

**THE WILLIAM BREMAN JEWISH HERITAGE MUSEUM
THE ESTHER AND HERBERT TAYLOR
JEWISH ORAL HISTORY PROJECT OF ATLANTA
GEORGIA JEWS**

MEMOIRIST: IRWIN KOPLAN
INTERVIEWER: SANDRA BERMAN
DATE: AUGUST 6, 2007
LOCATION: ATLANTA, GEORGIA

INTERVIEW BEGINS

<Begin Disk 1>

Sandra: Today is August 6, 2007. My name is Sandra Berman. I'm with the William Breman Jewish Heritage Museum. Irwin Koplan has agreed to do an interview for the Esther and Herbert Taylor Oral History Project of the Museum. I know that's a mouthful but I have to say that for the purposes of the tape. Thank you so much for agreeing to do this. I'd like to begin by just asking you to go back in time a little bit and tell me about your background, how you ended up in Dalton, Georgia, or how your parents ended up in Dalton, Georgia.

Irwin: My mother was born on November 28, 1915 in Rome, Georgia. Her parents, my grandparents, were Isaac and Ida Miller. I think the name was formerly 'Pinchuk.' I'm not sure of that. [It was] changed to Miller. My grandparents came from Poland. I don't know the location in Poland. I've been wanting to do a lot of genealogy, but I just don't have time. I'm going to call some of my cousins to see if they've done it already. Anyway, they settled . . . after getting off the boat, they came to Rome, Georgia.

Sandra: Why Rome?

Irwin: I'm guessing about 1880 to 1885. Why Rome? I would love to know that myself. However, during that period there was quite a bit of Jewish migration to Rome, Georgia, with Jewish immigrants moving to Rome. It would really surprise you.

Sandra: Did you know why? What the appeal was? Did they have friends there?

Irwin: It could be that another relative preceded them there. There were some. I have some great-aunts and [great]-uncles that I never met. I visit the cemetery every once in a while there in Rome where my grandparents are buried and several of my uncles and aunts. Rome was a small

flourishing town in the late 1800's after the Civil War.¹ It is [where] two rivers come together. What is it? I don't know the word.

Sandra: . . . converge.

Irwin: The Etowah and the Oostanaula [Rivers] come together there and actually there's been shipping. River barges have come up as far as Rome. I've read a little bit of history. There were several big mills there back in this time. It seemed to be a prosperous city during that period. My mother was the youngest of eight children. She was born in 1915. I know the oldest was probably 18 to 19 years older, maybe 20 years older than her. That's when I figured that my grandparents came.

Sandra: Her name, your mother?

Irwin: Minnie Louise Miller. That was her maiden name.

Sandra: What did your grandparents do in Rome?

Irwin: I understand my grandfather was a shoemaker. He had a shoe repair shop around the main street. He passed away before I was born. I never knew him, but my grandmother, my mother's mother, lived until I was around 7 or 8 years old. I have a pretty good memory of her.

Sandra: Your mother was born in Rome. She grew up there?

Irwin: She grew up there. She met my father when I think she was 17 or 18. I think it was a rather short courtship. I think they got married when she was 19. I believe that's correct. She was 21 when I was born. My dad was born on December 19, 1907. You may have to pardon me, when I was going through all these boxes I pulled up some stuff I didn't even know existed.
<Interview pauses, then resumes>

Sandra: You can stop this tape any time you want. I know it's difficult to sometimes go back like this. Anytime, we can hold it for a second.

Irwin: I appreciate it. He was born, like I say, December 19, 1907. He was about eight years older than my mother.

¹ The American Civil War, widely known in the United States as the 'Civil War' or the 'War Between the States,' was fought from 1861 to 1865 to determine the survival of the Union or independence for the Confederacy. In January 1861, seven Southern slave states declared their secession from the United States and formed the Confederate States of America. The Confederacy, often called the 'South,' grew to include 11 states, and although they claimed 13 states and additional western territories, the Confederacy was never diplomatically recognized by a foreign country. The states that did not declare secession were known as the 'Union' or the 'North.' The war had its origin in the issue of slavery. 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.

Sandra: His name?

Irwin: His name is Leo Joshua. He was born Leo Joshua Kopetovske. K-O-P-E-T-O-V-S-K-E. I thought it was “I” but in looking at some records, it was spelled with an “E.” His mother and father, my paternal grandparents, were Isaac and Anna Kopetovske from Russia. What city, I don’t know.

Sandra: They came to Rome?

Irwin: No, they came to Chattanooga [Tennessee]. My daddy was born in Chattanooga in 1907. My mother was born in Rome in 1915.

Sandra: And they met . . .

Irwin: I think I once heard how they were introduced. I do know how they were introduced. A very extremely close friend and lifelong friend was Abe Goldstein. He had met a girl from Rome, Ruth Lesser. They were dating and he got my dad a blind date with my mother, when he went down . . . Back in those days it would take a couple of hours to drive from Chattanooga to Rome. I don’t even know in . . . they had the old Model-T’s,² I’m sure.

Sandra: It’s interesting how the different cities would look for other Jewish people to get those folks together. I’m sure that . . .

Irwin: Rome got a big head start on Dalton in the early growth of the Jewish population in each city. Dalton, I don’t even know if maybe they only had one or two Jewish families at the turn of the century. I know of one, but Rome already had quite a few.

Sandra: The synagogue³ was founded early.

Irwin: Early.

Sandra: Did your father move from Chattanooga?

Irwin: Yes. They were married on February 3, 1935. My dad had a shoe store in Chattanooga. He owned . . . to my knowledge my dad never worked for anyone in his life. He was always self-employed. They had a shoe store in Chattanooga, or my daddy did, when they were married. I

² The Ford Model T was an automobile produced by Ford Motor Company from October 1, 1908, to May 26, 1927. It is generally regarded as the first affordable automobile, the car that opened travel to the common middle-class American; some of this was because of Ford's efficient fabrication, including assembly line production instead of individual hand crafting.

³ Rodeph Sholom Congregation was established in 1875. Construction on the current building began in 1937. The dedication was held on March 27, 1938 with Rabbi Harry Epstein and Rabbi David Marx, both of Atlanta, officiating. The congregation is affiliated with the Union for Reform Judaism and is a partner of the Goldring/Woldenberg Institute for Southern Jewish Life.

was born on May 21, 1937. Three months after I was born in Chattanooga Children's Hospital . . . shortly thereafter, three months later, we moved to Dalton.

Sandra: Why?

Irwin: I think I know why. I wished to G-d I had asked these questions you're asking me 20 or 30 years ago. I had two aunts that lived in Dalton in the 1930's, my dad's sisters: Ida Deitch [sp] and my Aunt Lily Dubrof. My uncle, Joe Dubrof, died very young. [Aunt Lil] married a Mr. Specter who also preceded her in death. In fact, my Aunt Lil just died last year at 100 years old. She was living in Atlanta when she died. You asked what my mother's father did, but you did not ask what my father's father did. I understand he had a shoe store, but when he first came to Chattanooga, which had to be in the late 1800's—I know it was, because my dad was the fourth of five children and he was born in 1907—he was a peddler. He had a horse and buggy and he traveled out of Chattanooga through Ringgold [Georgia]. The route was Dalton, Ringgold, Dalton, Rome, then back up through Summerville [Georgia] and Lafayette [Georgia], selling his wares. That was around the turn-of-the-century. He must have discovered that Dalton was a good business town. It was and still is. I had two aunts that lived in Dalton. One had a dress shop, Aunt Lily [Lilly's Style Shop]. My Aunt Ida, I think, had a restaurant. I'm not sure of that or another ready-to-wear shop of some kind. My dad knew of Dalton. I think that's why he moved to Dalton, for just a better business opportunity.

Sandra: What did he do when he got . . .

Irwin: He moved to Dalton when I was 3 months old. They rented a house on East Willow Park Drive and made plans to build their home a little further out of town. My dad went into business with Joe Sussman. They opened a furniture store, Dalton Furniture Company, in 1937. After two or three years, my dad . . . Mr. Sussman, he's dead, let him rest in peace, but he had a drinking problem. Dad sold out to him and just started Koplán Furniture Company. Now he's always pronounced it 'Copelan' but over the years I answer to Koplán about 80 percent of the time . . . my professors, my teachers, my customers, everybody. You look at the name you think 'Koplán.' But he preferred 'Copelan.' Koplán Furniture in the early 1940's . . . I'm guessing around 1941 because that's the memory. I can remember as a kid getting in the way and riding the delivery truck when they delivered their refrigerators and the stoves and the furniture. He sold a lot of appliances back in those days. That's my first memory of work, getting in the way.

Sandra: Koplán's must have been like a . . . everyone went to Koplán's for their furniture?

Irwin: Yes. He was not the only furniture store in town. He had competition. My dad was a good businessman.

Sandra: How big did it get?

Irwin: Better than I'll ever be.

Sandra: How big did the store get?

Irwin: He grew to a point where, I would say . . . he was next door, I remember, to Hill Furniture which was double or three times the size, so he had to compete with them. He was right next door. I believe it was Hills that he finally sold to. He only had Koplman Furniture, I think, around five years or six years. I believe it was Hills he sold to because they just put a doorway between the wall and they just expanded their business. At that time, he went into business with Jack Braver who had a store called 'Burts.'

Sandra: B-E-R-T-S? . . . B-U-R-T-S?

Irwin: B-U-R-T-S. It was B-U-R-T-S. It was a men's, women's, children's ready-to-wear clothing store. The retail merchant business was the choice of about 80 percent of all the early Jewish settlers in Dalton.

Sandra: Were there a lot of those kinds of stores in Dalton?

Irwin: Yes. Lots and lots.

Sandra: Can you name a few of the other ones?

Irwin: Sam Stock, he passed away. Mrs. Stock ran Stock's Department Store. Braver's Department Store, which they had before they merged with my dad's to form Burt's. There was the Economy Department Store which was [owned by] Simon Ginsburg. That's a history lesson in itself. Mr. Ginsburg made millions and back when \$1,000,000 in 1940 and 1950 was a lot of money. He was, in fact, a millionaire from a ready-to-wear store.

Sandra: What was his secret?

Irwin: He was a dynamic salesperson. How shall I put it? It was strictly a blue-collar clientele and he just knew how. He knew how. He had a terrific memory. He could sell you something and you go in a year later, as long as he had gotten your name, he would remember your name . . . a year later, if you bought a pair of socks from him. Most amazing thing you've ever seen in your life. He knew. He had thousands of customers and he knew them all by name. That was his major draw.

Sandra: That's amazing. Did your mother work in the store?

Irwin: Yes, my mother worked in the store, but in 1950 my dad sold his interest in Burt's and bought Ginsburg out. He bought the Economy Department Store. Here is an interesting bit of history. At the turn-of-the-century—again I'm guessing 1900—my grandfather Isaac Kopetovske, along with Mr. Alper from Chattanooga, founded the Economy Department Store. He was a peddler. Then he decided to open a business in Dalton with Mr. Alper. I believe he was more of a silent partner, my grandfather, and Mr. Alper ran the business. About 1919, Simon Ginsburg bought that business from my grandfather and Mr. Alper. In 1950 my dad actually bought the business back that his dad had co-founded.

Sandra: That is a great piece of history. When did the name change to 'Koplan'?

Irwin: I'm guessing when my dad was about 24 to 25 years old. I never got the exact figure on that or information. I could. I've got an aunt that's still alive, my father's younger brother's wife, Aunt Bessie. She would know.

Sandra: Do you know why they changed it?

Irwin: In the South back in those years . . .

Sandra: What year would that have been?

Irwin: He was born 1907 and 1920 . . . probably around 1933. It was before my mother and father got married in 1935. Anywhere from 1930 to 1933 is when I assume he changed the name legally.

Sandra: Go on with that "in the South at that time" . . . with that thought.

Irwin: I grew up in Dalton and you experience some mild antisemitism. I say mild because I never took it very seriously. It was mostly verbal. I never got punched or hit. I did get . . . but I threw the punch. I got Tom Lambert once. Tom was a good friend of mine, but he never let me forget that I was Jewish. One day I just couldn't take it anymore. I just knocked the hell out of him. From that point on he never said another word.

Sandra: How old were you when that happened?

Irwin: That was around [age] 18.

Sandra: Was that a prevalent problem for you growing up, or a problem for your parents?

Irwin: It wasn't so much. It must have been for my father. My father grew up in Chattanooga and there were a lot of Jewish people that did not change their . . . they were maybe simpler names. I mean 'Goldstein' is simpler to say than 'Kopetoske,' right?

Sandra: A better name for a store, Koplan's or . . .

Irwin: I think it was just a matter of convenience. Again, I never asked my dad and he never told me.

Sandra: What were some of the other people in Dalton? There must have been a lot of Jews involved in the carpet industry as well.

Irwin: Yes. The forerunner of the carpet industry was the chenille bedspread industry. Chenille was a certain tuft on a fabric that was used for bedspreads, scuffies which were kind of like house shoes, and bathrobes. That drew quite a few Jewish . . . that was the forerunner of the carpet industry. There's a whole history there. It's very easily obtained from the library, or over the years put in the papers that run it, the Atlanta papers that run it. Catherine Whitener⁴ was considered the founder of the chenille industry. It was what they call a home-based business then. The mills would kind of farm out the work and you could have your sewing machine at home and fill the order. That drew several Jewish families, the Hurowitz's . . . most of them came from New York and New Jersey, a few from Philadelphia, and a few from Chicago. They came to Dalton. Labor was cheap. It was a good business town. Dalton was not so small during the Civil War. There was a lot of Civil War history when [General William Tecumseh] Sherman⁵ came through in Dalton. It's an old town. It's an old city. It began to boom with the advent of the chenille business. There were two or three big cotton mills there around 1900.

Sandra: Who were some of the other families involved in the carpet business?

Irwin: The Hurowitz's. I remember distinctly the Hurowitz's, Sam and Ella Horowitz . . . Blue Ridge Chenille . . . Blue Ridge Spread Company.

Sandra: When did the Sauls come?

Irwin: The Sauls came about the same time that my father came.

⁴ Catherine Evans Whitener (1880 – 1964) is credited with reviving and expanding the tufted textile industry in northwest Georgia. The very first quilt she made was a gift for her brother's wedding. Her relatives took notice of her craft, and she began to sell her works to them. Whitener's business evolved from hand sewn quilts, to machine made carpets. With the help of her family, Whitener opened the Evans Manufacturing Company in 1917. Whitener's tufting industry eventually expanded to include bath mats, accent rugs, and carpets. Her carpets were especially successful, and her techniques were lasting. Today, over 90 percent of carpets produced in the U.S. today are tufted using Whitener's early techniques. She never had the chance to make millions off the industry, however, later on many Georgians. Dalton, Georgia, prior to the Silicon Valley boom, was the city with the most millionaires per capita in the United States; all part of Whitener's legacy. In the 1990's, 90 percent of the world's carpets were being produced in or around the city.

⁵ William Tecumseh Sherman (1820 – 1891) was an American soldier, businessman, educator, and author. He served as a general in the Union Army during the American Civil War (1861–65), for which he received recognition for his outstanding command of military strategy as well as criticism for the harshness of the “scorched earth” policies he implemented in conducting the war against the Confederate States.

Sandra: What year did they all come, did it all start?

Irwin: I think the Sauls may have come in 1938 or 1939. I think my dad was . . . but Mr. Harry Saul opened a clothing store. He didn't originally get into the chenille business. He opened a clothing store in the same block that the Economy Department store was in that my dad bought in 1950. He used to have the Boy Scout⁶ franchise. What'd they call it? They'd ship whatever, to handle the Boy Scout franchise, whatever. I remember as a Cub Scout getting my uniform from Mr. Saul.

Sandra: Saul?

Irwin: At some point—I don't know exactly when it was—he decided to get into the chenille spread business . . . 'Queen,' using the name 'Queen,' 'Queen Chenille.' There were several others, the Nochumsons, Ira⁷ and Sarye Nochumson. I believe their start was also in chenille but they ended up in carpet. The Rosens were very big in that industry. I could go on and on. I probably need a reminder. I need to look over some old lists and it will jog my memory.

Sandra: That's fine. I want to get back to you anyway. You grew up here in Dalton.

Irwin: I grew up in Dalton actually.

Sandra: Where did you go to school?

Irwin: I went to Dalton public schools up through the eighth grade. I went to City Park [School] or four years, Fort Hill [School] three [years], and then I went to Dalton High [School] as an eighth grader. I'm really dating myself. That year was the year that they added a twelfth grade. From the beginning to 1950, the eleventh grade was it. You were a senior graduated. There was no twelfth grade. Technically I was a freshman in the eighth grade. I then would have repeated again because there was another grade added on. However, my parents decided to further my education a little better. They sent me then to private school. In the ninth grade in

⁶ A youth organization in the United States. It was founded in 1910 to train youth in responsible citizenship, character development, and self-reliance through participation in a wide range of outdoor activities, educational programs and at older age levels, career-oriented programs in partnership with community organizations. They wear a uniform and earn merit badges for achievements in sports, crafts, science, etc. The boys start as a Cub Scout until age 11 and can move up to be an Eagle Scout.

⁷ Ira Nochumson (1896 – 1966) was a businessman from Chicago, Illinois who became a respected community leader and philanthropist in the north Georgia city of Dalton. Arriving in Dalton around the time of the carpet boom in the 1940's, he became president of the Tufted Textile Manufacturers' Association, an organization designed to lobby for chenille and carpet interests. Nochumson was the founder and president of Noxon Rug Mills and became a leader in many civic and religious organizations including the Elks, the Masons, the Lions Club the local B'nai B'rith and Temple Beth El.

1951, I entered the Baylor School for Boys,⁸ which was a private boy-only military school in Chattanooga. It's a beautiful campus. I only had one Jewish classmate in my class in Dalton. That was Lewis Millender.⁹ The name Millender you might know from Atlanta, but from Dalton, too.

Sandra: What was that like, growing up with so few Jewish friends?

Irwin: I don't know. It wasn't too bad really. I miss not having more Jewish friends, but I was accepted. I was in the Boy Scouts, as I told you. Cub Scouts, Boy Scouts. I was in Troop 60. I was sponsored by First Methodist Church. I was well accepted there. Lewis was also. We both were in the troop. I became an Eagle Scout. I accomplished some things that I'm very proud of and also was tapped into the Order of the Arrow which is a fairly exclusive .

Sandra: Scouting.

Irwin: In scouting, yes. There wasn't really . . .

Sandra: There was a synagogue in Dalton.¹⁰ Let's talk a little bit about that. Then we can talk about how you did find some Jewish . . .

Irwin: . . . that would be the next step.

Sandra: . . . a Jewish social life as well. Tell me about the synagogue.

Irwin: The synagogue was formed in the 1940's in a house on Cuyler Street. If I take you to Dalton going back, I'll be glad to show you if you needed a picture or whatever. It's only two blocks from the center of the town. The synagogue wasn't started until 1949, maybe 1948, because I was the second *bar mitzvah* in the current synagogue. The sanctuary upstairs was not finished so my *bar mitzvah* was in the social hall of the first floor. Lewis Millender, who I just alluded to, Lewis was the first. He was two months older than me.

Sandra: And the synagogue name?

Irwin: Temple Beth El. Largely, back in those days, Orthodox. Always an Orthodox rabbi. Kind of a mixed congregation, but it was considered a Conservative congregation.

⁸ The school began admitting girls in 1985 and is now called Baylor School.

⁹ Lewis Harold Millender (1937 - 1966) earned his medical degree from Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia and went on to become a renowned hand surgeon and chief of occupational medicine at New England Baptist Hospital [Boston, Massachusetts]. He wrote two books on disorders of the upper extremities and was a professor at Tufts Medical School in Boston where he helped train scores of hand surgeons practicing throughout the United States.

¹⁰ The Jewish community in Dalton, Georgia, unanimously voted in 1941 to approve the construction of Beth El. Until construction of the synagogue on Valley Drive was completed the congregation met in homes in the community. On March 9, 1947 Temple Beth El was formally dedicated in a public ceremony. The synagogue has been a Conservative congregation since its inception. In 1962, Temple Beth El became affiliated with the United Synagogue of America, an association of Conservative congregations.

Sandra: What is it today?

Irwin: What's left of it today would still be considered Conservative, but the rules have been lax. We've had to bend a lot of the rules—the bylaws—to accommodate the dwindling local membership. Now a lot of the members that have moved away still pay dues. They're still a member, but you can't count on them for a *minyan*.¹¹

Sandra: At its height, how many members were there in Dalton?

Irwin: There were approximately 80. At one point there was close to 90 in the heyday of—let's call it—the temple membership. There were approximately 90 families or affiliates. There were some traveling people. That was the height that was the beginning of the carpet industry. There were a lot of traveling people that would come in and maybe stay awhile in Dalton.

Sandra: Were your parents founders of the synagogue?

Irwin: Yes. My dad was a founder. He was one of the early presidents of the synagogue.

Sandra: It must have been important for them to have this Jewish part of your life, too. Was it difficult growing up in Dalton and having that, as well?

Irwin: Yes, I was always fortunate. If you have time and want me to show you, I can show you the first rabbi . . . let's go back to the first rabbi in the 1940's, late 1940's. He was there as the temple was being built. The congregation rented a house as a synagogue to get started. I went to *cheder*.¹² I took Hebrew from Rabbi [Ferenc] Hevesi.¹³ He was enticed to Dalton. I don't even know . . .

Sandra: How do you spell that?

Irwin: I'm going to go with H-E-V-E-S-H-I or S-H-E-V-E-S-H-E.

Sandra: Do you remember his first name?

Irwin: No. He was one of the senior rabbis from the main synagogue in Budapest. I said Poland. He's from Hungary.

Sandra: Hungary.

¹¹ A *minyan* 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 *minyan*.

¹² 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*.

¹³ Dr. Ferenc (Francis) Hevesi (1898 - 1952) was the son of Dr. Simon Hevesi, the Chief Rabbi of Budapest. He succeeded his father in the Budapest chief rabbinate. In 1947 he fled from the Communist regime in Hungary and emigrated to the United States. He served as rabbi of Temple Beth El in Dalton, Georgia until about 1950. In 1951 he became the first rabbi of Temple Emanu-El in Honolulu, Hawaii. He died 10 months later.

Irwin: He was. He came to Dalton in the 1940's . . .

Sandra: That must have been a culture shock.

Irwin: . . . with his family. Yes. The congregation rented the house. It's still standing out in East Dalton. That's where I used to go to study for my *bar mitzvah*, along with the house that was used as the synagogue. And he had his whole family.

Sandra: Were they survivors from the war?

Irwin: I remember he had his wife [Magda Rottenstien Hevesi], a daughter—it's funny I don't remember the husband—and a granddaughter, the baby was around one year old. It's a custom in Hungary, I guess. They never had her clothes on her. She was naked. Maybe it was a Hungarian . . . but at one year old, I guess, they figure what difference does it make? As a ten or eleven-year-old studying for his *bar mitzvah*, I noticed. Anyway, that's neither here nor there.

Sandra: You were *bar mitzvah* at the congregation?

Irwin: Right.

Sandra: Second one. Was there a Sunday school?

Irwin: Yes. When we had 80 to 90 families, a rather large Sunday school. There are pictures . . . I couldn't come up with that picture. Yes, I think I did come up with a picture for you on that. We had at one time, I think, 30 kids or more in our Sunday school at different stages of study. I do have a good picture of the rabbi that succeeded Hevesi in probably 19 . . . I was *bar mitzvah* with Rabbi Hevesi. My brother was *bar mitzvah* by Rabbi Max Zucker.¹⁴ Rabbi Hevesi only stayed in Dalton for five, six years, I'm guessing.

Sandra: Do you think your parents were at all concerned that you didn't have a large group of Jewish friends or that there were not . . .

Irwin: . . . yes, because I had one Jewish sweetheart, I guess she was. I dated Raina Stein. She was a year younger than me. Is, at 17, 18 years old, wasn't ready for any serious relationship, anyway, so Raina and I . . . in fact, I saw her last fall for the first time in about 40 years. She came down for a reunion because she graduated Dalton High School . . . the fiftieth reunion.

¹⁴ Rabbi Max Zucker (1924 – 1998) served at a number of congregations from New York, New York to Del Ray Beach, Florida. During the 1950's he was the rabbi of Temple Beth El in Dalton, Georgia. In Tennessee, he served on the Governor's Commission on Human Rights and as head of the Knoxville Round Table of the National Conference of Christians and Jews. In Dallas, Texas he presided over the local association of rabbis and the Texas Kallah of Rabbis.

Yes, they were concerned and that was one of the reasons they decided to send me to Baylor Prep[aratory] School in Chattanooga.

Sandra: What year was that?

Irwin: In 1951.

Sandra: You were back in Dalton during the height of the Civil Rights Movement¹⁵ in the late 1950's and early 1960's. What was it like here?

Irwin: I was a dorm student, but I got to come home on weekends if I kept my grades at a certain point. There were several boys from Dalton that went to Baylor. We were boarding students. They also had a big day student class.

Sandra: What was it like here during that time period?

Irwin: Absolutely, you wouldn't even know it was going on. In Dalton, they assimilated. They integrated the schools. There was not a single problem. Dalton had to be the model city of integration of blacks in the white school system. I don't think there was one incident. I remember that well.

Sandra: Why do you think that Dalton was able to do it so easily?

Irwin: Dalton just has a lot of nice people in it. People are unbiased and unprejudiced. And when I . . .

Sandra: Were there private schools?

Irwin: When I alluded to my . . . and . . . I told you it was very mild.

Sandra: Were there any private schools that sprung up because parents were afraid of sending . . .

Irwin: . . . no, not at all. Not in Dalton. I don't know what the ratio of blacks—African Americans—to the whites were in the early 1960's. I can tell you one thing. Every Jewish household had an African American maid or groundskeeper. That much I remember.

Sandra: Do you remember the . . .

Irwin: I remember Maggie. I remember my mother's own . . .

¹⁵ The American Civil Rights Movement encompasses social movements in the United States whose goal was to end racial segregation and discrimination against black Americans and enforce constitutional voting rights to them. The movement was characterized by major campaigns of civil resistance. Between 1955 and 1968, acts of nonviolent protest and civil disobedience produced crisis situations between activists and government authorities. Noted legislative achievements during this phase of the Civil Rights Movement were passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, the Immigration and Nationality Services Act of 1965, and the Fair Housing Act of 1968.

Sandra: Tell us about her.

Irwin: Maggie Lewis was a frail middle-aged black lady that would come and do the washing, ironing, cooking, take care of us—my brothers and me—when my parents wanted to go out for the evening. She was a character, let me tell you. The one thing I remember the most . . . this even went on into my after-college years, because after college as you’ll see on my notes that I made for you, I did come back home and live some at home. When I worked for my dad and I was still single, she’d say, “Irwin, you better hurry up. You better hurry up.” You knew what she meant. “Get married and have kids.” That’s what she was telling me.

Sandra: That’s a great story.

Irwin: Yes. She loved to watch the soap operas¹⁶ during the day while she was ironing or whatever.

Sandra: Did she also cook for the family?

Irwin: Yes, some. My mother was the best cook this world has ever known. My mother still persisted in doing most of the cooking for the family. But she would have Maggie make some sandwiches for us. She really didn’t do any regular cooking.

Sandra: Did you mother cook mainly Southern dishes, Jewish dishes, or a combination?

Irwin: Combination. My mother made everything. Everything.

Sandra: How was her fried chicken?

Irwin: Just absolutely delicious. She had this special fryer, a deep fryer, I remember. She didn’t make fried chicken all that much. She made about every other type of chicken, baked or broiled.

Sandra: Was *shabbat*¹⁷ a special meal for you?

Irwin: When I was young she kept kosher.¹⁸ It was a kosher household. But about the time I think my brother was born she kind of drifted away, and ceased keeping strict kosher. For

¹⁶ A soap opera or soap, is a serial drama on television or radio that examines the lives of many characters, usually focusing on emotional relationships to the point of melodrama. The term originated from such dramas in the past being typically sponsored by soap manufacturers.

¹⁷ *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.

¹⁸ Kosher or *Kashrut* is the set of Jewish dietary laws. Food that may be consumed according to *halakhah* (Jewish law) is termed ‘kosher’ in English. Kosher refers to Jewish laws that dictate how food is prepared or served and which kinds of foods or animals can be eaten. Food that is not in accordance with Jewish law is called ‘*treif*.’ The word ‘kosher’ has become English vernacular, a colloquialism meaning proper, legitimate, genuine, fair, or

Passover¹⁹ she kept the separate dishes and everything. Bear in mind, that it was tough in Dalton. Still tough today to get kosher meats.

Sandra: Where do you get it from?

Irwin: There was a kosher butcher at that time in Chattanooga. There's not even one any longer. Shapiro's, now that was a kosher deli. Mr. . . . I can't think of . . . there was a kosher butcher in Chattanooga. The name escapes me right now. Maybe it will come to me later. The meat . . . either you took orders . . . there were several other kosher homes in Dalton at the time. Someone would then go drive up to Chattanooga and buy the meats particularly for the Sabbath. Then in later years it was shipped out of Atlanta by Greyhound bus with dry ice, frozen. I can remember that because actually I had a sister-in-law that did keep kosher up until . . . she was married to my youngest brother. My youngest brother died very unexpectedly about six years ago.

Sandra: I'm sorry.

Irwin: He's eight years younger than me. Florence kept kosher and that's how she would get her meats. But then Kroger²⁰ opened a big store. Now it's a little different because they have a little kosher section at Kroger.

Sandra: Were all the holidays celebrated, the Jewish holidays?

Irwin: Yes, definitely. Every holiday.

Sandra: At the synagogue?

Irwin: Yes, at the synagogue. On Passover, my mother always had the *seder*²¹ at home two nights and we'd have the guests over for the *seder*. In later years, it got a little easier because we'd have a community *seder*.

acceptable. Kosher can also be used to describe ritual objects that are made in accordance with Jewish law and are fit for ritual use.

¹⁹ *Pesach* means 'Passover' in Hebrew and commemorates the anniversary of Israel's liberation from slavery in Egypt. 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 *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.

²⁰ The Kroger Company, or simply Kroger, is an American retailing company founded by Bernard Kroger in 1883 in Cincinnati, Ohio. It is the United States' largest supermarket chain by revenue for fiscal year 2016.

²¹ Hebrew for 'order.' The ritual family meal eaten at home on the first and second nights of Passover, accompanied by the retelling of the story of the Israelites' exodus from Egypt.

Sandra: Was it the family or just friends for *seder*?

Irwin: Friends.

Sandra: Friends?

Irwin: Yes and family. I had an aunt. My mother's sister lived in Dalton, Aunt and Uncle Myron and Aunt Tillie. They were always over.

Sandra: You keep mentioning your siblings. Can you tell us their names . . .

Irwin: Yes. I have a brother, Allan [Koplan]. He's four years younger than me. Allan is an oral surgeon in Birmingham, Alabama. He went to the University of Alabama [Tuscaloosa, Alabama]. He graduated Dalton High. He didn't go to private school like I did. He fared a little better than me later on. It goes to show you. Private school is not always the answer. It took him nine years from the time he graduated high school to get out of dental school. He wasn't the brightest star in the class, I got news for you. But he made it and he's lives in Birmingham. He married Anita. He married a girl he met in college. They had three children. They were married about 25 years, I guess, and then they divorced. He married again, a non-Jewish gal. It didn't last long. He's married for the third time. He has been married several years to a gal from Israel who was living in Alabama.

Sandra: That's interesting.

Irwin: Yes. He kind of went from one extreme to the other. We're not close, not at all. It's a shame really, but I blame him more than me. Our differences mainly have been in the care of my mother.

Sandra: Your mother is still living?

Irwin: My mother is still, if you want to call it that. She's still breathing. She's in a home. Dementia's got to a point where I don't know if she really knows who I am when I go in. I think she hears me and maybe deep down she knows me.

Sandra: You're probably right.

Irwin: She's 91.

Sandra: Is she in Dalton?

Irwin: I couldn't find a bed in Dalton for her condition. I tried when it became apparent I had to make a move in a hurry. I had caregivers around the clock in her home. I began to see things missing from the house. I was stupid. I should have taken an inventory. I should have taken some things out and I didn't. I said, "I've got to get her in a home." The only bed was,

coincidentally, ten minutes from my house in Fort Oglethorpe, Georgia. It's a wonderful home. I'm very happy with the care that she gets there.

Sandra: If we could go back a little bit to your childhood again. How would you describe—if you could just put it into words—your growing up? Your childhood in Dalton?

Irwin: My first interaction with other kids was probably when I was four and five because I entered the first [grade]. Mrs. Hugey, a German lady living in Dalton for years, had a kindergarten right next door. Each morning I could walk over across the driveway into her home. She had it upstairs in a loft-type area. I was extremely shy as a kid. I was very introverted and shy and I . . . where I got that from I don't know because my parents were certainly not that way. I don't know, but I was. I never will forget. If you want little just incidents that I can remember, I was late one morning. I went in and you had to go up the steps to the loft where she had the kindergarten. The door was already shut. I stood there. I was afraid. I wouldn't knock on the door or just go on in. I was so embarrassed to be late. I went back home and my mother then brought me back and made sure I went on in. I did not know pictures existed. It's one good thing that you brought about, even though it's been emotional for me. I found pictures of that kindergarten class in my little boxes. I didn't even know my mother had them.

Sandra: Did you like growing up in Dalton?

Irwin: I did. No. There were times that I wished I was from a bigger city, lived in a larger city, or with a larger Jewish group. I'd go with my parents. Chattanooga was like almost a second home. Back then it was an hour's drive. That was before I-75, so to go to Chattanooga was something special. My dad used to take me to professional baseball, the Chattanooga Lookouts,²² who still play in the Southern League. We spent a lot of time at Engel Stadium²³ watching some big names like Harmon Clayton Killebrew²⁴ and Bob Allison.²⁵ Even Babe

²² The Chattanooga Lookouts are a minor league baseball team based in Chattanooga, Tennessee named for nearby Lookout Mountain. The team, which plays in the Southern League, are the Double-A affiliate of the Minnesota Twins after having been affiliated with the Los Angeles Dodgers major-league club from 2009–2014. From 1930 through 1999, the Lookouts played at Engel Stadium, with a one-year break in Montgomery, Alabama's Cramton Bowl in 1943. The Lookouts currently play in AT&T Field, located in Chattanooga. (2017)

²³ Engel Stadium in Chattanooga, Tennessee was built in 1930 and holds 12,000 people. It was the home of the Chattanooga Lookouts until 1999 when they moved to their current stadium, AT&T Field. Engel Stadium was named for longtime President of the Chattanooga Lookouts, Joe Engel.

²⁴ Harmon Clayton Killebrew (1936 – 2011) was an American professional baseball player. During his 22-year career in Major League Baseball (MLB), primarily with the Minnesota Twins, Killebrew was a prolific power hitter who, at the time of his retirement, was second only to Babe Ruth in American League (AL) home runs and was the AL career leader in home runs by a right-handed batter (since broken by Alex Rodriguez). He was inducted into the National Baseball Hall of Fame in 1984.

Ruth²⁶ played in an exhibition game there. These are things that I remember. In those years, too, they would get me dates with Jewish girls in Chattanooga because there weren't any in Dalton. For that reason it was kind of an inconvenience. I'd always wished I was from a larger city . . . even Chattanooga, the size of Chattanooga, which is a mid-size city. It's not a big city.

Sandra: Did you ever move away? Or have you been here . . .

Irwin: Yes. I moved, finally. After college I went back. I went to work for my dad because he had some health issues there and he had bought a pretty good-sized store. I worked six years. Really, it wasn't my cup of tea, the retail business. I knew the time was coming and he wanted to retire. He asked me one day if I was interested and I told him, "No." To take it over, I couldn't. I would run it right into the ground. I left home and moved to New York to see what the big city was like in February of 1966.

Sandra: Do you want to take a minute?

Irwin: Yes.

Sandra: You went to New York, you enjoyed the Big Apple?²⁷

Irwin: Yes. I had a great time. I went up there without, believe it, without any job. I did look. I tried for a whole week. I knew I wanted outside sales, or marketing. I went from one agency to another, but with my Southern drawl and still wet behind the ears²⁸ I wasn't hireable. With my tail between my legs, I was ready to come back. I had driven. I just decided to call an old friend of the family. This was Stuart Rosenthal who grew up largely in Dalton. His father, Phil, and Pauline Rosenthal . . . there was another early, early chenille . . . they were in the chenille business, very early. He died very young, Stuart's father Phil did. He died in Dalton. We didn't even have a Jewish cemetery then. He had to be buried in Rome [Georgia]. Aunt Pauline . . . I call her aunt because they were such close [friends] . . . they moved back to New York [City]. I called Stu and I told him I'd been up looking for a job. He said, "Get your *tuchas* [Yiddish: rear

²⁵ William Robert "Bob" Allison (1934 – 1995) was a Major League Baseball outfielder and right-handed batter who played in the American League for the Washington Senators/Minnesota Twins from 1958 to 1970. In 13 seasons, Allison finished in the top ten in home runs eight times.

²⁶ George Herman "Babe" Ruth Jr. (1895 - 1948) was an American professional baseball player whose career in Major League Baseball (MLB) spanned 22 seasons, from 1914 through 1935. As part of the New York Yankees' lineup of 1927, Ruth hit 60 home runs, which extended his MLB single-season record. During his career, Ruth led the American League in home runs during a season twelve times.

²⁷ Big Apple is a nickname for New York City. It was first popularized in the 1920's by John J. Fitz Gerald, a sports writer for the *New York Morning Telegraph*. Its popularity since the 1970's is due in part to a promotional campaign by the New York tourist authorities.

²⁸ An American idiomatic expression meaning inexperienced, young or immature. Its meaning is believed to come from a baby that has just been born and is still wet behind the ears among other places.

end, backside] here. I'll get you hired." He had just gone to work for American Photocopy Equipment Company, known as APECO. Sure enough, he pulled some strings and got me hired there. I cannot tell you what I had for lunch yesterday or where I went last week, but I remember the office was at 3310 Queens Boulevard and that was in 1966. Stu is a dynamic salesman. He had already been hired more or less as a sales manager. At that time, that was in the infancy of the copy machine business. They put me up in Westchester County [New York] as my first sales territory. They figured that's more like Georgia than Manhattan [New York] or even Queens [New York]. It's more rural. I didn't do too well. I literally had stomach pains. I know what it is to be hungry and not have money to buy food. I know. I've experienced that. One day after about 5 months or 6 months, they were about to let me go because I wasn't meeting quota and Stucouldn't save my job. Clouds parted and the sun started shining through. I got my first big sale, Harrison High School in Harrison, New York in Westchester County. From that point on, I began to do well. I began to catch on and I did well. As a matter of fact, I was hired in with about 20 guys. These were all sharp New York salespeople. These guys knew the ropes. They knew the streets. They knew. Here I was from the South. By the time I left New York three years later, I was the only one of two left out of that class. All the others had flunked out. I was still there. They'd dropped out.

Sandra: But you came back home?

Irwin: I had met my wife to be . . .

Sandra: . . . her name?

Irwin: . . . in that third year I was there, Joan Jacqueline Berger. B-E-R-G-E-R. I met her in the first part of June of 1968. Her mother had just passed away. I never knew my mother-in-law. She had moved in with her father in Manhattan on the Lower East Side. One day after work [me and] one of my buddies, Ron Borenstein, went out to get a pizza after work. We walk in and there she is. She was helping. She wasn't even getting paid. She was behind the counter. She served me a terrible soda. It was warm and it had no fizz. I complained and she gave me another. I said, "Would you like to come join us?" She did. She came from behind the counter. She was 17 at the time. We talked and believe it or not, he asked her out first. She went out with him one time, with Borenstein. That was it. She didn't care for him at all. I called her, or she called me because I gave her my number, and we started dating. That was in June and in July . . . the reason she lived with her father is her father and mother had separated before her mother

died. She grew up in Hackensack, New Jersey, near River Edge [New Jersey]. She grew up in River Edge which is near Hackensack.

Sandra: Was it important to you to find someone or meet someone who was Jewish?

Irwin: That was one of the reasons I felt if I couldn't meet someone in New York City. I'll never meet anyone. Right?

Sandra: Right.

Irwin: Let's face it.

Sandra: Was it important to your parents?

Irwin: I dated other Jewish girls. That was important to my parents. Definitely. Yes.

Sandra: You knew it was something that . . .

Irwin: . . . yes, it was something that they wanted, and I wanted, if nothing else, because my parents wanted it. I had enough Jewish upbringing to want to marry a Jewish girl. I knew I wanted to. I had dates with many non-Jewish girls in those six years in Dalton. They were proposing to me. had several. I could've been married five times to non-Jewish girls. I didn't want it.

Sandra: Why were they proposing to you?

Irwin: I guess they figured I was a good catch.

Sandra: How did you end up back in Dalton again?

Irwin: Actually, during that period, on July 2, 1968 I left for 3 weeks . . . spending most of that time in Israel. That was my first and only trip to Israel. I left her there with her father. She could not stand her stepmother. I'm trying to think. Her father had remarried this Ruth, an opera singer in New York, a very eccentric type of woman. I got along with her okay because I get along with everybody. She resented Joan. Joan couldn't stand her. When I got back from Israel we were doing some serious dating. Her grandmother, who lived in Brooklyn, moved to Miami Beach [Florida] and wanted Joan to go live with her. Joan did. Joan went down and then I decided. I didn't really care to live in Miami. I transferred with the company to Atlanta . . . American Photocopy Equipment Company, better known as APECO. That was in November of 1968. It was on Plasters Avenue. I never will forget.

Sandra: Exactly where it's at.

Irwin: You know where Plasters Avenue is? You have got to go under the Interstate [I-85]. It's in that complex there.

Sandra: Armour Drive and Plasters Avenue.

Irwin: That's right. The building is still there. All of those buildings are still there. I worked out of there and we corresponded. I would run down to Miami and finally, in the spring of that year of 1969, we got engaged. We married on June 8, 1969. We got married in Atlanta.

Sandra: Who married you?

Irwin: Rabbi Emanuel Feldman²⁹ from . . .

Sandra: . . . Beth Jacob³⁰ . . .

Irwin: . . . [Congregation] Beth Jacob on LaVista Road. Of course, it's all in the boxes. We got married, though, not in the *shul*,³¹ but in my cousin Gloria and Fred Glusman's home about a block from the *shul* there.

Sandra: I know Fred.

Irwin: You know Fred?

Sandra: Yes.

Irwin: He's my cousin.

Sandra: That's funny.

Irwin: He married Gloria, my first cousin, so he's a cousin by marriage. We married in their home. I was working for APECO. I don't know if you want all these details. I got into some trouble with the company because I was doing some selling on the side, so to speak, having knowledge of all the customer lists. I wasn't the only one. They put some pressure on me to cease and desist that action. They wanted to get ugly about it and take me to court. I said, "I'm going home." We had just rented a beautiful apartment on Buford Highway. I said, "We're out of here. Don't bother to sue me. I'm gone. I won't bother you anymore." I moved to Dalton at that time. Joan and I moved to Dalton.

Sandra: What did you do once back in Dalton?

²⁹ Emanuel Feldman (b. 1927) is an Orthodox rabbi and Rabbi Emeritus of Congregation Beth Jacob of Atlanta, Georgia. He was born to a family of Orthodox rabbis dating back more than seven generations. During his nearly 40 years at Beth Jacob beginning in 1952, he nurtured the growth of Atlanta's Orthodox community from a city with two small Orthodox synagogues to a community large enough to support Jewish day schools, *yeshivas*, girls' schools and a *kollel*. He is a past vice-president of the Rabbinical Council of America and former editor of *Tradition: The Journal of Orthodox Jewish thought* published by the RCA. In 1991, his son, Rabbi Ilan Feldman, succeeded him.

³⁰ Congregation 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 first location was a converted house on Boulevard.

³¹ *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.

Irwin: I continued on in the business, not in competition. As long as I got 50 miles away from Atlanta or 100 [miles], I was okay. I started a new business there with the brother of the gentleman, the fellow in New York that got me the job in the first place in that business.

Sandra: That's great.

Irwin: That was Morton Rosenthal, an older brother of Stuart who was living in Chattanooga.

Sandra: Was your father's business still in existence?

Irwin: It was still in existence, but it was going down. Dad had sold when I didn't want to take it over. He sold to a gentleman who owned several stores throughout Georgia. The same gentleman . . . I can't remember his name, I wish I could because I'd love to see some of those old records. My dad didn't leave any records from the business that I've been able to find. The gentleman bought my dad out. He bought Cannon's which was an old-time department store in Dalton, also. Both are now gone, out of business. There's not a single business in downtown Dalton left anywhere in the retail clothing business.

Sandra: What happened?

Irwin: You got shopping centers beginning to get built. You got big stores with Goody's³² and J.C. Penney³³ moving in. You got Walmart³⁴ finally moved in. That killed the merchants that thrived for all those years in downtown Dalton. None of them evidently were smart enough or wanted to go and start competing. I don't know why they had to die out or be killed by the competition. They're all gone.

Sandra: Do you think it's a good thing for Dalton?

Irwin: I remember when he closed it, the gentleman that bought it from my dad. Dalton is continuing economically. It's still prospering. I don't think it hurt with the big boys coming in and taking over. I really don't. It created some more jobs. No, I don't think it hurt any. I really don't. The first shopping center was Bryman's Plaza.

Sandra: I think we need to change. I have so many more questions. I want to ask you again, go

³² Goody's is an American chain of department stores, owned and operated by Stage Stores, Inc. and headquartered in Houston, Texas, that specializes in retailing on-trend apparel, accessories, cosmetics, footwear, and housewares.

³³ J. C. Penney is an American department store chain with 1095 locations in 49 U.S. states and Puerto Rico. In addition to selling conventional merchandise, J. C. Penney stores often house several leased departments such as Sephora, Seattle's Best Coffee, salons, optical centers, portrait studios, and jewelry repair.

³⁴ Wal-Mart Stores, Inc., doing business as Walmart, is an American multinational retailing corporation that operates as a chain of hypermarkets, discount department stores, and grocery stores. Headquartered in Bentonville, Arkansas, the company was founded by Sam Walton in 1962 and incorporated in 1969. As of January 31, 2017, Walmart has 11,695 stores and clubs in 28 countries.

back again a little bit to growing up in Dalton. What did you do on a particular weekend day? Where did you hang out?

Irwin: From an early age, Saturday was the big day. My dad's stores were closed Sunday, at least in those days. My dad put me to work at a young age. I had to go down to the store and help out. As a young kid, I remember the furniture business. When I was around 10 years old, I generally on Saturday would go to the store. In the fall of the year . . . my dad was a big sports fan. Every once in a while he would just break away. We went to Knoxville to Tennessee Volunteers,³⁵ the Neyland Stadium . We would go see [Georgia Institute of] Tech[nology—Atlanta, Georgia] and a few times or the University of Chattanooga, which is now UTC.

Sandra: Where the Crackers³⁶ playing then?

Irwin: Yes, the Atlanta Crackers at Ponce de Leon Park there on Ponce De Leon [Avenue]. I saw several games there he would take me to. The right field had three walls in tiers. Chuck Tanner³⁷ . . . and I remember the Crackers. They were the big rivalry with Chattanooga in those days.

Sandra: Who did you root for?

Irwin: I always root for Chattanooga.

Sandra: Saturday was a really big day.

Irwin: Yes.

Sandra: Was that the day the farmers came in also from outlying areas?

Irwin: That was the farmers and the gals with the cotton in their hair. All the mill chenille workers, the women, would get all that lint. They'd come in and you could tell they just got off work. That was usually on Friday afternoon, Friday after four o'clock or five o'clock, and all

³⁵ The Tennessee Volunteers represents the University of Tennessee [Knoxville, Tennessee] in the sport of American football. The Volunteers compete in the Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) of the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) and the Eastern Division of the Southeastern Conference (SEC). The Vols play at Neyland Stadium, With it's 102,455 seat capacity Neyland is the fifth largest stadium in the United States. (2017)

³⁶ The Atlanta Crackers were minor league baseball teams based in Atlanta between 1901 and 1965. The Crackers were Atlanta's home team until the Atlanta Braves moved from Milwaukee in 1966. The Crackers played in Ponce de Leon Park from 1907 until a fire destroyed the all-wood stadium in 1923. Spiller Field (a stadium later also called 'Ponce de Leon Park'), became their home starting in the 1924 season. The new park was constructed around a magnolia tree that became part of the outfield.

³⁷ Charles William "Chuck" Tanner (1928 – 2011) was an American professional baseball player and manager. He was known for his unwavering confidence and infectious optimism. Tanner managed the Pittsburgh Pirates to a World Series championship in 1979. Earlier in his career, he was one of the best players on the minor league team, the Atlanta Crackers, from 1951 to 1954. He returned to Atlanta to manage the Braves from 1986 to 1988.

day Saturday was the day. If you didn't make it on Saturday you weren't going to stay in business. Monday and Thursday was pretty slow.

Sandra: Did your father give credit?

Irwin: I'm amazed that you ask me that question. I truly am. I'm going to give you some of my amazing story. My dad bought the Economy Department Store. Simon Ginsburg had built a big clientele. Let's face it. Fifty-seven years ago people were basically honest. Today they're basically dishonest, right? You wouldn't just go out and give somebody a \$50 loan on the sidewalk that you didn't know, right? In those days a lot of them came in, maybe two or three times a year, that had big families . . . the farmers, when they sold their crops. Prior to that, my dad would extend them credit. What they would do, they would pile up their shoes—he did a tremendous shoe business—their overalls, their shirts, their hats, and their socks . . . and the women, their dresses and skirts. He would run an adding machine tape that totaled \$230, which was a lot of money back then. You would write down socks, shirts, skirts, and shoes by each figure. He would then take it over . . . usually, we were too busy to do it then, but he would put them in a shoebox. At the end of the day you would then go over to a ledger book. You would take whatever was on that adding machine tape and you would write it down. "John Smith" and write down those articles. He had an index card system, a 3 x 5 index card with John Smith's name on it and "August 15, 1950 see page 31," or whatever the page number in that index in that ledger book was, and "\$230" and if you had a previous balance. That was how you extended credit. He extended credit to just about everybody. He never, rarely ever, took a bad debt. That was the most amazing thing. They were just honest, down-to-earth, salt of the earth people.

Sandra: That's great.

Irwin: Every once in a while I would have one of my friends come in and I would extend them the same credit. I got taken a few times, not by friends but generally guys that came in with one of our good customers. You figure if he's [good], they're good for it maybe. That didn't work out too well so I got scolded a few times on that.

Sandra: Was your dad a good salesman?

Irwin: Yes, he was a good salesman. He was. I was never that good. He would come in and he would take the babies out of the mother's hands, and kiss them, and hold them up. I could never do that.

Sandra: I think it's either in you or not in you.

Irwin: That's right. He's a true merchant.

Sandra: How about your mom? Was she a good salesman?

Irwin: She was good also. Yes, she was good.

Sandra: Was there a favorite customer that you can remember? Somebody that came in regularly?

Irwin: Yes. John Kincaid who is passed on. He would love to come in and talk about the Jewish people to my dad, [about] the *Bible*. There were a few like that. He had two sons. They were good customers. Shelby Peeples and his family would come in. Now Shelby is a multi-multi-millionaire, but when he used to come to my dad's store he was selling insurance. He got in the carpet business. Let's see. G-d, there were so many. If you want little excerpts . . . my dad had an Erbie Johnson that was working for Ginsburg when my dad bought the store. He was already an older man and there is a picture in that group two of him and the whole sales force of the store. Mr. Johnson . . . I didn't call him Erbie . . . would smoke. He was a chain smoker. I'm not exaggerating. He would smoke. He would never be without a cigarette in his mouth. When it got down to where it would burn your lips and my lips severely, he still had the butt of what was lit and light it from that. Take that one out in the ashtray and then put that one in, and then repeat the same thing when that smoked down. He was literally a chain smoker. He lived to be a ripe old age.

Sandra: Did he sell with the cigarette in?

Irwin: He did, but it was permitted back then. A lot of the customers smoked, too. Maybe not to that extent, but he was a true chain [smoker]. Probably the origination of the word chain smoker was Erbie Johnson.

Sandra: Were your dad and you involved in any of the clubs here in town, like the Elks?³⁸

Irwin: My dad. You must have done some research. My dad was a member of the Elks Club. He spent many hours at the Elks Club. Just about every Jewish adult in Dalton in the 1950's and 1960's was a member of the Elks Club, Fraternal Order of the Elks. Every year there is a memorial of all the past members the Elks have around in December and holidays. My dad's name is always mentioned.

³⁸ The Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks is a community 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 health and drug-free, by undertaking projects that address unmet need, and by honoring the service and sacrifice of military veterans.

Sandra: Are they still popular, the Elks, here?

Irwin: It's not like it used to be. I didn't follow in his footsteps there. I often wondered maybe I should, just to . . . I don't think it's as big an organization, at least in Dalton, as it was back in its heyday in the 1950's, 1960's, and even 1970's. He wasn't so active in the administration of the Elks. My dad like to gamble. He had his bridge game. He had his poker game. That was kind of their home field, the Elks Club. Dalton was dry back then but the Elks had a bar, of course. My dad didn't drink, don't get me wrong, but other men did.

Sandra: Was it easy then for Jewish folks here and non-Jewish to just be in the same club together?

Irwin: Yes. There was very little problem. Every once in a while, I guess as a result of alcohol maybe, a gentile³⁹ person would make some remarks. I heard that happened a time or two. When they sober up, they're apologizing like crazy. I don't recall ever any problem. There were some other social spots. I never went, but on Lookout Mountain [Tennessee] there was a club called The 19th Hole which was owned by Nat Wilenski. He ran a Las Vegas [Nevada] style casino out of there. There was obviously . . . and it was documented . . . there was a pretty good payoff to the Walker County sheriff. They were raided a time or two, but they were always warned when the raid was coming. It was a big business so that attracted a lot of . . .

Sandra: . . . folks and . . .

Irwin: . . . you could eat there. It was a regular Las Vegas back in the 1940's and 1950's. I remember when my dad used to go with my uncle.

Sandra: Did you ever attend summer camp?

Irwin: How do you know this? Yes, I went to . . . I didn't get around to that. Extensively. Those were some of the best years of my young life. I went to a very rustic camp. My parents sent me to Camp Sky Lake [Sky Lake Camps]⁴⁰ in Sautee, Georgia near Helen, Georgia. I went when I was 7, 8, and 9 years old . . . three straight years at that rustic camp. We slept in lean-to's.

Sandra: I have pictures of Camp Sky Lake in the archives.

Irwin: I think my cousin Jerry Dubrof went. Do you know Jerry?

Sandra: I think so, yes.

Irwin: Jerry made a few million in the chemical business in Atlanta, but he grew up in Dalton.

³⁹ A gentile is a person of non-Jewish faith.

⁴⁰ Jewish summer camp located in White County the North Georgia mountains in Sautee, Georgia.

I was going to call him one day— don't ever see him—to see if he had any records. You do have . . . the Brooks owned it. How could I remember that and I can't remember what I need to remember but I don't? That was an experience. Once a week we would go to Helen which had a dirt . . . nothing was paved there. We went to a movie. They took the campers to a movie for a Western there in Helen, way before it was developed like it is now. It was just a hick town, country town, a mountain town. Sautee was the address.

Sandra: Was it a kosher camp? I don't remember.

Irwin: No. Several Jewish kids went there. No, it was not kosher at all. Boys were on one side of the lake and girls on the other. I learned to swim there. I learned to swim at Camp Sky Lake. Those bullfrogs were this big. Literally you could see them on those lily pads—gigantic bullfrogs. That was a sport, to go out and . . . 'gigging' is that what they used to call it . . . gigging bullfrogs.

Sandra: What is gigging bullfrogs?

Irwin: That's where you take a spear. At night you are in a boat, a canoe, and you have a flashlight. When you shine the light on a frog's face he's not going to move so he's easy picking. I couldn't do it. I think that was cruel. But some of the counselors did it. I learned to swim there in three years. Let's see, I would have been . . . I wanted to figure this out. After the third [year], the next year I went to McCallie Camp in Chattanooga. McCallie is also a private prep school like Baylor. I went to their summer camp one year. The next two or three years I went to Camp Sidney Dew [Armuchee, Georgia], which is a Boy Scout camp. I went every summer, I think, for three years. That's where I got a lot of my training and my merit badges toward credit toward Eagle Scout.

Sandra: Are you active in the Boy Scouts today?

Irwin: No, but I've gotten a letter or two asking me to become active. I went to an Eagle Scout reunion about a . . .

Sandra: We are winding down. I wanted to talk to you a little bit about your own family, your children and . . .

Irwin: We were married as I told you in 1969. Our first child was born in 1983. We had some problems. Finally figured out what we were doing wrong. Our oldest daughter was born June 1, 1983, Kara. I had always liked that name but she . . . her Hebrew name is for my Aunt Sophie, her name. Kara . . . K-A-R-A. She went to Ringgold High School [Ringgold, Georgia] since

we're living here and she's still single. We thought we'd have a wedding last year. You might know . . . the grandmother goes to Beth Jacob. She was dating David Pilotsi [sp], a fine young man, but they broke up last year. She's dating another. She's got a new love right now. I haven't met him yet. She lives in Atlanta. She's graduated school. She went to Dalton State College [Dalton, Georgia]. When she started dating him—he lives in Alpharetta—she moved to Atlanta and went to Georgia State [University—Atlanta, Georgia]. Then decided on cosmetology. She got a part time job as a receptionist for one of the salons there. She didn't really know what she wanted. She just moved to Atlanta to be near him. She graduated the Aveda School of Cosmetology there. It's right at Piedmont Road and Peachtree Street. She's now with Van Michael Salon in Buckhead. She does color. She specializes in coloring. She says she's doing well. How well it is, I don't know. She never asks for money so I guess she's doing okay. Quickly, we had another one 17 months later. Heather. Heather is a piece of work. My daughter Heather and I, I guess you probably know . . . maybe you did not. Her picture is plastered all over the waiting room out there. She is out living in L.A. [Los Angeles, California] in West Hollywood [California]. She had dreams like thousands of other girls, but it's not working out. She's now going to shift, maybe, toward modeling. She has a nice figure. Kara is 24 now and Heather is 23. She will be 23. She was born in December of 1984. She will be 23. She is single also. She's met a lot of guys out there.

Sandra: No chance of them coming back to Dalton?

Irwin: No. I'm going to make a comment, not about my daughters. If half—literally half—the kids that I grew up with, or within ten years of me because I'm older . . . I'm one of the older ones . . . if half the kids that grew up in Dalton and were *bat* or *bar mitzvah* in Dalton, whose families lived in Dalton for many years . . . if half had stayed in Dalton, we would have a nice congregation, assuming they would still be active. None, absolutely none, have stayed except Henri Lorberbaum and me right now. His sisters are the only three that have actually stayed in Dalton as adults, having grown up as kids.

Sandra: Even the ones in the carpet business?

Irwin: Julian Saul,⁴¹ he's in Dalton but now he's retired. He merged with Shaw Industries.⁴² I don't know what his network is now. He still has his home in Dalton but he does a lot of traveling now. He supports the synagogue.

Sandra: How many families are left at the synagogue?

Irwin: Active, there are only around 19 now. There are some living out of town in Florida. That's Temple Beth El South in Florida. A lot of them still pay dues; some, out of town dues. We never see them anymore.

Sandra: Are you worried about the building?

Irwin: Definitely. Honestly, unless there is still big support from . . . there's two, the Lorberbaums. Jeff Lorberbaum . . . I don't know what he's worth, but he's worth plenty of money. He and Julian make an annual big contribution to the temple. But on our dues structure now we'll have to close in a year or two years.

Sandra: Are there services now?

Irwin: There's a gentile family that gives a lot of money. They are called the Pattersons. Every year they give generously. They don't want to be honored. They don't want to accept any recognition for it.

Sandra: How often do you have services there?

Irwin: Every Friday night and holidays.

Sandra: Is there a . . .

Irwin: Is there a rabbi who leads the services? There are no Saturday services. No. We have a rabbi, Rabbi Elaine Snyder, one of the few female rabbis in the country.

Sandra: When did she arrive?

Irwin: She arrived eight years ago.

Sandra: That's interesting. I didn't realize that. We're getting to the tail end. I was wondering if there's anything you would like to add that we may have forgotten, anything you want to say

⁴¹ Mr. Julian D. Saul is the son of Helen and Harry Saul, founder of the Queen Carpet Corporation (formerly Queen Tufting) of Dalton, Georgia. He joined his family's business after graduating from Georgia Institute of Technology [Atlanta, Georgia] in 1963 eventually becoming CEO and Chairman of the Board. In 1998, the company merged with Shaw Industries, the world's largest carpet manufacturer. Saul served as President of Shaw Industries until he retired in 2006.

⁴² Shaw Industries Group, Inc., a subsidiary of Berkshire Hathaway, Inc., is the world's largest carpet manufacturer with more than \$4 billion in annual sales and approximately 22,300 employees worldwide. It is headquartered in Dalton, Georgia.

about your life in Dalton, and something you might want to pass on to anybody who might hear this.

Irwin: Yes. Some of you Atlantans that are fed up with the traffic, the fight, the fumes, and the big city life, we'd love to have you move up toward Dalton. We need you badly. I was in favor . . . I've been a board member for about 3 or 4 years now and I'll be installed as second vice-president of our congregation later this month. I am in favor of running some type of advertisement that we need members. I don't know . . . there's just no newcomers moving in right now and it concerns me very much. It saddens me quite a bit. I don't know what the outcome would be. We, those that still attend, feel we need a rabbi. We've been without a rabbi very little over the last 50 to 60 years, a period of one year out of maybe six years that we didn't have a rabbi. We've lost several members. Dr. Crystal [sp]. I could name several that could lead the services if we did not have a rabbi, but they are all either retired [or] moved away. Dr. Crystal got more or less expelled. He was a member of a group of gynecologists and somehow they didn't want him anymore. I don't know what the story was but he had to leave town. He had to leave Dalton. He could lead the service, so to speak. We have had some tough, tough luck. The real leaders—one is in Florida, Lou Meltzer [sp], and the other, Alan Finkel [sp], died two years ago—passed away. He was just . . . he was the Temple, if you know what I mean. It's a problem and all I can say is we can only hope for the best. I appreciate this opportunity too.

Sandra: We appreciate it too and thank you very much.

Irwin: Give you my thoughts and my story.

Sandra: Thank you.

Irwin: You're welcome.

<End Disk 1>

INTERVIEW ENDS