Sandra: Today is August 11, 2010. My name is Sandra Berman. I am here with Don Kemp, who has agreed to participate in the Oral History Project of the Esther and Herbert Taylor Oral History Project of the William Breman Jewish Heritage Museum. Thank you so much for agreeing to participate in this project. We’re very glad to be here in Anniston, Alabama. I’d like to begin by asking you to tell us a little bit about your own background, where you were born, where your parents were born, and your parents’ names.

Don: My father’s name is Rudy Alfred Kemp. Actually, in Germany it was ‘Rudolf Alfred Kempenich.’

Sandra: How do you spell that?

Don: K-E-M-P-E-N-I-C-H. He was born in Emmerich, Germany. Emmerich is the last town on the Rhine River before you get to Holland. Mother was also born there. Her name is Margareta Sybilla [sp]. Her maiden name was Nathan and, of course, Kempenich.

Sandra: Could spell her first and maiden name?

Don: M-A-R-G-A-R-E-T-A. Sybilla is S-Y-B-I-L-L-A, and Nathan, N-A-T-H-A-N.¹ My grandparents on both sides were also living in Emmerich. Mother’s mother was from a town

¹ A possible alternative spelling is ‘Margarete.’ She was commonly called ‘Grete’ or ‘Greta.’
called Giershagen, Germany, which is where her father lived. He also came to Anniston when my mother and father came over.

Sandra: Let’s talk a little about your life in Germany. How old you were when you . . .

Don: I was born here.

Sandra: You were born here.

Don: Yes. They came over in 1937, and I was born in 1942.

Sandra: Did they talk much about what they were experiencing in Germany during that era and what prompted them to leave?

Don: Yes. They talked some about it. They left before they started rounding people up in Germany, so they were never in a concentration camp or anything like that. They experienced things like not being able to work anymore. Their possessions, money basically . . . their bank accounts were not really in their control anymore. They were allowed to take a certain amount out each month, but it was a limited amount. They were there when the temple was . . . I think . . . they were there when Jews were mistreated, when they had to wear stars [of David], and they had their passports stamped with a star, and so on.

Sandra: Did they talk very much about the decision-making process? How they went about getting everything in order and what went into leaving?

Don: They had been planning to leave a good bit before they left. Dad’s brothers . . . both brothers . . . and a sister had already left. One brother went to Brazil, and one went to Israel [then Palestine], and his sister was living in France at the time. They had been planning to leave and trying to decide where to go. They made a trip to Israel [then Palestine] to see what that was like and visited his brother. His brother showed him you can have an orange grove here or something. Dad didn’t think he could figure out how to make oranges grow in the sand, so they decided not to go there. In talking about it, Mother said that Dad’s family was scattered all over the world, and her family was all here, so they decided to come here.

Sandra: How far back did your mother’s family go in this country and in the South?

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2 In September 1941, Joseph Goebbels, the Nazi Propaganda Minister, issued a law requiring Jews over the age of six to wear a yellow Jewish star, or Magen David, on their outer garments. The star had the word “Jude [German: Jew]” written in Hebrew-style letters inside of it. The following year, Jews in lands under German control were also forced to wear the Star.

3 It was not a star, but a large red ‘J’ for ‘Jude.’
Don: Her close family . . . back to probably the early 1920’s, 1930’s, something like that . . . her uncle, [Levi] Lee Freibaum . . . I’m not sure what year he came here. He was in Gadsden [Alabama] . . . I think he was a bankruptcy administrator. There was a factory here that was in bankruptcy. He handled that and ended up as the president of that company, Classy Ribbon, which made narrow fabrics, ribbons, and that sort of thing. He was the one who arranged for the rest of the family to come over. He first brought over my uncle before things really got bad over there. My uncle was about 14, I think. He also brought over my aunt, my mother’s sister. Then, when Mother and Dad decided to leave, he told them that he would also bring them over, but he wanted them to bring his father and his sister with them. My grandparents had already come. The other sister was Metha Freibaum. His father was Solomon Freibaum. Freibaum is F-R-E-I-B-A-U-M. The four of them came over together in 1937. Dad had been taking out the maximum amount that he could each month from the bank, and he had been smuggling some of that across the border in the handlebars of his bicycle and that sort of thing. Any time he had a chance to, he took out money to relatives in Holland. They had also been preparing to ship their things and had actually a lot of their possessions already in Holland, which they were able to bring over here with them. The day they decided to leave, the Gestapo⁴ had told them that they wanted them to come in the next day to be interviewed about why they had been taking out as much money as they had been able to. Dad had previously told them that they had lost their passports. They had two sets of passports, and when the Gestapo told them that, they took the one set. After they left, Dad immediately went and got Mother, who was in a beauty shop, and told her it was time to leave. They were right at the border, so they just walked across the border and left.

Sandra: That’s an amazing story. Did they come directly to Anniston or did they . . .

Don: They did. Yes. Actually, they already had tickets, I believe, on a ship, so they came over.

Sandra: Did they speak English?


Sandra: Did they talk much about what it was like their first days here in Anniston, their first few months, trying to learn English and finding a place for themselves in Southern society?

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⁴ An abbreviation of Geheime Staatspolizei, which means “Secret State Police.” It was established in 1934 and placed under Heinrich Himmler. With virtually unlimited powers, it was highly feared.

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**Don:** Dad, prior to leaving, had learned magic tricks and bought supplies for that. He did shows on the boat when they were on the way over. When they got to America, they didn’t have to go to Ellis Island.⁵ We had a relative who was the chairman of the school board in New York, so he went out to the boat and met the boat and brought them in. They actually skipped that whole Ellis Island process. Then they came down here, I suppose by train. I really hadn’t asked that question. They had relatives here. My grandparents were here. My uncle and aunt were here on Mother’s side of the family. My great uncle was here, so it wasn’t hard finding someone to speak to or to help them get adjusted. Dad liked to tell a story about when he got his first haircut. My uncle told him what to do and that all he had to do was say ‘yes.’ Dad went in to get a haircut and got that. The man asked him if he wanted a shave, and he said ‘yes.’ He asked him if he wanted a singe. They used to take a little stick, and they would light a match and singe off the hair if there was any sticking out. Dad said ‘yes,’ so they started that and Dad said ‘no, no, no, no.’ The barber always said that that’s where he learned how to say ‘no.’

**Sandra:** That’s great. What line of work did they go into when they got here.

**Don:** They started working in the factory that my uncle owned.

**Sandra:** That was the ribbon . . .

**Don:** Yes. He was the president of it; there were other shareholders. Dad worked there as a . . . I’m trying to think of the word . . . doing time and motion studies and that sort of thing, because he had had some experience with that in Germany. He learned English reasonably quickly, was promoted, and finally got to the point where he couldn’t make any more money there. My great uncle told him that was as much as he could pay him because he wasn’t paying anybody else more. Dad left that and went to work at the Anniston Army Depot, which is in Bynum, adjacent to Anniston, and worked there also doing time and motion studies. Eventually, when he left there, he started a bowling alley.⁶ He had been talking to the Jewish soldiers that were coming to the Temple and asking them what they thought was needed in Anniston. That’s something they thought people would like, so he started a bowling alley and eventually sold that. My great uncle, his uncle, had been telling him that there was a need for a textile factory in Anniston that made cotton fabrics, that they had a lot of inquiries for that but they couldn’t make

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⁵ Ellis Island in New York Harbor was the gateway for millions of immigrants to the United States. It was the nation’s busiest immigrant inspection station from 1892 until 1954. Today it is a museum.

⁶ A bowling alley is a recreational facility with multiple lanes for bowling.
them in the same factory that synthetic fabrics were being made. He and some other people in Anniston that had Classy Ribbon helped Dad get another factory started making cotton narrow fabrics.

**Sandra:** What was the name of the bowling alley?
**Don:** I don’t know. I don’t remember.

**Sandra:** What was the name of the factory?
**Don:** Tape-Craft.

**Sandra:** I’m sorry.
**Don:** Tape-Craft. T-A-P-E hyphen C-R-A-F-T.

**Sandra:** How long did that factory stay in business?
**Don:** It’s still here.

**Sandra:** It’s still here.
**Don:** Dad . . . again it was owned by stockholders . . . sold the factory in 1969 to a company in Massachusetts . . . Chelsea Industries, and they eventually sold it to YKK, the very large Japanese corporation. YKK was in the zipper business, and one of the products made at Tape-Craft was zipper tape. Then YKK eventually sold it to six of the employees that were working there. The factory is still here.

**Sandra:** What are they making now?
**Don:** I’m sorry. I’ve got that wrong. Excuse me. They sold it to Chelsea Industries. Chelsea sold it to six people, and then those six people sold it to YKK. YKK still owns the factory.

**Sandra:** What do they make today?
**Don:** They still make narrow fabrics, things like zipper tapes, webbings, tapes that go on uniforms, all sorts of narrow webbings and materials, label tapes.

**Sandra:** What year were you born?
**Don:** Nineteen hundred forty-two.

**Sandra:** They had been here four years before you were born?
**Don:** Four or five years, yes. My brother was born in 1939, and his name is Alfred Max Kemp. My sister was born in 1947, and her name is Margaret Jean Kemp.

**Sandra:** Are they still living here also?
**Don:** Fred is. My sister lives in Fort Worth, Texas.
Sandra: I’d like to talk a little bit now about your childhood and growing up here in Anniston. Were your parents . . . for one thing, were they members of the Temple here, [Temple] Beth-El?7

Don: Yes.

Sandra: You grew up here in the Sunday school and . . .

Don: Yes.

Sandra: Can you describe what the Temple was like back in the 1940’s when you were just a little boy?

Don: Let me tell me a story about my great-grandfather first. He came over on the boat with Mother and Dad and with his daughter, Metha Freibaum.

Sandra: What was his name?

Don: Solomon Freibaum. His daughter that came over with him was Metha Freibaum. She had taken care of him in Germany. She never married. He was 89 or 90 when he came. The first time Dad came to Temple with him he said, “This is a Reform temple.” My grandfather was Orthodox.8 He said, “It’s okay if you want to wear your yarmulke9 if you want to.” His grandfather said, “No, little boy, that’s okay. I pray with my heart, not with my hat.” He came into the temple with him that way. It was a very Reform temple.10 They didn’t like a lot of Hebrew in the service back then, when they first started coming here.

Sandra: Who was the rabbi?

Don: We had student rabbis back then from the Hebrew Union College11 in Cincinnati [Ohio]. When you say ‘back then,’ the first one I remember is Irving Bloom,12 who lives in Atlanta now.

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7 A historic Reform Jewish synagogue in Anniston, Alabama. A group of Jewish women raised the money for the construction of the synagogue currently on Quintard Avenue. Temple Beth-El remains the center for Jewish identity in Anniston although there are only 40 members and services are only held twice a week.

8 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.

9 Jewish men cover their heads during prayer with a small skull-cap called a ‘yarmulke’ or ‘kippah.’ Orthodox Jewish men wear it at all times to remind themselves of God’s presence.

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

11 Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion (HUC-JIR) is the oldest Jewish seminary in the Americas and the main training seminary for rabbis, cantors, educators and communal works in Reform Judaism. It has campuses in Cincinnati, New York, Los Angeles and Jerusalem.

12 Rabbi Paul Irving Bloom was interviewed for the Oral History Project on August 17, 2010, OHC 10082.
Sandra: We’re interviewing him next week.

Don: After him was David Baylinson, who is also in Atlanta now. I don’t remember the names of the rabbis before that. We had lay services also, and Dad conducted a lot of those.

Sandra: How many families were here in the 1940’s when you were growing up here, in the 1940’s and 1950’s?

Don: I guess about 40 or 50, something like that. More than now. We had a much larger young . . . we don’t have any young people now really. Just a few. We had enough young people to have Sunday school and to participate in things around the area. There was an organization called ‘NFTY,’ which is the ‘North [American] Federation of Temple Youth.’ We would get together with other Jewish kids from Gadsden [Alabama], Florence [Alabama], Huntsville [Alabama], Jasper [Alabama], [and] other small towns that had synagogues. Once a year, we would go to one temple or the other for a convention.

Sandra: Were you a pretty close knit group?

Don: Was I . . .

Sandra: The young people. Were you a close knit group?

Don: As close knit as you can be when you live as far apart as we did. We knew each other, we did things together, went to each other’s houses, that sort of thing.

Sandra: What about your parents. Did they associate with mainly the family? Did they have a lot of friends within the community? Did they associate mainly with Jews?

Don: Both, I think. I think the Jewish community was much closer then than it is now to each other, and they did a lot more things together than the community does now. They were a pretty close knit group.

Sandra: Can you describe some of the activities they did?

Don: Most of the activities were here at the Temple, just the normal things that you do now. We had meals together and that sort of thing. They had a B’nai B’rith organization and a

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13 Rabbi David Baylinson was interviewed for the Oral History Project on June 29, 2010, OHC 10052.
14 An organized youth movement of Reform Judaism. Funded and supported by the Union for Reform Judaism, NFTY exists to supplement and support Reform youth groups at the synagogue level. About 750 local youth groups are affiliated, with over 8,500 youth members (2015).
15 B’nai B’rith International (from Hebrew: “Children of the Covenant”) is the oldest Jewish service organization in the world. B’nai B’rith states that it is committed to the security and continuity of the Jewish people and the State of Israel and combating antisemitism and bigotry. Its mission is to unite persons of the Jewish faith and to enhance Jewish identity through strengthening Jewish family life, to provide broad-based services for the benefit of senior citizens, and to facilitate advocacy and action on behalf of Jews throughout the world.

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Sisterhood. They got together at those things. They were friendly enough to have each other over to their homes.

**Sandra:** Where did you go to school?

**Don:** I went to the public schools here in Anniston, from first grade through twelfth. Then I went to the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill.

**Sandra:** What was school like for you? Being Jewish in a smaller community, were you well accepted at school?

**Don:** Yes. I never had any instance that I can think of that I would call antisemitic. I was in the Hi-Y, which is associated with the YMCA [Young Men’s Christian Association.] I was the ‘Hi-Y Boy of the Year.’

**Sandra:** That’s great.

**Don:** No, I didn’t really feel . . . People weren’t very familiar with Judaism, but I was invited to speak at some church youth groups. I really didn’t feel any prejudice because of that. Mother and Dad were pretty prominent members of the community, and that probably had something to do with it, too.

**Sandra:** Did you invite some of your non-Jewish friends to your home to participate in Jewish holiday celebrations?

**Don:** Not much. Maybe a little bit. Some of them would come to the Temple with us. A lot of them were here for my bar mitzvah.

**Sandra:** As you got older, what about dating? Was that a problem or an issue for your parents, since there were not that many Jewish girls?

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16 A group of women in a synagogue congregation who join together to offer social, cultural, educational, and volunteer service opportunities.

17 Hi-Y clubs are affiliated with the Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA). Designed to promote Christian character through fostering speech, sportsmanship and scholastic achievement, the Chapman, Kansas YMCA developed the Hi-Y club for high school boys in 1889. The service clubs ultimately became the “four fronts” program—Hi-Y, Jr. Hi-Y, Tri Hi-Y, and Gra-Y—and served youth of all ages throughout the country.

18 Young Men’s Christian Association, commonly known as the ‘YMCA’ or the ‘Y.’ Worldwide organization founded in 1844 that aims to put Christian principles into practice by developing a health body, mind and spirit. They offer recreational facilities, parent/child education programs, youth and teen development with after school programming, etc.

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

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Don: No, not really. All of us dated non-Jewish girls, or boys in my sister’s case, because there really wasn’t much choice.

Sandra: You were bar mitzvahed. Do you remember which rabbi was officiate[d]?

Don: [Rabbi] Baylinson. Rabbi Bloom came back for it also, so they both participated in my bar mitzvah.

Sandra: Were a lot of members of the community here in attendance?

Don: Yes. Back then we could fill the house up pretty well, so it was a pretty full house.

Sandra: That’s great. Did you go to Jewish summer camp?

Don: I went to [Camp] Blue Star twenty twice. When I was 11 was the first time. Rabbi Bloom was the counselor there in my cabin, so that was nice. Then I went again two years later.

Sandra: Was it important for your parents to send you to Jewish camp to give you more of a broad . . .

Don: I wouldn’t say . . . I don’t know if it was important to them or not. They obviously supported it, and I guess it was probably their idea, so maybe it was important to them.

Sandra: Did you have a particular hangout here in town?

Don: Not really. We all did things together, and really not so much with Jewish friends, because I was the only Jewish boy in high school. We hung out at the same places everybody else did.

Sandra: Where was that?

Don: What age?

Sandra: Teen years, let’s say.

Don: I would go places with my girlfriend, several other friends. There was a drive-in restaurant that everybody would hang out at. We would go to the drive-in movies, that sort of thing.

Sandra: Let’s talk a little bit about the changes that were happening in the South during the 1950’s and early 1960’s. Did your parents ever discuss with you the situation between the races here in the South? Was that a conversation you had in your home?

Don: Not so much. Back when I was in . . . the whole way through school here was segregated. All of the maids and gardeners and people like that were all blacks. It was hard for

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20 Blue Star Camps is a Jewish summer camp located in the Blue Ridge Mountains of western North Carolina.

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blacks to get a job other than working in a foundry or doing manual labor like that. The facilities were all segregated. Bathrooms were all segregated. Water fountains. There was a black water fountain. It was called a ‘colored water fountain’ back then. The train station had a ‘colored area’ and a ‘white area.’ That was the only life I knew at that time. It, I guess, was the normal way for life in the South. When I went to school at [University of North] Carolina, [it] was the first time that I had actually had a black person in my classroom, and there weren’t many there either. It was sort of an unusual thing. After things were desegregated here, the first time I went into a fast food place and saw blacks in line—that was an unusual thing. It was . . . I wouldn’t say accepted so much, but it was normal here. There wasn’t much that people could do about it. We had blacks that worked for us. Later on, after integration, Dad was one of the people that helped get the library integrated. He hired people early on to work in the plant that were black, other than his sweepers . . . I mean actually have a job working in manufacturing. Early on, that was just the way it was.

Sandra: Do you think your parents related at all to the discrimination they saw here, to the discrimination that they had to leave Germany for, to see that same thing happening to another group of people?

Don: I don’t know. I think they sort of accepted what was here.

Sandra: What about other Jews within the Anniston community? Did any of them get involved in the civil rights discussion? Were any of them involved with trying to change things?

Don: I think it depends on what period of time you’re talking about. If you’re talking about from the time they came here until the middle to late 1950’s, probably not. If you’re talking about after that, yes. Dad was a member of COUL, which was the ‘Committee of Unified Leadership,’ and other people in the Jewish community were also, which was an organization that was trying to make things go peacefully in desegregating the South. A local group. Yes, people were involved later on, but in actually participating in marches and that sort of thing, I don’t remember anybody doing that.

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21 This committee was formed in 1971 of a broad base of black and white leaders in Anniston. In the spring of 1971 there was an incident in which a grocery store owned by whites in a black neighborhood hood was burned. A crises seemed to be brewing and the committee was formed to find ways to defuse it, which they did without further escalation. (Ocala Star-Banner, August 14, 1977 at https://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=1356&dat=19770814&id=A5dPAAAAIBAJ&sjid=7QUEAAAIBAJ&pg=1696,2893941&hl=en.

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Sandra: Do you remember the discussions that were going on in the early 1960’s when the march from Selma [Alabama] to Montgomery [Alabama]\(^{22}\) and . . . or any of the reaction when the rabbis from the North came down to Birmingham?\(^{23}\) Can you recall any of those discussions with your family or friends about how you felt?

Don: I was in college by that time. You might remember the incident where there was a bus burning here in Anniston,\(^{24}\) and the leading force in that was the man that was the head of the Ku Klux Klan\(^{25}\) here. I think he and Dad had had some run-ins before. The bus was actually burned or ended up near where Dad’s factory was. He was certainly aware of that and upset by that, and it was a pretty terrible incident in Anniston’s history. I’m sorry. I lost the question now.

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\(^{22}\) The Selma to Montgomery marches were three marches in 1965 that marked the political and emotional peak of the American Civil Rights Movement. Selma and Montgomery were the focus of black voter registration drives which were resisted on every front. The marches were to support voting rights for blacks. The first was on March 7, 1965 and came to be known as “Bloody Sunday” when 600 civil rights marchers were attacked by state and local police with billy clubs and tear gas. Several marchers, both black and white, were beaten or murdered over the course of the marches. The second march was on March 9, 1965. Martin Luther King Jr. led 2,500 protesters who were turned back after crossing the Edmund Pettus Bridge. The third march started on March 16. The marchers marched along U.S. Route 80 protected by 2,000 soldiers of the U.S. Army, 1,900 members of the Alabama National Guard under Federal command, FBI agents and Federal Marshals. They arrived in Montgomery on March 24. The marchers in the third march were fed by women volunteers who cooked the food in the kitchen of the Green Street Baptist Church after which it was delivered to the gathering point for the march by truck.

\(^{23}\) In 1963 as Birmingham struggled in the throes of the Civil Rights era, Martin Luther King Jr. made pleas to the Birmingham clergy, including rabbis, to support his marches. When the Jewish rabbis counseled patience and moderation and asked him to wait for desegregation laws to take effect, King called them out on their perceived passivity in a “Letter from a Birmingham Jail.” The letter gained national attention and a few weeks later a group of 19 Conservative rabbis from the North, outraged by the images they saw on the TV of black protestors being beaten, arrived in Birmingham. They didn’t tell anyone in the Jewish community they were coming, which angered the rabbis and many Jews in Birmingham. After talking with King in the Birmingham jail, they toured black churches making speeches of support. Then they left. The whole episode appeared high-handed to the Birmingham Jewish community and they feared an antisemitic backlash from the Ku Klux Klan.

\(^{24}\) Freedom Riders were civil rights activists who rode interstate buses into the segregated southern United States starting in 1961 to challenge the non-enforcement of the United States Supreme Court decisions \textit{Irene Morgan v Commonwealth of Virginia} (1946) and \textit{Boynton v Virginia} (1960), which ruled that segregated public buses were unconstitutional. The Southern states ignored the rulings and the Freedom Riders were often greeted with open hostility and violence. On May 14, 1961 in Anniston, Alabama a mob attacked the first of two buses, slashing its tires and trying to block its exit from the station. The crippled bus finally stopped several miles outside of town and the mob firebombed it. As the bus burned, the mob held the doors shut, intending to burn the riders to death, although they did manage to escape. The second bus was also attacked. It was boarded by eight Klansmen, who beat the Freedom Riders and left them semi-conscious on the bus.

\(^{25}\) The Ku Klux Klan (or Knights of the Ku Klux Klan today) is a white supremacist, white nationalist, anti-immigration, anti-Jewish, anti-Catholic, anti-black secret society, whose methods included terrorism and murder. It was founded in the South in the 1860’s and the died out and come back several times, most notably in the 1920’s when membership soared again, and then again in the 1960’s during the civil rights era. When the Klan was re-founded in 1915 in Georgia, the event was marked by a cross burning on Stone Mountain. It is still in existence. In the past it members dressed up in white robes and a pointed hat designed to hide their identity and to terrify.
Sandra: I was just wondering if there was discussion about how your parents felt about integration and about what was happening with the marches and all that. What was their reaction?

Don: I think they were in favor of integration and realized, at least by that time, that what was going on was wrong.

Sandra: Were your parents involved, besides in business, were they involved in local community organizations, like the Elks, the Lions, the Kiwanis, any of those?

Don: Yes, they were very involved, and Dad in particular was very involved. I think at one point he was on over 20 separate boards [of directors] around town. They were very involved in the community.

Sandra: What about you after college? You decided to come back to Anniston?

Don: Yes. I worked at the plant here, at Dad’s factory for 15 years. Then in 1980, my brother and I bought an office supply and computer operation here in town and worked there.

Sandra: Was there any thought of not coming back?

Don: Not really.

Sandra: The pull of a big city . . . there was not the pull of a big city for you, or was there?

Don: Not really, because I was planning to work at Dad’s factory. I did once . . . when we sold it, I worked for a year-and-a-half in Boston [Massachusetts], half a year in Providence [Rhode Island] for the company that bought Tape-Craft, and then came back here.

Sandra: How do you think Anniston has changed since you were a child to what it’s like today? How would you describe the change?

Don: In a lot of ways it hasn’t changed much. Of course, everything has changed from 1942 until now. Anniston, not so much. It’s changed for the worse in some ways, in that it has started shrinking. The school system is not very attractive I don’t think to companies outside of Anniston. As I mentioned, when I was growing up the school system was totally segregated.

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26 The Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks is a service organization that consists of Elks Lodges in communities throughout the United States. Elks invest in their communities through programs that help children grow up healthy and drug-free, by undertaking projects that address unmet need, and by honoring the service and sacrifice of military veterans.

27 Lions Clubs are worldwide with over 46,000 individual clubs and 1.35 million members. They are a service organization that gets involved in community works. One of the major things they are involved in is helping providing children get eyeglasses.

28 Kiwanis International is an international, coeducational service club founded in 1915. It is a volunteer-led organization dedicated to building better communities, children and youth.
There were black schools and white schools. It’s pretty much that way again, only now the Anniston school system is almost totally black, and the white kids are going to either private schools or to Christian schools. I think that’s a negative, but I don’t know that there’s a solution to it. The school system is definitely not as good as it was when I was growing up. When I was growing up, there were a lot of factories here... foundries, textile plants. That was really the basis of the city, and a lot of that has disappeared. There are still a couple of foundries here, but not like it was, and there are still a couple of textile plants, but not like it was. There’s still a good bit of industry here, but not as much as there was back then. People have started leaving Anniston to move to surrounding communities, either to Oxford which... Oxford, when I was growing up, was probably 4,000 or 5,000 people. Now, I think it’s around the same size as Anniston, and a lot of the white community has fled to these surrounding communities. That’s been a big change in Anniston. There’s still... I think the whites are still a majority in Anniston, but it’s not quite the same in regard to the composition of the population. I think it’s been to the detriment of the city that all these people have left.

Sandra: On a smaller scale, that’s happened with the synagogue. Jewish families have just... their children didn’t come back after college. Is that mainly... how would you describe what’s happened to the Jewish population here?

Don: That’s basically it. Like in most small Southern towns, the Jewish kids have gone to larger cities, Atlanta or Birmingham or elsewhere. That’s something else that’s not going to change I don’t think. The small Jewish temples are disappearing. Two of the ones I mentioned earlier, Jasper and Gadsden, have already closed their temples.

Sandra: How often is this synagogue open?

Don: We have services usually twice a month.

Sandra: Still with a student rabbi?

Don: No. Rabbi Bloom conducts services once a month, and Rabbi Baylinson conducts services once a month. When they both retired, Rabbi Bloom was living in Fair Hope, Alabama, and would drive up once a month for services. Actually, he conducted services here and in Gadsden at one point. They both started coming back when they retired.

<interview pauses, then resumes>
Sandra: We were discussing what the community is like today and how it’s changed and how the synagogue has changed. Could you describe some of your fondest memories of growing up here? A couple of days in the life of Don Kemp growing up in Anniston, Alabama.

Don: When I was probably eight or nine, they bought a place out in the country between Anniston and Gadsden in a small community called ‘Wellington.’ There was a pond, and Mother and Dad and Hyman and Selma [Hirsch] Gordon built houses there. We would pack up everything every summer and move out there for three months. There was a swimming pool. That was a fond memory to go out there and be fishing and swimming all day. Back then, it was much more difficult to travel. Going to Atlanta would take three hours or maybe a little more. The quickest way to get there would be to go to Tallapoosa [Georgia] and then go up country roads to Marietta [Georgia] and then back down to Atlanta [Georgia], because it took so long on Highway 78 with all of the trucks that you had to follow on that road. It was a very slow process, hard to get other places, so people didn’t travel as much as they do now. We would have a lot of visitors. In fact, Selma Gordon, her sister was Rosalie [Hirsch] Alterman. They would come visit us in the summer, all of their family. They would spend a week or two with us, and a lot of other relatives would come and visit. People from in town would come out and visit, so that’s a fond memory that I have of that.

Sandra: You mentioned dating while you were living here in Anniston. How did you end up meeting your wife?

Don: My roommate from college . . .

Sandra: And her [his wife’s] name, by the way.

Don: My roommate from college was from Florence, South Carolina. I went . . . after we had graduated . . . when his father passed away, I went to his father’s funeral. His mother and my future wife’s mother got together at the funeral and decided that they needed to introduce me to their daughter. That’s how that happened.

Sandra: Her name?

Don: Her name was Gail Sopkin . . . S-O-P-K-I-N.

Sandra: Is she related to Henry Sopkin?

Don: To Henry? Probably.

Sandra: He was the conductor of the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra in the 1950’s.

Don: Yes, they were related.
Sandra: That’s interesting.
Sandra: I’m sorry. Was it important for you to marry someone Jewish?
Don: At the time, yes. My second wife was not Jewish. It was what we were supposed to do back then.
Sandra: I wanted to go back a little bit and ask you . . . you had mentioned earlier, when I first got here, that on your mother’s side the family went all the way back to the Civil War. Correct?
Don: I understand that. I can’t tell you who it was, though. I think the Hagedorns or somebody had been here quite a while.
Sandra: You don’t know any of that history then?
Don: No.
Sandra: I was just curious if you had any Confederates in the attic, so to speak.
Don: I don’t know.
Sandra: Did you ever regret not living in a larger city?
Don: No. I was happy here.
Sandra: My last couple of questions. I wanted to also talk about . . . was the [Ku Klux] Klan very active in Anniston?
Don: I think it was fairly active at one point.
Sandra: Was it ever a problem for any of the Jewish community here?

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29 The American Civil War, widely known in the U. S. as simply the Civil War or the War Between the States was fought from 1861 to 1865 to determine the survival of the Union or independence for the Confederacy. In January 1861, seven Southern slave states declared their secession from the U. S. and formed the Confederate States of America. The Confederacy, often called the South, grew to include eleven states, and although they claimed thirteen states and additional western territories, the Confederacy was never diplomatically recognized by a foreign country. The states that did not declare secession were known as the Union or the North. The war had its origin in the issue of slavery. After four years of bloody combat, which left over 600,000 Union and Confederate soldiers dead and destroyed much of the South's infrastructure, the Confederacy collapsed, slavery was abolished, and the difficult Reconstruction process of restoring national unity and granting civil rights to freed slaves began.

30 A person who fought for the South during the American Civil War.
Don: Not really. No. Not that I’m aware of, anyway. We didn’t have any crosses burned\textsuperscript{31} in front of the Temple. They did have a problem in Gadsden where they had a bombing\textsuperscript{32} I think, but, no, we didn’t have that here. The Jewish community had been pretty active in Anniston from the founding of the city, so the people that were in the Jewish community were fairly prominent members of the city.

Sandra: Was the school integration . . . I know you said you were already in college. I think, but was the integration of the schools and common buildings, public buildings, was it peaceful?

Don: I think it was fairly peaceful, yes. I think they handled things here as well as they could. There were problems, but I think it was pretty well handled here. Would you like to hear about some of the rest of my family here?

Sandra: Yes, I would very much like to hear about the rest of your family.

Don: My grandparents when they came over were in their fifties . . . I think 55 or so. My grandfather started working in my uncle’s factory. In Germany, he had been a cattle trader, cattle and horses. He liked carpentry work, so they put him to work putting crates together for shipping. He started eventually taking a cart through the factory and another mill that was right next to it selling sandwiches to the employees. Then they started a little . . . I guess it would be like a convenience store and sandwich store across the street from the factories. They had a cafeteria-style setup for lunch, and the employees could eat there. My grandparents and my great-aunt worked there, and eventually my uncle and his sister, my aunt, also worked there.

Uncle Henry . . . after my grandparents got older, my uncle ran it, and then my aunt ran it for a while. My great-grandfather took care of the chickens . . . He was, of course, in his nineties . . . so he became ‘Chicken Opa,’ and the grandfather that sold sandwiches became ‘Sandwich Opa.’\textsuperscript{33} Henry Nathan eventually moved to Birmingham. When he went, he had a franchise fried chicken store called ‘Chicken Delight.’

Sandra: I remember Chicken Delight.

Don: Do you?

\textsuperscript{31} Cross burning or cross lighting is a practice widely associated with the Ku Klux Klan. The first recorded instance was on November 25, 1915 on top of Stone Mountain near Atlanta, Georgia. The Klan burned crosses on hillsides or near the homes of those they wished to intimidate. It still occurs today (2015) although it is rarer.

\textsuperscript{32} Congregation Beth Israel in Gadsden was firebombed on March 25, 1960. Its windows were smashed during a Friday service. Two members who rushed outside were wounded with a shotgun by the attacker, Jerry Hunt, a 16 year old Nazi sympathizer.

\textsuperscript{33} In German ‘Opa’ means ‘grandpa’ and ‘Oma’ means ‘grandma.’

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Sandra: I think so.

Don: He did that for a while, and later on he took a job as a traveling salesman selling chemicals. My Aunt Sophie, his wife, worked in a jewelry store over there. Their son George went to Georgia [Institute of] Tech[nology—Atlanta, Georgia] and is an engineer. His brother Mark got into the food business. Aunt Helen, her first husband died not very long after they got married. They had a son Alan, who lives in Texas now. She remarried a man that she met in the Catskills when they went up for a vacation with my great aunt. I think they took her up there to find another husband. She met a fellow named Alfred Caro. Actually, Alan, her son, had met Alfred and went back and told his mother that she should marry him. They did end up getting married, and Alfred moved here. He first worked at the place where Helen was, my grandparents’ store, and then they bought a restaurant called the ‘Annistonian.’ For 20 or . . . <Don turns to person off camera on his left and asks, “How long was that here?”> . . . 20, 25 years, something like that, they ran the Annistonian. That became the most popular restaurant in town. [It] really did well while he was running it.

Sandra: What were those years that he was . . . When did he start the Annistonian? Do you remember?

Don: I’m not sure what the year was.

Sandra: Sixties?

Don: Yes, it was probably in the late Fifties I would think. Something like that.

<Person off camera says, “I think it was about 1955.”>

Don: Nineteen fifty-five. They also did catering. They catered my bar mitzvah, for example. [They] catered my sister’s wedding. Everybody in town went there to eat.

Sandra: How long did he have it? Was he forced or did he change the restaurant to include blacks? Was it integrated at some point?

Don: Yes.

<Person off camera says, “He sold it in 1976.”>

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34 This is Sophie Nathan Nathan. She is a Holocaust survivor from Emmerich, Germany. The Breman Museum has two oral histories for Sophie, OHC 10510 and OHC 10511.

35 The Catskill Mountains, often referred to as the Catskills, are a large area in the southeastern portion of the U.S. state of New York. The Catskills and its many large resorts are well known in American culture as a vacation destination in the mid-twentieth century.
Don: My Aunt Helen died when she was 54 from breast cancer. My Uncle Henry also died when he was 54 from a heart attack. Alfred lived to be 95. Dad lived to be 89, and Mother was 95 when she died. My grandparents, Mother’s parents, lived . . . I think my grandfather was 90, and my grandmother was 91, when they died.

Sandra: Did your grandparents ever go back to Germany to visit?

Don: Yes.

Sandra: Did they have relatives who perished or relatives who survived? Either?

Don: There?

Sandra: Yes.

Don: No. Everybody was gone from Germany. My grandfather went back first. He was pretty much of a town character in Germany, in Emmerich, and was very popular and very well known. He went back I think twice and was greeted with all sorts of celebrations. My grandmother would never go back. Mother and Dad went back. The first time I think they were fairly uncomfortable being there. They went again later. Dad had made contact again with some people that had been friends of his when he was young and that he knew were not involved in being Nazis. They actually came to visit them here, and he went and visited them there. Later on I think it was better. They did go back several times, and I went there once, too.

Sandra: All in all, do you think that your parents and grandparents had a good life in Anniston?

Don: My parents certainly did, yes. They were happy here. They both came over when they were 25 or so. I think they were happy here. My grandparents I think it was more difficult for . . . their English wasn’t as good. They were in their middle fifties when they got here, and it was a tough adjustment. They never . . . I don’t think they ever had the life they would have had if they remained in their native land. They had family here, but they really didn’t participate in the community very much. They came to Temple and that sort of thing, but other than that they didn’t . . . I think it was fine for Mother and Dad.

36 The National Socialist German Workers’ Party (NSDAP), commonly known as the Nazi Party, was a political party in Germany active between 1920 and 1945. The party’s leader was Adolf Hitler. Initially, Nazi political strategy focused on anti-big business, anti-bourgeois and anti-capitalist rhetoric. In the 1930’s the party’s focus shifted to antisemitic and anti-Marxist themes. Racism was also central to Nazism. The Nazis aimed to unite all Germans as national comrades, whilst excluding those deemed either to be community aliens or of a foreign race. The Nazis sought to improve the stock of the Germanic people through racial purity and eugenics, broad social welfare programs, and a disregard for the value of individual life, which could be sacrificed for the good of the Nazi state and the ‘Aryan master race.’ The persecution reached its climax when the party-controlled German state organized the systematic murder of approximately 6,000,000 Jews and 5,000,000 people from the other targeted groups.

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Sandra: When you were growing up, and your brother and sister, did they talk much about what life was like for them back in Germany?

Don: My parents?

Sandra: Your grandparents.

Don: Not a whole lot. I didn’t speak German. Mother and Dad never wanted us to learn German, so they didn’t speak it around the house. When they were with my grandparents, of course, and my other relatives, there was a lot of German spoken. It was difficult for me to communicate with them, too, because their English wasn’t good and my German wasn’t good. No, I didn’t hear a lot of their stories. I heard stories from Mother and Dad about what they did there, but not so much from them.

Sandra: I think we haven’t missed anything. I think we’re good. Is there anything we have not touched upon that you would like to talk about?

Don: I had a great uncle and aunt that were here, Carl and Henny [Henrietta] Nathan. Carl was my grandfather’s brother. He was a tailor. They came here later on. I think they came here in the late Fifties, if I remember right. They were fairly old, to me, back then. I guess Uncle Carl did a little bit of tailoring, but he wasn’t very good at it anymore, and they didn’t do much.

My grandfather had bought all of the houses in a half-block area where he lived, so they lived in one of his houses and hardly spoke English. They had come here from New York. I’m trying to think who else was here. Uncle Lee . . . Lee Freibaum . . . he was a really fine man. Very, very bright. He married . . . his first wife passed away, and he remarried Julia Freibaum. <Don turns to person off camera. “Do you remember Julia’s maiden name? No?”> Anyway, she was from Gadsden.

Sandra: How about a best friend for you? Who were some of your friends?

Don: In Anniston?

Sandra: Yes.

Don: I had a lot of friends. Actually, my two best male friends were both Catholic. Back then, Catholics were discriminated against here more than the Jews were.

Sandra: Do you think that bonded all of you?

Don: I suppose. There were not a lot of Catholics in town back then. I had a lot of friends in high school and all through school, because I grew up here. I still get together with some of them, and we see each other at reunions and that sort of thing.
Sandra: That’s great. I think on that note we’ll close it up. Thank you so much for agreeing to do this, and we’re very happy to have some of your memories on tape. Thank you.

Don: Thank you.

<interview pauses, then resumes>

Don: Back . . . I guess I was 12 or 13, we used to close the Temple in the summer because it was so hot and there was no air conditioning. They put a sign on the door saying, “Closed for the summer due to the heat.” As I told you, we lived out in the country then, in the summer. There was dirt road that went to where the lake was, and on it they built a church. It was the Wellington United Primitive Baptist Church. I’ll tell you a couple of stories. The people that Mother and Dad and the Gordons bought the place from was a man named John Kelly [sp]. When he was I think about 90, someone came to Mother and Dad’s house and knocked on the door and asked if they could baptize Mr. Kelly in the lake. Mother and Dad thought that they were talking about the pond, but they were actually talking about the swimming pool. The Altermans were visiting then, too. They said ‘yes,’ so they came and had a full immersion baptism in the swimming pool, surrounded by all the Jews from Anniston and Atlanta.

Sandra: That’s great.

Don: Anyway, they had that sign on the Temple, and there was a dye house at the factory, which required boilers. One day they had a speaker at the church, a loud speaker on the roof, and they aimed it our way. The preacher was saying that it was going to be a lot hotter in Hell when we got there than it was in the boilers at Tape-Craft. That’s the story that Sherry [Blanton]37 wanted me to tell you. Also, you asked about the Temple then. This area was not built at that time. I think it was built in the early 1950’s. The Sunday school . . . there’s a little area right back there between the social hall and the Temple, maybe seven or eight feet wide, and that’s where Sunday school was held. There was a lady, one of the Sternes . . . Miss Myra [Hannah] Sterne . . . Everybody called her ‘Miss Myra’ . . . who taught Sunday school. In the winter there was a little gas heater, and we all sat around that and had Sunday school. It was a pretty small Sunday school at that time. Later, of course when more military families came, we had a larger Sunday school. [We] had a lot more kids in Sunday school.

Sandra: Is the base still operative?

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37 Sherry Blanton’s oral history is available at the Cuba Archives of the William Breman Jewish Heritage Museum, OHC 10078.
Don: No. It was closed I think in 2001.

Sandra: That had to affect the community, as well.

Don: It did. Yes. The city annexed all of the area that was formerly Fort McClellan,\(^{38}\) except for one area where it’s used by the Alabama National Guard now. Yes, there were a lot of jobs that were lost due to that. Of course, you don’t have all the soldiers coming here that used to.

Sandra: Should I give you one more moment to think, because those were two great stories, and I don’t want to close this off until you give us a few more.

<Sherry Blanton, who is off camera, speaks>

Don: You have to talk louder.

Sandra: Soldiers came for Passover.\(^{39}\)

<Sherry speaks from off camera>

Don: Maybe you need to tell that story.

Sandra: All right. She could . . .

Don: I don’t know. There were a lot of soldiers that were coming to Temple back in the early 1950’s, and some of them became friends of the family. Mother and Dad stayed in contact with some of them over the years. Mostly from the New York area. There were some kids that were in Sunday school with us that were here because their parents were in the Army.

Sandra: Did your family members who were in Holland, did they also immigrate.

Don: Mostly they stayed there.

Sandra: Did they survive the . . .?

Don: Some of them survived. Some of them were hidden in barns by people that they knew all through the war. They eventually prospered. One of the families has a big plumbing

\(^{38}\) Fort McClellan was originally a temporary camp set up in 1917 for World War I artillery training. After World War I, then-named Camp McClellan was placed on “caretaker status” to be used for special training. Congress approved funds for permanent facilities in 1926, and it officially became Fort McClellan in 1929. It was closed in 1999.

\(^{39}\) Hebrew: Pesach. The anniversary of Israel’s liberation from Egyptian bondage. The holiday lasts for eight days. Unleavened bread, matzot, 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 matzot 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.

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company selling plumbing supplies. They’ve all done very well. Of course, they went through difficult times back then. My grandfather had nine siblings. Some of them went to South Africa, so there’s family there. There’s family in Switzerland. [There’s] family in Holland [and] in Brazil. Dad’s brother went to Sao Paulo, Brazil [Portuguese: São Paulo], and one of his sons, when he was in high school, came and lived with us and went to high school here. Then he went to Cleveland, Ohio, to college and lived with my aunt there. He’s still in America. He started working for Shell Oil.

**Sandra:** Shell Oil?

**Don:** Yes. He’s retired now and lives in Nashville [Tennessee].

**Sandra:** Thank you, Don.

<interview pauses, then resumes>

**Don:** When Mother and Dad became naturalized citizens, they went to court. The judge told them that ‘Kempenich’ was hard for Southerners to pronounce and suggested that they should cut off the tail. They did, and we became ‘Kemps,’ which was pretty easy to pronounce, but not so Jewish. ‘Kempenich’ really isn’t so much a Jewish name either, I don’t suppose. It’s a town in Germany. Its name is Kempenich. I was going to tell them something else. I forgot what . . .

<Speaking to person off camera: What was the other thing I was going to tell them, Sherry?>

**Sherry:** They shortened your Dad’s name, too.

**Don:** I was going to tell you about my name. When Mother and Dad changed their name, Fred and I were already born. They didn’t realize that they had to change our names as well. When I went to college, I had to provide my birth certificate and so on, and my name on my birth certificate was ‘Kempenich.’ At that point, they went through the procedure of getting my name changed, as well, but for many years Mother and Dad were ‘Kemps’, and I was unknowingly a ‘Kempenich.’

**Sandra:** That’s great. I think that’s it?

**Don:** Yes.

<End Disk 1>

**INTERVIEW ENDS**