A plus. One was her. The other one never married. I called her the night before last and talked to her in Knoxville. The first time I’ve talked to her in

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57 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.
years. She’s still living there, an old maid.

**Ann:** Never married?

**Bertram:** Never married.

**Ann:** She’s probably pining away for you all these years.

**Bertram:** No, she’s not. No, that’s another story. She was of a Jewish father but a Christian mother. They wouldn’t let her go with Jewish boys, so she didn’t go with anybody. Jewish boys were not interested in her.

**Ann:** The Jewish boys were probably not encouraged to go with her since she . . .

**Bertram:** Back to Bernice. After the dance, we went to a restaurant there. About 10 or 15 of us met there. The date that I had that somebody had set me up with was about ten years older than me. I had no interest in her whatsoever. I happened to be sitting next to Bernice. Got to talking to her a little more, and I’ll never forget. She ordered . . . we all had steaks, but she ordered hers rare, real rare. So it was a combination . . . so that’s when I got to talking to her. Later, I began to date her. We dated for about two years.

**Ann:** What did she do? What was her background?

**Bertram:** She was a stenographer. She worked for lawyers as a stenographer for a law firm until after we married.

**Ann:** Who is your firstborn child?

**Bertram:** Irvin was the firstborn. He was born in Knoxville.

**Ann:** He was born up there?

**Bertram:** He was born in Knoxville.

**Ann:** I didn’t realize you . . .

**Bertram:** . . . he was over three months old and then we moved to Bainbridge.

<End Tape 1, Side 2, 01>

<Begin Tape 1, Side 2, 02>

**Ann:** So you came back to work in your father’s pharmacy? You had been with . . . just getting . . .

**Bertram:** . . . chain stores.

**Ann:** . . . getting experience, is that why you . . .

**Bertram:** Yes, but he didn’t need me. He had two druggists in the store, and he didn’t need me
down there. I didn’t want to come back to Bainbridge. I wanted to find . . .

Ann: . . . spread your wings . . .

Bertram: . . . I wanted to find some Jewish girls, too. I went to New Orleans, then I moved to Atlanta. When I got in a chain drugstore, they moved me to Chattanooga [Tennessee] and Knoxville, back to Chattanooga, and back to Knoxville. I was single. Every time I’d get a move, I got another $2 raise.

Ann: Then it was worthwhile.

Bertram: That was why I was moving. Until I met her and married her, and I didn’t want to move around anymore.

Ann: Then your father needed you?

Bertram: Father needed me and I decided to go down. I’d had enough of the chain drug stores.

Ann: Surprisingly enough, your pharmacy survived . . .

Bertram: . . . it’s still there . . .

Ann: . . . that it’s still viable in spite of the CVS’s of the world and the Eckerd’s.58

Bertram: [Unintelligible: 1:03] who bought me . . . [unintelligible: 1:05] friend of his family and raised him, too. He’s a nice kid. He has just got a little prescription business left; there’s not much else left. Downtown business is not . . . there’s no businesses downtown anymore. Everything is out . . .

Ann: It’s hard to compete with the . . .

Bertram: You can’t compete with . . .

Ann: . . . with those big chains.

Bertram: . . . with Eckerd’s, Winn Dixie,59 and [unintelligible: 1:30] Pharmacy and all these other stores.

Ann: That’s right. The groceries all carry all the drugs too now.

Bertram: That’s it, too.

Ann: Over-the-counter things.

Bertram: So he has . . . he gets mainly Medicaid . . . charity . . .60 He’s surviving, working

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58 Eckerd Corporation was an American drug store chain that operated approximately 2,800 stores in 23 states. In 2004, the company was broken up with many of its stores sold to CVS Corporation (now CVS Health-2015).

59 Winn-Dixie Stores, Inc. is an American supermarket chain that operates in the southeastern United States.

60 Medicaid is a social health care program for families and individuals with low income and limited resources.
seven days a week with no relief. He can’t afford to hire a relief pharmacist.  

**Ann:** What did you . . . you were open . . . surely not, you weren’t open on Sundays originally, were you?  

**Bertram:** Originally, no.  

**Ann:** Because they used to have blue laws.\(^{61}\)  

**Bertram:** They had blue laws. In fact, my father was sentenced to ten year’s hard labor on the chain gang for selling cigarettes on Sunday.  

**Ann:** When was that?  

**Bertram:** Way back before my day. Early 1910 or 1909.  

**Ann:** He obviously didn’t serve.  

**Bertram:** No, he obviously didn’t serve.  

**Ann:** Did he pay a fine?  

**Bertram:** No. Tobacco was only sold in drugstores. He and the other drugstore were both . . . his competitor, both were arrested. They were guilty. They sold cigarettes on Sunday. They weren’t open on Sunday, but people would come in and get prescriptions filled. While they were sitting there, if somebody wanted a pack of cigarettes, they sold them. They pled guilty. The judge sentenced them to chain gang. He said, “Now, I’m going to hold this sentence if you don’t ever come back to me again and you stop selling cigarettes on that day.” Until that judge died, Dad wouldn’t fill anything but prescriptions on Sunday.  

**Ann:** I bet.  

**Bertram:** In later years, we opened part day on Sunday. We never opened up during church hour, but we would go about 10:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m., and we’d close . . . I mean . . . church hours we were closed, and then open about 2:30 [p.m.] to about 6:00 [p.m.] for Sunday hours.  

**Ann:** Afternoon.  

**Bertram:** Those were our Sunday hours for many years. In later years, I started closing on Sunday altogether because you couldn’t get the help.  

**Ann:** Tell me about your own education, elementary school.  

**Bertram:** I graduated from high school in Bainbridge. They had 12 grades in that day. They

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\(^{61}\) Blue laws restrict shopping or ban the sale of certain items on specific days, most often on Sundays in the United States.
didn’t feel I was mature enough to go to college.

**Ann:** How old were you?

**Bertram:** I had just . . . hadn’t turned 16. I was just 15. I spent a year in a military school in Lebanon, Tennessee founded by Bernarr Macfadden,\(^{62}\) which I . . . most miserable year I ever spent in my life.

**Ann:** What’s the name of it?

**Bertram:** Castle Heights Military Academy.\(^{63}\)

**Ann:** Bernarr Macfadden.

**Bertram:** Bernarr Macfadden. You’ve heard maybe of the ‘Physical Culture’?

**Ann:** Yes.

**Bertram:** He ran that school. I don’t eat apples today. One of his things, he made you eat apples three times a day.

**Ann:** You had to have . . .

**Bertram:** . . . you served them three times a day.

**Ann:** Keep you cleansed inside. You don’t eat apples now?

**Bertram:** . . . I don’t like them but I eat them. He ran that school. It was a military school. I hated it.

**Ann:** How long did you stay?

**Bertram:** One year. As a post-graduate. I had military . . . I was a RAT [Recruits At Training]. I had to take the hazing off these kids younger than me. It was rough. We won’t go into that.

**Ann:** Did they give you a hard time as a Jew?

**Bertram:** No.

**Ann:** That they didn’t.

**Bertram:** One restriction there was that you had to attend services. There were no services in Lebanon, Tennessee. There was one other Jew, my cousin Bernard Nussbaum. [He] and I were allowed to go out to Nashville [Tennessee] to attend services. He had a cousin down in

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\(^{62}\) Bernarr Macfadden (1868-1955) was an influential American proponent of ‘Physical Culture,’ a combination of bodybuilding with nutritional and health theories. He was the predecessor of Charles Atlas and Jack Lalanne, and has been credited with beginning the culture of health and fitness in the United States.

\(^{63}\) The Castle Heights Military Academy was founded in 1902 and became a military preparatory school in 1918. It closed in 1986 in the face of declining enrollment. It is now the Lebanon City Hall, a museum and Sigma Pi fraternity’s headquarters and other small businesses.
Nashville, the Haber family, who welcomed us in their home. We wanted to get out of school as much as possible. We got a Jewish calendar. Everything that had a red mark on it, we decided was a Jewish holiday. We invented more Jewish holidays. About every three or four weeks we had a Jewish holiday that we had to go to Nashville for. We went to Temple once.

Ann: You celebrated the things that you wouldn’t dream of celebrating, right?
Bertram: We went to Temple once.
Ann: Once in all those . . .
Bertram: The Habers got us dates. They served us steak for breakfast and things like that. It was no problem for transportation. If you’re in military uniform, just step out on the street and the first car that comes, picks you up and takes you to the street car line.
Ann: Of course, you didn’t worry about hitchhiking because in those years nobody worried about it.
Bertram: No. Never. I went there for a year. Then I went to New Orleans [Louisiana] to Tulane University. There I graduated in pharmacy.
Ann: How many years did it take for pharmacy?
Bertram: Three years. My plan was to go pharmacy for three years and then go into medicine. I could have stayed one more year and finished my pre-med. The Depression came along, and my brother was behind me. I had to get out. I went to work in New Orleans.
Ann: Did he study pharmacy as well?
Ann: What’s his name.
Bertram: Sidney. He graduated from Tech as an engineer. This uncle that was an engineer . . .
Ann: Louis?
Bertram: . . . took him up North, put him through [University of] Michigan [Ann Arbor, Michigan] to get his Master’s in electrical engineering and was his mentor or guide. Sidney married, moved back to Atlanta, opened a business in electrical . . . no, not electrical but an advisory business. He would advise people . . .
Ann: . . . consulting . . .
Bertram: . . . consulting business. He married a girl who was brought over here from the
Holocaust.

Ann: What’s her name?

Bertram: [Elenore] Dickey Weile. They were brought over here . . . in fact, the family brought her over here . . . my grandparents. We didn’t know her at the time. They married.

Ann: Do they still live in Atlanta?

Bertram: He died. Sidney’s gone. Dickey . . . they were living in Marietta [Georgia]. After his death she moved to be with her son in Memphis [Tennessee]. She’s living in a retirement home in Memphis now.

Ann: There were just the two of you boys?

Bertram: Just the two of us. In fact, another interesting thing. The family that took her in in Holland after she was released from . . .

Ann: . . . the camps?

Bertram: . . . camps, she considers her foster grandparents because she didn’t [unintelligible: 8:30] . . . they’re living downstairs.

Ann: Here, in the Atrium?

Bertram: Yes.

Ann: What’s their name?

Bertram: Gorey [sp]. He’s living down here. They just had to move her into a nursing home.

Ann: That is amazing. What a small world.

Bertram: It is, I think. Things go around. Her son, Jerry [sp], is in Memphis. He’s in advertising business. He comes down here about every month or couple of months. He comes by to see me. He just sent me an update, a whole brand new web TV. [unintelligible: 9:05] The new one came out and he got a free one, so he sent me the new upgraded one. He’s still a good . . .

Ann: Yes, close relationship. That’s great. What was your experience in New Orleans at Tulane? Tell me what it was like. What year did you graduate?

Bertram: I graduated 1934.

Ann: What was it like? Actually, that was right in the middle of the Depression.

Bertram: It was. I had to get out. I lived . . . I was lucky, too. I lived with a Jewish family. Had a room in their home. They moved, and I moved with them. They had one son, older, who was a lawyer [unintelligible: 9:50]. He was very active in Jewish fraternities.
Ann: What’s the name of the family?
Bertram: Lindy... L-I-N-D-Y. He was very active... they were very active in Jewish life in New Orleans. They were members of the Temple [Sinai—New Orleans, Louisiana].\footnote{Temple Sinai was founded in 1870 by German Jews. It was a Reform congregation in New Orleans.} They insisted I went to Temple with them. They had every Jewish holiday, everything was served in [unreadable: 10:13] just like at home... He was also interested in fraternities. He was advisor of the SAM [Sigma Alpha Mu]\footnote{Sigma Alpha Mu (ΣΑΜ) is a college fraternity founded at the City College of New York in 1909. Originally a Jewish-only organization, the fraternity became open to men of all faiths in 1953.} Jewish fraternity. He was a graduate. One of his jobs was to... when young girls came in, these freshmen, he had them checked out. He’d get me a date with one freshman, he’d get a date with another freshman, and we’d double-date. Then I’d give him my criteria.
Ann: You’d critique it.
Bertram: Critique which ones. I met many Jewish girls that way and went to all the Jewish affairs at the Jewish sororities. Then a girl I met, though, was a Jewish girl... I met her... she’s a Jewish girl, I went with her. In fact, she was the first girl I was ever in love with. If I had been able to, I’d have married her. With no job or anything, I couldn’t.
Ann: What was her name?
Bertram: Doris Rosenbaum. After we married, Bernice got to know her. We corresponded. After Bernice died... she had married... we corresponded. I guess just four years ago I went down to see her and her husband. The only time I had been back to New Orleans, though, for many years. All of a sudden, she went... she sold real estate... all of a sudden she cracked up. I’m not sure. I don’t know her husband. She’s in a sanitarium.
Ann: She probably got Alzheimer’s.\footnote{The most common form of dementia. There is no cure for the disease, which worsens as it progresses and eventually leads to death. The early stages are difficulty remembering recent events after which comes confusion, mood swings, trouble with language and long-term memory loss. Gradually bodily functions are lost, ultimately leading to death.}
Bertram: I called up her husband last week and asked about her. She couldn’t talk. He said she doesn’t know anybody. That was my life in New Orleans.
Ann: Your first love.
Bertram: Yes, my first life in New Orleans... it was a Jewish life, because I went to Temple.
Ann: You don’t mean to tell me you never went down to the French Quarter.67

Bertram: That was the place to go. You had dates, you went down to the French Quarter. You could ride a streetcar down for a nickel. We walked down to the French Quarter to those little clubs. They had a 50-cent cover charge. The 50-cent cover charge would cover either an alcoholic drink or a sandwich. That was what you spent. That was all the money you spent. You’d take a ride on the ferry, one nickel to Algiers68 and back. Take her home on the streetcar.

Ann: You would have spent a grand total of 20 cents on the girl?


Ann: That’s right, 50 cents to get into the club.

Bertram: As a couple, 50 cents a couple . . . but sometimes a little over $1.

Ann: I guess in the depth of the Depression, though, that was a lot of money.

Bertram: In the Depression if you had a date and you walked over to the neighborhood movie theater.

Ann: What part of the city did you live in?

Bertram: Around Tulane, uptown. Between Tulane and Loyola [University]. When I graduated, I went to work for the Katz and Besthoff69 chain, and I worked in that area too.

Ann: Now, they’re still around, too, that Katz and Besthoff.

Bertram: No, they’re not.

Ann: They get bought out?

Bertram: They were until two months ago.

Ann: Who bought them out?

Bertram: Eckerd’s bought them out. This week—it hasn’t been announced yet—those Eckerd stores in South Alabama and Mississippi, CVS is going to buy them out next week. I talked to my son last night. He’ll be CVS now down there. He says they’re going to get all those Eckerd

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67 The French Quarter, also known as the ‘Vieux Carré,’ is the oldest neighborhood in New Orleans, Louisiana. The district as a whole has been designated as a National Historic Landmark. Many of the buildings date from before 1803, when New Orleans was acquired by the United States in the Louisiana Purchase. The most well-known of the French Quarter streets, Bourbon Street, or Rue Bourbon, is known for its notable bars and clubs with interesting histories.

68 Algiers is a community within the city of New Orleans, Louisiana located on the West Bank of the Mississippi River.

69 Katz and Besthoff was a drug store chain headquartered in New Orleans founded in 1905. It expanded to have stores in the Gulf Coast region until it was purchased by Rite Aid in 1997.
stores next week.

Ann: It’s just going to be one big huge company.

Bertram: Katz and Besthoff was around down there until this last year.

Ann: You know what’s going to happen? The whole world is going to be under the control of one great big huge . . .

Bertram: . . . two. It’s going to be CVS . . .

Ann: No, I’m talking about the whole world, not just druggists.

Bertram: Yes. Two big corporations are going to run everything.

Ann: It’s scary, isn’t it?

Bertram: It is scary. It’s so different. The local little man hasn’t got a chance now.

Ann: Do you not think . . . for instance, you talked about your grandparents, several of them involved in banking. Today, small banks in small towns probably don’t have a whole lot of chance to survive, do they?

Bertram: They didn’t stay small banks. They just kept merging. The account I’ve got down there now . . .

Ann: . . . is it a NationsBank or something . . .

Bertram: . . . is just a savings, couple of CD’s, things of that kind. I got a new statement from them this week. It’s been changed . . . combined with another bank and the name has changed. The name has changed twice since I’ve been up here.

Ann: You’ve only been here a year and a half.

Bertram: Year and a half. The name has changed twice. They just keep combining. The little banks are combining. That’s how they are surviving. From the looks of the stockholders, they’re doing damn good, too.

Ann: I think that there will come a time, if it hasn’t already come, when people are so fed up with these great big corporate entities that they are going to look for . . .

Bertram: They’re getting that way. If I had . . .

Ann: . . . someone to give . . .

Bertram: . . . any choice. Our banking is with NationsBank because they’ve got an office right here in the Atrium. It’s the only place I can think of banking. The service I get out of that compared to what I got in a local bank, there’s no comparison.
Ann: If you had your druthers, you’d . . .
Bertram: We’d be getting away from our family history.
Ann: Let me look over my notes and see if there was something . . . there was something else I was going to ask you about. Your mother, Rosalie, was obviously the pillar of the Jewish community.

Bertram: Correct. She had a reputation. Her name was the ‘Boss of the Jews,’ and she lived by that. She went by that name, the ‘Boss of the Jews.’ Everybody called her ‘Boss.’ She formed the congregation, so to speak. She was instrumental in it. She taught Sunday school until she confirmed70 Irvin.

Ann: How old was she at that point?
Bertram: Eighty-something.
Ann: She finally retired.

Bertram: She ran the Sunday school until his confirmation, when she had her entire Sunday school. What happened was, many years ago, one of the cousins . . . she punished him . . . he told his mama he hadn’t been well, and that my mama [had] made him stand in the corner. The daddy came over and said, “What you doing to him, standing in the corner?” He said, “It’s Cousin Rosalie’s fault, she thinks she’s the ‘Boss of the Jews.’”

Ann: That’s how it got started.

Bertram: That stuck. At her funeral service, it was even mentioned. She had that title and she was . . . she really ran the congregation and was instrumental in everything.

Ann: She obviously was a woman ahead of her time, I would assume. You said she had gone to DeSalle University71 in Macon [Georgia]?

Bertram: Yes.

Ann: I guess with that opportunity, she could . . .

Bertram: There weren’t many women at that time that had any college education.

Ann: I was going to say, given the years you’re talking about. Had she been born a little

70 Confirmation is a coming of age ritual that originated in the Reform movement which scorned the idea that at 13 years of age a child was an adult. They replaced bar and bat mitzvah with a confirmation ceremony at about age 16 to 18. In some Conservative synagogues the confirmation concept has been adopted as a way to continue and child’s Jewish education and involvement for a few more years.

71 A private Catholic school run by the Sisters of Mercy which provides a Christ-centered school environment. It was founded in 1876.
later . . .

**Bertram:** Most of the Jewish women that I knew did not have a college education. They married and worked in the dry good store with their husband.

**Ann:** That’s what I was going to ask you. You mentioned very briefly, just kind of glossed over the fact that there were other Jewish families in Bainbridge who were more Orthodox or Conservative.\(^{72}\)

**Bertram:** At first, some of them didn’t want to join the Temple, but some of them began to come around and come to services occasionally. Nearly 100 percent of them . . .

**Ann:** . . . ended up . . .

**Bertram:** . . . some became active. One family really became fairly active in the Temple.

**Ann:** They never founded another congregation?

**Bertram:** Never tried. There weren’t enough. There were so few. They were perfectly satisfied. They came and they became more assimilated, too.

**Ann:** I ask because I know Macon—being a larger community—did have both Reform and Conservative.

**Bertram:** Yes. Many towns . . . Albany [Georgia], Tallahassee . . . Dothan never had one. They were too small. They couldn’t have another congregation. Everybody had to come pretty much to . . . Fitzgerald was a little town . . . they had an Orthodox congregation. It’s one man’s congregation. He pays for the student rabbi to come down every two weeks. It’s still an Orthodox congregation, but there’s one man paying for it all. You know who it is. No secrets.

**Ann:** That’s all that is left of that congregation pretty much, down in Fitzgerald?

**Bertram:** I don’t know how much is left. They still hold services. I’ve never been, so I don’t know.

<interview stops, then resumes>

**Ann:** I was going to ask you about Emma Ree [Baker].

**Bertram:** You asked about Emma Ree. I’ll go back a little further than that.

**Bertram:** We, like everybody else, had blacks for cooks and servants. My grandparents had

\(^{72}\) A form of Judaism that seeks to preserve Jewish tradition and ritual but has a more flexible approach to the interpretation of the law than Orthodox Judaism. It attempts to combine a positive attitude toward modern culture, while preserving a commitment to Jewish observance. They also observe gender equality (mixed seating, women rabbis and *bat mitzvahs*).
always at least three. They had a big house. You saw the picture.

**Ann:** They had a lot of children, too.

**Bertram:** Yes, they had a lot of children. Grandma didn’t have to do any work. They had three servants. My mother, she had a cook. She finally hired Emma Ree, whose mother was born on my grandfather’s plantation. She had never worked for a Jewish family. She went to Jacksonville to some Jewish families. Her husband had been the chauffeur and butler for these families. She knew Jewish cooking. She was a wonderful person. She worked for my mother. When my mother gave up her house, we took Emma Ree. We took my mother with her at first and then my mother moved out.

**Ann:** Which one did you really prefer? Did you really want your mother or did you want her good friend Emma Ree?

**Bertram:** We took Emma Ree first because mother first moved into her apartment. When she was no longer able to drive we took her car away from her. We moved her in with us. Emma Ree stayed with us until her death. She never paid Social Security. I had to go ahead and pay that, put in a few cents a week for her. When she got down, welfare took care of her, but I pensioned her. She got her salary until the day she died. Big salary . . . I think it was about $18 or $19 a week. [Unintelligible: 21:40] She was very . . . Sarah particularly was very devoted to her. In fact, Sarah often when she goes to Bainbridge, she goes down to the colored cemetery and sees Mr. Blowell [sp].

**Ann:** Emma Ree’s grand . . .?

**Bertram:** Emma Ree was a cook. Nobody could make a caramel pie or cake like Emma Ree’s caramel cake. We wanted . . . Passover is next week, and we’re going to have a *seder*. She made the *matzah* balls. She did it all.

**Ann:** She didn’t deep fry them in lard?

**Bertram:** No, no. She fixed . . . she took care of everything.

**Ann:** Did she ever have a family? You said she was married.

**Bertram:** We never met her husband. She moved to Bainbridge after her husband. She had some cousins down there, but we never had any connection with the family.

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73 In the United States, Social Security is a federal program funded through payroll taxes that provides income to retired and disabled citizens.
Ann: Because you said she had lived with you, I assumed that . . .
Bertram: One of my cousins, she would babysit some and all, things like that. She was a very unusual person . . . I’d say . . . in particular, the boys and Sarah were very fond of Emma Ree.
Ann: I gather that Allan Hytowitz’s mother also had a relationship with Emma Ree.
Bertram: Allan Hytowitz never met Emma Ree.
Ann: I have something about that his mother kept kosher? Allan’s mother?
Bertram: Allan’s grandmother kept strictly kosher. Allan’s mother kept kosher, too. They only came to Bainbridge just for the wedding. They thought they were in the middle of the woods. In fact, his grandmother wouldn’t eat. She was so kosher she wouldn’t come to anything we had. She cooked in a Holiday Inn bedroom. We bought her a few pans and paper plates. She cooked her own meals. She wouldn’t come to our house. Allan’s girls never came to Bainbridge. They live in Portland, Oregon. In fact, his mother just two weeks ago sold her house and moved into a Jewish retirement home in Portland.
Ann: Is there anything else that you can think of that you would like to add to some of the stories or something?
Bertram: I think I about covered it. These tales, I could keep on talking forever.
Ann: That’s fine. Go ahead. If you think there’s something interesting, go ahead.
Bertram: I have written them all down. I can take this book and look at the index and tell you hundreds of them.
Ann: One hundred stories? Tell me a little something about when families intermarried. Obviously, this was of major concern. Your uncles—who were interested and obviously must have had some sort of relationship with non-Jewish women—then eventually married them later in life once their parents were gone. Did they continue to live at home? Did they have their own apartments or houses?
Bertram: They didn’t live at home. By the time they married, they . . .
Ann: No, I meant before they actually married. Did they remain at home as bachelors with their parents?
Bertram: Yes, they remained . . .
Ann: . . . in the big house?
Bertram: They remained home in the big house until they married. In fact, some of them were
so far late in life, the big house was already burned down by then.

Ann: It’s gone? That house is gone now?

Bertram: Burned to the ground.

Ann: What a shame.

Bertram: Not the earliest one, the Kwilecki home burned. The earliest one was . . .

Ann: That’s still surviving?

Bertram: That’s still surviving. That’s Elmer . . . That one is actually still standing.

Ann: Who is living in that home today?

Bertram: It’s been sold and resold many times.

Ann: It’s nobody related.

Bertram: It’s for sale right now.

Ann: It’s not related to the family?

Bertram: No. No relation.

Ann: What I wondered about was, was that a common reaction, that men just didn’t marry rather than go find some Jewish wife that they really didn’t care for.

Bertram: I guess it depends on the family. The Kwileckis . . . the earliest family . . . were very ardent. They were bold. They were very ardent in Judaism . . . that was one factor they could not understand. The ones that married out of the faith did not marry until late in life.

Ann: Was that true of some of the other families in town, or in the nearby communities that you knew of?

Bertram: I’m trying to think. I really can’t say.

<End Tape 1, Side 2, 02>
<Begin Tape 2, Side 1>

Ann: This is the second tape, the first side, of an interview by Ann Hoffman Schoenberg of Bertram Adolph Ehrlich . . .

Bertram: ‘Daddy Bert.’ I use the name in Atlanta.

Ann: Named ‘Bert.’

Bertram: ‘Daddy Bert’ to the family.

Ann: ‘Daddy Bert,’ that’s his nickname with his family. It is being done for the Jewish Oral History Project of Atlanta, co-sponsored by the American Jewish Committee, the Atlanta Jewish
Federation, and the National Council of Jewish Women. We have been talking today on September 23, 1998 here in his home at the Atrium in Atlanta. We had primarily concentrated on a discussion of Jewish life in Bainbridge, Georgia, primarily the life and lifestyle of his own personal family, his mother’s family, the Kwileckis, and his father’s family, the Ehrlichs, all of whom were born and raised there in the community. There are . . . what did you tell me . . . six generations or five generations now that are in the cemetery there. Is that correct? Four or five, I guess.

**Bertram:** One story might be good because I mentioned the Temple. We were served by Rabbi Edmund Landau from Albany. We also mentioned about transportation. It became a problem. The roads were not paved. Rabbi Landau never owned a car in his life. He walked two blocks to a railroad track on Saturday afternoon after he had *Shabbat* service in Albany. He walked to the railroad track, flagged down the train . . . they knew him. He’d ride the caboose to Arlington, Georgia. There he could catch a passenger train to Bainbridge. He always stayed at our house. As I said, we were distant cousins, very close to his sons.

**Ann:** Besides, your mother was the ‘Boss of the Jews.’

**Bertram:** ‘Boss of the Jews.’ He always stayed at our house. He’d have services Sunday morning. Usually somebody would . . . we had one man who’d like to go to Albany for dinner so he would take him back.

**Ann:** He’d drive him back.

**Bertram:** Drive him back, or else send his chauffeur to take him back. If he didn’t have a ride, he’d have to take a train to Thomasville over about six hours. That’s how hard he had to come.

**Ann:** What did you pay him?

**Bertram:** Best of my knowledge, I think he got $100 a month.

**Ann:** A month. He came twice a month.

**Bertram:** Came twice a month. We paid him . . . we paid our rabbis. Now this is a little different, too. One reason our congregation has been successful, we hired our rabbis as our rabbi. We didn’t hire them by the week or by the service. These other towns paid a rabbi to come for a

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*74 Shabbat [Hebrew] or Shabbos [Yiddish] is the Jewish day of rest and is observed on Saturdays. Shabbat observance entails refraining from work activities, often with great rigor, and engaging in restful activities to honor the day. Shabbat begins at sundown on Friday night and is ushered in by lighting candles and reciting a blessing. It is closed the following evening with the recitation of the havdalah blessing.*

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service, and they paid him for that service. We affiliated with other congregations, and—with their full knowledge—we supplemented them, but we paid it to the rabbi. They were limping . . . to help their rabbi out. We paid . . . as our rabbi, we paid him 12 months a year whether he came or not. We still do. That made him our rabbi. He was available then for any service.

Ann: For funerals and things of that sort?

Bertram: Funerals or bar mitzvahs later or weddings.

Ann: When did you start doing bar mitzvahs?

Bertram: We had . . . after Landau’s death, some of these other rabbis came down. They had one or two. Only had about one or two of them. There wasn’t real bar mitzvahs. There was a family who wanted a bar mitzvah of their sons. They didn’t have any Jewish training. One of them studied a little Hebrew and could say the Sh’ma. The grandfather read the Torah more likely. They called it a bar mitzvah, but it was a party. We never had but one real bat mitzvah in Bainbridge. That was four years ago, Rosalyn Palmer.

Ann: But your sons weren’t . . .

Bertram: She studied. Her daughter . . . we had one of the members down there that was a sabra. She taught her . . . she put her through her Torah.

Ann: But your own sons were not bar mitzvahed?

Bertram: No.

Ann: Your own sons?

Bertram: No. Melvin wasn’t. Irvin was not bar mitzvahed in Bainbridge. He was at the University of Georgia, got his through Hillel. He decided he wanted to be bar mitzvahed if he was going to be in the rabbinate.

Ann: That’s why I asked.

Bertram: He decided if he was going to be in the rabbinate, he needed to be bar mitzvahed. He

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75 Hebrew for ‘teaching. ‘Torah’ is a general term that covers all Jewish law including the vast mass of teachings recorded in the Talmud and other rabbinical works. ‘Sefer Torah’ refers to the sacred scroll on which the first five books of the Bible (the Pentateuch) are written.

76 Hebrew for ‘daughter of commandment.’ 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.

77 The Foundation for Jewish Campus Life (known as Hillel International or Hillel) is a Jewish campus organization. Its mission is to enrich the lives of Jewish students so they may enrich Jewish people and the world.
did training by Rabbi Frank A. Fischer, who was a Hillel rabbi in Athens in the university. He was trained, and he was set up to be *bar mitzvahed*. We all went, my family, in-laws and all of them to Athens for the *bar mitzvah*. On the afternoon of the *bar mitzvah*, there was a terrible tragedy. [President John F.] Kennedy was assassinated that day. [Unintelligible: 5:45] . . . everything at the university was cancelled. The ladies at the little temple there had planned a little *Oneg Shabbat*. They figured about 25 or 30 people would show up. Several hundred students showed up, not even knowing it was a *bar mitzvah*. He had a big crowd for his *bar mitzvah*.

I might go back to his background a little bit, too. It might be interesting. He went to the University of Florida [Gainesville, Florida], studied chemical engineering which he was not fitted for. He got very active in the Jewish fraternity. In fact, he spent more time with the Jewish fraternity than doing his classes. We were called down there . . . notified that he was failing. We went down and the faculty advisor told us that he was not college material. He said he would never graduate from a major college. [He said,] “I would advise you take him home and put him to plowing.” I wish I had kept the man’s name. I would have liked to invite him when he got his doctorate. Anyway, he had to drop out. To salvage the rest of the year, a Jewish advisor—one of his fraternity advisors—put him on some quick courses of religion just to get him a mark. Then he came home and went one year to Georgia Southwestern, that was then a junior college in Americus [Georgia]. That’s where the kid got his feet on the ground. Then he went to [University of Georgia], got his degree from Georgia, and went to HUC.

Ann: He was a late bloomer.

Bertram: Yes.

Ann: Now he has a doctorate?

Bertram: It was honorary—HUC. At 20 years they give you an honorary doctorate. That’s customary. Twenty-five years in HUC gives him his honorary doctorate.

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78 Rabbi Frank A. Fischer was born in Germany and grew up in New York. Rabbi Fischer earned his MA in Hebrew Literature, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion [New York, New York] in 1962. He served Jewish college students on a number of campuses under the Hillel Foundations for the majority of his career beginning at the University of Georgia [Athens, Georgia] where he worked from 1962 through the summer of 1966 during the civil rights movement. He also served as rabbi of Children of Israel in Athens and worked with members of that congregation to help integrate the public schools of Athens. From there he went to New York, and later North Carolina. In 1993 he became a faculty member of the Osher Life Long Learning Institute at Duke University [Durham, North Carolina] where he taught courses in Judaica. He is retired.

79 John Fitzgerald Kennedy, commonly known as ‘JFK’, was the 35th President of the United States, serving from 1961 until November 22, 1963 when he was assassinated in Dallas, Texas.
Ann: That’s okay. I’d take it.
Bertram: He thought so, too. He was invited. He has a wonderful congregation there. He’s got about 250 people there [and a] big Sunday School.
Ann: Doesn’t sound like he’s about to leave Colorado Springs.
Bertram: No, he loves Colorado Springs. He just moved into his new home there. He built a new home to be nearer the temple. They don’t have a temple, they have services in a church.
Ann: Gradually.
Bertram: Yes.
Ann: They too will . . . if there’s . . .
Bertram: . . . they’re already talking about building.
Ann: They ought to hit up some of the rich Jews like the people in Bainbridge did.
Bertram: They’re already talking about it. I don’t think the congregation he’s got . . . they’ve got some money in his congregation, too.
Ann: Any other stories you want to tell?
Bertram: Let’s see.
Ann: Any of the special geschichten? 80
Bertram: It’s hard to say.
Ann: We’ve been doing this for a while now. I will tell you what. Why don’t you save them, and I will review these tapes. If I think there are holes that I discover, then I reserve the right to come back another day.
Bertram: That’s all right. Let’s do that.
Ann: Before I turn it off, I want to thank you for the time that we’ve spent together.
Bertram: I thank you for your time. It’s been a very pleasant morning.
Ann: Thank you.

<End Tape 2, Side 1>

Interview Ends

80 German for ‘event,’ ‘struggle,’ ‘story,’ or ‘history.’

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