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ESTHER AND HERBERT TAYLOR  
JEWISH ORAL HISTORY PROJECT OF ATLANTA  
AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE**

**MEMOIRIST:** RABBI S. ROBERT ICHAY  
**INTERVIEWER:** JOEL AROGETI  
**LOCATION:** ATLANTA, GEORGIA  
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<Begin Tape 1, Side 1>

**INTERVIEW BEGINS**

**AROGETI:** Good morning. This is the first of September 1995. This is Joel Arogeti. I am here with S. Robert Ichay, rabbi of Congregation Or VeShalom<sup>1</sup> here at 1681 North Druid Hills Road in Atlanta, Georgia. We're here as part of the Oral History Project of Atlanta sponsored by the American Jewish Committee, the Atlanta Jewish Federation, and the National Council of Jewish Women. We're talking with Rabbi Ichay. Rabbi, how are you feeling this morning?

**ICHAY:** I feel fine. Better than I felt the past month.

**AROGETI:** Good. We're glad to hear that. As we discussed before, this is the project by the Atlanta Jewish Federation and National Council of Jewish Women, American Jewish Committee, to record the oral history of prominent Atlantans. I'd like to start off with some background about you, if we could. Tell me for a few minutes where you were born and when.

**ICHAY:** I was born in Sousse, Tunisia, in North Africa, on the 26th of February, 1929, I believe, was the year in which the market crashed.<sup>2</sup>

**AROGETI:** The stock market crashed.

**ICHAY:** Stock market crashed.

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<sup>1</sup> Or VeShalom was established by refugees of the Ottoman Empire, namely from Turkey and the Isle of Rhodes. The Sephardic/Traditional congregation began in 1920 and was based at Central and Woodward Avenues until 1948 when it moved to a larger building on North Highland Road. The current building for Or VeShalom is on North Druid Hills Road.

<sup>2</sup> The Stock Market Crash of 1929, also known as the 'Wall Street Crash of 1929,' 'Black Tuesday,' or the 'Great Crash,' began on October 24, 1929, and was the most devastating stock market crash in the history of the United States, when taking into consideration the full extent and duration of its fallout. The crash signaled the beginning of the Great Depression that affected all Western industrialized countries. Ultimately, it was not just one crash but several. The falling stock prices bottomed out on November 13, 1929. It would recover a little, then crash again over the following decade. It wasn't until 1954 that the stock market reached the same level as it had been on October 24, 1929.

**AROGETI:** And the names of your parents?

**ICHAY:** My parents. My father was Simon. Simon Ichay. My mother Louise. Her maiden name was Bessis. B-E-S-S-I-S.

**AROGETI:** Where were your parents born?

**ICHAY:** They were born in Tunisia, both of them. My family places its origin back centuries in Tunisia. My mother was born in a town called Kairouan, which is a famous town and well-known city. Small city but well known because of the famous mosques, which start in Kairouan. It's inland, whereas my hometown is on the sea on the Mediterranean in the center of the coastal part of Tunisia. My mother was born about 40 kilometers inland. My father was born in a small village which is about 20 miles from my hometown by the name of Moknine.

**AROGETI:** Tell us a little bit about your siblings.

**ICHAY:** I have a brother and two sisters. I am the oldest of the family. My sister, the older one, is a year and nine months, almost two years younger than me. My brother is about five years younger than I am. My little, my youngest sister, was born a month after my *bar mitzvah*.<sup>3</sup>

**AROGETI:** Your oldest sister, her name?

**ICHAY:** Yvonn. Y-V-O-N-N.

**AROGETI:** And your brother?

**ICHAY:** Albert. And Colette.

**AROGETI:** Colette is your youngest sister?

**ICHAY:** She's the youngest, yes.

**AROGETI:** Your father, what was his occupation?

**ICHAY:** My father dealt in, he was a jeweler in silver and gold. He was not an artisan himself. He dealt many . . . he was a businessman, but he had artisans working for him. That was at the beginning, one of his endeavors. In 1947, he went through bankrupt, lost his money, and then started dealing, trying to recoup and trying to, and started working, what they call, taking concessions of markets. There are different markets, you know, like you see sometimes in Israel. Thursday, on Beersheba, you see their markets. They bring their camels and their cattle and their clothing and went into the market. In Tunisia, each town or certain number of towns, had this market on different days of the week. The government will sell you a concession of the market, so you can buy two markets, three markets, four markets, as many

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<sup>3</sup> A *bar mitzvah* [Hebrew: son of commandment] is a rite of passage for Jewish boys aged 13 years and one day. At that time, a Jewish boy is considered a responsible adult for most religious purposes. He is now duty bound to keep the commandments, he puts on *tefillin*, and may be counted to the *minyan* quorum for public worship. He celebrates the *bar mitzvah* by being called up to the reading of the *Torah* in the synagogue, usually on the next available Sabbath after his Hebrew birthday.

as you could handle, you and your partner. Then you travel from one city to another for four or five days a week. That's where you sell the entrance fees to those who wanted to exhibit their wares in the market. He did quite well.

**AROGETI:** What kind of commodities did he sell?

**ICHAY:** He marketed himself nothing. He had the concession of the market to allow people to have concessions within the market.

**AROGETI:** He was, in effect, buying a concession or the opportunity to come into a market and then sell . . . the local merchants could sell their goods?

**ICHAY:** Correct. In other words, the government, if you had an area which belongs to you, if anybody wants to buy a concession . . . like we do a bazaar at synagogue. When the Sisterhood<sup>4</sup> sells a spot to someone to sell jewelry or sell T-shirts or what. In the market, it was the same thing. People used to come, farmers or . . .

**AROGETI:** Crafts?

**ICHAY:** Ranchers or craftsmen selling shirts or clothing. They used to come for wheat or flour or whatever food it could be. Clothing it could be. Livestock it could be. To enter the market and be able to exhibit there, you had to pay a certain fee. The one who bought a concession, bought at a flat rate. You might buy the yearly concession to that market for a \$100,000 or \$50,000. Then you charge an entrance fee to whoever wants to exhibit there once a week. Hopefully, it's more than what you paid for it. Usually it is more, and money was made. They ran the concession. At the entrance of a market, it had an office for him and his partners. Whoever came in had to buy a ticket to get in, not for buyers. For buyers, of course, it was a free entry. But whoever brought wares with him to exhibit into the market. They did quite well for a number of years. Then again, something happened. I can't remember exactly what happened. I think he and his partners did not work very well or the concessions, you know, the government changed the way a concession was sold. He lost that particular deal. Again, lost some money or lost his spending money and no work for a certain number of months or year, whatever. This is where he went again and worked in secondhand clothing. After the war in 1945,<sup>5</sup> 1946, United States used to send these huge bales of secondhand clothing. That

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<sup>4</sup> A group of women in a synagogue congregation who join together to offer social, cultural, educational, and volunteer service opportunities.

<sup>5</sup> World War II (often abbreviated to WWII or WW2), also known as the Second World War, was a global war that lasted from 1939 to 1945, although related conflicts began earlier. It involved the vast majority of the world's countries—including all of the great powers—eventually forming two opposing military alliances: the Allies and the Axis. It was the most widespread war in history, and directly involved more than 100 million people from over 30 countries. Marked by mass deaths of civilians, including the Holocaust (in which approximately 6 million Jews were killed) and the strategic bombing of industrial and population centers (in which approximately one million

was very, very, at the time, it was quite a big business. A lot of people who had a lot of money made fortune with it. You'll see these big bales. There were sometimes uniforms from soldiers, old uniforms. So, you received these. You opened them, you sorted them out, good clothing from not so good clothing, and you mark them up. Same way probably the National Council of Jewish Women<sup>6</sup> does now. It's something very similar to it. It was a big business. My father's mistake was that he thought that business would last forever. So, he had a huge warehouse with hundreds of bales. But he sank the whole, and suddenly the business went down. After a while, secondhand clothing was not that interesting anymore because you could buy new things. Once the war was over and people started working, they could buy new things at competitive price and you didn't have to buy. I still remember these bales in this huge warehouse, and nothing was sold. We just were lost completely.

**AROGETI:** What about your mother? Did she have an opportunity to work outside the home?

**ICHAY:** No, my mother never worked. No, in Tunisia, in those days, I can't recall even a woman working. If a woman worked, usually it was as, you know, house help. If they were very poor, then the woman might go and become a help to someone who could afford her, to have house help.

**AROGETI:** What about your father's education before he had the opportunity -

**ICHAY:** My father was not . . . his education was really self-taught. My father, I think, went to school up to the age of 11. Then he had to go to work.

**AROGETI:** Was that in a government-sponsored school or was that in a private?

**ICHAY:** It was government sponsored. I think when he went, it was a grade school in a small village. It's probably a school where more Arabs, maybe an Arab school. I don't know exactly. He's never mentioned about it. I know that he went to school up to the age of 11. He could speak Arabic, not so well French. His Hebrew was good because they had to go to a Hebrew school there. In Tunisia, it was very intensive. But when he came to Sousse and started working, because most of my father's family, they are all in jewelry business. More, all of them silversmith. In fact, the street where the artisans work and where the tradesmen work, I used to walk there in Sousse, one shop to the other. They're all either my uncles or cousins or great uncle.

**AROGETI:** Give me the names of who some of those family members were.

**ICHAY:** There were the Ichay family, which is my name. There were the Uzan family. U-Z-A-N. There was the Sivera family. S-I-V-E-R-A. S-I-L-V-E-R-A. Silvera. Most of them, the

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were killed, and which included the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki), it resulted in an estimated 50 million to 85 million fatalities. These made World War II the deadliest conflict in human history.

<sup>6</sup> The National Council of Jewish Women is an organization of volunteers and advocates, founded in the 1890's, who turn progressive ideals in advocacy and philanthropy inspired by Jewish values. They strive to improve the quality of life for women, children and families.

Ichays, were quite a number. Some of them were the once removed or twice removed cousins. The way of a family is if you start from my grandfather, then my grandfather has brothers and sisters from the same father but not the same mother, because my great-grandfather lived up to the age of a 104 and married four women. He outlived them. He did not have four women at the same time. There was only, I think, in all of Tunisia there were two Jews that had more than one wife, which was permitted at the time since the Arabs could have it. Arab law. Jewish law permits it also in those days. Not anymore today, although technically upon Jewish law, a man can have more than one wife. The Sephardim,<sup>7</sup> not the Ashkenazi.<sup>8</sup> We can't. What happened is that his father, which is my great-grandfather, was having children while his children were having children. You can see that the uncle or an aunt might be younger than the nephew or the niece.

**AROGETI:** What was your great-grandfather's name?

**ICHAY:** My great-grandfather was David.

**AROGETI:** David Ichay?

**ICHAY:** David Ichay. My grandfather was Solomon, like my name.

**AROGETI:** The S in your name, S. Robert Ichay.

**ICHAY:** Is Solomon. Shlomo. What happened is that once my brothers and sisters of my grandfather already almost created another branch of the family. We knew one another most of the time. But if you go back to my great-grandfather and you take his brothers and sisters, that was a different branch already of the family. Because it was so large, they spread out. We know that because there are so many Ichays. We know we're related some way. You have to go back four or five generations until you find the connection. Today, if you go to Israel, you will probably find 2,500 Ichays who are all related to me, the same family, which we can trace. I mean, it's easy to identify.

**AROGETI:** You had mentioned earlier that your father had been in religious school in Tunisia.

**ICHAY:** No, my father did not.

**AROGETI:** He didn't go to Hebrew school?

**ICHAY:** He went to Hebrew school. I meant. That was in a small village. And there, it's

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<sup>7</sup> Sephardic Jews are the Jews of Spain, Portugal, North Africa and the Middle East and their descendants. The adjective "Sephardic" and corresponding nouns Sephardi (singular) and Sephardim (plural) are derived from the Hebrew word '*Sepharad*,' which refers to Spain. Historically, the vernacular language of Sephardic Jews was *Ladino*, a Romance language derived from Old Spanish, incorporating elements from the old Romance languages of the Iberian Peninsula, Hebrew, Aramaic, and in the lands receiving those who were exiled, Ottoman Turkish, Arabic, Greek, Bulgarian and Serbo-Croatian vocabulary.

<sup>8</sup> Ashkenazi is an ethnic division of Jews which formed in the Holy Roman Empire in the early 1000's. They established communities in Central and Eastern Europe.

different. Life is completely different from United States. First of all, you live in a very small place. Secondly, entertainment was self-organized. I mean, just you entertained yourself. You know, with your friends you go and maybe play marbles or play with the pits of the apricots. We used to collect these pits and there used to be a game we used to play with apricot pits. But most of the time, they used to go to *seder*.<sup>9</sup> That might have been his education, to go to a synagogue. Everybody sits in a large room. The rabbi is at the entrance at the door, sitting at the desk. All the kids are spread out throughout the synagogue and in groups and studying together. The rabbi from time to time would call a group and say, "Let me hear what you studied today. What you have learned?" The way they learned is each group had someone who was a senior and used to try and help them. Or they could come and ask questions if they wanted. That's the way, it would probably be the Montefiore concept, which was already formed in those days. All you do, you have to learn yourself and then you come. Rabbi will ask you to see how much you've studied. If you hadn't studied enough, then you were in trouble. That's probably the way he studied. When he left . . . he had to start working when he was 11, probably learning the trade in a jewelry store, making errands. A gofer maybe. He started then learning to speak French because his French was really self-taught. He could read and write. He developed it quite well as a young man. He never studied formally in a formal setting in school. Moknine was a very small town. In fact, I spent . . .

**AROGETI:** What was the name?

**ICHAY:** Moknine. M-O-K-N-I-N-E. We spent quite a few months in Moknine because in 1940, 1942 or 1943, the year of my *bar mitzvah*, that's when the Germans occupied Tunisia. In November of 1942. At the beginning of 1943, the city was bombed by the American . . .

**AROGETI:** Moknine or . . .

**ICHAY:** No, Sousse.

**AROGETI:** Sousse was bombed.

**ICHAY:** When the city was wiped out, I mean literally, it was almost completely destroyed. If buildings still stood up, windows were broken. I still remember on a Saturday morning, because it happened on a Friday night. On a Saturday morning, I went down to see what was happening in town. The town was a ghost town. Everybody was <unintelligible>. They used to walk, literally, on debris and on glass on all the huge avenues. There was debris and glass. The

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<sup>9</sup> *Seder* (meaning "order" in Hebrew) is a Jewish ritual feast that marks the beginning of the Jewish holiday of Passover. It is conducted on the evening of the fifteenth day of *Nisan* in the Hebrew calendar throughout the world. Some communities hold *seder* on both the first two nights of Passover. The *seder* incorporates prayers, candle lighting, and traditional foods symbolizing the slavery of the Jews and the exodus from Egypt. It is one of the most colorful and joyous occasions in Jewish life.

market was completely destroyed. So, that Saturday, we left. My father never drove on *Shabbat*.<sup>10</sup> Just went and looked for a truck and gave his gold watch to an Arab. He said, "I'll pay you after *Shabbat*. Take us." He took us to Moknine. Moknine had 500 Jews living in Moknine at that time. Suddenly, it has about 2,500 Jews living in the same accommodations. Five times as much. If you want to imagine what the area where the Jews lived. If you want to imagine Moknine, you take Toco Hills [Shopping Center, Atlanta].

**AROGETI:** Toco Hills?

**ICHAY:** Toco Hills. The whole of Toco Hills, that was Moknine.

**AROGETI:** The shopping center itself?

**ICHAY:** The shopping center and a little bit just in surrounding. You don't go as far as Beth Jacob.<sup>11</sup> That was Moknine. There was like a square in the middle, a square building, one next to the other, houses. The inside of that square was a courtyard of the building which were sometimes leading to another or it was closed between one and another. Around that square there was another square. The street was, in fact, like the square. You go one way, then you turn left. You go one way straight and turn left again. You go one way, and you circle the whole block. It was almost like a block, two blocks at most. In those houses, that's where the Jews had to live. They're all also related again. You had a lot of our relatives were still living in Moknine. For a number of months, we stayed there and lived in Moknine.

**AROGETI:** We were talking before a little bit about your father and his formal Jewish and Hebrew education. Did your mother have an opportunity to receive any formal . . .

**ICHAY:** My mother did. She went to school because there was a big difference between my mother's family and my father's family.

**AROGETI:** Difference in what way?

**ICHAY:** My father's family was, what you would call, Tunisian Jews, typical Tunisian Jews. Whereas, my mother, there was a combination of Tunisias and Livornese. Livorna was a city from Italy.

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<sup>10</sup> *Shabbat* (Hebrew) or *Shabbos* (Yiddish) is the Jewish day of rest and is observed on Saturdays. *Shabbat* observance entails refraining from work activities, often with great rigor, and engaging in restful activities to honor the day. *Shabbat* begins at sundown on Friday night and is ushered in by lighting candles and reciting a blessing. It is closed the following evening with the recitation of the *havdalah* blessing

<sup>11</sup> Beth Jacob is an Orthodox synagogue on LaVista Road in Atlanta founded in 1942 by former members of Ahavath Achim who were looking for a more Orthodox congregation. Beth Jacob is now Atlanta's largest Orthodox congregation. The congregation first met in a rented grocery store on Parkway Drive. It moved to a permanent location on Boulevard when it purchased and renovated a two-story apartment building. In 1956, it converted the Tabernacle Baptist Church on Boulevard to a synagogue. It built its current synagogue building on a five-acre lot on LaVista Road in 1961. Rabbi Joseph Safra was the congregation's first permanent rabbi in 1951, followed by Rabbi Emanuel Feldman from 1952 to 1991. Rabbi Ilan Feldman has been the congregation's rabbi since his father Emanuel's retirement in 1991.

There were many Jews in Tunisia. We used to call them Gorna. G-O-R-N-A O-N-I. Gorna or Gorni. Grana. G-R-A-N-A. That is distortion of Livonese, somebody from Livorna as sent down in Italy. These were like . . . I hate to try and make some comparisons, but they were the elite. They were the educated Jews. Whereas, the Tunisia Jews were not, were lower on the scale. They had their own community, their own chief rabbi. They would not identify with the Tunisian Jews. It's almost probably like it was between Sephardim and Ashkenazim. Over here, they were both Sephardim, but one was the elite. They were more learned. They could speak different languages. My grandfather on my mother's side . . .

**AROGETI:** What was his name?

**ICHAY:** Baraness. Albert. Albron Baraness [sp]. Where my father is named after. The way we named the children is by the first child, a boy or a girl, belongs to a father. In other words, he is named after the father's father or mother. Since I was the first boy, I was named after my father's father, my grandfather in my father's family. The second one came, it was girl. If it is a boy or a girl, it's going to be named after the mother's side, the second one. The only time the second one is not named after the mother; is if the first child is a girl. It's named after the father's mother. If the second is a boy, it's named after the father's father. She doesn't take it. But if the first one is a boy, then the mother would take the second one, boy or girl. My sister, who was born after me, was named after my mother's mother. Then another boy came, and he was named after my mother's father. So, the two in the middle . . . no, my mother's. Just a minute. Let me try and figure this one.

**AROGETI:** <Laughing>

**ICHAY:** The second boy was named after my mother's father.

**AROGETI:** Albert.

**ICHAY:** Albert.

**AROGETI:** Was named after your grandfather.

**ICHAY:** Grandfather on my mother's side.

**AROGETI:** Correct.

**ICHAY:** What happened is the two children in the middle are my mother's mother and my mother's father. The one at the two ends, the first one and the fourth one, Colette. Me and Colette are named after my . . .

**AROGETI:** Father's . . .

**ICHAY:** Father's parents.

**AROGETI:** Very good.

**ICHAY:** Colette is Esther. She is my grandmother, my father's mother. I am Solomon. It's

my grandfather on my father's side. Albert and Frena, which is Yvonn, are named after my mother. My grandfather on my mother's side worked in a bank, which is already kind of not like working as an artisan or in business.

**AROGETI:** Working with your hands or working with your back.

**ICHAY:** That's right. He was more educated. Could speak about six languages.

**AROGETI:** What languages did he . . .

**ICHAY:** He spoke Italian, Spanish, French, Arabic. [He] was much, much quite a learned man.

My mother was sent to a school for girls, which we used to call, in French they called the *Sur* [sp], which is the equivalent of a Christian school where the teachers were nuns. Their French education . . . in fact, my mother was not really particularly Orthodox<sup>12</sup> or particularly observant until she married my father. When she married my father, then she started, because my father was very observant, then she became observant. They were observing certain, you know, *Yom Kippur*<sup>13</sup> and *Pesach*,<sup>14</sup> but she was not as knowledgeable insofar as Jewish customs and traditions as my father was.

**AROGETI:** The school that your mother was educated, was that in her community or was she sent away to . . .

**ICHAY:** Yes. No, no, no, no. In Sousse itself. You see, Sousse, the city itself, was really cosmopolitan. It was small, very small. I don't think there were more than 80,000 people, of which maybe 50,000 were Muslims or 60,000 were Arabs. The rest, the 20,000, were 5,000 Jews, maybe 3,000 or 4,000 French, a couple of thousand Maltese, couple of thousand Italian. It was very cosmopolitan. When you walk into the streets going to places, there are Maltese, Italians, Greeks, Jews. There are French. Each one of these community had its own setup. They lived together. You go to Sousse, in those days, not any more now. Of course, there are no Jews now. You can go to a Jewish quarter. It wasn't the ghetto in Sousse. There was no ghetto, even though there was a wall around the city built at

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<sup>12</sup> 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.

<sup>13</sup> *Yom Kippur* [Hebrew: Day of Atonement] is 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).

<sup>14</sup> Hebrew: *Pesach*. The anniversary of Israel's liberation from Egyptian bondage. The holiday lasts for eight days. Unleavened bread, *matzah*, is eaten in memory of the unleavened bread prepared by the Israelite during their hasty flight from Egypt, when they had not time to wait for the dough to rise. On the first two nights of Passover, the *seder*, the central event of the holiday is celebrated. The *seder* service is one of the most colorful and joyous occasions in Jewish life. In addition to eating *matzah* during the *seder*, Jews are prohibited from eating leavened bread during the entire week of Passover. In addition, Jews are also supposed to avoid foods made with wheat, barley, rye, spelt or oats unless those foods are labeled 'kosher for Passover.' Jews traditionally have separate dishes for Passover.

the time of the Romans, built around the city. Jews lived inside the city, which is the Arab quarter. Even outside of the city, you can go in some streets and you can bet every house is a Jewish house. The main avenue leading to the beach, for example, from the Arab town, from the Arab quarter to the beach, if you walk down that avenue, every house was Jewish.

**AROGETI:** Do you remember the name of that street?

**ICHAY:** It was called Avenue de France, but it's been changed. I think. It was called Avenue de Bourguiba, maybe, or named after the independence there. You could go, as you walk down on Saturday afternoon, if you're tired or want a glass of water or something to eat, you walk into one of the houses, it's usually an uncle or a cousin or a friend. Then you go down walking on that street, on that avenue. Cars were out. They couldn't drive because people would walk in the middle of the street on *Shabbat* and Sunday afternoon. The French had their own school, they called the *Sur* [sp]. It was a French school. The Italians had an Italian school. The Arabs had the Arab school. Then you had the kind of a primary and secondary school which was no one else, a college. College for us means high school. That was where Italian, French, Jews, Arabs, whoever had the certain grade, could go to study in that college. That's where I studied. As a child, I remember in one of the houses where we lived when I was maybe three or four or five-year-old, before I could go to first year of formal schooling, I used to go to Italian school, which was exactly across the street from our house. I still remember the marching when you had the exercises to some Italian nationalistic songs, like *Giovinezza* and <unintelligible> and having to eat these macaronis and spaghettis at lunch, when they used to give you a kind of spaghetti. It was not just plain. I used to throw it away because I never liked it. Then to run for my life, as soon as the bell rang and we were dismissed, because the Italian kids would try to run after me and try and catch me and then beat me. As soon as the bell rang, I was out of the door and across the street in two seconds to go back to the house. That's where my mother went and my father did not. There was a Jewish day school too, which was sponsored by the Alliance, the Israeli Alliance [*Alliance Israélite Universelle*, Paris, France].<sup>15</sup> Alliance is in Tunisia still. Some of the schools still exist in some Arab countries.

**AROGETI:** Repeat the name of that?

**ICHAY:** Alliance is a very elite university.

**AROGETI:** That was an organization when it was the 1930?

**ICHAY:** I can't remember when it started, but in the 1930s it was there. Most Jews went to that school. Ironically, it was not one of the schools where if you could afford it, you don't go to that

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<sup>15</sup> A Paris-based international Jewish organization founded in 1860. Together with Abraham-Salomon Rothschild, it established over 100 schools for poor Jewish children across the Middle East. They still have schools in Israel today.

school, because many of the poor people went. Although the school was a great school. The school produced many teachers who used to go to France after and pursue their studies <unintelligible>. The *Alliance Israélite Universelle* was formed by a man by the name of [René Samuel] Cassin.<sup>16</sup> French. I think he was a Jewish statesman in France. They built these schools in all the Arab countries which had French influence. The Jews used to go there. I don't think they had the high school. It was mainly a junior school. You see, education was not compulsory there in Tunisia.

**AROGETI:** How old were you when you went to the Italian day school?

**ICHAY:** I must have been four, maybe, or five. I was really young. Then I went . . .

**AROGETI:** For a few years or for more?

**ICHAY:** Maybe not even a year.

**AROGETI:** And then after that?

**ICHAY:** After that, I went to <unintelligible> College.

**AROGETI:** College?

**ICHAY:** It's called <unintelligible>. No girls.

**AROGETI:** Five or six years old?

**ICHAY:** From the time we left the equivalent of kindergarten, which we called the class first grade. Then I moved up to the ninth, which was the end of the junior school. Then you moved from that one to the secondary school. High school. In the same building. One area was primary school, and the other area was secondary school. Once you moved there, then you go until you get your baccalaureate. I dropped out when I was 13.

**AROGETI:** Just so that I'm oriented, the years would have been approximately the middle 1930s?

**ICHAY:** 1934, maybe.

**AROGETI:** You were five or six years old?

**ICHAY:** Five years old.

**AROGETI:** Then you go until the rest of that decade, 1935, 1936, 1937?

**ICHAY:** Until 1942 I went.

**AROGETI:** You were in elementary school during World War II?

**ICHAY:** No. I was two years . . . I was second year in high school. I'm trying to remember. I think I went in 19 . . . when I was 5 years old. From the time I was 5 years old until I was 11, I was in junior school. After 11, you have two possibilities, the way the system

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<sup>16</sup> René Samuel Cassin (5 October 1887 – 20 February 1976) served as President of *Alliance Israelite Universelle*

functioned. Either you were a good student and you took classic, you know, high school training. Or you finished at 11. That was the end of your . . . sometimes it could be that you went two more years to graduate from junior school. So, you could be 13 when you graduate. What you got at the time was a simple certificate called the certificate *du premier*, which was the Certificate of Primary Studies of Junior School. If you were a good student, then you would go to high school. Usually, if you were a good student, you moved, in junior school, within a period, by the time you reached 11. By the time you reach 11, you go to first year in high school, which was a classical.

**AROGETI:** Were you a good student at that time?

**ICHAY:** Yes. In fact, it was even worse than that because that was the years in 19 . . . there was already some discrimination. Germans were not there yet, but there was some discriminations against the Jews between 1941. That's when I moved to first year high school, 19 . . . I must have been 12 years old. In 1940, 1941 already the war was . . . the only way you could go to high school, you had to pass an exam. You passed the exam. Ten percent of those who passed it, of the Jews, were allowed to carry on their studies. The other 90 percent, regardless of what you did, you could have scored 90 percent. If you were not the first 10 percent, the 10 percent of the Jews who passed, then . . . I was among first 10 percent, and I went to high school.

**AROGETI:** Was that a quota that was established by the state?

**ICHAY:** Sure. There's no question about it. It was even tougher for the Jews. Once you go to high school, if you miss school for three days . . . if you miss school one day and you don't have good excuse, you were suspended for a week or two weeks. If you miss school for three days and you don't have excuse, you were kicked out of the school.

**AROGETI:** Did they recognize the Jewish holidays as a legitimate excuse for . . .

**ICHAY:** No, not at all. We just don't go.

**AROGETI:** Don't go to school.

**ICHAY:** Don't go to school and penalize them. Teachers did not enforce so much of things they required of you. But I remember there was an exam on *Yom Kippur*. There was only one Jewish kid that went to avoid it. He was the son of a rabbi. All the others, we said, we're not fighting it. I remember when we were in the second year. The diploma which a kid can get, which student gets in junior school, we didn't have it because normally you had to wait until you were 13. You cannot get it if you're 11. It's very peculiar, the most peculiar setup. If you're 11, you can go to high school. You

can jump from junior school to high school. You could not get that certificate that you completed your junior school. You had to be 13 to get it. I was second year in high school when I was 13. That's the year me and . . . we were 6 Jews in that class out of 22 students.

**AROGETI:** Do you remember some of the names of some of your colleagues?

**ICHAY:** Baraness. Simon Long [sp] was a non-Jewish guy.

**AROGETI:** What was his name again?

**ICHAY:** Baraness was a French one. I mean Jewish guy.

**AROGETI:** B-A-R-A-N-S?

**ICHAY:** B-A-R-A-N-E-S-S. There was my cousin, Albert Baraness, also named. That one was my mother's brother's son. She had a brother, and his son was named after his father, Albert, also. Albert Baraness was there. There was Yoseph Batee [sp] was there. Sarfarty was a young kid. What were the others in school there? Lucien Cohen was there. He's one of the rare ones I still see whenever I go to Paris. I see Lucien Cohen.

**AROGETI:** Lucien Cohen was a . . .

**ICHAY:** Was also in the class. We decided when we were 13 that we're going to apply and write the exam for a certificate, the junior school certificate. You understand? We're two years in high school.

**AROGETI:** Right. You're a year away.

**ICHAY:** No.

**AROGETI:** A year early?

**ICHAY:** No, no. That was the only time we could take that exam because once you're in junior school, if you're not 13, you cannot write the exam. But we jumped and went from the age of 11, we already went to high school. So, we waited two years and then we decided we're going to write that exam. I remember the teacher by the name of Corona [sp] was a reader of Corsican. At French, that's the one who taught us French and Latin. He was the Latin teacher and the French teacher. He asked us, "Why are you taking the junior exam? You don't have to. You're in high school now." We told him. We said, "Just a minute. You forget we are Jews. You can kick us tomorrow morning. We want at least to have a paper." I don't know where my paper is. I know I passed it, but I don't have the paper. We all passed it by the way. The interesting thing was when you're writing that exam, it had nothing to do with what you studied during the two years in high school. It's something which was really two years ago. We studied history and geography and many of these things. We studied together, wrote the exam, and passed it. All of us, in fact, passed

it. I don't have the diploma anymore. I don't know where it is. That's what happened. Sure enough, within a month or two months of that, I dropped out of school. The day I became *bar mitzvah*, my father says, "You don't go to school anymore." Because we used to go on *Shabbat* also. My father says, "You're not." We used to go to *Shabbat*, and one of the courses on *Shabbat* was woodwork. Some people worked with fire and so on. We used to work with woodwork making all kind of . . . that was one hour.

**AROGETI:** You would go to your school on *Shabbat*?

**ICHAY:** Correct. *Shabbat* was a school day. My father said, "Now you are *bar mitzvah*. You don't go any more to school." The principal of the school was a close friend of my father. He told him, he says, "You're making a mistake pulling out your son," and gave him a whole month to bring me back, where normally, as I told you, three days and you're out. You know, I had three strikes and I'm out. Three days and you were kicked out, if you had no reason, unless you were in the hospital or something. I had no reason. I just dropped out. My father told him, "No, forget about it. He's not coming. Give it to another Jew. Give his spot to another Jew." My cousin did go. My uncle, my father's brother's son, who is now a doctor in Israel.

**AROGETI:** What is his name?

**ICHAY:** Ramon.

**AROGETI:** His last name?

**ICHAY:** Ichay. My father's brother's son. He went, and he's the only child or the only student, not child. He wasn't a child then. He was a teenager. The only student who used to go on *Shabbat* to school and sit and listen. He wouldn't write. He wouldn't touch a pencil or nothing. He would just sit down. He was kicked out of school once, twice, three times, and always brought back after he came back and penalized. He'd say he was not going to write on *Shabbat*. He had to attend school, so he used to go and sit. They would let him. I mean, it's really interesting because even though there was anti-Semitism, it was not . . . don't forget, as I mentioned, the town was a conglomeration of 5,000 Jews, 3,000 thousand French, Maltese, and Italian.

**AROGETI:** Were there many Arabs in that school?

**ICHAY:** In that school, there were quite a lot but not many because next to that school, there was the Arab school.

**AROGETI:** Were the Arabs that attended your school either from better affluent families financially or smarter?

**ICHAY:** Correct because you had to pay. That was not free education. You had to pay.

They were from a more business people and so more affluent. There is no question about their higher class. In fact, a few years ago, I met one of them in Nice.

**AROGETI:** Did you run into one of your former classmates?

**ICHAY:** No. My cousin who is deceased now, David Cohen. You remember you came to David's *bar mitzvah* here. He was the one who I performed his wedding here with the girl, and he passed away now. When I went to visit him in Nice, he told me, "We're going to a restaurant, an Arab restaurant. We're going to have Tunisian dish." Fried fish, fried peppers, fried potatoes and fried <unintelligible> over gin and so on, which is fried eggs. I go over there. The owner of the restaurant knows my cousin very well. He knew him because he was also from Tunisia. He told me something. Looking at him, doesn't click. Suddenly he comes, he sits down with me, introduced himself. He asks me, he says, "Which school did you go?" So I told him. He said, "Who was the teacher?" I told him. He said, "Who were your friends?" I start naming some friends. After a while, I could see he's pulling my leg. What is he asking? He says, "You don't recognize me?" I used to sit next to him in the classroom.

**AROGETI:** What was his name?

**ICHAY:** He told me his name. I turned around to him. I said, "You were the one who used to always give us a hard time, used to run after us and beat us." He was a strong guy, and he always used to beat us. One day we were good friends, and one day we were fighting. Shoot, I can't think now.

**AROGETI:** If the name comes back, we'll remember him.

**ICHAY:** Yes. That's the way. While he was asking questions, he was giving me some answers, too. He knew, he remembered better than I did. It's almost like I have a blank with some of these things which happened in . . . I remember most of the things, but I don't remember everything.

**AROGETI:** Let's talk a little bit or for a few minutes about what it was like in your home in Tunisia, North Africa, in the 1930s and your parents' views towards Zionism,<sup>17</sup> for example.

**ICHAY:** The Tunisian Jews, the Jews who lived in Arab countries, were very, very Zionist. I mean, there was no question. You must understand that you were a second-class citizen. You were not first class. I was a Tunisian but French protégé, which means protected by French government. I was a guest of the Tunisian government. Even though we traced maybe our

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<sup>17</sup> Zionism is a movement that supports a Jewish national state in the territory defined as the Land of Israel. Although Zionism existed before the nineteenth century, in the 1890's Theodor Herzl popularized it and gave it a new urgency, as he believed that Jewish life in Europe was threatened and a State of Israel was needed. The State

family 2,000 years. We believe that first ancestor came from the time of the destruction of the First Temple, not the Second Temple,<sup>18</sup> which means 2,500 years ago. I think that maybe five, six, seven generations ago, they came from the Isle of Djerba, which is in the south of Tunisia. In the Isle of Djerba in the south of Tunisia where the Jews settled there, the great majority of the people there are *Kohanim* or Kohens.<sup>19</sup> When you go to *shul*<sup>20</sup> there, which is now in kind of a shrine, when you go into that synagogue and they call up to the *Torah*,<sup>21</sup> they call up one Kohen after the other, which we cannot do. They have no choice. They are all Kohens. There are no Levis<sup>22</sup> there. The Levis for some reason or another would not live or stay more than six months. If one tried and think he wants to live on that island and sends him over, in six months he's almost sure he'll die. I don't know if it's superstition, but these are facts. This is what would happen. So, there were no Levis. The legend goes, or the tradition goes, that when the first Temple was destroyed, many of the priestly tribe of the *Kohanim* just left. They didn't go to Babylon in the Exile.<sup>23</sup> They left Jerusalem and came and settled in that island. That's why they're all Kohens. The Levis did not want to follow them. They said since the Temple is destroyed, why should we be their servants because the Levites ministered to the Kohens. You know, they're the second in there. They didn't want that. That's why they didn't go. These Kohens went to this Isle of Djerba and never had Levis with them. If anyone came after that, there was that kind of a curse, and they would never survive. There were others who were Israelites and not either Levis nor *Kohanim*. We believe that my ancestors probably settled there also in those days and then moved up more inland because Djerba is an island off the coast of Tunisia. It's part of Tunisia. It's, in fact, really close to Tripoli, Libya also. It's

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of Israel was established in 1948 and Zionism today is expressed as support for the continued existence of Israel.

<sup>18</sup> The destruction of the First and Second Temple in Jerusalem (the First by the Babylonians in 586 BCE and the Second by the Romans in 70 BCE) is a pivotal event in Jewish history and tradition. Both times, Jews were driven from the city in what is known as the Jewish Diaspora, or exile. The dispersion of Jews throughout Africa, Asia and Europe had a profound impact on the Jewish people and brought about a dramatic change in Judaism itself.

<sup>19</sup> *Kohen* is a Hebrew word for 'priest.' *Kohanim* (plural). A *kohen* is traditionally believed to be of direct patrilineal descent from the Biblical Aaron.

<sup>20</sup> *Shul* is a Yiddish word for synagogue that is derived from a German word meaning "school," and emphasizes the synagogue's role as a place of study.

<sup>21</sup> 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.

<sup>22</sup> Levites are members of the tribe of Levi, the third son of the Biblical patriarch Jacob. Members of the tribe are either priests (*Kohanim*) or Levites, their status being established by family tradition. In Temple times, the function of the Levites was to provide the musical accompaniment to the sacrifices, vocally and with musical instruments, and to act as gate-keepers and general guards. Nowadays, a Levite is given the privilege of being called, second to the Kohen, to the reading of the *Torah* in the synagogue and a Levite washes the hands of the *Kohanim* before the latter deliver the priestly blessing.

<sup>23</sup> In 586 BCE the Babylonians conquered Jerusalem, burned down the Temple, tore down the city walls, and drove the surviving Israelites to Babylon to be slaves (called the 'Babylonian Exile'). The exile ended in 538 BCE when the Persian conqueror of Babylon, Cyrus the Great, gave the Jews permission to return to Judah.

very south of . . . so even though we lived in Tunisia probably 2,000 . . . I mean, I can trace . . . my brother-in-law did it up to 300 years ago. Can't go beyond that. We were still only guests of the Tunisian government. We were never full citizens. What that means, they were very hospitable to us. We did not have to join the army. It has its double-edged sword. On the hand, you were not accepted really by them. On the other hand, the French government couldn't do any more. They "protected us." The Arabs were not allowed, for example, the French government wanted to draft us to take into the army.

**AROGETI:** Because the Arabs would not serve in the military?

**ICHAY:** No, the Arabs served.

**AROGETI:** But the Arabs would not serve in the military with Jews, side by side?

**ICHAY:** No, no, no, no, no. Because we were guests.

**AROGETI:** You were not citizens.

**ICHAY:** We were their guests. Therefore, as their guest, we had certain privileges. For a Jew to go into the army, he had to volunteer.

**AROGETI:** For example, did your parents have the right to vote in municipal elections?

**ICHAY:** No. No, no, not at all. Not at all. In fact, when I left Tunisia, I was about 20 in 1952 or 1953. Had I stayed one more week, that would have been the first time I could have voted and not for a municipal election but for the Jewish community. Because the president and vice-president or anything were almost self-appointed. For the one who gave more money was always appointed as the president. It was like a small clique or . . .

**AROGETI:** This is within the Jewish community?

**ICHAY:** Within the Jewish community. In Tunisia, you must understand, it is not like in United States. In Tunisia, we were a state within a state. We had our own rabbinical court. Jews who had arguments did not go to court. They went to rabbinical court. They didn't go to the civil court. The only time we went to civil court is if we were caught for a crime by the French authority. But if you had an argument in business with another Jew, then you'd go to rabbinical court. You settled it with rabbinical court. If you wanted to get married, you get married by rabbinical court. You don't go to civil court. There were no civil marriages. You get married. Same as it is in Israel today. Therefore, the Jewish community had its own kingdom. We had a president of a committee. All the synagogues were under the aegis of that committee.

**AROGETI:** Do you remember what the name of that committee was?

**ICHAY:** It was called the Committee Israelite. It was Israelite Committee. Just simply it was . . .

**AROGETI:** What were some of your early memories of your parents talking to you about Israel? Palestine?

**ICHAY:** It's only on the religious level, not so much of Palestine. My father, even though next year in Jerusalem, never wanted to go when the time came. All my relatives on his side, 90 percent of them, went to Israel. Very, very few did not. [They] went to France and settled in France. The great majority of the Ichays went to Israel. My father is the only one of all his brothers and sisters who did not and stayed in Paris, stayed in France.

**AROGETI:** You finished school when you were 13, at least that phase of your school.

**ICHAY:** Correct.

**AROGETI:** While the United States had been in war for a couple of years, what was it like in Tunisia in 1942 with the German occupation?

**ICHAY:** It was not. I mean, we had to pay taxes. We had to give gold, money, fines, clothing if they wanted. Bedding if they wanted.

**AROGETI:** When you say they wanted, do you mean to the German soldiers who occupied?

**ICHAY:** No, the SS<sup>24</sup> used to come. There weren't that many SS. My father . . . when we all left after the town was destroyed, up to that time we didn't have much to do with Germany impressing in on us. It's only when we went to the small village that they came and wanted to ask for volunteer workers, to pick up the rubble, where bumps . . . we had to clear out the mess and to pay fines. These two or three SS started talking. The community, most of the leaders of the community, ran away and went into hiding in small villages. My father ended up one of two who took care of the Jewish community in that small town. The other one was a lawyer.

**AROGETI:** I'm going to turn the tape over.

<End Tape 1, Side 1>

<Begin Tape 1, Side 2>

**AROGETI:** It is September 1, 1995. I'm here with Rabbi S. Robert Ichay. We were talking about Tunisia. This is the second side of the first tape. We were talking about Tunisia in 1942 and German occupation. You were telling us a story about an attorney.

**ICHAY:** The attorney I meant was Benice [sp]. The name of Benice, who was a Jew only because he was born Jewish. Never he identified as such with the Jewish community. I mean he would help if any Jew came, and he was a great lawyer. A tough lawyer, in fact. We still remember one of his problems was his smoke. He was a chain smoker. On *Yom Kippur* [he] made a point. That's why

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<sup>24</sup> The *Schutzstaffel* (SS). Literally "Protection Squadron" was a major paramilitary organization under Adolf

he never went, not even *Yom Kippur*. He didn't go . . . one of the rare. But when most of the leaders went into hiding, he was a very close friend of my father. The two of them became the leaders of the community by default. They are the ones who dealt with the SS. If they needed money, then the SS used to tell them, "We will go and get it for you. Don't go into the homes." Because we'd never. The SS used to stand outside. [I] still remember that small village where we stood outside when my father went in and asked the people, "What can you give them? We need something." When they had these workers working for the German, the Jewish community paid them. They used to go two weeks and work, and they get paid. After two weeks they come back home, and another group used to go. They weren't forced labor as such.

**AROGETI:** What kind of work would they do for the Germans?

**ICHAY:** Just cleaning up rubble.

**AROGETI:** Cleaning the roads.

**ICHAY:** Cleaning the roads, grading stones. I don't know. Some of them doing that. It wasn't that . . . we had to wear the yellow star,<sup>25</sup> but it was nothing to compare with what happened in . . . in fact, we didn't know what happened in Germany or in Poland and in some of these parts. We really didn't. Even though we had to wear the yellow star, we had no problem with it. We made the six-pointed stars like <unintelligible> wear them. We were fine. In fact, there were many, many stories, whether true or not, I don't remember at the time where the RAF, the Royal Air Force of Britain or the American, used to come and bomb. Or the RAF used to come and bomb. Many Arabs were killed. Not a Jew was killed from some bombing. In my town, 150 Jews were killed that night when the town . . . usually the workers went to work for Germany or anything. Not a single Jew was killed. Whereas the Arabs, sometimes they were killed. The Arabs started spreading the rumor that they can see the yellow star and don't shoot at the Jews. Some of them felt also like wearing the star. Some of them probably did just to try and protect themselves. Whereas, we never had problem. We had to salute the German and salute the French officers. The French were worse than the German, by the way, in that village at the time. But, that's about it. I hitchhiked with a German officer on *Purim*.<sup>26</sup> I must have been 14. For me, my father said that some meat had to go to the Jewish workers 20

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Hitler and the Nazi Party in Nazi Germany and later throughout German-occupied Europe during World War II.

<sup>25</sup> As of 1941, in every European country the Nazis conquered, legislation was passed obligating Jews six years and up to wear a yellow star of David on their clothing with the word *Jude* inscribed on it.

<sup>26</sup> *Purim* is a Jewish holiday that commemorates the deliverance of the Jewish people in the ancient Persian Empire from destruction in the wake of a plot by Haman, a story recorded in the Biblical book of Esther. According to the Book of Esther, Haman planned to kill all the Jews, but Mordecai and his adopted daughter Queen Esther foiled his plans. The day of deliverance became a day of feasting and rejoicing. Some of the customs of *Purim* include drinking wine, wearing masks and costumes, and public celebration.

miles away. If you send meat, it went into a German truck with soldiers driving the truck. He would direct me to take the kosher<sup>27</sup> meat to take it to the Jewish worker. My father says it had to be followed. It had to be supervised.

**AROGETI:** You had to watch it?

**ICHAY:** He sent me. Who did I drive with following the truck? It was a captain of <unintelligible>. We followed the truck until the meat was delivered. Then I came back 20 miles, back to the village. The captain started talking to me. He's a captain of <unintelligible>. He's German. He knows I'm Jewish. I'm wearing . . . he is showing the picture of his wife and picture of his children. He's saying he doesn't know what he's doing here. He was most unhappy. He just was not. He says, "I don't know what we're doing here" and wished the war was over.

**AROGETI:** Which language did you speak with the officer?

**ICHAY:** French.

**AROGETI:** You both spoke French?

**ICHAY:** Yes, French.

**AROGETI:** It's 1942, 1943, and 1944. Tell me what your memories are of the war coming to an end.

**ICHAY:** I remember the day the British entered the small village.

**AROGETI:** What was it like? What kind of day was it as best you can remember?

**ICHAY:** It was a Wednesday at one o'clock in the afternoon.

**AROGETI:** Where were you? Were you at work?

**ICHAY:** We went down. No, no. All the time we spent, the couple of years we spent, all I did was go to *yeshiva*<sup>28</sup> and skip whenever I felt like skipping and so on. I went to *Talmud Torah* and studied. That's what I did when I left school because after I left school, I went to *yeshiva*.

**AROGETI:** You shifted from a public school or the private school to a *yeshiva*?

**ICHAY:** To *yeshiva*, which was not as <unintelligible> but it was fairly advanced and so on.

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<sup>27</sup> Kosher/*Kashrut* is the set of Jewish dietary laws that dictate how food is prepared or served and which kinds of foods or animals can be eaten. Food that may be consumed according to *halakhah* (Jewish law) is termed 'kosher' in English. In a kosher kitchen and home, meat and dairy are kept separate, so a separate set of dishes, cookware, and serving ware are needed. Food that is not in accordance with Jewish law is called 'treif.'

<sup>28</sup> *Yeshiva* (Hebrew for "sitting") is a Jewish educational institution for religious instruction that is equivalent to high school. It also refers to a *Talmudic* college for unmarried male students from their teenage years to their early

**AROGETI:** Tell me a little bit about that because I don't think we've talked about that yet.

**ICHAY:** When I finally left school, there were two things he wanted me to do. On the one hand, he says, "You go and study in *yeshiva*." I went with <unintelligible> because there it was every day. Even when I used to go to school, it was like 16 hours or 20 hours a week studying your *cheder*,<sup>29</sup> going to the <unintelligible> *Torah* because you didn't have school on Thursday and Sundays. Those two days you spent them going to the Hebrew school. You were lucky. Sometimes you skip so that you can go and pray or you can go. You tell the rabbi you want to go to the bathroom and then you leave. You come back two hours later. This is what I did from maybe 1942 until about 1945.

**AROGETI:** That was also in your town?

**ICHAY:** No. Not at the time. It was in the village. Then we moved to the capital, Tunis, in 1945. All this time it was in the village most of the time. In 1945, my father moved to the capital of Tunis. The war ended by then. With us, it ended in 1944.

**AROGETI:** A year before the . . .

**ICHAY:** A year before the end. Yes. In 1945 was in Europe.

**AROGETI:** Right, but in 1944, it was in Tunis.

**ICHAY:** It was in Tunis. It ended much earlier.

**AROGETI:** What do you remember about the British troops coming through town?

**ICHAY:** It was great. First of all, we weren't sure whether they were really British troops because we used to listen in a clandestine way to BBC. If we were caught, we would have been shot. But we listened. They warned us that the German would come dressed as British, as Allied troops. If they see any rejoicing, and then they will kill them. I still remember when they came, we started asking . . . they started telling us . . . we didn't do anything. They arrived in their half-track, if it was even small tank. <unintelligible> on the tank. We didn't do anything. Suddenly they came to us and they said, "Where is the police station? We want to go to the police station. That's where we're going to go." We didn't want to answer. They told us that they were British and so on. After a while, we believed them. That's when we all jumped on the tanks. We shook hands. They started giving us cigarettes. They started throwing candies, chocolate, and we took them. Then we really took them to the police station and we told them what they did. They caught all the policemen. The chief of police was arrested, too. I

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twenties.

<sup>29</sup> Hebrew for 'room.' A Jewish religious elementary school for boys. Religious classes were usually held in a room attached to a synagogue or in the private home of a teacher called a '*melamed*.' It was traditional for boys to start *cheder* at three or five years old, learning to read Hebrew from a primer and studying the Book of Leviticus. Girls did not attend *cheder*.

remember when the Germans left. We were always afraid that they pretend they're leaving and they come back. When they left, they left the day before. That's how we knew that the others were coming.

**AROGETI:** You saw the German soldiers packing up and leaving?

**ICHAY:** Yes, leaving on their trucks or half-track. Rommel used to be on a half-track. If you know an open air. I saw Rommel when he passed because his headquarter was about five miles away from . . .

**AROGETI:** The famous German General [Erwin] Rommel?<sup>30</sup>

**ICHAY:** Yes, that's correct.

**AROGETI:** He passed through your town?

**ICHAY:** Yes, sure. I saw him when he passed. I saw him once when I was downtown. I didn't really think . . . when the Germans left, they didn't . . . the Italians also left with the Germans. The Italians were much more friendly. They throw all these packs of cigarettes. They gave us, to get rid of whatever they had. They left on Tuesday. Then the town was really quiet. The following day, that's when the others came in.

**AROGETI:** When did you and your family first learn about the Holocaust<sup>31</sup> in Europe?

**ICHAY:** Much, much later.

**AROGETI:** 1945, 1946, 1947?

**ICHAY:** Probably. We didn't hear very much.

**AROGETI:** Were any members of your extended family ever involved in the Holocaust?

**ICHAY:** No. The thing is, no, no. We knew soon after the war because we knew that we were next in line. Had the Germans stayed another two weeks in Tunisia, the catacombs were built and they were ready to . . . they were built in a town called Djedeida [possibly].

**AROGETI:** There were crematoriums built in Tunisia?

**ICHAY:** They were in Djedeida. We found out after. I have never seen them. We found out after that had they stayed another two weeks, had the Allied troops not come in, we would have been next in line to go.

**AROGETI:** That's interesting because you don't hear very much about . . . you hear about the crematoriums in Europe and Germany and Poland.

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<sup>30</sup> Erwin Rommel (1891–1944) was a German general. He served as field marshal in the Wehrmacht of Nazi Germany during World War II. The success of his North Africa military campaign earned him the nickname "Desert Fox" from British journalists. When Rommel was accused as a conspirator in the plot to assassinate Adolph Hitler in 1944, he committed suicide rather than face trial.

<sup>31</sup> The systematic, government-sponsored attempt by the Germans to annihilate the Jews of Europe between 1939 and 1945, which resulted in the deaths of nearly 6,000,000 Jews.

**ICHAY:** They said the camp was built. They were ready to . . . my father was almost deported to Germany at the very beginning, but they didn't take him.

**AROGETI:** Do you know how he avoided that?

**ICHAY:** Because he tried . . . he told the SS. The SS asked for something. My father says he cannot deliver. They told him, "You better deliver." He said, "If [Adolf] Hitler<sup>32</sup> hears what you're doing," my father is telling the SS, "he'll probably shoot you." The SS said, "What do you mean?" He said, "I mean, if you have <unintelligible> the Arab mentality," you know and so on. He says, "When you have a cow, if you milk it too much, you won't get any more milk. So, don't kill the cow who is giving you or don't kill the goose, you know, who is laying the eggs for you." He said, "Either you want it or you don't want it. But if I tell you I can't, then . . ." Ironically, at the time, it fell back almost to him and the other guy. Then they wouldn't have anybody to deal with, and so they didn't take him. I didn't see my father for weeks. He used to come at sometimes two or three o'clock in the morning. In that room, we used to sleep . . . I think my father and mother had a bed. In that bed, probably my youngest sister was sleeping with them. On the carpet, there must have been about maybe six or seven of us sleeping on carpet.

**AROGETI:** These were your brother and sisters?

**ICHAY:** In one room.

**AROGETI:** And relatives?

**ICHAY:** And some relatives sometimes sleeping there, too. Cousins. Then I moved into another room across from that room. We used to sleep about 12 of us in that room, 8 or 12. I can't remember. Quite a number of us.

**AROGETI:** Were these cousins, aunts, and uncles of yours?

**ICHAY:** Yes. They were relatives.

**AROGETI:** Tell me a little bit about some of the holidays that you remember as a young child and as a teenager that were celebrated were in your home.

**ICHAY:** Holidays. Because the Jewish life was much more intensive, you notice much more. If you take *Yom Kippur*, we knew that there was only one Jewish store open. All the other stores were closed. On Saturday, there were some stores which were open. There were some Jewish stores open on Saturday, but the majority of the Jewish population did not work on *Shabbat*. It was closed. If

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<sup>32</sup> Adolf Hitler (1889-1945) was a German politician who was the leader of the Nazi Party, Chancellor of Germany from 1933 to 1945, and Führer ("leader") of Nazi Germany from 1934 to 1945. As dictator of Nazi Germany, he initiated World War II in Europe with the invasion of Poland in September 1939 and was a central figure of the Holocaust.

you take *Rosh Ha-Shanah*<sup>33</sup> and *Yom Kippur*, 99.99 percent, with the exception of one store, believe me. One store was open on *Yom Kippur*, and it was a shoe store. They used to sell shoes. I still remember the name of the guy. Fitoussi was the guy.

**AROGETI:** F. Itoussi?

**ICHAY:** No. Fitoussi. F-I-T-O-U-S-S-I. Fitoussi. What you see is that even though many other kids might not go to *shul*, might not go to a <unintelligible> or to a synagogue, or maybe would drive or maybe would smoke. We knew them. Nevertheless, the Jewish life interacted with all the others. I had some friends who used to go to a synagogue like I did for every service. Others used to keep on walking into a street on *Shabbat* afternoon, and we joined them two minutes later after we finished a service, 10 minutes, 15 minutes, whatever it took. We used to go and join them and carry on our walk or carry on spending Saturday afternoon with them. When festivals came, because we all lived within a certain area, you could see everybody walking to the synagogue, to the synagogue of their choice. You didn't have to go to one particular synagogue. Usually, you went to the nearest one. But if you had your friend a bit further and you wanted to be with him, you walked to the other, all under the aegis of one community. You did not belong to a synagogue. You belonged to a Jewish community. Therefore, you go to the synagogue of your choice. You might like the cantor<sup>34</sup> in one synagogue or the rabbi. You might like to listen to a talk which might be given by a young guy. I remember we used to walk to one synagogue because you had a young guy who used to give us a course on <unintelligible>, and he was great.

**AROGETI:** What was his name, do you remember?

**ICHAY:** No.

**AROGETI:** Was he a student or a teacher?

**ICHAY:** No, he was already an advanced student. Much, much advanced. He went to Israel, by the way. I can't remember his name. I remember his face, but I can't remember his name. We used to go and listen to that talk. That's the way. You can see everybody walking and going to synagogue. When you come out, you're invited to some other house. Sometimes a friend would tell you, "Come to my house for a second." We used to walk from one house to the other on *Shabbat* and have maybe a bit of tea, like the same way when you come here. We used to do it. Sometimes it created problems

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<sup>33</sup> *Rosh Ha-Shanah* [Hebrew: head of the year; i.e. New Year festival] begins the cycle of High Holy Days. 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. Prayer and repentance before the sealing of the books on *Yom Kippur* may revoke these decisions.

<sup>34</sup> The *chazzan* (cantor) is the official in charge of music or chants and leads liturgical prayer and chanting in the

because by the time you get home and your mother is upset because the challah<sup>35</sup> was almost burned. You didn't come in time to come and eat. But you can feel on *Rosh Ha-Shanah* and *Yom Kippur* and the festivals. *Sukkot*.<sup>36</sup> On *sukkot*, you walk into the street and you see the *sukkah*<sup>37</sup> built on every balcony. Everybody built a *sukkah*. In Tunisia, they were made out of palm trees, branches of a palm. Therefore, you see all these palms in the balconies. You see them all over that area. On *Rosh Ha-Shanah* when you go to do the *tashlikh*,<sup>38</sup> pouring all the sins into . . . we used to go to the beach. They had hundreds of Jews gathering there. On *Yom Kippur*, you could almost not get into the synagogue. I remember being in Tunis one year. It was almost 500 meters outside the synagogue. Crowd standing in the streets.

**AROGETI:** Tell me a little about the most memorable synagogue in Tunisia that you remember attending as a child? Obviously, there was separate seating for the men and women?

**ICHAY:** Absolutely. Absolutely. But not many women went to synagogue. Usually some of these women who did go to the synagogue, if they sat with the men, nobody told them anything because they were too old. If a woman is 70 years old, 75 . . . There, believe me 70, 75 was old in those days. It's not like today, you can see 70, 75, you're still a young guy. In those days, a woman 70, 75 was old. You could not ask her to go to the balcony. She could not. Therefore, she used to sit in the corner in the men's sanctuary and nobody would say anything. They wouldn't. But if other women come, then yes, they would say. The only time the women came to a synagogue was on *Kol Nidre*.<sup>39</sup> Not *Kol Nidre*. They came at the end for blessing, which we have here.

**AROGETI:** At the end of *Kippur*?

**ICHAY:** At the end of *Kippur*, to be blessed. Then everybody walked everywhere. Men, women, children, and so on. They all come next to the head of the family. My mother would come. My

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synagogue.

<sup>35</sup> Challah is special Jewish braided bread eaten on Sabbath and Jewish holidays.

<sup>36</sup> One of the Harvest Festivals. It is seven days long and comes after the ingathering of the yearly harvest. It celebrates G-d's bounty in nature and G-d's protection, symbolized by the fragile booths in which the Israelites dwelt in the wilderness. During *Sukkot* Jews eat and live in such booths, which gives the festival its name and character.

<sup>37</sup> During *Sukkot*, Jews transfer their living quarters from the house to a *sukkah*, which is a makeshift booth whose roof is of branches or vegetation thin enough to let the rain in. People eat in the *sukkah* and many pious Jews sleep there. The *sukkah* is meant to remind Jews of the booths in which their ancestors dwelt when they wandered in the wilderness during the Exodus.

<sup>38</sup> *Tashlikh* is a ritual that many Jews observe during *Rosh Ha-Shanah*. *Tashlikh* means "casting off" in Hebrew and involves symbolically casting off the sins of the previous year by tossing pieces of bread or another food into a body of flowing water. Just as the water carries away the bits of bread, so too are sins symbolically carried away. Since *Rosh Ha-Shanah* is the Jewish new year, in this way the participant hopes to start the new year with a clean slate.

<sup>39</sup> *Kol Nidre* is an Aramaic declaration recited in the synagogue before the beginning of the evening service on every *Yom Kippur*, the Day of Atonement.

sisters would come under my father's *tallit*,<sup>40</sup> and he used to bless. After that, they used to leave. Even though there was a women gallery, not all synagogues had a women gallery, by the way. One of the synagogues I used to go to, which was close to when we moved and we lived in the Arab quarter, the synagogue there did not have a balcony. It had a courtyard. That was supposed to be the women's courtyard. When you walk into the synagogue, you walk in from the area where women are sitting. Then you walk into a main sanctuary. There was no galley. Other synagogues had a galley.

**AROGETI:** How many years did you spend at the *Talmud Torah* and *Yeshiva*?

**ICHAY:** First of all, I studied ever since I was five. As a child, I used to have a private tutor was to come to our house, besides going Thursdays, Sundays, Saturday afternoon, and every morning to a *minyán*<sup>41</sup> besides that. On the formal study day, it must have been about three years.

**AROGETI:** This would have been age 13, 14, 15, 16, is that right?

**ICHAY:** Correct. In 1945, that's when I went to work for one of my father's artisans. Craftsman.

**AROGETI:** What did you do for him?

**ICHAY:** I learned jewelry, a little.

**AROGETI:** Learned how to make jewelry?

**ICHAY:** I learned how to make jewelry.

**AROGETI:** With gold and silver?

**ICHAY:** Correct.

**AROGETI:** What were some of the things that you did? Rings? Bracelets?

**ICHAY:** Rings, bracelets, broaches, necklaces. Any kind. I was not the greatest craftsman. I wish I had the silver dollars I melted. It's a huge number of silver dollars. We used to get it that way because silver dollar is 925. It's like sterling silver.

**AROGETI:** Were these American silver dollars?

**ICHAY:** Yes. We used to get the silver. I wish I had them, all those I melted in those days. It was by the hundreds.

**AROGETI:** How long did you apprentice and work with your father and his artisans?

**ICHAY:** From 1945 to almost 1948, 1947.

**AROGETI:** By that time, you were 18, 19 almost 20 years old?

<sup>40</sup> A prayer shawl fringed at each of the four corners in accordance with biblical law. The wearing of *tallit* at worship is obligatory only for married men, but it is customarily worn also by males of *bar mitzvah* age and older/

<sup>41</sup> A *minyán* refers to the quorum of 10 Jewish adults required for certain religious obligations. According to many non-Orthodox streams of Judaism adult females count in the *minyán*.

**ICHAY:** Yes. In 1948, I went to work for my uncle in my hometown. I came back. From Tunis, I came back to Sousse.

**AROGETI:** What was your uncle doing then?

**ICHAY:** He had the flour mill. He was a big manufacturer. My uncle, he was my mother's sister's husband. It was <unintelligible> to my mother.

**AROGETI:** Right, through marriage.

**ICHAY:** Yes. David's father, David D'Alimonte's [sp] father who came here. He had two factories. One of them produced only flour and samorina. They had a small area where they used to make the ice. Huge. They used to come into the trucks and they sell the ice. Do you remember on the street?

**AROGETI:** Big blocks of ice?

**ICHAY:** Big blocks of ice. I can still remember. They used to be on the ground. I used to pick them up, and it was full of water. Then I used to put these blocks. The other one was about three miles away. That one had flour mill. That is where I used to work. I started in the first one, but I ended up in the second one. Had the flour mill, both used samorina and flour and the dross, which was sold. The dross of the wheat was sold for the cattle feed. They had an oil factory. They used to make olive oil. They used to make . . . another factory next to it in the same Jewish compound. The other factory used to make the olive oil for soap. Once you have the dross of the olives, then you treat it chemically.

**AROGETI:** What is the dross of an olive?

**ICHAY:** If you take an olive and you crush it, then you get the juice out. But then you have the . . .

**AROGETI:** Pulp?

**ICHAY:** The pulp. The pulp becomes like a paste which the juice has been taken out completely. There is nothing. It's dry. It's a dry part. That part used to be treated chemically with a chemical, which smelled horrible. That chemical you would draw again oil from that pulp. The last results of the pulp was that you get a powder, a black powder, which you could tar the road with. You could even use it to burn into the factory.

**AROGETI:** As a fuel?

**ICHAY:** As a fuel, or you could use it to tar the dirt roads which were in the factory. They used to spread it there and then go over it and then it would become hardened. That oil was used to make soap. You could not drink it. It was poison because it was through the chemicals. So, the olive went through

these different steps. First, you'd have the olives. Then you pull out the olive oil. Then the olive oil was put in barrels. The pulp, whatever was left, went to the other side of the factory, got treated. Then became oil, which you worked into the soap factory. Then it moved and it made soap with olive oil. Then there was a canning factory. We used to can sardines and mackerels. It was in another area there. I worked in the flour mill and the olive production. That's where I worked.

**AROGETI:** And how long did you work there?

**ICHAY:** I worked from 1948 until either 1952 or 1953.

**AROGETI:** You were in your early to mid-20s?

**ICHAY:** Correct. That's when I went to the seminary.

**AROGETI:** Tell me a little bit about that. What inspired you to go from a career in business, in commerce, to the seminary?

**ICHAY:** It's by accident. From the time I was 14 or 15, I used to belong to a Zionist organization. I used to belong to Marekeva, which was a religious . . . it's like *Mizrachi*,<sup>42</sup> the Upward *Mizrachi*, not Israeli. In those days, you don't hear much about the Upward *Mizrachi*. You have different religious political parties.

**AROGETI:** What was the name of it again?

**ICHAY:** Upward *Mizrachi*. The *Mizrachi* worker. It was like more socialist religious whereas *Mizrachi* was <unintelligible>. I helped form that organization there. There is a chapter in my hometown. Then I moved to *Torah va'Avoda*<sup>43</sup> which was a higher . . . when you reach a certain age, when you're not <unintelligible>. *Bnei Akiva*<sup>44</sup> was for younger teenagers. Then once you reach eighteen, you move to *Torah va'Avoda*, which was a political arm of *Bnei Akiva*. I was the secretary or head of that organization while I was in my hometown. *Torah va'Avoda* means *Torah* and work and labor. Many of the *kibbutzim*<sup>45</sup> were *Torah va'Avoda*.

**AROGETI:** The second word is *Torah Avoda*?

**ICHAY:** And. *Avoda*. *Torah va'Avoda*. In fact, in 1947, three visas were granted to three Tunisian Jews from the British. They could go legally to Israel. One of these visas was allocated to

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<sup>42</sup> *Mizrachi* is a religious Zionist organization founded in 1902 in Vilna, Lithuania by Rabbi Yitzhak Yaacov Reines. Its youth movement, *Bnei Akiva*, became an international movement. *Mizrachi* believes that the *Torah* should be at the center of Zionism and that Jewish nationalism is a means of achieving religious objectives.

<sup>43</sup> *Torah va'Avodah* (Torah and Labor) is a Zionist slogan and a religious Zionist organization that supported the founding of religious *kibbutzim* and *moshavim* where work was done according to *Halakha*. Its name came from the *Mizrachi* Zionist organization. It was founded in 1922.

<sup>44</sup> The *Bnei Akiva* movement began out of the *Mizrachi* movement in 1929 in British Mandate Palestine to promote religious study and work in the land of Israel. Today, it is the largest religious Zionist youth movement in the world.

<sup>45</sup> A *kibbutz* [Hebrew: 'gathering' or 'clustering'] is a collective community in Israel traditionally based on

me. They told me, "You have a visa if you want to go to Israel." I almost went. My parents would not sign the papers for me to get a passport. They would not. They didn't let me go. But I was in charge of preparing the people who wanted to go on immigration to Israel, illegally. In those days, it was illegal immigration. My cousin went to Cyprus. Twenty years in Cyprus, one of my cousins was caught by the British in Cyprus. Many of them were. The way we used to do it is we used to get the passport. To get a passport is not that easy to get, so you have to try and get . . . it's better if you can get a French I.D. card. The French I.D. card used to cost 10 francs, like \$2. We had that connection with the chief of police there. We used to go, give him the names, information, and he would fill in the I.D. card saying that you're a French citizen. With that, you left Tunisia, and you went to the south of France. You stayed in Marseilles in a camp called <unintelligible>. From there, after a certain time when the boats were ready, you were put into a boat and just went to Israel as illegal immigration. In 1948, of course, the State [of Israel] was declared as a State. I still worked and sent a few. It was not illegal any more at the time, but we still had a problem leaving the country. Because if <unintelligible> sees you are going to Israel, you had some problems. Not big problem, but you had some problem. So, we used to get these papers, these French papers and French I.D. card. It was a simple card, just with your picture on it and saying that you were a French citizen. I still worked for that. Then one day when they formed the seminary in <unintelligible> in England, it was in conjunction with the Sephardic community of Briton. Dr. [Solomon] Gaon<sup>46</sup> and the Sephardic community and the Jewish Agency [of Israel].<sup>47</sup>

**AROGETI:** We'll talk about Dr. Gaon in a few minutes. In 1948, the Sephardic Jews of England formed a synagogue?

**ICHAY:** No, no, no. In 1952 or 1953, the Sephardic in England used to be scholars at Montefiore College. That was a college where . . . in the time of Montefiore, you had 10 . . . the equivalent of a college where the rabbis who lived there . . . some of them was a famous one, Rabbi [Shem Tob] Gaguine,<sup>48</sup>

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agriculture. They began as utopian communities that combined socialism and Zionism.

<sup>46</sup> Rabbi Solomon Gaon was born in Yugoslavia in 1912. Both of his parents died in the Holocaust. In 1949 he became *Haham* (Chief Rabbi) of the Sephardic congregations of the British Commonwealth. He died in 1994.

<sup>47</sup> The Jewish Agency for Israel is the largest Jewish nonprofit organization in the world. Previously called the Palestine Zionist Executive, it was designated in 1929 as the "Jewish agency" provided for in the League of Nations' Palestine Mandate. The Jewish Agency played a central role in the founding and the building of the State of Israel and continues to serve as the main link between Israel and Jewish communities around the world. Since 1948, the Jewish Agency for Israel has been responsible for bringing 3 million immigrants to Israel.

<sup>48</sup> Shem Tob Gaguine (1884–1953) was a British Sephardic rabbi. His major contribution to Jewish scholarship was *Keter Shem Tob*, an encyclopedic treatise which examines and compares the rites, ceremonies and liturgy of the eastern and western Sephardim and Ashkenazim, paying particular attention to the customs of Spanish and Portuguese Jews. The first two volumes were published in 1934. The final work comprised a total of 7 volumes, the last 4 of which were published posthumously with the help of his son, Rabbi Dr. Maurice Gaguine. In 1998 *Keter Shem Tob* was republished as a complete set.

who wrote a lot of books on Sephardic customs and traditions and the reasons for some of the laws. What they did, there were small houses all joined, all connected. You had like a semi-circle. There was a synagogue, a beautiful synagogue, the Montefiore synagogue. This college was built. They called it the Lady Judith Montefiore [College].<sup>49</sup> I don't call it *yeshiva*. *Yeshiva* Lady Judith Montefiore's wife named after. You had about ten houses which were two-story houses. You had the room on the bottom with a small kitchen, a very small kitchen in the room. At the top, there were two or three bedrooms also, one next to the other. In the middle of that semicircle, you had a study room and at the top there was a library, which was a huge room where all the books which [Sir] Moses Montefiore<sup>50</sup> had. For many years, it was just a place where 10 families lived there, 10 rabbis' families. All they did was study under the guidance of one particular head, whoever it was, which was Rabbi Gaguine. They all either died or left, and for many years, the school was just looked after by a caretaker, that building. One of them was called Afrigan, by the way. Like African, but instead of a "c," you had a "g." You were Afrigan. He was of Moroccan origin, a great guy, but typical English with top hat. He took care of things. There was a minister or reverend who lived in a house close by the synagogue who took care of the synagogue. Next to the synagogue there was a mausoleum where Moses Montefiore and his wife were buried. It was mausoleum. You can see the stone, raised stone. Jews used to come and visit it. The minister every day used to go for morning service, like there was a *minyan*, at exactly 7:30 in the morning. He used to walk in, put his <unintelligible>. The whole thing. It starts from 7:30. It takes him about one hour to read the morning service and did it like he had a minyan; but singing, chanting, exactly. I remember when we came, we had to go for all that – and in the afternoon for

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<sup>49</sup> Lady Judith Montefiore, born in London as Judith Barent Cohen (1784–1862) to a prominent religiously observant Ashkenazi family. Her father, Levi A. Barnet Cohen (1740–1808), a wealthy Dutch businessman, had settled in London in the 1770s. She was given a strong education in languages, including French, German, Italian, Hebrew, and Arabic as well as an intensive background in literature, music and art. In 1812 she married Moses Montefiore, a Sephardi of Italian origin. Marriages between Sephardim and Ashkenazim were not approved by the Portuguese Synagogue, but Moses believed that these divisions were hurtful to the best interests of Judaism and was desirous of abolishing it. After her death, Sir Moses Montefiore founded Judith Lady Montefiore College at Ramsgate in her memory.

<sup>50</sup> Moses Montefiore (1784-1885) was born in Livorno, Tuscany to a Sephardic Jewish family. In 1812, Moses Montefiore married Judith Cohen. Her sister, Henriette (or Hannah) was married to Nathan Mayer Rothschild. The two brothers-in-law became business partners. Montefiore retired from his business in 1820 and used his time and fortune for communal and civic responsibilities. He established a Judith Lady Montefiore College, a Sephardic *yeshiva*, after the death of his wife in 1862. Jewish philanthropy and the Holy Land were at the center of Montefiore's interest. He was elected Sheriff of London in 1837 and served until 1838. He was also knighted that same year by Queen Victoria and received a baronetcy in 1846 in recognition of his services to humanitarian causes on behalf of the Jewish people. A number of synagogues and medical centers in United States and Canada were named in honor of Montefiore. In Israel, Montefiore is commemorated in several cities by streets named after him. He was also commemorated on two Israeli banknotes.

*minhah*<sup>51</sup> and the same thing for *Shabbat*. He didn't have a minyan. Then we decided that London community with the Jewish Agency, to turn it into a *yeshiva*, turn it into a college. It was called Lady Judith Montefiore College. And started bringing youngsters from Tunisia and from Morocco. Moroccan and Tunisian Jews. They wanted to prepare them to be . . . when the Jewish Agency went into that contract with the Jewish, the Sephardic community of England, the arrangement was as follows: All the students who go there the Jewish community, Sephardic community, they will pay for their learning, their transport, vacation once a year if they go back to see their families, their food, that sort of thing is paid for, the upkeep of the place. But the students who have to go back to Tunisia and become teachers or spiritual leaders, prepare the community to go on IBL to Israel. That's the arrangements, how we went to Montefiore College. The Sephardic community had the rights to keep two or three of them for their own needs.

**AROGETI:** In England?

**ICHAY:** In England, right. When they told me if I had anybody, if I prepare the young guy. He was 16 years old. I was 23, 24. I prepared this young man. He was supposed to go. We prepared his passport, his papers, so that he would go to the seminary. Then about maybe a month before he was supposed to leave, his father came to me and says, "If you want my son, you have to pay me what he earns every year because he works for me and we need him. We are poor people." I don't know how much it was at the time. It was peanuts. I mean, literally, it wasn't that much money. I turned around to his father and I says, "You know, you are destroying your son because when he comes back, he'll make in one month what he's making in one year now, if not more in one month than what he's doing in one year." The father said, "Nothing doing. Either you pay me or you don't." So, I wrote Tunis to my chief, my superior, the one that was in charge. I wrote to him and I explained to him the situation. I said, "It's crazy. I don't understand the guy. I'm still fighting with him to let his son go." Here I am, and that's what I'm writing. I'm making 100 times more money than his son is. I'm making big money at the time, because I have such . . . that's another story. I was making big, big money working as a go-between, buying the flour and delivering and buying olive oil and so on. I was, what do you call that?

**AROGETI:** Commission salesman?

**ICHAY:** Yes, commission salesman. I was making big bucks. Big, big bucks. I spent it as fast as I made it. Here I am, making all this money. If I had the opportunity, I would have gone. I wouldn't stay here. What am I doing here in Tunisia? I got a letter that says you're on board ship. That's

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<sup>51</sup> The afternoon prayer service, one of the three daily services of the Jewish liturgy.

exactly what happened. He called me or he wrote back or he called me on the phone. He says, "You know, you're on board ship. Prepare your passport." I prepared my passport within a week or two weeks. My mother didn't even know. She almost had a fit. About a week before I was leaving, I told her, "Oh, by the way, I'm going to England." My mother won't let me go next door. She was a very, very fat woman, a very . . . I wouldn't say she was mentally disturbed. She was not, but she was very . . .

**AROGETI:** Was she concerned about the unknown?

**ICHAY:** She was afraid. No, if she says I must be home at eight o'clock, from five to eight, she's always sitting on the balcony and thinking about that. My mother, when I was here, if she heard that there was a flood in Los Angeles, she used to call me here in Atlanta, if everything was all right. That's her kind of a . . . so I did go. When I finished, when I graduated from Montefiore College . . . because I and one more guy, there were two of us, could speak English better than the others, because we learned. While we were there, we were able to learn. I had some background because I went two years in high school. When the GI came, I used to be able to . . . but my English was . . . if it's bad now, it was horrible then. I still remember some of my mistakes. On a bus, I said, "Did you know double-deckers?" The guy from the top starts shouting and says. "I might be. I'm on the top deck." The guy, what do you call it, the one who gives the tickets.

**AROGETI:** The driver or ticket taker?

**ICHAY:** Not the driver. The one who takes the tickets downstairs. He has people coming up. He asks, "Any more room upstairs?" I say, "Yes, there are six rooms" instead of "six seats" available. This kind of thing. The expression which . . . even grammatically I was not. I still remember one of my papers one time <unintelligible>. I wrote a four-letter word trying to speak about fog. There was a lot of fog here in one of my first . . . . The teacher looks at the paper. He says, "You mean fog?" And he corrects it. All I wrote was a four-letter word. I didn't even know what it meant at the time.

**AROGETI:** <Laughing> What was the name of this other student with you?

**ICHAY:** Camhi.

**AROGETI:** Camhi? C-A-M-H-I.

**ICHAY:** C-A-M-H-I. No, K. I think his name was spelled with a K. K-A-M-H-I. He, the two of us, the Jewish Agency released because we signed a contract that we'd go back so that we could go and minister to Jews, to Sephardic community, which we did.

**AROGETI:** How many years were you in England?

**ICHAY:** Three and a half years, from February 1953 to August 1956.

**AROGETI:** That was in Manchester?

**ICHAY:** No, no. That was at a college. When I graduated from college . . .

**AROGETI:** What type of courses did you take there? Were they secular courses? French, languages?

**ICHAY:** No, no, no, no. The only secular course was English. Everything else was from *Torah*, psychology, teaching, *Bible*, *Talmud*.<sup>52</sup> Every day we had at least an hour and a half of *Talmud*. When I graduated there, they pushed me to the rabbinate to become a spiritual leader. I moved to Manchester into a small community where a lot of people went through that synagogue, only 40 families, which by the way still exists in another area. That building became a museum, became historical. It was a beautiful little synagogue. I went there and worked there. While I went there to prepare for, I had to try and go and get my matric [matriculation]. I didn't have secular studies certificate. I did not. I had maybe on the outside, so I had to go back to evening classes to try and get my matric.

**AROGETI:** Matric is your . . .

**ICHAY:** General Certificate of Education so I could go to college. I didn't have that since I dropped out when I was 13. So, here I am now, in 1956, I'm a 27-year-old, and have to go back and study to get my degree. Otherwise, I have no degree. The only degree I have is a Jewish one. I went and studied. Got my matric. Passed every subject in General Certificate of Education. My matric, my high school certificate, is from England as a foreign student working and learning at night. In 1959, that's when I was going to go to college. I was going to go to Manchester College and learned Semitic studies, Semitic languages. While I was working, preparing my papers to go to college, I received a call from Dr. Gaon telling me if I would come to London, I was in Manchester at the time, if I would come to London and meet a gentleman from Rhodesia who is looking for someone.

**AROGETI:** Tell us a little bit of who is Dr. Gaon.

**ICHAY:** Dr. Gaon was my . . .

**AROGETI:** What is his name, his full name?

**ICHAY:** Solomon Gaon.

**AROGETI:** G-A-O-N?

**ICHAY:** G-A-O-N.

**AROGETI:** Who was he?

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<sup>52</sup> Hebrew for 'study.' The legal code spanning 1,000 years and based on the teachings of the *Bible*, the *Talmud* interprets biblical laws and commandments. It also contains a rich store of historic facts and traditions. It has two divisions: the *Mishnah* and the *Gemara*. The *Mishnah* is the interpretation of Biblical law. The *Gemara* is a commentary on the *Mishnah* by a group of later scholars.

**ICHAY:** Solomon Gaon was born in Yugoslavia in a small village not far from Sarajevo. He came to England and became, eventually, the chief rabbi of the Sephardic communities in England and Commonwealth. He was accepted in Australia. He used to go Australia, New Zealand. I don't know about New Zealand. I think he did. Of course, South Africa, Rhodesia, and wherever there was a British-speaking Sephardic community, he was their spiritual leader. He was a head of that seminary there. He was not the principal of it. We had a principle who was a teacher, but he was like the director or the . . . and he was the one who was always in contact with us. When we stayed there, then we were in contact with him. We carried on studying with him under his supervision. He moved us from one place to another. He didn't force us, but he asked us. He asked me if I would go to Rhodesia. So, here I go back to London. I'm offered the job to go to Rhodesia. I'm still interviewing to go into Manchester University, which was a great college for Semitic languages. I told the guy, I said, "You know, can you give me an extension for my application?" He says, "You better have a good excuse for it." I told him what was happening to the dean of the faculty there. He says, "It is a good excuse, so you have to make a decision to come or not." I decided to go to Rhodesia. That's why when I went to Rhodesia, that's where I went to college there, to try and get my B.A.

**AROGETI:** You went to college in Rhodesia?

**ICHAY:** Sure. While I was working. I was working full-time now. I am now an associate minister, associate rabbi to Dr. [Joseph] Papo.

**AROGETI:** The year is 19 what?

**ICHAY:** Year is 19 . . . 31st of December, 1959. It's the first of January, 1960, in Rhodesia now.

**AROGETI:** You're 30 years old.

**ICHAY:** Yes. And I'm going back to college.

**AROGETI:** Going back to college.

**ICHAY:** And working full time.

**AROGETI:** Assistant to the rabbi in Salisbury, Rhodesia.

**ICHAY:** Associate, because he was going to retire, eventually, so they didn't call me assistant. He got really upset. I was an associate rabbi. Associate minister.

**AROGETI:** The name of the rabbi in Salisbury?

**ICHAY:** Dr. Papo. P-A-P-O. He was originally from Austria. He spoke German.

**AROGETI:** The name of the synagogue in Salisbury?

**ICHAY:** Salisbury Hebrew Congregation.

**AROGETI:** Sephardic.

**ICHAY:** No, not Salisbury Hebrew. It was Sephardic Hebrew Congregation of Rhodesia.

**AROGETI:** How big a congregation was it? How many families?

**ICHAY:** At the time, there were 230 families. All Rhodeslees. All from the Island of Rhodes. Not all, with the exception of maybe seven or eight. There was one from Turkey by the name of Petsu Feloine [sp], who felt like an outsider. A nice, very nice guy. There were about six or seven German Jews who would not belong to the Ashkenazi congregation because of a few reasons. Number one, the decorum was not as good as ours. Ours was as close as you can get to a "Reform"<sup>53</sup> congregation as far as the decorum. The services were Orthodox. It was known for part of it. But from point of view of decorum, number one. Number two, they would not associate with Polish Jews and Lithuanian Jews. These were supposed to be the line of, you know, from Berlin or Frankfurt. I don't know where they came from. Thirdly, they identified with Dr. Papo because he was from Austria and his wife, who was also from Austria.

**AROGETI:** What was her name?

**ICHAY:** Louise. Louise also, believe it or not, like Luisa Cohen here. Louise Papo. They could identify with them because we are from Austria and from Germany and, therefore, joined our synagogue. One of them belongs to our synagogue now here.

**AROGETI:** Who is that?

**ICHAY:** Andre Schnabl. His father was Fritz Schnabl. His father was, and he belonged to our synagogue. Andre came here to belong too. Andre Schnabl is one of us. I knew Andre Schnabl from Rhodesia. He was my member there when I was in Rhodesia. What happened was that I became the associate minister at the time. While I was working, I had to go to college. I became not the . . . it's funny because there was no campus at the time there. There was campus life but there were no dormitories or anything. I don't think anybody . . . no, there must have been. I don't remember. I think there were, there were. There was a place for a student center, but I was an outside . . .

**AROGETI:** You were day student?

**ICHAY:** Day student.

**AROGETI:** You commuted.

**ICHAY:** I used to go only for the courses. I used to miss the extramural. I used to miss a lot of things. I could not do them.

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<sup>53</sup> A division within Judaism especially in North America and Western Europe. Historically it began in the nineteenth century. In general, the Reform movement maintains that Judaism and Jewish traditions should be modernized and compatible with participation in Western culture. While the *Torah* remains the law, in Reform Judaism women are included (mixed seating, *bat mitzvah* and women rabbis), music is allowed in the services and most of the service is in English.

**AROGETI:** Right. You would just go to class and study.

**ICHAY:** And bring back my papers. Blanchette used to make all the French translation.

**AROGETI:** This is probably as good a time as any to talk about . . . there's a woman that came into your life. Why don't you tell us about how you met Blanchette Lieberman?

**ICHAY:** We used to correspond. We are pen friends because we used to belong to the same organization.

**AROGETI:** Which organization was that?

**ICHAY:** The *Torah Va'Avodah*, the *Bnei Akiva*. It's really the same. The *Bnei Akiva* is for younger, and the *Torah Va'Avodah* . . . my friends went to Geneva on vacation. One of my friends met Blanchette's friend by the name of Rosette Sussman [sp]. She was here. She came and visited a couple of times. You probably met her. When we came back to Rhodesia, we started corresponding. As we corresponded, my version is, correct one, is that she asked my friend where is a friend for her friend who would correspond with her friend called Blanchette? She was one who asked. I have her letters, but that's beside the point. Makes no difference. It depends which version you have. The fact is that we were put . . . one of my friends was going to be the one to correspond and I ended up being the one corresponding. From 1952, we started corresponding. In 1953 when I went to England, she came to England. That's where we met for the first time. We just met. In 1956, I think, that's when we got engaged. But we corresponded all these years.

**AROGETI:** She was living in Switzerland?

**ICHAY:** But she was studying in England.

**AROGETI:** Where was she studying?

**ICHAY:** In some schools for finance. Blanchette is able to do accounting. She keeps books. She worked in Rhodesia for some companies and worked in England too. She's very good. I mean, as a secretary, but she used to be a good typist. She used to speak German. She speaks German. She speaks French. She speaks English, and she keeps books. She can keep the books. Therefore, she worked.

**AROGETI:** What was the year in which you got married?

**ICHAY:** 1957.

**AROGETI:** Tell us a little bit about where you got married.

**ICHAY:** We got married in Geneva, in Switzerland. I didn't see her for a year before we got married. I arrived two days before the wedding. Because the moment you announce our engagement in 1956, she went back to Geneva. For 11 months, we didn't see one another.

**AROGETI:** You corresponded?

**ICHAY:** We corresponded, yes, and the telephone. In 1957, we got married on the 12th of June. I arrived there the 10th of June. The 11th of June we had a civil marriage. The 12th of June, it was a religious marriage. We had to get married civilly before you have a religious one on Tuesday, the 11th of June in 1957.

**AROGETI:** Where was the religious ceremony?

**ICHAY:** It was in a garden in the community center. There was a room where we had the party. They put the *chuppah*<sup>54</sup> in the garden, and that's where we got married.

**AROGETI:** Who were some of your family members who were able to . . .

**ICHAY:** Only my father and my mother. I don't think any of my sisters or my brothers . . . I went to my brother's wedding. My two sisters' wedding, I did not go. My brother's wedding, I did. Can't remember why. We were in Paris at the time.

**AROGETI:** Were any of your colleagues or associates there?

**ICHAY:** At the time, nobody. It was all her side. Only my father. That's the time when my father and mother left Tunisia. In other words, they left Tunisia on the 10<sup>th</sup> or the 9<sup>th</sup> of June. They brought with them their belongings. They carried them by hand literally. That's all they had.

**AROGETI:** They left Tunisia?

**ICHAY:** And they left Tunisia. When they arrived in Geneva, they had these belongings in their hands, whether in a suitcase or in bags or whatever it was. The day after the wedding . . .

<End Tape 1, Side 2>

<Begin Tape 2, Side 1>

**AROGETI:** Beginning the second session of the interview with Robert Ichay. This is Joel Arogeti. We are here on the 22<sup>nd</sup>.

**ICHAY:** 20th.

**AROGETI:** 20th of October, 1995. Rabbi, when we last stopped talking, we were talking about your wedding in Switzerland to Blanchette Lieberman. You were telling us a little bit about how your parents traveled from North Africa to Switzerland for the wedding. Why don't you continue with the story. Then we'll talk a little bit more about your work after you and Blanchette were married.

**ICHAY:** They left Tunisia, and they came to Switzerland with all their belongings in their hands. They literally carried their belongings. They could not bring . . . they could not ship anything. They took what they needed, whatever they wanted. My father was not, at the time, working. He must

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<sup>54</sup> Hebrew for 'canopy.' The canopy under which a Jewish wedding takes place.

have lost it. My father went bankrupt twice or three times. In 1920, 1933, they lost. It was one of those casualties of the crash of the market. Then, again, a couple of years after the war because he was sick for about a year. Every time picks up and then loses it again. After the war, he went into another business and was able to make money and pay all his debts and whatever. Then again, a misjudgment on some kind of . . . when you invest all your . . . that's one thing I should have learned at the time and which I haven't learned very well. When you put all your eggs in one basket, you know, the classic ideas. One of the times or first time when he became bankrupt when he was a silver smith or rather dealing in jewelry and silver and gold, he put all his money in silver. It was huge, I mean, a fortune, literally a fortune in silver. Then he was sick for a year, literally, he was that way for a year, which I still remember it clearly. Therefore, he did not pay attention to what was happening in the gold markets. The gold went up, more than doubled and tripled in value, and the silver went down, and then he crashed. So, he ended up having almost worthless and lost a lot of money. Second time was when he started working with second-hand clothings. After the war, we used to receive these bales of clothes from United States. He went in business with a partner and was doing very, very well. There was plenty of money in that business. Again, he became not wealthy in the sense of wealthy, but pretty well off. He's had these up and down in his life where at times he was very well off and at times he just didn't have the money. Suddenly, because he thinks that's a thing of the future, so he made the warehouse of all these bales, a huge warehouse with bales and bales. He tried to corner the market, him and his partner. Suddenly, again, new clothes, and everything comes through cheap that his things are not worth anymore. That's the memory. It was like just completely abandoned for that segment. He's always comes turning on one issue. So, he came to Switzerland, to Geneva, for the wedding and stayed for the wedding. After the wedding, my parents went back to Paris, not back. They went on to Paris, and that's where they settled. The early years were very good for them.

**AROGETI:** What year was that that you were married?

**ICHAY:** In 1957. June 12, 1957.

**AROGETI:** Why did your parents select France, or Paris, in particular, to move, to relocate?

**ICHAY:** Two reasons. Number one was because it's a French speaking country. Reason number two was because it was the only county that would accept him. At the time when Tunisia got its independence, many of the Jews were allowed to . . . in fact, soon afterward were granted French citizenship. Because while we were second-class citizens, we were not . . . the Jews in Tunisia were not first-class citizens. They were Tunisian and yet second-class Tunisian

because we were *Tunisie protectorat francais*.<sup>55</sup> Tunisia was a protectorate. Therefore, the Jews in Tunisia were protected by the French government, so we were a guest of the Tunisian government even though we might have lived there for 2,000 years. The Jews were in Tunisia for more than 2,000 years. We are still second-class citizens in a sense that we did not have the same rights as the Muslims, but we had a lot of rights. We were almost a state within a state. We had our own courts. We ran our own affairs. The only time a Jew would appear in a civil court, in a non-Jewish civil court, is if his argument is between non-Jew.

**AROGETI:** When you were married in 1957, you were a citizen of Tunisia?

**ICHAY:** I was Tunisian.

**AROGETI:** After you were married, where did you and Blanchette live?

**ICHAY:** I was already in England. I came from England. I went to the seminary in England. When I went to England, that's when I saw Blanchette for the first time. We used to correspond before that, before I left Tunisia, through the efforts of a good friend of mine who corresponded with a friend of hers in Geneva, in Switzerland. We met in England. After a while we got engaged. Later I came from England to Geneva, and that's where we got married. When we got married, we went back to England. We were living in Manchester. I was living in Manchester at the time. We lived in Manchester for a while. In Manchester, I was more or less in training. She had to work so we could supplement the income there. After 1957, at the end of 1959, almost two years and a few months later, just a little over two years, I had the offer to go to Rhodesia.

**AROGETI:** Tell us, you became assistant to the rabbi or assistant rabbi?

**ICHAY:** When I went to Rhodesia, they gave me the title of Associate Rabbi, Associate Minister, Associate Rabbi, Associate Reverend.

**AROGETI:** Tell me a little bit about your life in Rhodesia. What was the name of your synagogue and where were you?

**ICHAY:** The synagogue was called the Sephardic Hebrew Congregation in Salisbury. It was Salisbury, now it is Harare. Salisbury, Rhodesia. When I came, the rabbi was saying that he was tired and wanted to retire and so on. They brought me along, and for about from 1960, from the first of January. I arrived in Rhodesia the 31st of December, 1959. It was one night 1959 or there's a night between 1959 and 1960. During 1960, 1961, 1962, and the first three months of 1963, that's when I went to college, first of all, during that period while I was working with the congregation. I went to

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<sup>55</sup> The French protectorate of Tunisia (French: *Protectorat français de Tunisie*) was established in 1881 during the French colonial empire and lasted until Tunisian independence in 1956. Before French occupation, Tunisia formed a province of the Ottoman Empire but enjoyed a large measure of autonomy.

University of Rhodesia Nyasaland it was known as the time, which was a little London charter.

**AROGETI:** What was the name of the city?

**ICHAY:** Nyasaland. No, it's not. It's University of Rhodesia in Nyasaland because at the time when I came, there used to be a federation between southern Rhodesia and northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland. Nyasaland has become . . . the name has changed. It's not called Nyasaland. It's not Zambia. Northern Rhodesia has become Zambia. Southern Rhodesia has become Zimbabwe. Federation broke up. Nyasaland is Malawi. It became Malawi. At the time, that university was University for this federation of these three different states or countries, Southern and Northern Rhodesia, Southern Rhodesia and Nyasaland. Therefore, it was University of Rhodesia and Nyasaland. While I was studying, I was working also at the synagogue. In 1963, I graduated. In 1960, 1961, and 1962, these were three years where I studied there. Beginning of 1963, the rabbi decided that he wanted to retire at the end of 1963. Beginning of 1964, he would retire. He suggested to me that I should go on sabbatical for nine months because they knew that the rabbi was not very happy. It was Rabbi Papo. Dr. Papo.

**AROGETI:** Spell his last name.

**ICHAY:** P-A-P-O. His name was Joseph also. Joseph Menford. We had problems. At the time, I did with him exactly what I did with Rabbi [Joseph] Cohen<sup>56</sup> here. I always looked up. I never . . . but for some reason or another, I find out afterwards the fellow said because it was that I was given the title of Associate instead of saying Assistant. I told him that one day because I went to see him before we left. I told him, "You've been fighting me all these years. I was working for you. I was not." I told him, "At the time, it's very <unintelligible>. Had you not fought with me, I couldn't do anything, so you stifled me so much and fought me so much that you really wanted to get rid of me. I wasn't going to stand up for you or take up your fight. Had you supported me, I would have said that I don't want you to retire. I would have said, 'Why doesn't he stay still as rabbi here, and I will do the job, but he'd still be the head rabbi.'" His wife turned around and told me, a very uncouth word she used. She says, "Because my husband is a . . ." She didn't use the word an idiot. She used a worse word. I said, "What bothered you? Was it the fact that they called me associate?" He said, "Yes." I mean clearly. I says, "You know, the title didn't mean anything to me. I really couldn't care less about the title." I told him,

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<sup>56</sup> Rabbi Joseph Cohen received his training for the rabbinate in Turkey and accepted his first pulpit in Havana, Cuba in 1920, where he was spiritual leader of the Congregation Union Hebraic de Cuba. In 1934, he moved to Atlanta, Georgia, and was installed as Rabbi of Congregation Or VeShalom three days after his arrival. In addition to his rabbinical duties, he served as the teacher and principal of Or VeShalom's Hebrew school. Rabbi Cohen was also active at the Atlanta Bureau of Jewish Education, the Adult Institute of Jewish Studies, the Atlanta Jewish Federation, and was the first president of the Atlanta Rabbinical Association. Rabbi Cohen retired in 1969 and died in 1985.

"I just wanted to do my job." But the title undermined <unintelligible>. They knew that and, therefore, felt that this nine months would have been very, very bad, the last nine months. They told me you go, and you come back when he's ready to leave. In fact, this is what happened is because he was going to leave and go back to Austria. That's where he was born. He used to receive a pension from the Austrian government because he was an allied Austrian. Therefore, I was going to occupy the house, which was also on the premises, close to the synagogue. I stayed for about two weeks or three weeks with a member. In fact, Menashe. Joe Menashe's brother-in-law. Not Joe Menashe but his brother-in-law, in his home until Dr. Papo left. When he left, they cleaned up the house and painted it, and then we moved into the house.

**AROGETI:** From 1964?

**ICHAY:** From beginning of 1964, about February of 1964 until August 1968.

**AROGETI:** Tell me, how did you have the occasion to move to Rhodesia?

**ICHAY:** It's very, very similar to the way I moved to Atlanta. I was going to go to college there in London. I took my matric, and I told you the story of when I left school. I took my matric in London. I wanted to go after I finished the seminary. Dr. Gaon was pushing. He says, "You need a degree. You need a degree." So, I went for my matric. While I was working in Manchester, I used to go to night classes to get my . . .

**AROGETI:** Secular degree?

**ICHAY:** To get the high school certificate so I could go to college, which I did. At the time, I was taking courses. I was a foreigner. Some of these things I was taking in years I never . . . it was like I left the high school, two years in high school, a year and a half in high school. In secondary school. Now we're talking like 13 years later, 13, 14 years later.

**AROGETI:** You're in your late 20s?

**ICHAY:** Yes.

**AROGETI:** You're going back to the equivalent of high school?

**ICHAY:** Yes. Sure. Sure. Many of the subject, whether it was geography or history or even maths, even mathematics as much as I love math. I was good in math, but, not that kind of . . . I never reached that. Never mind about Shakespeare and literature and so on. Never studied in my life. I mean, that's not my life. Anyway, I managed to get my high school certificate. It didn't take me long. It took me about a couple of years of study because it's limited. In England, the system was different. You choose the subject. As long as you have the number of subjects in what do they call ordinary level and then secondary level. Advanced, I forget what they call it. It might come back to me. I took the

number of subjects required to enable me to get a high school certificate which would enable me to go to college. I applied to be a student at Manchester University. Because Manchester University, that's where I was living, first of all, so I was working. I was working really as a student minister. The congregation was a very small one. In fact, it's a museum now, the building. Many before me have also went through because there was only like about 40 members. These 40 members were all very old people. For Sunday school, I used to have about six kids.

**AROGETI:** Now we're talking about your time in Manchester, England, and not in Rhodesia.

**ICHAY:** No, Manchester, England, before I went to Rhodesia, because you asked me how I went to Rhodesia.

**AROGETI:** Right.

**ICHAY:** I was there, and I applied to go to Manchester University. University of Manchester. I was accepted. They had told me to come and have until such a date to register. There I was going to take Semitic course. I was going to take B.A. in Semitics. I was going to take Aramaic, Arabic because that was my department, and Hebrew. Classical Hebrew. The day I was supposed to register, I got a call from Dr. Gaon. "Can you come to London to visit Mr. Rosen. He was a surgeon in Rhodesia who was looking for a guy and would like to interview you." It's the exactly the same way it happened when he came to the United States and told me, "Come to New York. Albert Maslia is here." I asked the guy, the dean of the university, of the department, of Semitic department, and I told him that I had to go to London. "I have something urgent. I cannot register. Could you postpone my registration for a couple of days?" He said, "You better have a very, very good excuse." I told him what happened, about the offer of a job. He said, "Well, that is a very good excuse," and he allowed me to go. The same thing happened which is basically what happened with Albert or maybe slightly different. Whereas, Albert didn't want to see me because I was a North African.

**AROGETI:** Why don't we jump ahead. Sometime in 1968, you had the occasion to be contacted by Dr. ...

**ICHAY:** No. In 1968, I wanted to quit North Africa.

**AROGETI:** Tell us a little bit about that.

**ICHAY:** 1968, I was tired. I was really tired. I was burned out. I told them. In fact, for a whole year I was telling them, I want to quit."

**AROGETI:** Them being your members in Rhodesia?

**ICHAY:** The members and the . . . and they would not. They would not listen. Even Mr. Rosen, who was my protector, was my sponsor. The same way as Albert does here. Mr. Rosen was the guy.

He carried a lot of weight. He used to say, "You're doing great. You're doing great." I went to him one day. I said, "Mr. Rosen, you're telling me I'm doing great. Suppose you're not my friend. Forget about that you're my friend and supporting me. Am I really performing the way I performed when I came here? Am I really working the same?" He said, "No." I said, "So what are you talking about? You can see I'm not performing as well." We kept thinking but nothing was happening because I kept telling him, "You should look for somebody," and they didn't. Because I wasn't going to leave without them . . . Then when I went to Paris, there was some kind of marriage or wedding or something. I went to Paris. While we were in Paris, we discussed it. I discussed it with Blanchette. I says, "I'm going to quit. I'm going to tell them. I'm going to write to them." I wrote a letter to them. "You find somebody. So when I come, I'll give you time to get somebody that you talk about, if you're going to get somebody. I just don't want to come back." What happened, that was during the strike in France in 1968. I don't know if you remember there were the students. There was that guy, [Daniel] Cohn-Bendit,<sup>57</sup> that young Jewish guy who hid in Paris and the airports were closed. I could not go back to Rhodesia. The mailing was . . . I had to go back. It was urgent for me to go back because they were waiting for me at the time. I took a military plane which was commuting between Paris and Geneva. For about \$20 or \$30, you just carry a suitcase on the plane, and you get those planes which are used for parachutists to jump. I've never had the pressure, cabin pressure. I thought my ears were going to pop. I mean, really. I went back to Geneva. When I arrived there, I'm acting as if they must have received my letter. They acted as if they received nothing. In fact, they did not receive the letter, so it was very upsetting. I says, "I hope you've got somebody." He said, "What do you mean?" Then I realized that he did not get a letter because of the strike. Anyway, to cut the story short, he realized that I was through because he got the letter eventually after the strike, but he did manage to get a guy. It took him about a month, because they did ask Dr. Gaon. At the time there was a lot of kids my type. Many of these were from the college, graduated from college. The day he arrived, I told him, "How long do you need me here?" He says, "No." He asks a couple of questions. I said, "Fine." The day he arrived, I left the following day. As when he came, I was all ready. Blanchette was not with me. She was in Paris. Packed up everything. Everything was packed up when I knew when he was coming, and I went to Paris. Stayed in Paris for about . . . maybe arrived in August, the 18th or 19th of August. That September was when Dr. Gaon asked me if I would come to the United States.

**AROGETI:** Dr. Gaon called you on the telephone and said, "Can you come to the United States to

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<sup>57</sup> Daniel Marc Cohn-Bendit (b. 1945) is a French-German politician. He was a student leader during the May 3, 1968, massive student and workers riots which erupted in Paris against Charles de Gaulle's government. Cohn-Bendit quickly emerged as a public face of the student protests.

meet with me?"

**ICHAY:** No, no. First of all, I was looking for a job in Paris, which I almost got. But because of passports. At the time, vacation passports weren't so good, so you could not travel as easily. It was very difficult. I got caught in Geneva, and they wouldn't let me come back in France. I wasted two weeks in Geneva until I could get a British passport, valid only for six months, so I could move. There were a lot of regulations with the papers. I went to England. Dr. Gaon kept telling me, "You're making a mistake. You should go back." I says, "You know, I'm tired. I really don't want to." He said, "Well, relax." Then Mr. Rosen came to France and saw me in Paris and started talking to me. He says, "You know, we made a mistake. We should have given you a sabbatical for a year." I was working seven years there. "Just go over here and you come back." I says, "You know, had you done that I might have come back. Maybe I would have come back." Anyway, it was water under the bridge at the time. I just wasn't ready to go back to Rhodesia. Dr. Gaon kept saying, "I'm going to United States and I know there are some synagogues looking for someone. Would you come?" I said, "Well, if I had nothing else to do, I would come." That's what happened. Then he went to New York and sent me a cable which was November, the beginning of November, telling me can I be in New York on such and such a time. I went and got my visa and went to New York. That's when I met Albert. The rest, you know, you know the story.

**AROGETI:** I may know, but a lot of folks listening to this tape may not know all the circumstances surrounding how you came to the United States. The Albert you've been talking about is?

**ICHAY:** Albert Maslia. Albert Maslia used to work for Rich's [Department Store].<sup>58</sup> As you know, he used to travel. Therefore, he's been, to this day, the agent, more or less, of one in charge of looking for somebody. At the time, it was easy because he used to travel between not only Atlanta and New York, but he used to go to Europe. He used to go to France. He used to go to England. He was in contact with all these people who would have been able to help him in his search for someone. Since Albert was going to be in New York, Dr. Gaon told me, and Albert must have told Dr. Gaon or Dr. Gaon must have told Albert, whatever, whichever way. So, he sent me a cable which I received on a Wednesday in November. On Thursday, I went to the embassy, and I got a visa. On Sunday, I left for New York. I was in New York on Monday morning. I was in New York Monday afternoon. On Tuesday afternoon, Albert was in. At the time, Dr. Gaon told him why don't you talk to the guy? He told me he to talk to Mr. Maslia, and I really didn't want

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<sup>58</sup> Rich's Department Store was a retail chain headquartered in Atlanta, Georgia, that operated in the southern U.S. from 1867 until March 6, 2005 when the nameplate was eliminated and replaced by Macy's.

to go. I still didn't want to go back. I said, "Why not. I'll come and see the United States."

**AROGETI:** Had you been here before?

**ICHAY:** No.

**AROGETI:** This was your first travel to the United States?

**ICHAY:** It was my first time. I never thought I would ever take a job in United States. As I said, this couldn't have been further from my mind <unintelligible>. I was already in an English-speaking country, but it was England. We're talking about Australia, England, even Canada to a certain extent, but not so much Canada because it was cold. That's what happened. Eventually, we <unintelligible>. This story is not very important at this point. You know, what happened between me and Albert

**AROGETI:** Eventually you did come to Atlanta to interview?

**ICHAY:** Yes. Albert just wanted me to come, from the "I don't want to talk to him." He said, "You must come to Atlanta."

**AROGETI:** So, did you come to Atlanta on that trip in November?

**ICHAY:** Thursday.

**AROGETI:** You flew down to Atlanta?

**ICHAY:** He told me, at the time, Albert says, "Don't come tomorrow." It was a Tuesday. He said, "Come on Thursday. Give me time to sell you to the congregation." At the time, I told Albert, I says, "Don't sell me to the congregation. You sell the congregation to me. I really don't want the job." That's what made Albert even more eager and more intense. Which was the truth. I wasn't playing any, I wasn't trying to pull a fast one that you need me and therefore make me an offer I can't refuse. It wasn't the issue at all. But I came to Atlanta, and I really . . .

**AROGETI:** Who were some of the people you remember meeting initially in the first few meetings?

**ICHAY:** The one who came to pick me up at the airport was your father, Jimmy Arogeti. He used to wear a <unintelligible> at the time. I remember when Jimmy came and picked me up to take me to Albert, who used to live in Arborvista at the time. I remember very well driving with your dad, and your dad was talking to me about Atlanta. As I came middle of town, center of town, the center of town was almost identical to the center of town in Rhodesia in Salisbury. I really thought I was back in Salisbury. I started having chills. It was funny the way you can get. Then I get to Albert. I'm come to the area of Arborvista. I thought I was back in Highland. In Salisbury, there is an area called Highland.

**AROGETI:** In the neighborhood where some of the members of Or VeShalom lived.

**ICHAY:** That's exactly the same.

**AROGETI:** Was similar?

**ICHAY:** Similar to one area. A lot of trees. Rhodesia had a lot of trees. Salisbury is a beautiful town, beautiful city. I thought I was back. For a little while, I thought I was back in Salisbury. Then went to Albert. Of course, there was Asher Benator. Victor was there. Danny was there. Danny was the president at the time. Your father, Firestone, was there. Stafford was there.

**AROGETI:** This is Victor Maslia and Dan Maslia?

**ICHAY:** Albert and Stanford Firestone, your father, and Asher Benator. I think Julian Levy was there. A couple of ladies. The ladies took me out while I was visiting here for a weekend because I stayed from Thursday to a Monday. I think I left here on Sunday. I think I left on Monday. It was Emily Amato and Louise Habif and Vicki Cadranel. While the men were working, they took me around town to show me. I stayed at the Howard Johnson here on North Druid Hills, the one across from Executive Park, which isn't there anymore. I think it's now Salvation Army. Danny was president. We went to Albert's house that night, and we spoke for a little while. He kept asking me questions. Of course, he had paper plate and read for me, which didn't mean anything to me because I didn't know who Manhattan was and that that was kosher, not kosher. I observed *kashrut* but not that I won't take a glass of water, which <unintelligible> I believe, didn't do.

**AROGETI:** <Unintelligible> was the former . . .

**ICHAY:** Was the former assistant to Rabbi Cohen. On Friday night, I had to go to the synagogue, which was on Highland near the corner of Lanier Place. They asked me to conduct a service. I went into the synagogue. By then, of course, everybody is trying to give me their names and ask for me who are related, because what really clinched it to a certain extent also is that suddenly they found that I came from a sister congregation that they were related to all the people I knew in Rhodesia, and I knew them well.

**AROGETI:** Who were some of the family names that you remember as a relative of some of your congregants in Rhodesia?

**ICHAY:** I'll tell you. I'll tell you just now. As the people were giving their names, one of them, I went to him, and I said, "You don't have to tell me your name. You are the Levy. You have a brother Moise Levy living . . . it was Solomon Levy, the old guy. You remember? Looked exactly like his brother, and his face lit up. The others which were related, there were Francos. We had the Francos. We had not the Arogetis, so much. Arogeti we didn't have. We had Aruoesti and Aweti [sp], but we didn't have Arogeti. The Galantis. The Alhadreff. Tourial.

The Tourials, they questioned because that Friday night since I could not stay at a hotel because I wouldn't have been able to walk, it's too far from North Druid to Highland. I was supposed to stay at the Tourial, Regina and <unintelligible> which lived at the time on Zimmer Drive. When I went, they told me, "You are not sleeping here." I'll tell you off the record afterward. She says, "Next door, but you're eating there." They were a bit reserved. We started talking. She said she has family in Rhodesia," she was telling. I says, "Oh, you do?" She said, "Yes, she did." She mentioned Marie Hannan. She said, "It's her sister. I said, "Marie Hannan." I said, "Sam Hannan's wife." The moment I started mentioning it, the wife, her mother's sister was Vida Hannan also. That's when we started hugging because the Hannans have relatives of Regina, of Rousso. I was in their house at least one a week. In fact, to this day, Marie Hannan sends flowers on *Rosh Ha-Shanah*. She's a widow now. Her husband died. Sends us a note to this day. I married her daughter, her first marriage, Stella Hannan. That's when we became . . . literally, she hugged me. You know how Regina can get very effusive and very emotional.

**AROGETI:** Sounds like the ice was broken.

**ICHAY:** Absolutely. After that, it was smooth sailing. There was no . . . ever since. This is what happened. On Saturday morning, I was at the synagogue and, of course, I conducted a service. Everybody says, "Hire him. Bring him. Take him. Take him over the old guys." They used to be Isaac Alhadeff. At the time, <unintelligible> had something in his throat. I think he could hardly speak. He had some problems. That's <unintelligible> Alhadeff's father. Julia Milt's father, I think, Julia Milt. They all said, "Why don't you hire him? Hire him. Hire him." Then Saturday morning I went and conducted service there. I was introduced to Rabbi Cohen. I think I got his approval because he had to give his approval at the time. On Saturday night or Saturday afternoon, Shearith Israel,<sup>59</sup> there was a *bat mitzvah*.<sup>60</sup> Olga Feldman. The one who took me there was Ralph Galanti. Everybody calls him Uncle Ralph. By the way, one of the people I met, too, and became very friendly was your grandfather, Joe Arogeti, which was one of the first guys also I met. Joe Arogeti and I became very friendly. We were very, very close to him. Ralph Galanti took me to his

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<sup>59</sup> Founded in 1904, Shearith Israel began as a congregation that met in the homes of congregants until 1906 when they began using a Methodist church on Hunter Street. After World War II, Rabbi Tobias Geffen moved the congregation to University Drive, where it became the first synagogue in DeKalb County. In the 1960's, they removed the barrier between the men's and women's sections in the sanctuary, and officially became affiliated with the Conservative movement in 2002.

<sup>60</sup> 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

granddaughter's *bat mitzvah*. On Sunday, they had the party at what is now Pano's & Paul's restaurant. Suddenly we found also that I know Galanti's relatives. That was also a name. Chaim Galanti used to be related to all the Galantis here. In fact, Chaim Galanti's granddaughter, who is married now. Her father was Mr. Moss. Her mother married Dr. Moss. I don't know if she's still alive or not, but she was Chaim Galanti's daughter. She had children. One of her daughters, who was like second cousin or first cousin to Isaac Galanti. He lives in South or North Carolina, not very far from here. I happen to remember, in fact, she called, and I spoke to her one day. I remember her once as a child. I used to be her teacher. This is one of the things which is very interesting because even though I left Rhodesia, I still am very much in contact with a lot of them, as you know. There's more as a matter of fact <unintelligible>. I was talking to some of them in Los Angeles recently. They are settled now in South Africa, many of them.

**AROGETI:** So, you spent that first weekend, long weekend in Atlanta. Then did you go back to Paris?

**ICHAY:** I went back to Paris. On Sunday morning, they had a meeting at the community center. There was a whole board. There must have been 20 or 22 people. They said, "Well, we want you to come." I said, "I promised Dr. Gaon I'm going to Canada. He wanted me to go and see the synagogue in Canada," I said. Then he turned to ask me a question. He said, "What do you mean? You mean you don't know what you want to do?" I said, "I really do know, but I must go to Canada. Otherwise he will tell me, 'You should have seen it there.'" The experience in Canada was a hard one because I knew that if I was going to take a job, it wasn't going to be in Canada. It's going to be in Atlanta. What made it even worse is that I arrived in Canada, I think it was, again, a Thursday afternoon. It was a beautiful sunny . . . it was like the 11th or the 18th of November. I mean, it's not too winter. There was a beautiful sun and it was great. It was a beautiful day. I get up on Friday morning, and the whole thing is covered with snow. There was a snowstorm at the time in Washington in 1968, just in that time it came. I thought I wasn't going to be able to get out. The storm caused a stall. They were jumping cables. Jumping, trying to start the cars. I said, "I have to be crazy to be here." From that moment on, as cold as the weather was, so were the people, and so was I. I still remember very, very well. That turned them off completely because when they were told. They wanted to hire me, first of all, to handle youth, which I had no problem with. If I liked the thing, I mean, I would have been able to. I work very well with kids, in those days anyway. Even today, I can work with the kids. I mean, some I can't. But they asked me, "How would you run a program?" They asked me some kind of a question. They said, "What kind

of a solution would I bring to a certain problem." My answer was, "When I'm faced with a problem, I find the solution." That turned them off. You wouldn't believe it.

**AROGETI:** Eventually you made it back to Paris.

**ICHAY:** Not only was I going to stay there, they weren't going to hire me either. They didn't want me. Period. What made it worse is that they asked me to read the *haftorah*<sup>61</sup> on *Shabbat*. That one, I didn't do on purpose. That one was a mistake. I'm reading the *haftorah*. For some reason or another, instead of reading the tune they wanted, which I knew, the Spanish and Portuguese tune, which I knew, I didn't start it properly. I started in the Tunisian way. I chanted the *haftorah* the Tunisian way. That, again, turned them off completely. It was not their tune at all. I was supposed to leave on Monday. I told the people who I was staying with, a woman who was taking me around, who happened to be very friendly with Ben Laurel [sp], but that's another story. She told me at the time that I could stay in her house. I said, "I don't want to stay anywhere. I want to leave tonight." It was Sunday night. I found a Canada Air leaving for Paris. There was room and it cost me another \$30 to pay instead of leaving on Monday I would have left. I said, "I'll pay whatever it takes." More than \$50, \$30, or \$60. I said, "I just want to leave." That was my experience in Montreal and with Canada. I went back to Paris. After a while, I was waiting. I really couldn't make up my mind or anything. I kept getting letters from Danny. He says, "Well, what's happening?" Then eventually, I sent him a note and I says, "I'll be coming. Send me the papers." That's when I started preparing for papers.

**AROGETI:** This was when, very late 1968 or 1969?

**ICHAY:** That was in December, 1969. He took about two and a half months to prepare the papers until I got my visa. In March, I got the visa. It was the 5th of March. It's very interesting. It's exactly like this year, this coming 1996. The 5th of March is *purim*. That year, I think it was the 5<sup>th</sup>, no, maybe the 3rd of March. Anyway, it was also *purim*. I was sick, as sick as a dog. I had a bad cold. It was influenza. I said, "I'm leaving. I'm leaving." I was tired by then of staying in Paris once I made the decision. At the time, I was in a dump because I didn't know what I wanted to do. Once I accepted the job, I said, "I must go." I left. I slept one night in England. I had to call the doctor. That following morning, we left and we went to New York. I arrived in New York, I was sick. I was really sick. I stayed at Blanchette's cousin. We stayed at Blanchette's cousin, Keegan [sp], for about . . . I arrived there on the 5th. I did not leave from

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<sup>61</sup> The *haftorah* is a series of selections from the books of *Nevi'im* ("Prophets") of the *Hebrew Bible (Tanach)* that is publicly read in synagogue as part of Jewish religious practice. The *haftorah* reading follows the *Torah* reading on each Sabbath and on Jewish festivals and fast days. On Sabbath days, the *haftorah* is selected because it relates to the day's Torah portion. On holidays and special Sabbaths, the *haftorah* is selected to coincide with the calendar.

there until the 11th of March, when I felt better, until my flu passed. I stayed in bed all the time while I was in New York, in Ardsley. Upstate New York. I came on the 11th of March.

**AROGETI:** Where were you living when you first moved to Atlanta?

**ICHAY:** That was also another experience. Danny rented the apartment, a duplex, next to Ralph Galanti on Lanier Place. I think it was 1651 Lanier Place.

**AROGETI:** This is a few houses or blocks down from the synagogue on Highland Avenue?

**ICHAY:** Correct, correct, correct. Just up the hill.

**AROGETI:** At the time you moved to Atlanta, had there been plans under way to relocate from Highland Avenue to North Druid Hills?

**ICHAY:** That's when they mentioned to me. They said that they had plans for a synagogue, which I saw shortly after coming. In fact, they were concerned about raising the funds. Then wait a few months. I think I was talking to Danny and to Victor and to Asher. Victor Maslia, Danny Maslia, and Asher Benator. I told them, "Why don't we try and start. Let's go." Sure enough, in January 1970, we had the meeting. That was about 12, 10 months after I arrived. We had a meeting. I still remember well in the social hall of Highland Avenue. That's when they raised the money. They were still discussing about the location. Just hindsight, you don't know whether we would have been better off or not, and each one can come to his conclusion. But it was very close.

**AROGETI:** Where were some of the other sites that you recall the synagogue was considering?

**ICHAY:** I didn't see any sites, but the thing was to go to north side. That was the Galantis. Isaac Galanti, Benny Galanti, Morris Galanti. Sam didn't speak very much. These were people who were pushing for the north side. The vote was close, by the way. It was not, and there should, when a vote is close on an issue, the smart person is trying to see that maybe we should really think about it or try and see. They didn't.

**AROGETI:** Try to build more consensus?

**ICHAY:** Yes. One way or the other.

**AROGETI:** But eventually a decision was made to purchase the property?

**ICHAY:** It was in the low 50 percent. It was not 70. I'm sure that is what it was. So, to decide, I saw the quality here. They took me to show me part of it when I came to visit the first time.

**AROGETI:** This is the property that's on North Druid Hills Road?

**ICHAY:** This one here, 1681 where we are now on North Druid Hills Road. We broke

ground in November, 1970. We had the building ready. We celebrated *Rosh Ha-Shanah* in 1971. Within nine months, the building was . . .

**AROGETI:** Tell me a little bit about your relationship with Rabbi Cohen. I know that there was some overlap even though he was interested in retiring.

**ICHAY:** Rabbi Cohen retired three months after I arrived, or two months. I arrived on the 11th of March. Rabbi Cohen retired the beginning of May. It's about a couple of months. I still remember it because the guy came from New York, Dr. Gaon, couldn't come, so some guy, I know his name, Goodman. I think it was Rabbi Goodman or something, a similar name. He came to install me. It was at the community center again. Rabbi Cohen decided to become emeritus. I took over from that moment on. That's when I went to Rabbi Cohen. I says, "You can be emeritus all you want, but you're still the boss of the synagogue. You tell me anything you want to do. You let me know. I will not do anything or change anything unless I discuss it with you. If you're against it, we will not touch it. All I have to do is between the two of us. Anything you want to do, you let me know. Just tell me whatever you want to do." Even for a while during the services, the first year was an interesting *Yom Kippur*. The first *Yom Kippur* came along, his son Allan, Allan Cohen, after the services to the synagogue and they told me, "Do you need some help?" Albert was the one always . . . it was either Albert or Danny because he was always the one . . . everybody seems to think that only Albert can reach me when nobody else can. That's the prevailing belief in the synagogue which doesn't make sense. Asher can reach me very well. Danny. Anyone. You can reach me better than probably anybody else. Anyway, he told me, he says, "Do you need the assistant?" I said, "He wants to conduct service, no problem." He said, "No, but we have to pay him." I said, "How much?" I think at the time it was \$800. My salary at the time was, I think, \$12,000 a year. I'm working it out. I'm making a calculation in my head. He's paid \$800 for one day ready to help, which is a month's salary. Almost a month. I told him, "If he wants to do it for nothing, it's fine. If he wants to be paid, then we can handle it." When Rabbi Cohen or Mrs. Cohen probably heard that, she was, I'm assuming, that I'm a third hand. Because he went and took the job for *Kippur* in Columbus, Georgia, which he's been doing ever since <unintelligible> recently. Rabbi Cohen then suddenly is not well and cannot help. He used to conduct the services, too. Suddenly, he is not well. I said, "Fine." I conducted the service, the whole thing. That was the first time that I did from commitment night to <unintelligible>. Taught every single night where you're saying a few words, you're conducting, servicing the whole thing, which was fine. At the time, I was very young. I don't think I'll be able to do it now. At the time, there was no problem.

**AROGETI:** How old were you when you came to Atlanta?

**ICHAY:** Forty. I was 40. Yes, I was exactly, because my birthday is on 26th of February, and I arrived on the 11th of March. It's like two weeks after my birthday.

**AROGETI:** Tell us a little bit, you had some very good news very shortly after you and Blanchette arrived to Atlanta was the addition.

**ICHAY:** Yes.

**AROGETI:** Addition of your family, your son. Tell me a little bit about that.

**ICHAY:** Six months after we arrived here, David was born.

**AROGETI:** That's great. How old is David now?

**ICHAY:** He's as old as long as we've been here. Now he's 26.

<End Tape 2, Side 1>

<Begin Tape 2, Side 2>

**AROGETI:** It's October 20<sup>th</sup>. Joel Arogeti interviewing with Robert Ichay. We were talking right before the break about your son David. He's interesting politically. I've never met anyone quite as politically active as your son David.

**ICHAY:** Not so much now, but he still talks about it. He's what you call a staunch Republican. Where for him, [President George W.] Bush<sup>62</sup> is a communist. <Laughing> That's my son. Where did he get it from? I honestly don't know. I'm an extremist. When it comes to Israeli situation, I'm a hawk. Even my extremism is not nothing to . . . I'm really what you would call a moderate. Middle of the road. I feel very strongly about certain issues, but I won't be a zealot about it or the kind of person who throws stones simply because of my beliefs on certain issues.

**AROGETI:** You told me a story before our interview today about your experience to become a United States citizen. Can you tell us a little bit about your thoughts of why you decided to do that? Why did you apply for citizenship and what your thought processes were?

**ICHAY:** The thing is that for all those years since I left Tunisia and had the Tunisian passport. Tunisian passport was not, when it comes to passport, which you boast about. There are certain countries that had no diplomatic relations with, for example, Portugal, Mozambique. If I wanted to go to Mozambique, at first I could go. I had no problem. Then one day, suddenly, for some reason or another, they wouldn't let me in Mozambique. I had to go back to Salisbury after going to the border. To Portuguese, it's African. Because a Tunisian passport is enough? No, it's rubbish. You don't get in. So, I decided to become a Rhodesian citizen. If I'm a Rhodesian citizen, and Russia had problems also getting

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<sup>62</sup> George Walker Bush (b. 1946) served as the 43<sup>rd</sup> president of the United States from 2001 to 2009. He had

you a passport because to Russia, it was stateless. It was a Swiss resident. Alien or with an alien's paper. When we became Rhodesian citizenship soon after they got their independence, that passport became a lousy one and not as good. You could travel. Certain countries will allow you in. France allowed me. When I left Rhodesia, they allowed me in and then they wouldn't allow me back in the second time. They let me in at first. Then when I went to Switzerland, they wouldn't let me back in the country even though it was a stamped visa which allowed me to go in the first time. For some reason or another, they had sanctions. So, I had problem. I was able to get through the efforts of Dr. Gaon and a friend of his who was close to the ambassador in Geneva, the British ambassador, so I was able to get that passport for six months. When I came to the United States, I traveled with that passport. I came here. As soon as I came here, I had to renew it. I went to the British embassy. Again, they gave me six months. Six months later, I went to renew it. Again, they gave me six months. I said, "Why don't you make it two years? Why not?" The guy said, "No. How long did it take you to get it?" I said, "About ten minutes." He said, "You live here six months, you come for ten minutes." I said, "You know what? I'm not going to come back anymore. I'm going to stay here until I become an American citizen. Then I will take a passport." The guy, whoever behind the desk was like an attache, whatever it was, delivering the visas, told me, "You know, you make a bad mistake. You should always have a valid passport in case of emergency." I turned around to him and I said, "How long did it take me to get the visa today?" He tells me, "Touché." I said, "I have no problem. No problem. The same way. If you tell me it takes ten minutes, so if I have an emergency, I'll come back for ten minutes. There is no new problem." He laughed. I never came back. My passport, in fact, the last time it was renewed was 1969. September 1969. That was the last time when it was renewed. The main reason was not so much because of a passport or anything. Once I felt that this was my home, then my obligation was to this country. There was no question about it. I wasn't going to be an alien resident here in the United States. Either I'm completely able, if I don't like it, I can leave it.

**AROGETI:** When did you become a citizen?

**ICHAY:** Five years later, exactly. Not exactly five years later. I became a citizen, I think it was in July or August 1974. I didn't know at the time how you applied. Once you apply, you go with your immigration officer who asks you questions. They ask you if you can speak English, which they don't ask anymore. If you can write English. I could write it better than I could speak it. Just a few questions. I made a mistake with the amendments to the Constitution. I think I said there are 20 and it should have been 22. I don't know what at the time. I don't know if there are any more now. That's

what happened. In fact, in 1974, after *Rosh Ha-Shanah* and *Yom Kippur*, that's when I went for the first time in Europe to visit my friends. The day I arrived there, following day my father got a stroke. I arrived there on a Friday, I think it was. Thursday. Saturday morning, he had the stroke, which he recovered from. That's why I got the U.S. citizenship.

**AROGETI:** Tell me now to reflect, because we're now thinking about the decade of the Seventies. We're coming up upon the decade of the Eighties. Very interesting times in the United States. Politically, what was going on with the end of the war in Vietnam. Our synagogue had just moved from Highland Avenue, the place it had been for 20 to 30 years, now moving to a new location on North Druid Hills Road. What are your recollections of what the times were like back in the Seventies?

**ICHAY:** The early years on Highland, where we were on Lanier, we didn't stay more than . . . I think I didn't stay more than a year, a year and a half. We decided to move. I wanted to live at the Cabana Apartment during the whole period of building here. We were having our services at the Hebrew Academy,<sup>63</sup> which used to be on North Druid Hills around the corner. In those years in 1970, I was, personally, not that involved politically. It's very interesting because my own reaction to the political scene at the time was that even though I became in . . . first of all, at the time, in early 1970, 1971, I was not an American citizen. Therefore, I felt that that for my background, maybe because I was a second-class citizen in Tunisia, maybe because . . . I never voted. The first time I was going to vote in Tunisia, that's when I left to England. In England, I couldn't vote. Although, I think I did vote once in municipal. If you're living there, they have some kind of a rule that even if you're a foreigner, you can vote for the city hall. I think I did vote. I'm not even sure. In Rhodesia, I never voted because it took me a long time before I became a citizen. I come to the United States, and I say it's not my business to interfere. I'm a little bit taken aback by some of the laws in the United States to which I'm not used. This constitutional right. The right of the individual. The fact that anybody can do anything they want. This is something unheard of in some of these countries, particularly burning flags or anything. That used to upset me very, very much, even though I was not. If anybody was caught burning a flag in France or burning, believe me, he wouldn't come out alive. All these laws in the United States, to me were . . . not that I didn't admire them or that I did not understand them, but they are pushed to extreme. The system of law, their courts, the way they function. To me, that . . .

**AROGETI:** Freedom of expression. Freedom of speech.

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<sup>63</sup> Hebrew Academy of Atlanta was established in 1953 as the first all-day Jewish day school in Atlanta, with Alex E. Milt chairing its organization committee. It was renamed the Katherine and Jacob Greenfield Hebrew Academy. In 2014, the Greenfield Hebrew Academy (grades pre-K through 8) and Yeshiva High School (grades

**ICHAY:** Freedom of expression. Freedom of speech. The Miranda.<sup>64</sup>

**AROGETI:** The right to remain silent.

**ICHAY:** The right to remain silent. All these things. It's a little bit . . .

**AROGETI:** It's different than the countries you had been living in.

**ICHAY:** Absolutely. If you catch a guy with cocaine, if you, for some reason, didn't have the search warrant or anything, the guy can go scot free. It doesn't make sense.

**AROGETI:** In the countries you had been living in . . .

**ICHAY:** He's caught, there's no . . .

**AROGETI:** You catch somebody with the contraband . . .

**ICHAY:** That's it. There is no search warrant. If you catch him, you catch him. I mean, you need a search warrant. There's no question about it to go into houses. But if by accident or whatever happens, it was found . . . Of course, it becomes a bit of a problem when you see all the abuse and what's happening with police department, which are very much in the news here in Atlanta and in Los Angeles. You can understand how you can try and avoid where innocent citizens can be really abused. It is a problem. But I had problems with all that. I really had problems. With the alien who comes here and suddenly has all the rights. I felt I did not have all the rights. This country opens its door to allow me to come here. I either shape up or ship out. For me, there was no question of trying to take advantage of a situation or trying to . . . if I was caught for anything, I don't think I would have been able to use my right, my constitutional right of the Fifth [Amendment].<sup>65</sup> Why plead the Fifth when you're guilty? I couldn't imagine that because. . . I would have fought. The country had the right to deport me if they wanted to. I had a problem. Where would they deport me?

**AROGETI:** You met a lot of people here at congregation Or VeShalom when you first came here, obviously, they're members of the congregation. What about your other professional colleagues? Who were some of the other rabbis you had early contact with here in Atlanta?

**ICHAY:** Rabbi Feldman<sup>66</sup> was here. Of course, Rabbi Cohen. Rabbi [Jacob] Rothschild,<sup>67</sup>

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9-12) merged into one college preparatory day school that was renamed the Atlanta Jewish Academy.

<sup>64</sup> In the United States, the *Miranda* warning is a type of notification customarily given by police to criminal suspects in police custody advising them of their right to silence; that is, their right to refuse to answer questions or provide information to law enforcement or other officials. These rights are often referred to as *Miranda* rights. The concept of *Miranda* rights was enshrined in U.S. law following the 1966 *Miranda v. Arizona* Supreme Court decision, which found that the Fifth and Sixth Amendment rights of Ernest Arturo Mirando had been violated during his arrest and trial.

<sup>65</sup> The Fifth Amendment, or Amendment V of the United States Constitution, is the section of the Bill of Rights that protects you from being held for committing a crime unless you have been indicted correctly by the police.

<sup>66</sup> Emanuel Feldman (b. 1927) is an Orthodox rabbi and Rabbi Emeritus of Congregation Beth Jacob of Atlanta, Georgia. He was born to a family of Orthodox rabbis dating back more than seven generations. During his nearly 40 years at Beth Jacob beginning in 1952, he nurtured the growth of Atlanta's Orthodox community from a city

blessed memory.

**AROGETI:** Rabbi . . .

**ICHAY:** Emanuel Feldman.

**AROGETI:** Emanuel Feldman at the Beth Jacob.

**ICHAY:** At Beth Jacob. I can't remember the name. A few rabbis at Shearith Israel while I was here. Until [Rabbi Mark Hillel] Kunis came, there was . . . I can't remember. What was the name of that guy who left for Australia? There was Rabbi [Hyman] Friedman. I knew very well Rabbi [Sydney] Mossman, who was a retired rabbi at the Shearith Israel at the time when I came. He was not well. He was sick. But when I came, he was still active to a certain extent, first year.

**AROGETI:** What were the synagogues that you remember when you . . .

**ICHAY:** There were six or seven synagogues.

**AROGETI:** There was the Ahavath Achim.<sup>68</sup>

**ICHAY:** The Ahavath Achim, Shearith Israel, Beth Jacob, ours, and the Temple.<sup>69</sup>

**AROGETI:** The Temple was Rabbi Rothschild?

**ICHAY:** Rabbi Rothschild.

with two small Orthodox synagogues to a community large enough to support Jewish day schools, *yeshivas*, girls' schools and a *kollel*. He is a past vice-president of the Rabbinical Council of America and former editor of *Tradition: The Journal of Orthodox Jewish thought* published by the RCA. In 1991, his son, Rabbi Ilan Feldman, succeeded him.

<sup>67</sup> Rabbi Jacob Rothschild, born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, was rabbi of the city's oldest Reform congregation, the Temple, in Atlanta, Georgia from 1946 until his death in 1973 from a heart attack. He forged close relationships with the city's Christian clergy and distinguished himself as a charismatic spokesperson for civil rights.

<sup>68</sup> Ahavath Achim Congregation (often referred to as "AA") was organized in 1886 as Congregation Ahawas Achim (Brotherly Love) and is Atlanta's second oldest Jewish congregation. Organized by Jews of Eastern European descent, the congregation's founding members felt uncomfortable in the established Hebrew Benevolent Congregation (The Temple) comprised primarily of Jews from Germany, who by the late 1800s had begun to liberalize their Orthodox doctrine. Originally located in a rented room at 106 Gilmer Street, the congregation would make a succession of moves, to 120 Gilmer Street, to a hall on Decatur Street in 1895, to its first building in 1901 on the corner of Gilmer Street and Piedmont Avenue, to its second building on Washington Street in 1921, and finally, to its present location on Peachtree Battle Avenue in 1958. Four different Rabbis, Rabbi Mayerovitz (1901 – 1905); Rabbi Joseph Meyer Levine (1905 – 1915); Rabbi Yood (1915 – 1919); and Rabbi A.P. Hirmes (1919 – 1928) provided spiritual leadership for Ahavath Achim until 1928, when Rabbi Harry H. Epstein was hired as Rabbi. He retained that position for the next 50 years. Rabbi Epstein became Rabbi Emeritus in 1986 and was succeeded by Rabbi Arnold Goodman. During the early years of Rabbi Epstein's tenure, he slowly made innovations and modifications in congregational activities. By 1952, Ahavath Achim joined the Conservative Movement, with the most noticeable shift from Orthodoxy being the gradual change to mixed seating. Today, Ahavath Achim Congregation is the largest Conservative congregation in Atlanta.

<sup>69</sup> The Temple, or 'Hebrew Benevolent Congregation,' is Atlanta's oldest Jewish congregation. The cornerstone was laid on the Temple on Garnett Street in 1875. The dedication was held in 1877 and the Temple was located there until 1902. The Temple's next location on Pryor Street was dedicated in 1902. The Temple's current location in Midtown on Peachtree Street was dedicated in 1931. The main sanctuary is on the National Register of Historic Places. The Reform congregation now totals approximately 1,500 families (2015).

**AROGETI:** Did you have any interaction with Rabbi Rothschild?

**ICHAY:** Yes, sure, sure.

**AROGETI:** Tell me a little bit about your recollections of him.

**ICHAY:** I had problems relating to Reform. I had big, big problems. Again, I came from a different background where there was no Reform or Conservative.<sup>70</sup> I still remember it clearly when they formed the Atlanta Rabbinical Association.<sup>71</sup> In fact, Rabbi Cohen was the first president of the association. He was the senior rabbi, the oldest. Rabbi Feldman was almost like the one I looked up to like my mentor, even though we were similar in age, he was just a little bit older than I was, but he was here already. Synagogue was the Orthodox synagogue and anything I was going to do from the point of view of Jewish law, then it was going to be Rabbi Feldman. I would relate to Rabbi Feldman. I would consult with. I asked him. I says, "You mean to tell me that you will sit on an organization with the Reform and the Conservative?" He said, "Why not?" I said, "If you sit, then I'm in it, too." It's very interesting because a year before he retired or the year he retired, he told me that I was right. He was wrong. He should not. Because the organization itself did work and still to this day functions. Today, of course, the majority of the rabbis in it are Reform and Conservative. I think [Rabbi] Juda Mintz is still in it, who is traditional. Kunis is still in it, who is traditional. With the exception of Kunis and Mintz and Rabbi Feldman, Ilan [Feldman], the son, goes from time to time there, myself, the four; there might be one more. Maybe a traditional rabbi or something. I'm not too sure. But all the others, they're either Reform or Conservative. If you take [Rabbis] [Harvey] Winokur, Donald Tam, Phil Kranz, [Stuart] Davis, [Alvin] Sugarman. Already have five, six Reform. Then you have the other one. What do you call it? The one in Riverdale. Not Riverdale. I forgot who it was.

**AROGETI:** That's an interesting point you raise, because when you came here, there were six synagogues in Atlanta and now there are so many.

**ICHAY:** Six synagogues, one Reform, one Conservative, one Sephardic, one Orthodox, and one . . . I think Shearith Israel was also looked as traditional Orthodox.

**AROGETI:** Now there are, I think, in excess of 20 synagogues throughout the metropolitan Atlanta area.

**ICHAY:** With a great majority of them Reform. Although, the Orthodox also have increased

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<sup>70</sup> A form of Judaism that seeks to preserve Jewish tradition and ritual but has a more flexible approach to the interpretation of the law than Orthodox Judaism. It attempts to combine a positive attitude toward modern culture, while preserving a commitment to Jewish observance. They also observe gender equality (mixed seating, women rabbis and *bat mitzvahs*).

<sup>71</sup> The Atlanta Rabbinical Association, founded sometime prior to 1970, is comprised of rabbis who represent the full spectrum of organized religious expression in the Atlanta area.

numbers. Today, you have Orthodox synagogues. You have Beth Jacob, the Iranian synagogue. I'm speaking Orthodox where there is no mixed seating. No <unintelligible>. You have Beth Jacob. You have the Iranian synagogue. You have now a new one, a very small one, Ariel. Then you have the Young Israel. You have two Chabad. They are small, maybe not very large synagogue, but they are increasing in number.

**AROGETI:** Tell me a little bit about . . .

**ICHAY:** To come back to the Seventies and the political scene. Because of my background, I felt that I had no right. That's the way I felt, rightly or wrongly, to really interfere on political issues. I was very apolitical during the Seventies. I could see what was happening. I had mixed feelings about the Vietnam War.<sup>72</sup> I could understand some of these . . . but what have we got to do in Vietnam? My personal view at the time when I expressed it, which you've seen. I spoke very little politically from the pulpit. I didn't express political views. My feelings at the time was if the French got out of it, don't go in. Because if the French could not handle it, the American were there . . . even though atrocities were committed in Vietnam, but usually they're makings of fair play. That's usually the way. Stuff may be as bad as the English. You shoot first when facing the enemy. We tell the enemy, you shoot first. We're not going to shoot first to the enemy, you know. But maybe not as bad as that. Maybe not to that extreme as British. But never mind, there is a sense of fair play. The United States is the only country who goes to war, destroys a country and then rebuild. No other country will do that. Either destroy it. It was just different. So, if they could not act the way the French acted . . . you speak about atrocity. Nobody can compare with what the Italian could do or what the French could do. The British, so-so. The French, I know what they used to do in Algeria. You speak about the German sending to the gas chamber. They used to put the Arabs and load them into trucks and then set fire to the trucks in Algeria, the French people. The Italian used to take people and take them on board planes, load them on board planes and then drop them from the plane, the Italian. Here, the French who fought in Indochina, as it was known as the time, or Vietnam, and then suddenly they say, we've had enough. Either pull out your full legion. These were the elite fighters. Something the United States couldn't . . . they had no business going there. They shouldn't have gone to begin with. That was my personal opinion. But by the same token, if a government says, "That's what we do," then I believe very, very much whether right or wrong. You have one choice. If you don't like it, leave the country. But as long as you're in the country, that's the government you've elected. That's the government you've put in power. Therefore you . . . you can

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<sup>72</sup> The Vietnam War occurred in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia from November 1, 1955 to the fall of Saigon on April 30, 1975. This war fought between North Vietnam—supported by the Soviet Union, China and other communist allies—and the government of South Vietnam—supported by the United States and other anti-

only protest by legal means. <unintelligible> To a certain extent was not that bad, but at times it turned ugly. Then there was the people who used to run away and go to Canada, many of them to try . . . amnesty, and they could come back and they did come back. That is not something. If I left a country because I was against their policy, I don't know whether I would ever come back. Therefore, I had mixed feelings. I thought it was a horrible war. I thought we should not have been there to begin with. I thought the government was wrong. It was not my job to speak about it. I was a foreigner. Even after I became an American citizen, I still did not.

**AROGETI:** One foreign affairs issue I think you've always been comfortable speaking about, that's been Israel.

**ICHAY:** That's obvious.

**AROGETI:** I think your feelings are very well known on that subject.

**ICHAY:** Yes.

**AROGETI:** But your position has been very consistent. Why don't you share with us for a few minutes that position you've long held on the State of Israel.

**ICHAY:** As everybody knows, I am a hawk. For 2,000, we pray for a State of Israel and today we have it. You can't expect me to . . . I have this problem of dual allegiance. I have no problem with it. If you want to accuse me of having dual allegiance, I do have dual allegiance. Which one would take precedence? Would I betray the United States for Israel? I would not. What I would do if I felt that United States and Israel were at odds. Not at odds on a simple issue - whether they give \$2 billion or they don't. That's not the issue. I think they shouldn't have given it to begin with, but then that's a different issue. But if they are at odds where the United States is going to go to war against Israel, I'd have only really one choice or two choices. Either to go against Israel, which I wouldn't; or just to leave the country. But I would not betray the United States. I do not. Therefore, I have no problem with dual allegiance, because I am in a country which allows you to have dual allegiance, as long as it doesn't <unintelligible>. When the Pollard case came onto the scene . . . while I was against some of the sentence against the Pollard.

**AROGETI:** Jonathan Pollard?<sup>73</sup>

**ICHAY:** Jonathan Pollard.

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communist allies.

<sup>73</sup> Jonathan Jay Pollard (b. 1954) is a former intelligence analyst for the United States government. In 1987, as part of a plea agreement, Pollard pleaded guilty to spying for and providing top-secret classified information to Israel. He was sentenced to life in prison for violations of the Espionage Act. Pollard is the only American who has received a life sentence for passing classified information to an ally of the United States. He was incarcerated in the Federal Bureau of Prisons system. He was granted parole in July 7, 2015, and released November 20, 2015.

**AROGETI:** The American who was accused of spying?

**ICHAY:** He was accused of spying for Israel. Yes. He was accused of spying for Israel. By the same token, I was not as angry as some of my colleagues here who felt that my allegiance to Israel has come down and cannot trust the Israeli anymore. Some of the prominent colleagues here. I don't want to mention names. I cannot trust Jews. How can they do that to the United States? I was not that. I didn't go to that extreme. I personally felt that the Israelis were a bunch of idiots to ask a Jew to spy for them. They should not. They should not have asked an American Jew to spy for them. There's plenty of non-Jews who would have done it anyway. They've done it for Russia. Furthermore, I felt that there was almost a tacit agreement, a gentleman agreement, between the United States and Israel. You spy. We spy. The fact is that many, many Americans were caught spying in Israel. Do you know what they do to them? They don't even take them to jail. They take them to the first airport, take them to Ben Gurion Airport, put them on a plane, tell them to go back to America. But that's it. That's the way they treat the American spies in Israel. Regardless . . . they turned it into . . . and blew it out of all proportion. At the time I could understand what was happening because there were others which were caught also spying for Russia, and they were. He wasn't the only one. There was one, a guy **Walters**, I think, at the time. What were some other names? There were some other cases before and after. There were a few cases of it. They always try to pick just Jonathan Pollard who spied for a country you have such relations with the State of Israel and choosing to make a kind of a case and make an example of it. But that's a different one. I think they should have let him go anyway. [President William Jefferson] Clinton<sup>74</sup> doesn't grant him pardon or anything. It doesn't make sense. The guy's sick. He's in jail. It doesn't make sense at all. Others have been released within two or three years and Pollack's still there. I think that one was your worst. They tried to present as if . . .

<Interview pauses, then resumes>

**AROGETI:** We were talking a few minutes ago about politics and change in Atlanta. I've observed that 25 years ago, Jewish people in Atlanta were protesting former Soviet Union to let our brothers and sisters out of the Soviet Union. There's been a lot of very dynamic change politically with the breakup of the Soviet Union and the immigration of Jews, not only to Israel but also to the United States. What would have been your thoughts and your impressions of that? How has that impacted here in Atlanta, Or VeShalom in particular?

**ICHAY:** The movement, the activist on behalf of the State of Israel and on behalf of Soviet Jewry

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<sup>74</sup> William Jefferson Clinton (b. 1946) was the 42<sup>nd</sup> President of the United States. He served from 1993 to 2001. Prior to the presidency, he was the governor of Arkansas from 1979 to 1981 and again from 1983 to 1992, and the attorney general of Arkansas from 1977 to 1979. He is a member of the Democratic Party.

and on behalf of any Jew in any other country, is still very much active now. There is still work on behalf of these organizations. Not maybe as much as history in the past. In the past, the issue was much, much more critical. Jews were being persecuted in Russia. Therefore, it was important they start coming out of Russia. The positive aspect was that it increased the immigration in Israel by hundreds of thousands. To a great extent, it had an impact also on the political scene there. Many people think that one of the reasons the Palestinian came to the peace talk,<sup>75</sup> to the table, and said we're coming to talk to the Israelis because they saw a number of Russians coming, and they were beginning to worry that if someday the Jewish population in the State of Israel, the population would become such that there is no way that they were able to get back to get back territories. Instead of having 10,000 or 100,000 settle in the territories, if you have two million people settle in the territories, that is a majority. You can call it anything you want. They are <unintelligible>. That's one of the things. The benefit of the community in Atlanta, in a sense, many, a great majority, or I don't know if it is great majority, but quite a number of Russian Jews who left the Soviet Union came also and settled in the United States. A great number came and settled in Atlanta. From our point of view as a synagogue, it was, some people are happy about it, some not so happy about it. There is always fear of a stranger, different customs, different habits. We, as a congregation, have benefited to a certain extent by the immigrants who have come here and who came from a republic which is looked upon as a "Sephardic." Many have a problem trying to define what you mean by Sephardic. These are from Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, Jews who are looked upon as the . . .

<Interview pauses, then resumes>

**AROGETI:** You were talking about the Jews from Uzbekistan.

**ICHAY:** Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. I think it's called, Tajikistan. These are Jews who were part of the Jewish communities of Middle East, very close to Persia, to Iran, not far from Turkey. That part of the world. Therefore, they were looked upon as, not being the least in such, but they were looked upon as a Sephardic tradition. Their prayer book is the same as ours. Their melodies are very similar to the Middle Eastern melodies. The Sephardic melodies. Therefore, they're looked upon as Sephardic. Maybe not the Spanish speaking Sephardic, but nevertheless Sephardic culturally or religiously

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<sup>75</sup> The Oslo Accords are a set of agreements between the government of Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). On September 13, 1993, Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and PLO Negotiator Mahmoud Abbas signed a Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements, commonly referred to as the "Oslo Accord," in Washington D.C. Israel accepted the PLO as the representative of the Palestinians, and the PLO renounced terrorism and recognized Israel's right to exist in peace. Both sides agreed that a Palestinian Authority (PA) would be established and assume governing responsibilities in the West Bank and Gaza Strip over a five-year period. Then, permanent status talks on the issues of borders, refugees, and Jerusalem would be held. By 2000, the peace process had run aground, and a new round of Israeli-Palestinian

or spiritually. Maybe not culturally because it's a different kind of a culture than the Spanish Jews who came from Spain and from Europe. We benefited from that influx of immigrants who came here. Many of those, as I said, were Sephardic. On the other hand, we had different customs and different habits and that created a little friction within the congregation. When they see the way they act, the way they behave. It's communication. Language is a big problem. But as a congregation, as a synagogue, it has enhanced not only just because of the number of people who come in, but because of their commitment. They are very, very committed to this synagogue. It's a different, it's a very interesting situation because these republics were predominantly Muslim. The Russian government, the Soviet government, would not try to destroy or fight them. So, they allowed them to keep their faith and their religions, their mosques and active mosques into these republics. Therefore, since they allowed them, they could not just discriminate against another group. The Christian also thrived there. The Jews were allowed to practice and many other kinds of denominations as long as they're faithful to the Soviet Union, they could, which is not the case in Moscow and in Leningrad, which was Russia. Russia itself. There, they controlled which were most of the Russian people, who suddenly became communist. They subdued religion, and there was no religion. If you take a Russian Jew who comes from Moscow, he has no idea at all about Judaism. They are not circumcised. They have never been *bar mitzvahed* or anything. They just never mind about the religious ceremony for a wedding. It doesn't exist. They don't have any of the *tallit*<sup>76</sup> or *tefillin*.<sup>77</sup> They don't have it. You take the Jews who came from Uzbekistan, they came with their prayer book. They came with their *tefillin*. They came with their <unintelligible> which they came and asked me to try and fix. They were all circumcised because they did it. They had to keep a low profile but, nevertheless, they were able to do it. That's the big difference between them. All of them were married to Jews with some rare exception. They were intermarried even with Uzbekistan with Tajikistan. But, mostly, they were married within their community. They did not marry Ashkenazi. They married Jews from Uzbekistan and Jews from Tajikistan, which were what you call, what I define as Sephardic. Whereas the Jews who came from Moscow and Leningrad, sometimes their spouses were not Jewish. The wife might be Jewish, the husband is not or vice versa. Their children were not circumcised. This is where our synagogue, to a certain extent, benefited without some of the problems attached to this influx. Whereas in the

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violence, known as the Second Intifada, had begun.

<sup>76</sup> A prayer shawl fringed at each of the four corners in accordance with biblical law. The wearing of *tallit* at worship is obligatory only for married men, but it is customarily worn also by males of *bar mitzvah* age and older

<sup>77</sup> *Tefillin*, also called 'phylacteries' are a set of small black leather boxes containing scrolls of parchment inscribed with verses from the *Torah*, which are worn by observant Jews during weekday morning prayers. They are worn around the arm, hand and fingers and on the forehead. The *Torah* commands that they should be worn as a "sign" and "remembrance" that G-d brought the children of Israel out of Egypt.

Ashkenazi synagogues, they either have to try and teach a man to go back and be circumcised. Many of them here in Atlanta had to go for surgery. I witnessed a few of them where they were grown-up men and they wanted to be Jewish. They wanted to be accepted by them. Sometimes the women had to go to the *mikveh*<sup>78</sup> to convert them to Judaism. The children had to be circumcised. Sometimes they had problems with them. Some refused. In many, many instances, I had the child . . . in one particular case, whose mother wanted him to be *bar mitzvahed* in our synagogue. I asked her if the child was circumcised. She said, "No." I said, "Then I can't." She went to the Reform, and Reform synagogue just *bar mitzvahed* him. I could not have done it. She did not want him to be circumcised. The irony of it all is the one who discouraged him from being circumcised is one who went through it. He went through it. He said, "Don't do it." Yet he, himself, did it. At the time, I suppose he didn't know what he was in it or what was happening, and he didn't know. It's not the most pleasant when you're an adult. When you're a child, it's okay. But when you're adult, it's a bit of a problem. These are the advantages. I would like to come back for a second about the political scene. You must understand where I come from, why my political views, and with me, they haven't changed. If anything, they have changed now a little bit, it's because of the peace process and all the getting back of these things to the Arabs. The way I was brought up, and for generations and generations, because I'm only the result of past generations, we were not welcome in any country. We were a people in our own right. We are wandering until we can go back to our country. That's the way I was brought up. The concept of a people of Israel was a very, very strong concept engrained in every one of us, from the time we were a child. If you say our country is not Tunisia, you are a guest in Tunisia. Your country is Israel. One day you're going to go back to Israel. That's the way I grew up. That's the way I was educated. Therefore, when you try and speak about . . . forget about dual allegiance or you speak about, how you feel deep down. Whose nations are you part of? I might be an American citizen now, but I also belong to the people of Israel. The people of Israel is not just a term which you used as a euphemism or justifying that. It's the children of Israel. We meant the people of Israel. We meant the nation of Israel. In fact, in Spanish, you don't say the Jewish religion or Jewish faith, you speak of a *pueblo*. You speak of the people. In Spanish, they always mention *el Pueblo de Israel*. Therefore, that is the way I was brought up. To me, I could not conceive of anything else but. Therefore, when the dream becomes a reality, if you want to speak about Zionism, Zionism is not just . . . it is a modern concept in many ways, but it is a religious concept. We speak about Zion, returning to Zion, today. Read the prayers. We've read them for 2,000 years. We invented Zionism and then it became a full modern Zionism. Political Zionism is what was invented by

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<sup>78</sup> A *mikveh* is a pool of water, gathered from rain or from a spring, which is used for ritual purification and

[Boris] Yeltsin.<sup>79</sup> As far as a return to Zion, it's something wished to be for 2,000 years. Therefore, this is why if you put that upbringing and that background into proper context, then you can understand the way I feel and my views, my political view. Today, of course, it has changed. You are right. The problems are not all the time positive, by the way. If you look at what is happening now, the activism is not as strong as it used to be. Now that the State of Israel has sat at the table with the Palestinian and is prepared to give back territories, which at one time they swore would never give, which were holy to a lot of people. Bethlehem. That's where King David became king and many of these holy places. Interestingly enough, most of the holy places are not so much on the west side of the <unintelligible> of Tel Aviv. They are more inland. Whether it's Jericho, whether it is Bethlehem, or whether it is Shechem, or whether it is Jerusalem, of course, and all these surrounding neighborhoods, these are the places where you didn't hear anything. In those days where the children of Israel were in Tel Aviv or in Jaffa. They were not in that. That was a Philistine post. It was not. Most of the religious, all the religious activity was centered. These are the ones we're losing. These are the ones we're giving away and we're giving up. Therefore, what's happening is that people are reacting differently. You have a small group of zealots and extremists, like the ultra-orthodox.<sup>80</sup> Most of the main street, the average person, they say, "Well, Israel now is now reaching peace. They're talking with the Arabs and so on. Therefore, there is no more danger now. We should be watchful. We should be careful, but we can just relax now." The activism is not as needed as before. Today, apparently many people they became . . . and the Israelis are as much at fault, maybe, as the Diaspora.<sup>81</sup> The bigger problem is the policy. Let me explain what I mean by the Israelis. If you get statement like [Menachem] Begin<sup>82</sup> who says, "We don't need your money," or [Yitzhak] Rabin<sup>83</sup> who tries to tell

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ablutions.

<sup>79</sup> Boris Nikolayevich Yeltsin (1931-2007) was born in Sverdlovsk [now Yekaterinburg], Russia. He was a Russian politician who became president of Russia in 1990. In 1991 he became the first popularly elected leader in the country's history, guiding Russia through a stormy decade of political and economic retrenching until his resignation on the eve of 2000.

<sup>80</sup> Haredi Judaism is the most theologically conservative form of Judaism. Haredi Judaism is often translated as ultra-orthodox Judaism, although Haredi Jews themselves object to this translation. They simply refer to themselves as Jews and consider more liberal forms of Judaism to be unauthentic. They live in insular communities with limited contact to the outside world, and their lives revolve around *Torah* study, prayer and family.

<sup>81</sup> Diaspora is the term used to describe the dispersion of the Jewish people throughout the world after the fall of the Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple in 70 C.E. The Jewish people have suffered various exiles and they are all associated with the loss of the promised land or Israel. Exile has become associated with Messianic expectations in Jewish belief where the return of the people to the Promised Land would occur simultaneously with the coming of the Messiah.

<sup>82</sup> Menachem Begin (1913-1992) was born in Brest-Litovsk, Poland. He was an Israeli politician, founder of Likud [the Labor party] and the sixth Prime Minister of the State of Israel. Before independence, Begin was the leader of the Zionist militant group *Irgun*, the Revisionist breakaway from the larger Jewish paramilitary organization *Haganah*.

people, "You should not interfere," because he doesn't like some of the protests of the Diaspora Jews, the Jews in the United States. He doesn't like. Then he goes and he gives them a dressing down at the Conference of Presidents,<sup>84</sup> the different organizations that I've been listening to. He really gives them a dressing down like you wouldn't believe because many of them did not support some of his policies and were not lobbying in favor of what he was doing but rather against what he was doing. That's what happened. What's happening is that to a certain extent, there is a polarization between the Jews in Israel and State of Israel and the Jews in the Diaspora. You always have to ask yourself, what in fact do I have in common with a person who lives in another area? For centuries, for millennium, we identified with every Jew in every part of the world. Why? Because we had a common goal, number one. Number two, we had a common background, a common culture. You could go to any part of the world and walk into a synagogue. You can go to China. If there was a synagogue, they would be praying in Hebrew. And there would be a very similar service to the one you're used to in the United States. Therefore, you looked upon . . . you said, they were my brothers and my sisters. The concept why we brought Jews from Soviet Union, why we brought them out. Wherever there was a Jew, there it was our problem. It's part of my people. It's not just my brother, but it's my people. Today, when the State of Israel start talking about whether it is a secular state, whether they're changing some of the concepts, they're changing their ideals, which is not the same. It's been . . . they were quite happy. It's really inconceivable to give back some of that. In fact, many of them, although they've changed a little bit now about Jerusalem, still people are worried Jerusalem one day will be divided. What do I have in common with them now? How do I identify? How do I relate to the - I'm not an Israeli. My allegiance was to a Jewish people and not to a State, to kind of a conception of a state, whether it is Afghanistan or . . . The State of Israel was only identified, in my mind, as the state of a Jewish people. The moment it changes, I cannot relate to the state anymore. Therefore, suddenly I says, "Where am I going? Just to go to the beach of Tel Aviv? What kind of a country am I going to where they can't conceive, in fact, that the country, the concept which you had for 2,000 years, in fact, you have to change all the prayers

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<sup>83</sup> Yitzhak Rabin (1922-1995) was an Israeli politician, statesman and general. He served two terms as Prime Minister. In 1995, he was assassinated.

<sup>84</sup> The Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations (commonly Presidents' Conference) is an American non-profit organization that addresses issues of critical concern to the Jewish community. It comprises 51 national Jewish organizations. It was founded to develop a consensus voice among Jewish organizations in dealings with the executive branch. The organization was founded in 1956 in response to requests from President Dwight D. Eisenhower and his administration. The American Jewish community of the period was experiencing a large growth in its similar policy groups (such as the American Jewish Committee and American Jewish Congress and the increasing influence of the Jewish denominations on politics (particularly from Orthodox and Conservative Jews). The Eisenhower administration wanted a way to gauge the opinion of the community, without wading into the internal politics of the community, and polling leaders of each organization. The conference established a unified voice for the community, one that government officials could consult on

technically, from my point of view, unless you want people to have faith that the Messiah will come. But from my point of view, you cannot pray any more what you used to pray before because many of these mentioned, the whole history has changed with what's happening now in the peace process. As long as you had the dream, even though you did not have it, then you can still dream and hope and, therefore, everything is valid, whether it is a prayer, whether it is a hope, whether it is a statement or discussion. Today, it is not because you do have it. You are giving it back. Therefore, how can I identify with that? The truth of the matter, I've said recently. I was talking to Doris Goldstein, who is very involved in some of these issues, and Julian Jacobs was here. Dr. Jacobs. I told them, "I don't feel as eager to go back to Israel as I used to." I really don't, and it's a horrible thing. It's not that I don't feel any allegiance to the State of Israel. But it is a horrible feeling where I say, "What am I going for there?" If it is to go to the beach, I can go to Miami. I have a nicer beach in Destin [Florida]. If that's why I'm going. It has a different connotation to me and not just the same connotation of just going to visit another country. This is what's happening. The polarization between . . . of course, it was started by us anyway. What we have. That is on the whole religious feel. The moment we allow the division to occur, and you can call it any way you want, but it's a division where you have a separation between different branches of "Judaism." You create a different kind of people. It's very interesting how the people talk. When we might turn around to you and tell you, "You cannot do that. It's because you are Orthodox. But I can do it. I'm Reform." That is not one people. That is two different concepts. You can say anything you want, that you're Jewish or not Jewish, but you belong to two different groups, and it's not just a branch of Judaism. A branch of Judaism is, it can be valid. You can talk of a branch of Judaism if the bottom line is the same for everybody. If, for example, you have one belief, underlying belief, which is for everybody, a basic belief which everybody just accepts. Then, how you practice within that belief and that concept, then might be different. Then you can say, you can speak of different branches. When the Hasidic movement<sup>85</sup> came on the scene, it was not a breakable movement from Judaism because the basic concepts were the same. They did not change. How they defined who is a Jew did not change. How they defined how you perform a wedding did not change. How do you give a divorce did not change. How do you convert did not change. They were the same thing to all of them. They believed, for example, that their soul is greater than my soul or anything. That's

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important matters.

<sup>85</sup> Hasidic Judaism (also sometimes called *Chasidim* from the Hebrew word "Chasid" meaning "pious") is a Jewish mystical movement that was founded in eighteenth century Eastern Europe by Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov. It promotes spirituality through the popularization and internalization of Jewish mysticism as the fundamental aspect of the faith. Hasidic Judaism also refers to a branch of Orthodox Judaism that maintains a lifestyle separate from the non-Jewish world.

already not an issue. Who cares? You can believe whatever you want. But the basic principles, today, it's not the same. Today, we reach a situation where what you or I might consider as a Jew, you or I might feel that, no, they are not Jewish. So, one of us might accept him, and one of us does not accept him. Then we do have a problem because the division within the community is much, much more central than we even realize. I mean it's not a problem. I mean, one day it could become a problem.

**AROGETI:** Are you talking about the community here in Atlanta or the community throughout world Jewry?

**ICHAY:** The community in Atlanta is not unique. It's throughout the world. Obviously, I'm using Atlanta as an example, but that is not just an Atlanta phenomenon. It's throughout the world. And now it's going to Israel. We've transplanted the problems which we've always looked upon it as a problem. Everybody looks upon it as a blessing and a problem. The same divisions, which we've had, now is moving to Israel. In Israel, the division is occurring within the people where we have also the same movements being developed and people talking. Whereas, in our olden days, not everybody was Orthodox.

**AROGETI:** Do you think that part of this is in this particular country or culture, or in the world culture of an environment where we've got freedom of religion and freedom of speech, and tremendous numbers of individual freedoms and liberties where people are testing those to their extremes? That as a tendency to add to the polarization or potential polarization?

**ICHAY:** That's possible. That's maybe true. Regardless of what the reasons are and whether the reasons are justified, these are the facts on the ground.

**AROGETI:** Right. Rabbi, I want to, as we are approaching the end of our discussion this morning, I want to give you an opportunity to reflect a little bit upon your experience here in Atlanta and any other thoughts you might have.

**ICHAY:** When I came to Atlanta, the Atlanta Jewish community was a very small one, relatively speaking. Today, it is a very important community. A number of people have settled in Atlanta. A lot of immigrants have come to Atlanta from different countries and from foreign countries have settled here, as well as American born who have moved to Atlanta because Atlanta is a great city. Atlanta has moved by leaps and bounds from point of view of organization, from point of view of achievement, from point of view of development even within the Jewish community. While you might disagree, depending on your tendency, whether you're extreme Orthodox or you're a zealot or not a zealot, you cannot overlook the fact that Atlanta is a very dynamic community. While there might be disagreement within certain organizations, yet it's very interesting there is a very, very close friendship and a

warm friendship within the different segments of the Jewish community, even those branches which I spoke about and say, "Well, we're different theologically." Yet for some reason or another, we're very close to one another, and we're very friendly with one another. We are able to work with one another and function with one another. You can criticize the [Atlanta Jewish] Federation<sup>86</sup> as much as we want, and I don't know if I did in the course of our discussion or not, at the same time. The Federation has been able to achieve great things within the Jewish community. You might disagree with the method. You might disagree with some of the philosophy. But by the same token, there are organizations here in Atlanta who are strengthening the Jewish community, whether it is organizations to social work, whether it is organizations which do religious work.

**AROGETI:** Thank you, Rabbi.

<End Tape 2, Side 2>

**INTERVIEW ENDS**

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<sup>86</sup> The Atlanta Jewish Federation was formally incorporated in 1967 and is the result of the merger of the Atlanta Federation for Jewish Social Service founded in 1905 as the Federation of Jewish Charities; the Atlanta Jewish Welfare Federation founded in 1936 as the Atlanta Jewish Welfare Fund; and the Atlanta Jewish Community Council founded in 1945. The organization was renamed the Jewish Federation of Greater Atlanta in 1997.