

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

MEMOIRIST: PHYLLIS GERSHON ARNOLD
INTERVIEWER: SANDY LEFF
LOCATION: ATLANTA, GA
DATES: OCTOBER 6, 1994
DECEMBER 1, 1994

INTERVIEW BEGINS

<Begin Tape 1, Side 1>

Sandy: This is Sandy Leff, and I am interviewing Phyllis Gershon Arnold for the Jewish Oral History Project of Atlanta, co-sponsored by the Atlanta Jewish Committee, the Atlanta Jewish Federation¹, and the National Council of Jewish Women. The date is Thursday, October sixth, 1994, and we are presently in Phyllis' home at 2625 Mercedes Drive, Northeast, in Atlanta. Phyllis, can we start by asking you where you were born?

Phyllis: I was born in Atlanta, Piedmont Hospital², many years ago. This is 1994? I was born in 1934.

Sandy: 1934. So, did you just have a big birthday?

Phyllis: I'm going to.

Sandy: You're about to.

Phyllis: I'm going to.

Sandy: So, we have to ask your official date, if you don't mind.

Phyllis: October twenty-seventh, 1920—1934.

Sandy: 1934. Are there big festivities planned for your . . .

¹ The Atlanta Jewish Federation was formally incorporated in 1967 and is the result of the merger of the Atlanta Federation for Jewish Social Service founded in 1905 as the Federation of Jewish Charities; the Atlanta Jewish Welfare Federation founded in 1936 as the Atlanta Jewish Welfare Fund; and the Atlanta Jewish Community Council founded in 1945. The organization was renamed the Jewish Federation of Greater Atlanta in 1997.

² Piedmont Atlanta Hospital is located at 1968 Peachtree Road, Atlanta, Georgia. Piedmont was established in 1905 as the Piedmont Sanitarium in the former mansion of Charles Thomas Swift at the northwest corner of Capitol and Crumley streets in the then-affluent Washington-Rawson neighborhood. The name was changed to Piedmont Hospital and eventually the hospital took up an entire square block. The Washington-Rawson neighborhood was razed in the early 1960's to make way for Atlanta-Fulton County Stadium and its parking lots.

Phyllis: . . . I hope not . . .

Sandy: . . . celebration?

Phyllis: I hope not. <Laughs> But actually, none. I'm going to celebrate my birthday with this new cousin who has a birthday in the same time frame, the one that's coming from Russia.

Sandy: This newly discovered relative from Russia . . .

Phyllis: . . . He and I are going to celebrate our birthdays together.

Sandy: Isn't that a wonderful way to . . .

Phyllis: . . . That's if [inaudible], but we'll get to that.

Sandy: Okay. What were your parents' names?

Phyllis: Jeanette London Gershon.

Sandy: G-E-A- . . .

Phyllis: . . . J-E-A-N . . .

Sandy: . . . J-E-A-N . . .

Phyllis: . . . -E-T-T-E.

Sandy: Jeanette Gershon London.

Phyllis: No, London Gershon.

Sandy: London Gershon, right. And that was your mother. And your father?

Phyllis: Was Sam Gershon.

Sandy: Did he have a middle name?

Phyllis: No, no middle name.

Sandy: Okay. Everyone called him Sam.

Phyllis: Sam.

Sandy: Okay. Now, where was your father born?

Phyllis: Kobryn, Russia. When he was born, it was Russia. Then it became Poland, back and forth from Russia to Poland as the borders changed. But at the time he was born, in 1877 . . .

Sandy: 1877. Now, we have to spell some of these . . .

Phyllis: . . . K-O- . . .

Sandy: . . . for the transcriber . . .

Phyllis: . . . -B-R-Y-N.

Sandy: Okay. Kobryn. Uh, Russia, Poland.

Phyllis: Right

Sandy: Okay. And your mother?

Phyllis: Was born in Brest, B-R-E-S-T, Litovsk, L-I-T-O-V-S-K. And that was Russia.

Sandy: In Russia, okay. Do you know what year she was born?

Phyllis: 1900.

Sandy: 1900. So, she was a good bit younger than . . .

Phyllis: . . . Considerably younger, yes . . .

Sandy: . . . than your dad?

Phyllis: Yes, yes.

Sandy: When did your parents come to Atlanta?

Phyllis: Well, my father came to Atlanta first in 1904.

Sandy: Um, were they married at that time?

Phyllis: No, no, no, no.

Phyllis: No, because she was only fourteen.

Sandy: He was married. He had married a woman named Esther Green in Europe, and they had one child who was born in 1902. Her name was Fanny Goldstein, Fanny Gershon Goldstein.

Sandy: And she was born in Europe?

Phyllis: She was born in Europe.

Sandy: So how did he get . . .

Phyllis: . . . That was my half-sister . . .

Sandy: . . . How did he get from Russia to Europe?

Phyllis: Now, she was born in Russia. He left Russia, as many young men did, when he was in the army. And that just was not his cup of tea. But he left the army. And, you know in those days, they had conscription.

Sandy: Right.

Phyllis: So, he was in for the duration, maybe twenty-five years, if [inaudible] young men. Anyhow, he worked his way. He was from a very poor family, very religious father, and he worked his way from Russia. He went to Hamburg, Germany, and . . . he departed from Hamburg, Germany, for New York. And left his wife and child there to work and earn enough money to bring them here, which he did . . . in just a very short time.

Sandy: Uh-huh.

Phyllis: He worked in New York as a dishwasher, came to Atlanta because he had a *landsman*³ here, Joel Dorfan.

Sandy: Who was that?

Phyllis: J-O-E-L Dorfan, D-O-R-F-A-N.

Sandy: Now he was well known in the community, wasn't he?

Phyllis: Mr. Dorfan was the president in later years of the AA⁴ synagogue, and he was a wonderful man. I remember him very well.

Sandy: Well, we'll have to catch up on some of your memories of him.

Phyllis: Uh-huh.

Sandy: How was he related to . . .

Phyllis: . . . They were not. It was just a *landsman*.

Sandy: *Landsman*.

Phyllis: When he came to Atlanta, he was really on his way to Birmingham [Alabama] where he did have cousins, the Weinstein family in Birmingham. But he never got to Birmingham. Mr. Dorfan convinced him to stay in Atlanta, and that was the reason why he picked Atlanta to settle in.

Sandy: And . . . he then brought his wife and daughter . . .

Phyllis: . . . Well, he brought his wife and daughter . . .

Sandy: . . . right to Atlanta?

Phyllis: A few years later. He . . . saved enough money, sent them in, and they came to Atlanta. And his wife died in 1919, the flu epidemic.

Sandy: Oh

Phyllis: She's buried at Oakland Cemetery⁵.

³ Yiddish: A fellow Jew who comes from the same district or town, especially in Eastern Europe.

⁴ Ahavath Achim was founded in 1887 in a small room on Gilmer Street. In 1901 they moved to a permanent building at the corner of Piedmont and Gilmer Street. In 1921, the congregation constructed a synagogue at Washington Street and Woodward Avenue. The final service in that building was held in 1958 to make way for construction of the Downtown Connector (the concurrent section of Interstate 75 and Interstate 85 through Atlanta). The synagogue moved to its current location on Peachtree Battle Avenue in 1958.

Rabbi Abraham Hirmes was the first rabbi of the then Orthodox congregation. In 1928 Rabbi Harry Epstein became the rabbi and the congregation began to shift to Conservatism, which they joined in 1952. Cantor Isaac Goodfriend, a Holocaust survivor, joined the congregation in 1966 and remained until his retirement. Rabbi Epstein retired in 1982, becoming Rabbi Emeritus and Rabbi Arnold Goodman assumed the rabbinic post. He retired in 2002. Rabbi Neil Sandler is now the rabbi. (2015).

⁵ Oakland Cemetery is the oldest cemetery and one of the largest green spaces, in Atlanta. Many notable Georgians are buried at Oakland including Margaret Mitchell, author of *Gone with the Wind*; Joseph Jacobs, owner of the pharmacy where John Pemberton first sold Coca-Cola as a soft drink; Bobby Jones, the only golfer to win the Grand Slam, the United States Amateur, United States Open, British Amateur and the Open Championship in the same

Sandy: Buried at Oakland Cemetery.

Phyllis: Uh-huh.

Cuba Family Archives

year; as well as former Georgia governors and Atlanta mayors. Oakland is an excellent example of a Victorian-style cemetery and contains numerous monuments and mausoleums that are of great beauty and historical significance.

Sandy: Does your family have plots at . . .

Phyllis: . . . in Oakland? . . .

Sandy: . . . Were there a lot of your family that are buried there?

Phyllis: No . . . she's the only . . .

Sandy: . . . Only one . . .

Phyllis: . . . member of my family who is buried there. My parents' plots are in Greenwood.⁶

Sandy: Okay. So, but then she passed away.

Phyllis: So, she left a teenage child.

Sandy: Fanny . . .

Phyllis: . . . Gershon Goldstein.

Sandy: Gershon, uh-huh.

Phyllis: That was my sister.

Sandy: Okay. So, your sister who's a good deal older.

Phyllis: Yeah. Two years younger than my mother. <Laughs>

Sandy: Uh-huh. Oh, my goodness.

Phyllis: And . . . in the teen years, my father had made a success in Atlanta financially, and he became very involved in the Central Relief Committee for War Sufferers, the Kobryner Relief Committee. And he became a delegate. He . . . put various brothers-in-law and relatives in business here to watch the . . . dry goods⁷ stores.

Sandy: Now you said brothers-in-law.

Phyllis: Well, he brought over his sister's family.

Sandy: I see.

Phyllis: Well, his wife's family.

Sandy: His wife's family . . .

Phyllis: I'm sorry.

Sandy: . . . yeah. I see you are showing me some material here that you have shared with the archives?

⁶ Greenwood Cemetery, opened in 1904, is designed in the Lawn style, with long vistas in all directions. Greenwood has a large Jewish section. Greenwood Cemetery is also the home of the Memorial to the Six Million, where Holocaust remembrance services are held every spring.

⁷ Dry goods are products such as textiles, clothing, personal care, and toiletry items. In United States retailing, a dry goods store carries consumer goods that are distinct from those carried by hardware stores and grocery stores.

Phyllis: Uh-huh.

Sandy: The Central Relief Committee for the War Sufferers. It's dated 1920, is that right? May [inaudible].

Phyllis: That one probably is. Yeah, that was after the First World War. Before that, he was very involved in what was called the Kobryner Relief Society, which was an organization of Kobryners, from Kobryn.

Sandy: Oh.

Phyllis: And he went repeatedly from Atlanta over there.

Sandy: Back to his home town?

Phyllis: Many times, taking various things for orphanages or vocational schools, old age homes that he started. I have pictures of all those things.

Sandy: Is that right?

Phyllis: It was quite wonderful work he did.

Sandy: He took boats back to Russia, long trips back to Russia, to deliver goods and . . .

Phyllis: . . . To deliver goods, money and then in later years, after the First World War . . . you couldn't send money. It would never have reached relatives. No, no. If a family in Atlanta wanted to send to their relatives there, it couldn't be done. So, he would travel with a body guard, because he would have huge amounts of money on him from people in Atlanta, in the surrounding Southeastern states, who wanted to send to their families over there. That was a real Jewish pocket in that part of Russia-Poland. I mean it was part of the Pale of Settlement, and it was really, Kobryn was almost a Jewish town.

Sandy: I see.

Phyllis: It was bigger than a *shtetl*⁸, but it was still mostly Jewish.

Sandy: Okay. That is so interesting. Now, had his wife passed away when he got involved with this?

Phyllis: He started getting involved when she was still alive, but when he really poured himself into it was after she had died.

Sandy: Uh-huh.

Phyllis: And he was successful enough, he was lonesome enough, and he really put himself into

⁸ A *shtetl* is a small town, usually in eastern Europe, with a significant Jewish presence in it. The Yiddish term for town, '*shtetl*' commonly refers to small towns or villages in pre-World War II Eastern and Central Europe with a significant Jewish presence that were primarily Yiddish speaking.

it.

Sandy: Two questions I want to follow through on. One, did he still have family back there, a mother and father?

Phyllis: No, his father . . .

Sandy: . . . Did he ever bring his parents here?

Phyllis: No. No, his father—his mother died when he was just a young child. And his father died—I don't know what year his father died, I really don't, Sandy, but he was a young man. No, his father never came here.

Sandy: They were religious, you said?

Phyllis: Uh, his father was . . .

Sandy: . . . A religious family?

Phyllis: You remember Mrs. Adina Gross at the AA synagogue? You know Leon Gross? His mother.

Sandy: Yes.

Phyllis: His mother. His mother was a young girl when my father met him, and she was from this little shtetl, Kobryn. And she told me one day before she died about a time that my father had come from America, had made a success, had gone back to present a Torah⁹ to the little synagogue, a little wooden synagogue in the town. And my father was kind of a rebel of this town as far as religion or things of that nature. He was observant, but not . . .

Sandy: . . . To the extent.

Phyllis: . . . the European sense, you know. And he, my grandfather, had a beautiful voice, they said, and sang not as a *chazzan*¹⁰ but as the *chazzan sheni* in the synagogue. And he also, by this time, his wife had some kind of crippling disease. I have no idea what it was. But he was unable to . . . he was bedridden. So, she said that my father came back and presented the Torah. And over there. . . you know, they paraded through the streets with the Torah . . .

Sandy: . . . With the new Torah.

Phyllis: That's right. All around the town. And . . . from the synagogue and back into it. And she said

⁹ Hebrew for 'teaching.' 'Torah' is a general term that covers all Jewish law including the vast mass of teachings recorded in the *Talmud* and other rabbinical works. 'Sefer Torah' refers to the sacred scroll on which the first five books of the *Bible* (the *Pentateuch*) are written.

¹⁰ The *chazzan* (cantor) is the official in charge of music or chants and leads liturgical prayer and chanting in the synagogue.

she was a child of maybe five years old when all this was happening. And my daddy came with his straw bowler and his suit which . . . I can see it because there are many pictures of him . . .

Sandy: . . . Pictures of . . .

Phyllis: . . . just in that outfit. And she said that finally her father picked her up on his shoulders so she could see, the crowd was so large.

Sandy: So, he was a local hero, really, to the town.

Phyllis: And she said that his father, my grandfather, was carried on a platform in a bed. He was bedridden, as I said. And they carried him in a platform through the town for Torah. And he was so proud, you know. This was dedicated to the *shul*¹¹ in his honor, so I think that my father always was happy about that, that they had this, not reconciliation because there was never a rift as such, but that his father could be proud of . . .

Sandy: . . . Proud of him . . .

Phyllis: . . . before he died. And it was a very important moment in his life, too.

Sandy: Now, my second question is: what did he become involved in in Atlanta that he became so successful?

Phyllis: Oh, his business?

Sandy: Yes.

Phyllis: Dry goods.

Sandy: Dry goods, okay.

Phyllis: Right. You know . . .

Sandy: . . . A little . . .

Phyllis: Around the state, he had many little dry goods stores.

Sandy: Okay. And what did they have in the dry goods stores?

Phyllis: Oh, in the dry goods stores there was piece goods which was in today's vernacular, it was material, you know, fabric.

Sandy: Fabric.

Phyllis: Yeah, bolts of fabric. Oh, we had valises, we had diapers, we had all kinds of clothing for men, women, and children.

Sandy: No hardware?

¹¹ *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.

Phyllis: I say “we” because he was in this all his life, and when he lost all of the many stores through mismanagement when he was off in Europe . . . I grew up in the same thing because he still had one store that was [during] my time, you know, experience . . .

Sandy: That you kept and . . .

Phyllis: Well, it was our family, my brother and sisters and I. But . . .

Sandy: . . . And we'll talk about that store and how it affected, you know, the course of your life, too.

Phyllis: Uh-huh, it did. It did. So, that was how he made his living.

Sandy: Uh-huh. But did he start this store out, like so many of the early . . .

Phyllis: . . . As a peddler?

Sandy: Yes, as a peddler on the streets?

Phyllis: Yeah. His story was he came here, he worked as a dishwasher in New York, came to Atlanta and worked as a dishwasher because that was the one thing that everybody could do. And he said that he got enough money to get together a little wagon, a little peddling. And did that in the town and then . . . he would do it by street car . . .

Sandy: . . . By street car?

Phyllis: As he got a little more successful, by street car. But before that he had his wagon. He then . . . had a little push wagon. Then he bought a bigger buggy and a horse. And he said the nicest thing was all week long he would work with this horse and buggy peddling, and then on Sunday he would groom it. He would clean everything up and he would groom the horse, and he would take his daughter and his wife to Piedmont Park¹² where . . . and then listen to the bands with the music. Piedmont Park - this was right after the Cotton States Exposition that was . . .

Sandy: . . . In 1897?

Phyllis: It was exquisite. It had the bands playing and everything.

Sandy: Yeah. Okay. I'll let you get your phone. <Phone rings, interview stops, then resumes>

Phyllis: That was one of his fondest stories to tell.

Sandy: Tell about Piedmont Park and . . .

Phyllis: . . . It was so gorgeous, he said. It was the gazebos and the bandstands, and there was a lot of

¹² Piedmont Park is a 189-acre park located just north of downtown Atlanta. It was originally designed by Joseph Forsyth Johnson to host the first Piedmont Exhibition in 1887.

music there on weekends.

Sandy: They say that this new Centennial Park that they're hoping to build now . . .

Phyllis: Uh-huh.

Sandy: . . . will end up as another Piedmont Park.

Phyllis: Maybe our grandchildren, Sandy, will be talking into a tape recording someday about...

Sandy: <Laughs> Exactly.

Phyllis: . . . Centennial Park at the 1996 Olympics.¹³

Sandy: Olympics, right. What a legacy it left the city.

Phyllis: <Laughs>

Sandy: So, he had a little horse and buggy, and this family with one child.

Phyllis: Uh-huh.

Sandy: And then his wife passed away in the flu epidemic.

Phyllis: Right.

Sandy: And . . .

Phyllis: . . . The reason he was able to travel after his wife died with a teenage child is because by that time there were more *landsmen* in Atlanta. And it was very close-knit friendships between these people. And you have an eligible bachelor, everybody kind of takes you under their wing. And he was very eligible. But . . .

Sandy: . . . What do you remember about . . .

Phyllis: . . . he would—he left her, he left my sister Fanny with Rosa Fleshner, and that was a family in Atlanta . . .

Sandy: How do you spell . . . ?

Phyllis: F-L-E-S-H-N-E-R, Fleshner. She had a boardinghouse her whole life. She always, that's how she made her living. And lots of single men lived there. And in later years, she still had the boardinghouse when I was a child. And on Sunday . . .

Sandy: . . . Where was it?

Phyllis: Well, I don't know where the one was located . . .

Sandy: . . . Originally . . .

Phyllis: . . . that Fanny lived in, because that's where Fanny stayed when my father went back to Russia.

¹³ Held from July 19 to August 14, 1996. A record 197 nations took part in the games, comprising 10,318 athletes.

But in later years, I remember going to her boardinghouse on St. Charles Avenue, and the house is still there. And she would serve Sunday dinner. And we would go there for Sunday dinner. It was a, you know, a paid thing.

Sandy: Uh-huh.

Phyllis: Business, or something.

Sandy: Well, how about if we pick up on your mother a little bit.

Phyllis: Okay.

Sandy: Okay. Although I didn't ask you if your father, he was involved with this War Relief . . .

Phyllis: . . . Right. And . . .

Sandy: . . . Was he involved in . . . this was a Jewish thing, of course . . .

Phyllis: . . . Yes . . .

Sandy: . . . Because it was going back to his home town and with the Torahs. Was he involved in a synagogue?

Phyllis: AA, always AA, invariably.

Sandy: Very well.

Phyllis: He was the . . . in these papers is a lot of things about that, I mean. In those days, the Purim Ball was the big thing. He was always the . . .

Sandy: . . . The Purim Ball?

Phyllis: Yes, he was always the Purim Ball chairman. That was the big money maker of the whole year, was the Purim Ball. And he was a part of the original building committee and the Board of Directors and all of that. His brother, Oscar Gershon, was the president of the *shul* for many years. So, the AA was his . . .

Sandy: . . . So, Oscar was brought here? He brought his brother . . .

Phyllis: . . . He brought all of his family. He brought his brother Oscar Gershon. He brought his sister Rosa Garber. I don't know . . .

Sandy: G-A-R-B-E-R, the Garber family?

Phyllis: Yeah, you may have interviewed Al, I would think you probably have interviewed Alfred somewhere, Al Garber.

Sandy: Yeah. We're losing you as you go to get coffee. <Laughs>

Phyllis: I'm coming, I'm coming.

Sandy: Well, we'll stop and let you get back in place, okay.

Phyllis: All right. I've got it. I'm sorry.

Sandy: That's all right. At the end of the interview, I always ask if there's anyone else you think would be a good memoirist for us, anybody else that . . .

Phyllis: . . . My guess is he's been picked.

Sandy: Al . . .

Phyllis: . . . Al Garber.

Sandy: Okay. I'll check on it to make sure, because you think he would be a good person for us to follow through with.

Phyllis: Uh-huh.

Sandy: Okay. So, your father was involved with this Central Relief Committee. I see some of the lettering is in Hebrew on this.

Phyllis: Some is Hebrew, some is Yiddish.¹⁴

Sandy: He was proficient in Hebrew and Yiddish? It's in Hebrew and then translated.

Phyllis: Yeah, yeah. I mean, I don't think he was, he wasn't a Hebrew . . .

Sandy: . . . Scholar . . .

Phyllis: . . . scholar as far as speaking. You know, conversational . . . a lot of this is probably Yiddish more than it is Hebrew.

Sandy: So, do you know where he lived when he first moved here?

Phyllis: I think it was somewhere around Grant Street but no, I'm not . . .

Sandy: . . . Near Grant Park?

Phyllis: Grant, yeah.

Sandy: In that area?

Phyllis: In that area, uh-huh. But I don't really know what street it was.

Sandy: Okay, so if we pick up then with your mother, okay, a little bit about her background. Born in 1900 in Brest. What kind of a family did she come from?

Phyllis: My mother came from a large family. She was the fifth child born and the fifth girl. And she always said that her father gave a huge party when she was born. And they wondered why. Aren't you

¹⁴ Yiddish is the common historical language of Ashkenazi Jews from Central and Eastern Europe. It is heavily Germanic based but uses the Hebrew alphabet. The language was spoken or understood as a common tongue for many European Jews up until the middle of the twentieth century. Although Henry uses the terms "Yiddish" and "Yid" to refer to Jews, Yiddish is a reference to a person's language and not necessarily their ethnicity, religion, or culture.

disappointed, it's another girl? And his [inaudible], you know, it's a healthy baby kind of attitude. And he said . . . she talked about her father with—and mother—but she talked a lot about her father with great love, great love. So, she was one of . . . she was the fifth, and then there were several sons following. My father ended up bringing all of her family that wanted to leave and couldn't to this country. He brought many, many people to this country . . . other than family.

Sandy: So, did they meet over there?

Phyllis: They met there on one of his trips back with aid to the people in Kobryn. He also went to the surrounding areas, and Brest Litovsk and Kobryn were only, at the most, sixty miles apart. And he went into Kobryn and he set up in a hotel. And I know this is exactly as it happened, Sandy, because when I went Israel twenty years ago, I met my mother's girlhood friend. And she sat there. I spoke English, her daughter-in-law spoke to her in Hebrew, and the friend Paula turned around and spoke to me in Yiddish. I mean, this is how they made the circle. But she told me the exact story, the same beautiful story of how they met. My father set up in a hotel, which is what he would do when he would go into one of these little towns.

Sandy: And the year, do you know what year it was?

Phyllis: 1920.

Sandy: 1920. Okay.

Phyllis: 1920. They were married in '21. And he contacted the people for whom he had money, packages, whatever. And Paula's family were one of them. And she was to come to the hotel to pick up for her parents.

Sandy: And you said Paula's?

Phyllis: Paula.

Sandy: Who . . . ?

Phyllis: That's my mother's friend.

Sandy: Okay.

Phyllis: Alright. So, Paula said, "I can't go to a hotel alone to meet this man. I mean, that just isn't done." And she said to my mother, who was her best friend, "Please, will you go with me?" And they did. And father said he was lying back on his chaise lounge in the hotel room, very relaxed with his, you know, shirt open. And they came into the room and he saw the most exquisite vision he had ever seen in his life, and he immediately just fell in love with her. He said it was love at first sight.

Sandy: It gives me goosebumps.

Phyllis: He jumped up from his lounge and he straightened his tie. He tightened it up, and he made himself very presentable. And after he transacted the business with Paula, he said, "By the way, ladies, I have tickets for the concert tonight, and I would be very honored if you'd be my guest." Well, Paula who was engaged said yes, she accepted with her fiancé, and my mother said she'd have to ask her parents.

Sandy: Uh-huh.

Phyllis: And if the answer was yes, she would love to go. And they let her. He says, "I quickly ran downstairs and bought whatever tickets there were to whatever was . . .

Sandy: . . . Oh, because he didn't have the arrangements.

Phyllis: <Laughs> And he didn't leave until she consented to marry him, and he just stayed in the city for . . . six months before she . . .

Sandy: . . . To win her over?

Phyllis: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

Sandy: How do you like that. And convinced her not only to marry him but to leave her country and her family . . .

Phyllis: . . . That's right . . .

Sandy: . . . and to come to the United States.

Phyllis: That's right.

Sandy: To Atlanta, no less.

Phyllis: He surely did. I mean, if you had known him, you wouldn't be surprised he would be capable of doing that. But, after that, he did bring her whole family. He brought many people, many, many people to this country. He was walking down the street one day in New York, and someone walked by him and did a doubletake, you know, "Sam Gershon?" And he says, "You brought me to this country and I lost touch with you, and I must . . . take you in a store. I must buy you something. I must do something." And these kinds of things happened . . .

Sandy: . . . Happened all of his life?

Phyllis: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

Sandy: You have a picture or a newspaper article about them when they got married?

Phyllis: This was in the *Atlanta Constitution*. August 6, 1921. That's when they came back to this country. They were married in May, and he took her on a whirlwind honeymoon Europe. But this is a long article, but it's a beautiful, wonderful thing that you might want to just peruse it some other time.

Sandy: I'd love to.

Phyllis: When the tape's not running.

Sandy: “Sam Gershon Wins Bride While in War-torn Poland.” And it tells the story. Well, he must have been pretty well known here in Atlanta . . .

Phyllis: . . . Yeah, he was . . .

Sandy: . . . to have a picture and an article like this written about him in the *Atlanta Constitution*.

Phyllis: Well, he went back and forth. In the article, you'll find, it's really also an interview about the conditions in Europe at the time and his opinions and so forth. And it was quite a . . . he was quite a man, Sam. He really was. He was a wonderful person.

Sandy: Uh-huh. I know you were very proud . . .

Phyllis: And you said find out about parents and grandparents. In this case, he was my . . . he was a parent and a grandparent . . .

Sandy: Grandparent, uh-huh.

Phyllis: . . . which is a very close relationship. If I did anything good in my life, it was to please him. I mean, that was—we just kind of . . .

Sandy: . . . Well, he was a wonderful role model, wasn't he?

Phyllis: That's right.

Sandy: I mean, in terms of his . . .

Phyllis: . . . His [inaudible] . . .

Sandy: . . . community outreach and his concern for others. So, this young couple came to Atlanta. He had several successful stores here already. Is that right? Dry goods stores at that time.

Phyllis: Right, right.

Sandy: And where did they settle, do you know?

Phyllis: Their first . . . I believe their first apartment was called The Princess Apartment on Washington Street.

Sandy: Princess?

Phyllis: The Princess Apartment . . .

Sandy: . . . Princess or . . .

Phyllis: . . . Yeah, Princess. And the reason it's notable is that it was owned by the Selig¹⁵ family.

¹⁵ Simon Selig (Sr.) founded Selig Chemical Company in 1896, after working as a sales representative for West Chemical Corporation in New York. Originally Selig Chemicals manufactured and sold home cleaning products (soaps, dispensers, disinfectant, etc.), insecticides and other consumer goods. In 1968 ZEP purchased Selig Industries and today it manufactures cleaning products and programs to the industrial and institutional markets.

Sandy: Oh.

Phyllis: And it was where the Jewish people lived. It was down the street from the AA on Washington Street.

Sandy: On Washington Street, uh-huh.

Phyllis: And evidently it was a very nice place. I never saw the building, and it was torn down long before I was born.

Sandy: But the Selig family already was in real estate at that time and owned . . .

Phyllis: Right. Right, they were well established in the city already.

Sandy: Uh-huh. And so that's where this young couple came. Now she must have only spoken Russian and maybe . . . ?

Phyllis: That's right, that's right. That's about it. My poor mother. When I think about having to . . . she came here to a step-child two years younger than she, no language, she was already pregnant . . .

Sandy: . . . Oh, she . . .

Phyllis: . . . you know, by the time she got here.

Sandy: Uh-huh. So, she came over on the boat pregnant?

Phyllis: And she had been sick as a dog in the boat . . .

Sandy: . . . Oh, poor thing . . .

Phyllis: . . . she said, the whole way. But . . . she adjusted. She always regretted not having had education because her education had been interrupted, you know, during the First World War, and there really was no schooling for children her age.

Sandy: Was she a seamstress or did she have any skill like that?

Phyllis: No . . . she was the smartest women I've ever met, she really was. And yet she did not know she was.

Sandy: She had no opportunity.

Phyllis: She had the most amazing mind. She could just grasp anything. But, no, as far as . . . she never worked out of the home, except to help my father in business.

Sandy: Uh-huh. So, she did help him?

Phyllis: Uh-huh. She did, she must have sewed. You know, she lost her first child—no . . . it was her . . . She lost her first child, but then the third child died at three or four years of age. She used to . . . pictures of her were so gorgeous and the clothes she wore. And as I was a little girl, my mother would alter

things, you know, take in a seam, shorten a skirt. But she didn't sew. And she said she stopped when Hilda Lee died, the little girl, she stopped sewing. She said she just couldn't sew any more.

Sandy: So, tell me about . . . she was already pregnant with one child.

Phyllis: Uh-huh.

Sandy: And that child she lost?

Phyllis: Yeah, she lost him in three days.

Sandy: Oh.

Phyllis: It was a birth injury.

Sandy: I see. So that was . . . she had that first child. Then?

Phyllis: My sister Elinor Smith, Elinor Gershon Smith.

Sandy: Uh, E-L- . . .

Phyllis: . . . E-L-I . . .

Sandy: . . . I-N-O-R . . .

Phyllis: . . . N-O-R. Elinor passed away in 1988.

Sandy: So, she was the oldest . . .

Phyllis: . . . Uh-huh . . .

Sandy: . . . in your family, really.

Phyllis: Right. She was.

Sandy: And then . . .

Phyllis: . . . And then she had another child, Hilda Lee, who died at age four. I never knew her.

Sandy: Uh-huh. Okay. And then . . .

Phyllis: . . . And then my brother, Herbert Gershon.

Sandy: And he . . .

Phyllis: He lives here in Atlanta.

Sandy: Atlanta. And then . . .

Phyllis: Elaine Beeber, B-E-E-B-E-R.

Sandy: Elaine Gershon Beeber.

Phyllis: Uh-huh.

Sandy: And does she live in Atlanta?

Phyllis: Yeah, she lives in Atlanta.

Sandy: So, everybody has stayed right here.

Phyllis: Uh-huh.

Sandy: That's wonderful for you and are they both involved with AA synagogue . . .

Phyllis: . . . Yeah . . .

Sandy: . . . or Shearith Israel.¹⁶

Phyllis: My whole family is AA.

Sandy: With the AA synagogue. You've all stayed there. So, they had these children, which must have kept your mother very busy then. Did Fanny live with her, too?

Phyllis: No, Fanny married just maybe a year after mother and dad married. She was very much wanting to get married, and my father was not going to let her. She was too young. Anyhow, the story always went that Fanny and mother became best friends.

Phyllis: Became best friends.

Sandy: Because they were very close in age.

Phyllis: They became very good friends, which I think is quite an accomplishment under the circumstances. And mother always had the [inaudible] her friends. Fanny said, "She helped me convince Papa to let me get married, you know." So, she married Julius Goldstein.

Sandy: Also in Atlanta?

Phyllis: Also in Atlanta.

Sandy: So, was any of your mother's family brought over here?

Phyllis: Uh-huh. Everybody that, as I say, that could come.

Sandy: But her parents?

Phyllis: Her parents, no. Her parents died in Russia. They did not want to come. He brought over Max London, and he brought over the Feldman family, my Uncle Max Feldman who was married to mother's sister. And the Mason family who was another brother-in-law, married to another sister.

Sandy: Uh-huh. So, you have a wonderful extended family here.

Phyllis: Uh-huh.

Sandy: So, you never met your grandparents?

Phyllis: No.

¹⁶ Founded in 1904, Shearith Israel began as a congregation that met in the homes of congregants until 1906 when they began using a Methodist church on Hunter Street. After World War II, Rabbi Tobias Geffen moved the congregation to University Drive, where it became the first synagogue in DeKalb County. In the 1960's, they removed the barrier between the men's and women's sections in the sanctuary, and officially became affiliated with the Conservative movement in 2002.s

Sandy: And your father, as you said, was both parent and grandparent and all. And your mother helped in the business a little bit. But mostly she was in the home.

Phyllis: Yeah.

Sandy: Okay. So, what is your earliest memory? You were born in 1934 . . . they had been married thirteen years.

Phyllis: Well, I guess the first thirteen years of my life, my father and mother, the family moved back and forth from Atlanta to Carrollton, Atlanta to Carrollton.

Sandy: Was the largest store in Carrollton, is that why?

Phyllis: Yeah, you see, there was the Depression.

Sandy: Uh-huh.

Phyllis: And when I was born, my father was absolutely broke.

Sandy: So, he lost everything in the Depression.

Phyllis: In the Depression. And they . . . let me think now . . . I was born in 1934 and he had a very young family. My sister Elinor was eleven years old and I was an infant. Now here is a man, almost fifty-nine, sixty years old. That's pretty tough, right?

Sandy: Uh-huh. To lose everything at that age.

Phyllis: That's right. And a young family to . . .

Sandy: . . . To support . . .

Phyllis: . . . to support. So, here was a pretty tough situation, and they were going to move to Carrollton and put all their eggs in this one last remaining store called The Leader. And we didn't have enough money to move as my mother couldn't pay the dray bill. So, she remembered that Elinor who went to grammar school in Atlanta had . . . every week they would put forth a sum for a savings account since she started school. And this is something the school ran for the children. And lo and behold, she had fifty dollars in it. And that's how they moved to Carrollton.

Sandy: Carrollton.

Phyllis: They borrowed her fifty dollars. <Laughs>

Sandy: Wow.

Phyllis: And Max Siegel from Siegel Delicatessen and Kosher Meats, gave them -

Sandy: S-I-E- . . .

Phyllis: . . . - credit. S-I-E-G-E-L . . .

Sandy: . . . -G-E-L.

Phyllis: Remembered with great fondness by my family. He gave them credit for food.

Sandy: That's in Carrollton?

Phyllis: No, that was in Atlanta.

Sandy: It was right here?

Phyllis: And that really was . . .

Sandy: . . . Cause did they keep kosher?¹⁷

Phyllis: Oh, yes.

Sandy: Your family kept kosher. Where were they living when you . . . wait, so then they went to Carrollton . . .

Phyllis: . . . When I was born, they lived on Atlanta Avenue.

Sandy: Atlanta Avenue. So, they had come back from . . . they had this store in Carrollton, but then they came back to Atlanta?

Phyllis: Yes, we moved to Carrollton when I was nine months old, and we stayed there for about three years until daddy got things going. And then moved back to Atlanta. At that time, we moved to Mentelle Drive.

Sandy: So, that was after Atlanta Avenue or before . . .

Phyllis: . . . Yeah, after Atlanta Avenue.

Sandy: Men, M -

Phyllis: M-E-N-T-E-L-L-E.

Sandy: And where was that, in what area of town?

Phyllis: It's on Parkway, Charles Allen Drive . . . it used to be called Parkway, now it's called Charles Allen, Eighth Street.

<Telephone rings>

Sandy: Oh, okay.

Phyllis: Grant Place, all those . . .

Sandy: . . . Do you have to get that? It's probably a good time.

Phyllis: I can let it ring. Harold or Scott will bring it in there.

¹⁷ **Kosher**/*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 acceptable. **Kosher** can also be used to describe ritual objects that are made in accordance with Jewish law and are fit for ritual use.

Sandy: Okay. Okay. So, you moved back to Mentelle Drive.

Phyllis: Yeah. And that was . . . that's where my earliest memories are.

Sandy: That's the first house that you remember?

Phyllis: Uh-huh.

Sandy: What's your earliest memory as a child?

Phyllis: I went back to that house a month or two ago.

Sandy: Is that right?

Phyllis: And had . . .

Sandy: . . . It's still standing? . . .

Phyllis: . . . And the person there let me come in. It was quite an experience, because there are lots of good memories there. Next door lived Jack Levine. Remember . . . you didn't know Jack Levine? Oscar Leblowsky's mentor.

Sandy: Oh.

Phyllis: Jack Levine was, in those days, Jack was a young man right out of medical school trying to be an OB/GYN, but there was no popularity for specialists in those days. He couldn't make it. And he lived there in that house with his mother, and he became just a family practitioner. And we adored him. My family adored him, and he was our doctor and our confidante and our friend. He was everything. We loved him to pieces. And I think that's where I first developed a crush on doctors. <Laughs>

Sandy: Oh. We're tracing that early on.

Phyllis: That's right.

Sandy: Right, how that came about. So, as a child, do you remember—what's the first thing you remember? Do you remember an event with him or do you remember something at school or at the services?

Phyllis: Well, as a child, what do I remember? I remember . . .

Sandy: . . . Was it a happy childhood?

Phyllis: Oh, yes. I remember we lived in this little house, the little bungalow, with not a lot of room. I can really attest to that after having said I went back recently—with the four children, parents, my cousin. I have a cousin, Bill, or had a cousin. He passed away recently. Bill Mason, who lived with us also, my mother's nephew. And I would share the room with my two . . . my brother Herbert and Bill and I lived in . . .

Sandy: . . . In one room? . . .

Phyllis: . . . Stayed in one room. And I can remember vividly all of those things, and who was where. I went to Clark Howell School for kindergarten and first grade. And in that neighborhood, everybody lived there. I mean, everybody that moved to the South Side lived in that neighborhood.

Sandy: Would you say mostly Jewish people?

Phyllis: Yeah, it was . . .

Sandy: . . . Was it a very ethnic . . .

Phyllis: . . . Well, it was a lot of Jewish people there. It seemed like everybody was Jewish, you know. But that's because you knew so many. And there were a lot of relatives there.

Sandy: Your friends were all Jewish, is that right?

Phyllis: Yeah, in those days everybody was Jewish. We lived here for three years, and then let me see. The war . . . the Second World War started. <Telephone rings, interview stops, then resumes>

Sandy: Okay. We're back to talking about the Second World War and the effect that it had on your family.

Phyllis: Well, and then we moved back to Carrollton because my father's help in the store—who stayed with him for the rest of their lives, by the way—they went away to the army, they came back, and then forty, fifty years, they worked for him. Anyhow, they went to the army and we had to move to Carrollton, so Daddy could be able to run the store.

Sandy: I see.

Phyllis: And that was . . . so that really - that's really where life began for me was Carrollton. I loved it, I loved it. You know, you're a little girl and . . . I think I was starting the second grade, and that's where you began making your friendships and getting established.

Sandy: How far is Carrollton from Atlanta?

Phyllis: It's only sixty-two miles.

Sandy: Oh, that's right. You said sixty miles.

Phyllis: Of course, in those days, that was a long trip, as far as, you know, the two-lane roads . . . Or one lane, you know, one way and one the other.

Sandy: Did you have a car by then that you traveled back and forth . . .

Phyllis: . . . We had a car. My mother always did the driving. In fact, my mother always did all the heavy work. She was very solicitous and protective of my father.

Sandy: Because he was older?

Phyllis: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

Sandy: So, she learned to drive? She really did become . . .

Phyllis: Uh-huh, he taught her to drive.

Sandy: . . . adapt . . .

Phyllis: Oh, she was a modern woman. In fact, he would work very hard in the store. In those days, Saturday night the store would be open until close to midnight.

Sandy: Wow.

Phyllis: And then Sunday morning, we would pile in the car and come in for Sunday school. And mother would, while we were in Sunday school, she would go to the kosher butcher and get all of her food. Sometimes we would drive in with the live chickens and ducks and take them back dead. It was horrible. <Laughs> It was absolutely awful.

Sandy: So that's one of your earliest memories.

Phyllis: You know, I never did like chicken. <Laughs> I mean, honest, I'm not kidding you. Oh, it was dreadful. But she'd take them to the *shochet*, Mr. Parkman, on Washington Street. It was the Kaufmans and a **Wonpouner** [sp.] and then I think Stein was in the middle and then . . .

Sandy: . . . Now, Stein was . . .

Phyllis: . . . Another grocery. And then Mr. Siegel. And she stayed loyal to him forever because he had been so good to them and giving them credit when they needed it. And that's . . . you talk about memories, I can still taste it when we would go there on Sunday. And, of course as a little girl, I wanted everything I saw. And to distract me, Mr. Siegel would bring me over to the corned beef machine where he sliced it, and he would let me run my finger on the . . . you know, the little pieces that fall off when they're slicing corned beef. Nothing has ever tasted that good since. I mean, it was marvelous, the little pieces of corned beef that would fall.

Sandy: And they would be yours.

Phyllis: That was mine. So, she would pack up in dry ice all the kosher meats, and we would load up the groceries and head for Carrollton. And on the way home, it would be usually the radio, it would be things like Fibber Magee and Molly. It would be . . . have you ever heard of Fibber Magee's closet, Sandy, or are you too young?

Sandy: Yes. Oh, yes. I've heard of it.

Phyllis: Or "One Man's Family," Walter Winchell, "Good Morning Mr. and Mrs. America." I mean, you could tell where you were by which program was coming on. But the drive usually took about four good programs, so they needed to [inaudible]. And that was the Sunday routine. My father would go, of

course, to the Progressive Club¹⁸ and play poker.

Sandy: On Sundays?

Phyllis: He was a big poker player.

Sandy: They played on Sundays?

Phyllis: Oh, yes. Sunday morning, we'd be dropped to Sunday School, my father would be dropped

...

Sandy: . . . And the men would play poker?

Phyllis: He would be dropped at the Progressive Club to play poker, and then mother would go shop.

Sandy: Where was the Progressive Club at that time?

Phyllis: At that time, it was over where Turner Broadcasting is now. You know, over on Tenth and Techwood.

Sandy: Uh-huh.

Phyllis: That's where it was.

Sandy: So, you were not unhappy to have left your early friends in Atlanta . . .

Phyllis: No.

Sandy: . . . that you had down on Mentelle Drive, and to go to Carrollton?

Phyllis: No, because my main friends, even then, were family. Fanny's son, Harold, was near my age. Bob and Sara, and Herbert London lived right around the corner. All the Jewish kids were around there. It was fun. And we would see them anyhow. When we came out on Sundays . . .

Sandy: . . . On Sundays. And you were kind of out in the country . . .

Phyllis: . . . visiting family.

Sandy: Would you say Carrollton was out in the country?

Phyllis: Yeah.

Sandy: Were there Jewish people in Carrollton?

Phyllis: No children.

Sandy: No children? So, where you went to grammar school . . .

Phyllis: . . . There were a few older couples, but not many.

¹⁸ The Jewish Progressive Club was a Jewish social organization that was established in 1913 by Russian Jews who felt unwelcome at the Standard Club, where German Jews were predominant. At first the club was located in a rented house until a new club was built on Pryor Street including a swimming pool and a gym. In 1940 the club opened a larger facility at 1050 Techwood Drive in Midtown with three swimming pools, tennis and softball. In 1976 the club moved north to 1160 Moore's Mill Road near Interstate 75. The property was eventually sold as the club faced financial challenges and the Carl E. Sanders Family YMCA at Buckhead opened in 1996.

Sandy: You went to grammar school there, and you didn't have Jewish friends.

Phyllis: Uh-uh.

Sandy: And how long did you remain in Carrollton?

Phyllis: Until I was thirteen. That was our routine, back and forth until then. And the year or two before we moved to Atlanta, my parents bought a house so they could come in, a little small house on Vedado Way so they could . . .

Sandy: . . . On the . . .

Phyllis: . . . Vedado, V-E-D-A-D-O. A little small house with a white picket fence around it. <Laughs> And that was so my sister Elinor who had gotten out of college would have a place to live in Atlanta, and also so we could come in on Saturday night instead of Sunday morning. That was the big, big improvement. But I have a theory, Sandy, growing up in a small town, as many Jewish people did in the south, and being one of very few Jewish people or no Jewish people, does almost as much to keep you . . . I think in keeping one Jewish as being in a heavily populated Jewish area. It's the in-between where I think you become threatened.

Sandy: Uh-huh. But you knew you had to maintain your identity.

Phyllis: Our identity was very, very strong.

Sandy: Uh-huh.

Phyllis: I mean, extremely strong. I can remember my mother always having a Hanukkah¹⁹ party in Carrollton, and whatever few elderly people lived there would come over for the Hanukkah party and would take latkes and all that went with it. And Daddy would light the candles. And always I was on exhibition, you know. It was "Come here, darling," "Come here, baby." I was the baby. And with everyone around me, tell the story. Why do we celebrate Hanukkah, you know. And . . . I never thought those people were groaning, oh no, here they go again. Because I was so delighted to do this. It was something that gave them such pride and I thought I was just the cat's meow to be able to do that sort of thing.

Sandy: <Laughs> Well, I'm sure you were. We're going to take a little break and turn the tape over.

¹⁹ Hebrew for 'dedication.' An eight-day festival of lights usually falling around Christmas on the Christian calendar. *Hanukkah* celebrates the victory of the Maccabees in 165 BCE over the Seleucid rulers of Palestine, who had desecrated the Temple. The Maccabees wanted to re-dedicate the Temple altar to Jewish worship by rekindling the *menorah* but could only find one small jar of ritually pure olive oil. This oil continued to burn miraculously for eight days, enabling them to prepare new oil. The *Hanukkah menorah*, or *hanukiah*, with its nine branches, is used to commemorate this miracle by lighting eight candles, one for each day, by the ninth candle.

Phyllis: Uh-huh.

Sandy: Okay.

<End Tape 1, Side 1>

<Begin Tape 1, Side 2>

Sandy: This is Sandy Leff and this is Side Two of my interview with Phyllis Arnold. Again, the date is October sixth, 1994. And we were talking about celebrating Jewish holidays and what Phyllis remembers. She was telling us about Hanukkah. What else do you remember about celebrating Jewish holidays?

Phyllis: We were . . . in those days living in Carrollton what you'd call today [inaudible] because, you know, not living in town, we didn't come in for Simchat Torah and Pesach and all the festivals that now and in the years I was bringing up my children would take them to synagogue for.

Sandy: And of course, you didn't come in on Saturday morning because that was a business day.

Phyllis: That's right, exactly. We were strictly—Sunday School was very important, and to study and to do well in Sunday School just as you were expected to do in secular school. It was not . . . it was serious with my parents, the education. And the holidays were always big events. My relatives from Atlanta would come to Carrollton for *Pesach*²⁰, the Goldstein family.

Sandy: Oh, so your family, your parents would do the holidays?

Phyllis: Yeah.

Sandy: Even though you were in Carrollton . . .

Phyllis: . . . That's right . . .

Sandy: . . . they all came from Atlanta?

Phyllis: Well, the Goldstein family would all come from Atlanta to do the holidays. And by this time,

²⁰ Hebrew: *Pesach*. The anniversary of Israel's liberation from Egyptian bondage. The holiday lasts for eight days. Unleavened bread, *matzah*, is eaten in memory of the unleavened bread prepared by the Israelite during their hasty flight from Egypt, when they had not time to wait for the dough to rise. On the first two nights of Passover, the *seder*, the central event of the holiday is celebrated. The *seder* service is one of the most colorful and joyous occasions in Jewish life. In addition to eating *matzah* during the *seder*, Jews are prohibited from eating leavened bread during the entire week of Passover. In addition, Jews are also supposed to avoid foods made with wheat, barley, rye, spelt or oats unless those foods are labeled 'kosher for Passover.' Jews traditionally have separate dishes for Passover.

Fanny Goldstein had a family the same age as my father's family . . . In fact, all of Fanny's children were older than I am, which I think is interesting.

Sandy: Interesting, yes.

Phyllis: I was an aunt before I was born, see.

Sandy: That is incredible.

Phyllis: But . . . so they would come, and the London family didn't come for holidays, but they would visit back and forth. For the summer time, they'd come down there and stay a few days. The Feldman girls would do it. Now, Eunice Stein and Frieda Socol, I don't know if you . . .

Sandy: . . . Socol? S-O-

Phyllis: S-O-C-O-L. Anyhow, they would come. And it was just a fun way to live. But, you know, holidays were always celebrated. Although it's funny, when I first went to Simchat Torah in Atlanta as a mother of my own children, I was just stunned at what happened. And when I went over to Beth Jacob one evening to a service . . . I mean, it was sheer bedlam. Everybody was so happy and celebrating and singing and dancing. And I went home, and I told . . . my father was at my house when I arrived, and I said, "Do you know what I just saw?" And he says, "Well, that's exactly the way it's supposed to be." And I realized then there was a wealth of things . . .

Sandy: . . . You hadn't experienced . . .

Phyllis: . . . that anybody's parent has experienced that you never know about. I mean, there are so many things that looking back . . . if you only knew which questions to ask, you know.

Sandy: Uh-huh.

Phyllis: It was an interesting phenomenon.

Sandy: Your dad lived until he was . . .

Phyllis: . . . Ninety-one . . .

Sandy: . . . quite old. That's wonderful. So, he lived here in Atlanta?

Phyllis: Yeah.

Sandy: With you? Did he ever live with you?

Phyllis: No. No, no, no, no. My parents were always independent.

Sandy: Great. Well, but getting back. So, you had those about ten years, was it ten? Eight years that you had in Carrollton, away?

Phyllis: Yeah. And it was . . . I think the fact that my mother kept a very kosher home was important in our formulation. I mean, I didn't do the same, and I regret it

today. But I think it made a big difference in how I felt about things and how one's Judaism is derived when you come out of a home that is kosher and observant in that respect. She always had these, you know, help in the house that knew as much or more about it than most Jewish people do. She taught them well. She was a wonderful cook. But they were both European, they both spoke, I am told, with heavy accents, particularly my father. I didn't hear accents, you know. But . . .

Sandy: . . . Did they speak Russian when they didn't want you to understand something?

Phyllis: No, no. Yiddish, Yiddish.

Sandy: No? Yiddish.

Phyllis: Yiddish. They did not speak Russian. My father wanted to be an American. This was the most marvelous, wonderful country in the world.

Sandy: And yet he married a woman from Russia.

Phyllis: Oh, but he loved this country like nothing else. And when he was ninety years old, he - and feeble, he did not miss going to vote. I mean, this was the most marvelous privilege to be had was to vote, to have a voice.

Sandy: We always ask people if they feel like their parents' values were transmitted to them, and knowing you a little bit, I think they really were. Your feeling . . . you have been involved . . .

Phyllis: Well . . .

Sandy: . . . with the Democratic Party. You're going to a Planned Parenthood meeting, you just told me. And you're involved in synagogue today. So . . .

Phyllis: Well, yeah. I think that very definitely values have transmitted. Sometimes we don't think it's happening, but it does, obviously. But, the good and the bad. <Laughs> No, those are the values that I think meant so much to them both, so I mean English was the language spoken. And yet, Sandy, they in this little town where there weren't Jews and there was nothing Jewish about it, their identity as Jews was so important. When we were closing the store a couple of years ago, it's amazing how people came in, so many people, with stories about what they did, what my father and mother did for them.

Sandy: To help them, you mean?

Phyllis: Uh-huh, farmers and people that he gave things on credit to . . . people he gave things to at no cost because he was just . . . they were good people.

Sandy: Uh-huh.

Phyllis: And I don't mean to make saints out of them, that's not what I'm intending to do here. But what I'm saying is that it was just an acceptance in this town of Jewish people who were Jewish, who were

sure of themselves, who—when I say, sure of their identify as Jews and as their place in the world in the scheme of everything. And I think with that attitude, you were accepted well.

Sandy: And they were very secure with their Judaism?

Phyllis: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

Sandy: And then, of course, could come to Atlanta and have this wonderful core of family.

Phyllis: That's right.

Sandy: What were services like at AA? What do you remember about services at the synagogue?

Phyllis: Well, services were on Washington Street . . . where it was at that time.

Sandy: Rabbi Epstein²¹ was there already?

Phyllis: Rabbi Epstein. Very formal services and very dignified.

Sandy: The men and women sit . . .

Phyllis: . . . Men and women were separated.

Sandy: . . . separate at that time.

Phyllis: Upstairs was the women's section, and I would sit there with my . . . We had a bench where we always sat, the same bench whenever we were there. My mother and my sisters and I. I'm trying to think if there were any other female relatives. I think Fanny, Fanny was with us. But family at that point was scattered. My mother's sister went to Shearith Israel for some time. I think the Londons were there too, at AA, or Anshi S'fard.²² But anyhow, that's immaterial. And downstairs, of course, at the same pew, I can still see my father and his brother and the brother's sons and my brother sitting there. And the men all had on felt hats. There were no yarmulkes. They wore . . .

Sandy: . . . Really . . .

Phyllis: . . . felt hats. And . . . when I see an old photograph with that, it's very nostalgic.

Sandy: So, you looked down on these brimmed hats?

Phyllis: Uh-huh, uh-huh. And we'd see the cantors stand in the center of the synagogue and the rabbi

²¹ Rabbi Harry Epstein (1903-2003) served as the rabbi of Ahavath Achim Synagogue in Atlanta, Georgia from 1928 to 1982. Under his leadership the congregation began to shift to Conservatism, which they adopted in 1952. Rabbi Epstein retired in 1982, becoming Rabbi Emeritus and Rabbi Arnold Goodman assumed the rabbinic post.

²² Congregation Anshi S'fard is an Orthodox synagogue located in Atlanta. It was founded in 1911 to provide a home for Hasidic worship and fellowship for Jews from Poland, Galicia and the Ukraine who had settled in Atlanta. At first the congregation met in the Red Men's Hall on Central Avenue, but by the end of 1913 a wooden building at the corner of Woodward Avenue and King Street was secured. A few years later the congregation moved to the corner of Woodward and Capitol Avenues. After 1945, the settlement of Jews where Anshi S'fard was located disappeared. Anshi S'fard moved to its present location on North Highland, in the Morningside area. It is the oldest Orthodox congregation in Atlanta.

would . . .

Sandy: . . . Like Beth Jacob²³ today, then?

Phyllis: Yeah, exactly, exactly.

Sandy: Because it was more religious . . .

Phyllis: . . . Yeah, yeah . . .

Sandy: . . . more traditional at that time.

Phyllis: Uh-huh.

Sandy: And do you remember any stories about Rabbi Epstein? Did you have a relationship with him in those early years?

Phyllis: Well, yes and no. <Laughs> Rabbi Epstein was a man to be admired. I mean, it wasn't . . . it was a relationship of respect and admiration. Rabbi Epstein didn't cotton to young people too much, and as years go by and the various classes came up, whether it was a graduating class or a confirmation class . . . well, maybe Rabbi Epstein should have left that to the assistant rabbi to do because he had very little patience with *any* disruption. And when you've got a bunch of teenagers, there's going to be some.

Sandy: Uh-huh.

Phyllis: I was never a victim of his wrath personally, but I was a witness to it. <Laughs> And it was most uncomfortable.

Sandy: Uh-huh. Well, you weren't a cut-up or anything like that because you took it very seriously.

Phyllis: No, I wasn't a cut-up, no. Probably missed a lot of fun, Sandy.

Sandy: <Laughs> Well, your parents, like you said, said this was serious business. Did you have a bat mitzvah?²⁴

Phyllis: No.

Sandy: No. Girls didn't have . . .

²³ Beth Jacob is an Orthodox synagogue on LaVista Road in Atlanta founded in 1942 by former members of Ahavath Achim who were looking for a more Orthodox congregation. Beth Jacob is now Atlanta's largest Orthodox congregation. The congregation first met in a rented grocery store on Parkway Drive. It moved to a permanent location on Boulevard when it purchased and renovated a two-story apartment building. In 1956, it converted the Tabernacle Baptist Church on Boulevard to a synagogue. It built its current synagogue building on a five-acre lot on LaVista Road in 1961. Rabbi Joseph Safra was the congregation's first permanent rabbi in 1951, followed by Rabbi Emanuel Feldman from 1952 to 1991. Rabbi Ilan Feldman has been the congregation's rabbi since his father Emanuel's retirement in 1991.

²⁴ Hebrew for 'daughter of commandment.' A rite of passage for Jewish girls aged 12 years and one day according to her Hebrew birthday. Many girls have their *bat mitzvah* around age 13, the same as boys who have their *bar mitzvah* at that age. She is now duty bound to keep the commandments. Synagogue ceremonies are held for *bat mitzvah* girls in Reform and Conservative communities, but it has not won the universal approval of Orthodox rabbis.

Phyllis: . . . Well, they weren't . . . I think a couple may have just started around that time, but no. I really had no Hebrew education because of . . .

Sandy: . . . Just had the Sunday School?

Phyllis: Yeah, uh-huh.

Sandy: Now did your brother Herb have a bar mitzvah?²⁵

Phyllis: My brother Herbert did have a bar mitzvah, and I'm not sure how they handled, how they pulled that off, you know.

Sandy: But it was at the AA?

Phyllis: But I can remember . . .

Sandy: . . . Do you remember it?

Phyllis: No, I can't remember the service at the AA, but I can remember the party at my aunt's house.

Sandy: Now which aunt was that?

Phyllis: The Londons.

Sandy: Okay.

Phyllis: I can remember it because they put me on the table to, again, you know, the baby, to show. And I can remember singing, "God Bless America." <Laughs> And I don't remember much else about it, except it was my brother's bar mitzvah and a very happy . . .

Sandy: And you were—how much younger are you?

Phyllis: I am six years younger.

Sandy: So, you were about six or seven?

Phyllis: . . . Uh-huh . . .

Sandy: . . . when you did that?

Phyllis: Uh-huh. <Laughs>

Sandy: Well, you must have been adorable.

Phyllis: But . . .

Sandy: . . . The apple of your daddy's eye, it sounds like.

²⁵ 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.

Phyllis: Yeah.

Sandy: Yeah?

Phyllis: That's what it boils down to. It really and truly does . . . that's what it boils down to. But it was mutual. Anyhow, so Carrollton was a good, happy life. I was very unhappy to come to Atlanta.

Sandy: Really?

Phyllis: Oh, yes.

Sandy: At thirteen. You were unhappy because . . .

Phyllis: . . . Yeah, we moved here because my sister who was three years older was starting to date. And the only way she could have a date would be to come to Atlanta. I mean, there were no Jewish boys in Carrollton, so then she was not permitted to date non-Jewish boys. So, we came to Atlanta. But she would come on Saturdays and spent the night with her girlfriend.

Sandy: Maybe that was another reason you got this little house where you could come Saturday.

Phyllis: No, she would come in and spend the night with Shirley Wolson and Shirley Goodman.

Sandy: Wolson is . . .

Phyllis: . . . Wolson has moved away.

Sandy: But it's W-O- . . .

Phyllis: -L-S-O-N. And Shirley Goodman was Shirley Diamond . . .

Sandy: . . . Oh . . .

Phyllis: . . . who recently passed away.

Sandy: Yeah.

Phyllis: Yeah, Leonard Diamond's wife. But those were Elaine's two best friends, and she would come to them and spend the night. She just got so tired of being . . . she felt like such a nomad, and it was time. It was time for the family to consider moving, and we did. And she cried to move to Atlanta and I cried to stay in Carrollton, but she won out on that deal.

Sandy: And so, at age thirteen . . .

Phyllis: . . . We moved . . .

Sandy: . . . you were uprooted, so to speak.

Phyllis: Uh-huh. I was terrified, Sandy. I was terrified of this town, of this city, moving here. I was very shy, and just scared. It was a big change.

Sandy: Uh-huh, right. To the big city.

Phyllis: Uh-huh.

Sandy: Comfort in knowing everybody, I guess, in that small little town. Where did you move to?

Phyllis: Vedado Way.

Sandy: Vedado Way, in that little house. And did you have your own room by then?

Phyllis: No.

Sandy: You were still sharing your room. So, what do you remember about Atlanta then? Did you go to movies? Did you . . .

Phyllis: . . . Well . . .

Sandy: . . . go to . . . I mean, what kind of activities?

Phyllis: I went to Henry Grady High School.²⁶ That was the first year that Henry Grady was co-ed. It had been Boys' High.²⁷ And they made it co-ed, so that class was the first class that started in the eighth grade and went to Grady. And Vedado Way . . . I lived about three houses from the school. That's what I remember the most. I could sleep an extra fifteen minutes in the morning. <Laughs>

Sandy: So, it was down . . . Grady High School, the same . . .

Phyllis: Yeah. Over there on Sixth – is it Parkway Drive? Charles Allen, by Piedmont Park.

Sandy: Park, uh-huh.

Phyllis: Yeah. Tenth Street borders it from one side.

Sandy: Uh-huh. And so that's where you started in eighth grade . . .

Phyllis: . . . That's right, uh-huh . . .

Sandy: . . . when you moved here?

Phyllis: Yeah.

Sandy: And you lived around the corner?

Phyllis: Well, less than around the corner. <Laughs>

Sandy: You opened . . .

Phyllis: . . . A stone's throw, that's right.

Sandy: You could open the school in the morning.

Phyllis: That's right, exactly. And Grady was very Jewish. I met a lot of Jewish kids that went there.

Sandy: What percentage would you say?

²⁶ Henry W. Grady High School is located in Atlanta, Georgia, United States. It is one of the first two high schools established by Atlanta Public Schools in 1872.

²⁷ Boys' High School was founded in 1924 and is now known as Henry W. Grady High School. It is part of the Atlanta Public School System. It has had many notable alumni, including S. Truett Cathy, the founder of Chick-fil-A. It is located in Midtown Atlanta.

Phyllis: Well, I would guess there had to have been maybe twenty-five, thirty percent Jewish.

Sandy: Percent Jewish?

Phyllis: I think so. And that's a guess, but I would think so.

Sandy: Uh-huh.

Phyllis: It was . . . I can remember going to the lunchroom and not knowing anybody and being just mortified that I would have to sit by myself. So, I left. I would go home, and I would cry throughout my lunch period, and then I'd go back, you know, for the next class. And that went on for a while. And then gradually you'd meet a person here or there that you'd sit with. And . . .

Sandy: . . . None of your cousins? I mean, you did have . . .

Phyllis: . . . No . . . well, first of all, they were all older.

Sandy: Uh-huh. They were older?

Phyllis: Except for Bobby.

Sandy: That's right, 'cause you were the baby.

Phyllis: Bobby was young. Bobby London is a year and a half younger than I am, and everybody else was older. And they didn't live on around there at that time. They'd already moved. So, they didn't go to that school, you know. It was scary. It was real scary. And, of course, I think it was partially just me, you know, because I didn't want to be there. But . . . I then joined the DOZ, which was a Jewish social club. I mean, it was very much like the BBG²⁸ chapters except we were not affiliated with BBG.

Sandy: What did DOZ stand for?

Phyllis: Daughters of Zion.

Sandy: Oh, Daughters—okay.

Phyllis: My sister was already a member, and so they were the Alpha Club, and they took in a Beta Club which I joined. And you had to be invited in to do it, see. But I was a legacy. After I left, it was already there. And all of my friends came from that, and they are to this day, to a great degree.

Sandy: People like . . .?

Phyllis: Like Babs Levitas, Babs Hillman Levitas; Jane Lewis Axelrod, Elinor Rittenbaum who passed away a good many years ago now with breast cancer. She was Elinor Carl. And Margie Shure.

²⁸ B'nai B'rith Girls or BBG is the female order of the B'nai B'rith Youth Organization (BBYO), a youth movement that grew out of B'nai B'rith International, a Jewish service organization. BBG was founded in 1944 for teenage Jewish girls. Chapters of girls soon sprung up throughout the United States and Canada. Today, it is an international sorority. The male brother order is the Aleph Zadik Aleph (AZA).

Sandy: How do you spell that?

Phyllis: S-H-U-R-E. I'm just thinking of some of the names that are still—oh, Jean Goldstein.

Sandy: So, you met at the Jewish Community Center?²⁹

Phyllis: Well . . . our meetings were either at the Jewish Alliance . . .

Sandy: . . . Alliance at that time . . .

Phyllis: . . . or at . . . our private homes, we would meet.

Sandy: What was the purpose? Was it just social?

Phyllis: Well, it was a social club, but like all . . . you have to have a reason for being. And we did things. I remember . . . one of the things was . . . we belonged to the Youth Council in the city. And then all the kids' clubs belonged to AZA³⁰ and BBG and the few independent clubs. We had a Youth Council in the city.

Sandy: How was this different from BBG?

Phyllis: It's not.

Sandy: It's not. It was the same thing? It was . . .

Phyllis: . . . No, it wasn't the same thing as BBG, but it was a club.

Sandy: A club where . . .

Phyllis: . . . Whereas BBG you have a national affiliation.

Sandy: Okay. Yours was a local . . .

Phyllis: Yeah . . .

Sandy: . . . group.

Phyllis: Strictly local.

Sandy: Okay. Some girls were . . .

Phyllis: . . . It had been in existence for . . . it had been in existence several, not generations, but groups and girls before us. Virginia Saul, I think you said she's active in this . . .

Sandy: . . . Yes.

²⁹ The Atlanta Jewish Federation was formally incorporated in 1967 and is the result of the merger of the Atlanta Federation for Jewish Social Service founded in 1905 as the Federation of Jewish Charities; the Atlanta Jewish Welfare Federation founded in 1936 as the Atlanta Jewish Welfare Fund; and the Atlanta Jewish Community Council founded in 1945. The organization was renamed the Jewish Federation of Greater Atlanta in 1997.

³⁰ The Grand Order of the Aleph Zadik Aleph (AZA) is an international youth-led fraternal organization for Jewish teenagers, founded in 1924. It currently exists as the male wing of B'nai B'rith Youth Organization, an independent non-profit organization. AZA's sister organization, for teenage girls, is the B'nai B'rith Girls (BBG). The *Aleph Godoh* is the president.

Phyllis: She was a member of DOZ, her group of friends.

Sandy: So, would you belong to DOZ as opposed to BBG?

Phyllis: Yeah, yeah.

Sandy: You would make a decision either . . .

Phyllis: Exactly.

Sandy: Was it supposed to be an honor to be invited into DOZ as opposed to . . .

Phyllis: . . . Oh, yes . . .

Sandy: . . . It had more status . . .

Phyllis: . . . Yeah . . .

Sandy: . . . as opposed to BBG here in . . .

Phyllis: . . . That's right. That's right, exactly. I mean, you know, in little girl terms.

Sandy: Uh-huh.

Phyllis: In fact, I didn't . . . we did have blackballs and that sort of thing. It was really, when you think back on it, it was awful.

Sandy: Blackballs?

Phyllis: Blackball . . .

Sandy: . . . Oh, like blackballing people.

Phyllis: Yeah.

Sandy: Yeah, like a sorority.

Phyllis: And people we would name were brought up and not everybody got in. And I have a friend today, who will remain nameless, who tells me how hurt she was by . . .

Sandy: . . . That she wasn't asked?

Phyllis: I didn't know her then. She's several years younger than I am. But she said she was just . . .

.

Sandy: . . . Devastated that she wasn't . . .

Phyllis: . . . Yeah, devastated that she didn't get into it.

Sandy: So, this was the group of girls that were kind of the movers and shakers, or thought they were, anyway.

Phyllis: Thought they were, yeah, that's right. Exactly.

Sandy: The most "popular" girls were in this little group or the most . . .

Phyllis: . . . Yeah, I guess so . . . no, I don't know that that's true. But we thought we were.

Sandy: Uh-huh.

Phyllis: We thought we were hot stuff, you know.

Sandy: What kind of things do you remember doing?

Phyllis: Oh, you mean other than social? <Laughs>

Sandy: Social and . . .

Phyllis: Oh, well, social was basketball at the Alliance. Basketball at the Alliance was the big highlight of the . . .

Sandy: . . . The girls played? . . .

Phyllis: . . . Jewish youth activity in Atlanta. I mean, not just DOZ, but part of the basketball league. And the Alliance was over on Capitol Avenue. Are you familiar with what I'm talking about?

Sandy: Tell me more about it.

Phyllis: Alright. The Jewish Educational Alliance³¹ was on Capitol Avenue. And there was an old building and getting over there was a hassle because everybody already, in this group, lived on the north side of town. And . . .

Sandy: . . . North side of town being Grady High School?

Phyllis: That's right.

Sandy: That was the north side of town then?

Phyllis: Right, that's right. That was the north side of town. And Johnson Road, that area in there, do you know where I'm talking . . . which is now Midtown really.

Sandy: Right, right.

Phyllis: All of that area was in north side. A few had begun to move a little further out, Peachtree Battle, but not many. I mean, that was just a handful.

Sandy: The Inmans.

Phyllis: Right. But, I mean, Sussex Road, Berkshire, Johnson, those are the streets that everybody lived on. But we stayed on Vedado. Anyhow, the Alliance was the focal point . . .

Sandy: . . . Down on Capitol Avenue . . .

³¹ The Jewish Educational Alliance (JEA) operated from 1910 to 1948 on the site where the Atlanta- Fulton County Stadium was located. The JEA was once the hub of Jewish life in Atlanta. Families congregated there for social, educational, sports and cultural programs. The JEA ran camps and held classes to help some new residents learn to read and write English. For newcomers, it became a refuge, with programs to help them acclimate to a new home. The JEA stayed at that site until the late 1940's, when it evolved into the Atlanta Jewish Community Center and moved to Peachtree Street. It stayed there until 1998, when the building was sold and the center moved to Dunwoody. In 2000, it was renamed the 'Marcus Jewish Community Center of Atlanta.'

Phyllis: . . . On Capitol Avenue was the focal point of Jewish a teenage existence.

Sandy: Where was it on Capitol?

Phyllis: Oh, golly. It's . . . Georgia Avenue was about a block or two north of the old Alliance. I can't remember the actual cross street . . . but Georgia Avenue would have been the main cross street, not far from where the stadium is now.

Sandy: Today?

Phyllis: Yeah.

Sandy: Right.

Phyllis: And everything happened at the Alliance. Meetings, adult as well as teenage meetings, took place there. And in the back, they built a big gymnasium where everybody played basketball. And they had a basketball league, the guys and the girls.

Sandy: So, did you go to watch the guys play?

Phyllis: Oh, always, always. Most definitely. And we'd go by [inaudible] or play. I was not a basketball player. I was much too clumsy to play basketball. I just couldn't do it. But I always was there, and my friends all played. I mean, gosh, Elinor and Jane, they were mean on the basketball court. Barbara Orkin was in our group, and she was a good basketball player. Anyhow, we had a lot of fun.

Sandy: And you'd go there on Sundays?

Phyllis: And we'd spend Sunday at the Alliance. It was just the thing to do. And as the Youth League became a very important thing in the city at that time . . . at least, it was important to me because I became active in that. It was like the student council of the social aspect of being a young Jewish teenager. And . . .

Sandy: . . . The Youth League?

Phyllis: Yeah . . . I don't know any other name for it now, Youth Council, whatever. It must have been a Youth Council, representatives from all the various organizations.

Sandy: From . . . so in other words, you . . .

Phyllis: See, BBG had chapters.

Sandy: So, the various chapter heads were on this . . .

Phyllis: Yeah, yeah.

Sandy: And you as a representative from DOZ.

Phyllis: That was a very important organization. We kind of planned what was going to happen in the community as far as . . .

Sandy: . . . Dances and . . .

Phyllis: . . . teenage activities and the things we would do together . . . even then, we had a community calendar to clear, among the youth, to clear dates and things, because everybody had their big annual dance. I mean, you needed formals galore in your closet. And at the time, there was a woman called Mrs. Hancock who would make all the girls' evening dresses, and then make over the evening dresses to look different the next year. But those were big, big . . . that was a big part of our lives, going to the annual formals.

Sandy: Where did they hold them?

Phyllis: Well . . .

Sandy: . . . At hotels or . . .

Phyllis: . . . They're in hotels usually. The Ansley, Henry Grady Hotel³², they were all downtown [inaudible] was a room. And . . . there would be, you know, a banquet and a dance. And all the community would be invited. The other clubs would all be invited to come to the dance. You had your own banquet, just your members and dates. But then . . .

Sandy: . . . Afterwards, you opened it up? . . .

Phyllis: . . . the dance, it opened up. And it was all very . . . I mean, I guess we were playing debutantes. We would have flowered archways where we'd walk out with our dates, you know.

Sandy: Where did your funds come from, monies to do these things?

Phyllis: We would do money raising things all through the year, various events. We would have a night club evening when we would charge admission or a talent show, or we would sell raffle tickets. I'm trying to remember some of the dumb things we did. But we would raise money all year long for this. And then we would have an assessment on top of it. So . . . it was a big thing, and [inaudible] we had the prophesy in the newspaper. We'd print it in the newspaper several times a year. Oh golly, looking back on it, Sandy, it was all-consuming. I mean, it was our lives . . .

Sandy: Well . . . So, your life really revolved around your Jewish friends?

Phyllis: Yeah, absolutely.

Sandy: Did you have any friends that weren't Jewish or not really?

Phyllis: Well, in those days, not any social friends.

³² The Henry Grady Hotel was a 13-story hotel located at the corner of Peachtree Street and Cain Street (now Andrew Young International Boulevard) in Atlanta from 1924-1972. It was named after Henry Grade, Georgia's most celebrated orator. After the Grady was demolished, the Westin Peachtree Plaza was built on the site.

Sandy: No?

Phyllis: No.

Sandy: Or black friends or anything like that?

Phyllis: No, never black friends. Although, I tell you, I don't think there was ever . . . well, I know in my family there was no prejudice, but it was separate. It was separate. There was never any mixing of black and white.

Sandy: Did you feel any anti-Semitism growing up, at Grady High School or in the community?

Phyllis: Almost none. Almost none.

Sandy: Because you really were just so involved with this?

Phyllis: Almost none. But I'll tell you, I think . . . this was my social life . . . I think what became my religion in these years was the Holocaust. I think all through my younger years, it was part of my awareness, what was happening in Europe. And there was a big sign in the store in Carrollton, "This store will be closed for Hitler's funeral." We are gonging, you know, that kind of thing. It was always a big part of my parents' conversation. But later, when I became old enough and aware enough to know about it, I think it became really the most important focal issue in my Judaism. I don't know if . . . I'm sure people have experienced that, but it was very, very important to be Jewish because we couldn't, you know, give Hitler his victory.

Sandy: Uh-huh. A lot of kids today don't always feel that way.

Phyllis: No. But, I mean, but this was a very important issue. And it remained that way for most of my life, it really has. It's been a very, very important issue in my life, in my formulation.

Sandy: So, did you . . .

Phyllis: No, it was even in these years. There were things being done. I can't remember what exactly now, but there were things that we did about that, you know, as a group. And there were things we did. We used to go, some of us would go . . . and we did these things individually and we did them in the group. We'd go to . . . at that time, Scottish Rite had a hospital over . . . a little small place, almost like a little residence center . . . around Juniper Street. And we'd go there on Saturdays, sit with [inaudible]. I'd do that on Saturday mornings, go feed the children and try to teach them to talk, mostly the cerebral palsy . . . children there at that time.

Sandy: And was this a DOZ activity or was this just you?

Phyllis: Well, we talked about it, but it never got off the ground. Just a couple of us just did it.

Sandy: So, would you say most people did not get involved in community outreach like you?

Phyllis: Not most. I mean, some of these gals were already dating at thirteen or fourteen, and then were married. So, their lives were a little bit different in that respect. Then . . . I think everybody . . . it was a good group, nice group of people. Not always the most involved group, but a good group. And very close friends. I can remember at the Alliance sitting one night in a meeting, and Meyer Balser³³ presenting a big poster, a visual, on a stand about the new center that was proposed.

Sandy: The new Jewish center?

Phyllis: Yeah. I mean, those of us that are seeing . . . you know, it'll never happen, not in our lifetimes . . . we were such skeptics. And besides, we didn't think there was anything a lot better than what we had, but we were so skeptical. And . . . oh, no, it's going to happen. And then they bought the building on Peachtree Road, and the Alliance became kind of passé and everything moved to Peachtree. And it was an old house, and it wasn't a building . . .

Sandy: . . . Is that right?

Phyllis: Yeah, it was just an old . . .

Sandy: . . . They bought an old house? . . .

Phyllis: . . . a big, old house on that property. And that's where [inaudible] . . .

Sandy: . . . But what'd you do about the basketball? . . .

Phyllis: . . . But we still went over to . . .

Sandy: . . . Capitol Avenue? . . .

Phyllis: . . . for the basketball. But softball became important, also, and they had a softball field in back of the old house. Before that, we played softball, the girls' and the boys' leagues – and I did play softball, if not basketball. Softball was my sport, at Piedmont Park. And that was a Sunday morning activity, and I lived close enough to walk.

Sandy: Uh-huh.

Phyllis: I mean, that was great.

Sandy: Well, it sounds like from maybe an unhappy beginning here . . .

Phyllis: . . . Uh-huh . . .

³³ Atlanta native Meyer Balser (1908-2004) was a business and civic leader. He served as chairman of the Red Cross and Community Chest (predecessor to United Way) campaigns. He was twice named 'Man of the Year' of Massachusetts Mutual Life Insurance Company where he was a leading insurance agent for many years. He received numerous accolades and awards for his leadership in Atlanta's Jewish community including the Atlanta Jewish Community Center and the Atlanta Jewish Federation. The Meyer Balser Naturally Occurring Retirement Community at the William Breman Jewish Home which offers programs and services to help seniors live independently in their own homes is named in his honor. A book about his life by Vida Goldgar, *A Goal Worth Shooting For: The Biography Of Meyer Balser*, was published in 1998.

Sandy: . . . you became pretty involved and pretty happy very quickly.

Phyllis: Oh, yeah.

Sandy: I mean, even though you might remember some of those early traumatic moments.

Phyllis: No, those were just months. It was a very good Atlanta Jewish community. The only thing . . . in the teen years as far as growing up . . . there was a lot of us, and . . . there were a couple of things that were wrong, and that was there was no real mixing. There was your Ashkenazi³⁴ and there was your Sephardim³⁵ and your Reform³⁶. And ne'er the twain shall meet.

Sandy: Even at the Alliance, at this Youth Council that you were on?

Phyllis: Well, they would all be . . . well, the Temple wasn't represented.

Sandy: They had their own thing?

Phyllis: Yeah, they had their own thing. But the Ashkenazi and the Sephardic communities did both have representatives. And the boys seemed to mix more than the girls did. And I don't just mean DOZ girls. I mean, but there just wasn't a lot of mixing. Thank goodness there was some. I think I had some friends – Babs Hillman Levitas did, but other than that, there weren't a lot of us who mixed. And it was a shame, because too bad . . . that came later. And of course, now some of your most active leaders in the community are from the Sephardic community.

Sandy: Right. So, that was one bad thing then.

Phyllis: That was one bad thing, and the other bad thing is we grew up too fast. At fourteen, we were dating the college guys in town.

Sandy: From Tech?³⁷

³⁴ Ashkenazi is an ethnic division of Jews which formed in the Holy Roman Empire in the early 1000's. They established communities in Central and Eastern Europe.

³⁵ Sephardic Jews are the Jews of Spain, Portugal, North Africa and the Middle East and their descendants. The adjective "Sephardic" and corresponding nouns Sephardi (singular) and Sephardim (plural) are derived from the Hebrew word 'Sepharad,' which refers to Spain. Historically, the vernacular language of Sephardic Jews was *Ladino*, a Romance language derived from Old Spanish, incorporating elements from the old Romance languages of the Iberian Peninsula, Hebrew, Aramaic, and in the lands receiving those who were exiled, Ottoman Turkish, Arabic, Greek, Bulgarian and Serbo-Croatian vocabulary.

³⁶ A division within Judaism especially in North America and Western Europe. Historically it began in the nineteenth century. In general, the Reform movement maintains that Judaism and Jewish traditions should be modernized and compatible with participation in Western culture. While the *Torah* remains the law, in Reform Judaism women are included (mixed seating, *bat mitzvah* and women rabbis), music is allowed in the services and most of the service is in English.

³⁷ The Georgia Institute of Technology (commonly referred to as 'Georgia Tech' or 'Tech') is a public research university in Atlanta, Georgia, in the United States. It is a part of the University System of Georgia. The educational institution was founded in 1885 as the Georgia School of Technology as part of Reconstruction plans to build an industrial economy in the post-Civil War Southern United States.

Phyllis: Tech and Emory.³⁸

Sandy: Jewish?

Phyllis: Oh, always Jewish. Always Jewish.

Sandy: How did you meet them?

Phyllis: Well, they'd invite you to come to rush, which I never did. They had rush week for the freshman, and they would invite the girls in the city to come and be at the open house party and you'd meet people. I never did that. I thought that was kind of awful. I didn't like doing that. But you meet people. You met them around. You just met them, at parties.

Sandy: Were there hang-outs? Was there a drugstore, soda fountains, places like that, where you would go, the Varsity?³⁹ I mean, where . . .

Phyllis: The Varsity . . . nice girls did not go inside the Varsity. Everybody went to the Varsity on a date, but strictly . . .

Sandy: . . . to the drive-in?

Phyllis: Yes, strictly to the drive-in. You just didn't go in. Women did not go inside the Varsity. It was frowned upon.

Sandy: I see.

Phyllis: Uh-huh. But as far as hang-outs, it'd be . . .

Sandy: . . . Besides the Alliance?

Phyllis: No, because the social life became very, very packed with fraternity parties. And of course, the AZA chapters were having parties. And, you know, all of that. Everybody had parties, so you didn't really have to have a hang-out.

Sandy: I see. After school, you wouldn't all go any place around Grady where you all would meet after school or anything like that?

Phyllis: No. Unless it was my house.

Sandy: Was that a focal point, your house . . .

³⁸ Emory University is a private university in Atlanta. It was founded in 1836 by a small group of Methodists and named in honor of Methodist bishop John Emory. Today it has nearly 3,000 faculty members and is ranked 20th among national universities in *U.S. News & World Report's* 2014 rankings.

³⁹ The Varsity is an iconic chain restaurant serving burgers, hot dogs, fries, shakes, and other American classics. The original location was opened in 1928 but soon grew so popular it was relocated to its present location on North Avenue in Downtown Atlanta. Billed as America's largest drive-in, the present structure covers two city blocks and has the capacity to accommodate 600 patrons and 800 cars. The catchphrase, "What'll ya have?" once used by frazzled employees has become part of modern Atlanta culture.

Phyllis: Yeah.

Sandy: Because it was close to school and . . .

Phyllis: And my sister was only three years older than I, so she had her group of friends there and my group of friends there. So, there was always a lot of kids at my house.

Sandy: And how did you feel about being Jewish at that time?

Phyllis: I've loved being Jewish all my life. I really have. As far as anti-Semitism, I have encountered it so rarely that I have no big major incidents to relate, even as a young child in Carrollton. And I think one thing about Carrollton that helped as far as being Jewish, because I think there was anti-Semitism present . . . I mean, I wasn't stupid enough to know it wasn't there, among some people, but I just hadn't had no personal experiences. But one thing that may have made a difference, Sandy, is we were Southern, and we were very light, all blond as kids, and we all had light eyes.

Sandy: You didn't stand out?

Phyllis: No, we were fair-skinned, that's right. So, we fit right in. A family moved to Carrollton the year we left . . . we were there just a few months together . . . from Brooklyn, very swarthy. And really had the Northern accent. And those poor kids had an awful time being accepted into the community, into the school. So, I think that was what happened. But I had not experienced it before.

Sandy: Uh-huh.

Phyllis: It was a nice family. And it worked out for them. Everything worked out. They stayed in Carrollton. The kids went through school there. And I know them, I see them today, and they're fine. They weren't, you know, marked forever. But they had a hard time being accepted. But in Atlanta . . . first of all, in high school, your Jewish kids were generally your most academically successful, at Grady, I mean. Not totally, of course, but among the most successful.

Sandy: Was that where most of the Jewish kids went to school?

Phyllis: Uh-huh.

Sandy: Was Grady?

Phyllis: Uh-huh.

Sandy: There was no private schools then or . . .

Phyllis: . . . Well, Westminster was always around.

Sandy: But Jewish kids did not go then?

Phyllis: Well, I think some of your Temple . . .

Sandy: . . . Temple kids already were going there?

Phyllis: I think they were, yeah, but none of our crowd.

Sandy: None of the AA . . .

Phyllis: . . . None of our crowd went, that I knew of, in my generation.

Sandy: How did you feel about the Temple kids?

Phyllis: Well . . .

Sandy: . . . Resentful?

Phyllis: I ended up dating them. Never really had any real girlfriends in the crowd. I mean friendly, but not girlfriends. But the Ballyhoo⁴⁰ thing I was telling you about . . .

Sandy: . . . Yes, that's the next thing we're going to . . .

Phyllis: . . . that was a Temple thing.

Sandy: Okay. Now, you were queen of, you told me, Ball . . .

Phyllis: . . . Ballyhoo.

Sandy: Now, how do you spell Bally . . .

Phyllis: B-A-L-L-Y-H-O-O. <Laughs>

Sandy: Okay. Queen of the Ballyhoo. What did that mean?

Phyllis: Nothing. <Laughs> Nothing. It was . . . in those days, they voted on girls, you know. Names were proposed, and they voted. Ballyhoo was a . . . I had never heard of Ballyhoo except it was something that certain people went to in Birmingham, and in Atlanta. It was an exchange between Birmingham and Atlanta.

Sandy: Oh, okay. A Jewish . . . ?

Phyllis: A Jewish group. It was less than a club. It was more of a social thing. I don't know that they ever did anything worthwhile or, you know, productive. And I had never been to a Ballyhoo. It was a . . . they took turns, Atlanta and Birmingham.

Sandy: You had never been to a Ballyhoo . . .

Phyllis: . . . Yeah, that's right . . .

Sandy: . . . meaning Ballyhoo . . .

⁴⁰ From 1931 to the late 1950's, courtship weekends in southern cities included Montgomery, Alabama's 'Falcon,' Birmingham, Alabama's 'Jubilee,' Columbus, Georgia's 'Holly Days,' and Atlanta, Georgia's 'Ballyhoo.' They were attended by college-age Jewish youth from across the South who participated in rounds of breakfast dates, lunch dates, tea dance dates, early evening dates, late night dates, formal dances, and cocktail parties, with the goal of meeting a "nice Jewish boy or girl" who might well become a spouse.

Phyllis: . . . To the weekend, the Ballyhoo weekend.

Sandy: To the weekend, okay.

Phyllis: Yeah, I had never been to one . . .

Sandy: But someone invited you?

Phyllis: Yeah.

Sandy: A guy?

Phyllis: Uh-huh.

Sandy: From the Temple?

Phyllis: Yeah. And I don't know exactly how it happened.

Sandy: And then you were chosen queen?

Phyllis: Yeah.

Sandy: Was that wonderful? I mean, in your . . .

Phyllis: . . . Well, it would have been wonderful. But I had Bell's Palsy at that time. Have you ever heard of Bell's Palsy? Yeah, I had it on my face, my mouth was over here, and I was all twisted, and so it was diluted. It wasn't exactly wonderful for me that night. And I think that I was resented by the Temple girls that night because I was . . .

Sandy: . . . Chosen? . . .

Phyllis: . . . chosen, yeah. So that was not a particularly high point . . .

Sandy: . . . Happy memory.

Phyllis: Yeah, it was not a happy one. The other social things were great fun. I mean by being Sweetheart 518, the silly time.

Sandy: Yeah, now tell me about that again. You were Sweetheart of AZA 518.

Phyllis: Yeah, which was a chapter. And I wanted to play 518 in the Lottery, and don't you know it came up the other night.

Sandy: And you never played it?

Phyllis: I never played it. <Laughs>

Sandy: That'll teach you.

Phyllis: Uh-huh. I need to be more loyal, right. A dollar a day.

Sandy: So, how did you get to be sweetheart of that chapter? They just . . .

Phyllis: . . . They present names . . .

Sandy: . . . And voted?

Phyllis: And the guys vote. And you have a sweetheart and a court in those days. And just like the fraternities do, same thing.

Sandy: Uh-huh.

Phyllis: And we were playing, not house, we were playing fraternity and sorority in those days. But 518 was a nice group of guys.

Sandy: Like who? Who do you remember?

Phyllis: Oh, Harris Jacobs, Jerry Rittenbaum, Larry Greenberg, Earl Greenberg, they were twins, Freddy Seligman. Oh, golly, who else? Sanford Orkin, Phillip Sunshine.

Sandy: How does he spell his name? Sam . . .

Phyllis: . . . Sanford.

Sandy: Oh, Sanford -

Phyllis: Sanford.

Sandy: Oh, Orkin, Orkin, okay.

Phyllis: Phillip Sunshine.

Sandy: Sunshine. So, what were your duties as sweetheart of AZA?

Phyllis: To root for them at their games, to have a breakfast, like the closing, when they had their annual . . . well, that wasn't a duty, but it was always done . . . to have their closing meeting of the year, or rather dance of the year. After the dance I had a breakfast at my house.

Sandy: Sounds very much like the AZA and BBG when my kids were growing up . . .

Phyllis: . . . Probably . . .

Sandy: . . . being a sweetheart involved that kind of thing.

Phyllis: That sort of thing. Same thing, same thing. And it was fun. I mean, you always had a date at functions and their parties, and usually on Saturday night, too. So . . .

Sandy: Well, what did you do on Saturday nights . . . did you go to the movies . . .?

Phyllis: To the movies. Oh, our big thing was going to the Paradise Room⁴¹ in those days.

Sandy: Now the Paradise . . .

Phyllis: . . . For every special occasion, we went to the Paradise Room.

Sandy: Now, tell me about that.

Phyllis: Which was at Henry Grady – yeah, the Henry Grady Hotel. It was on the corner of Cain and

⁴¹ The Paradise Room was a popular dining and dancing club in the Henry Grady Hotel in Atlanta, Georgia.

Peachtree where the tall . . .

Sandy: . . . Westin Peachtree Plaza is?

Phyllis: Yeah, yeah, that's where it was. And the Paradise Room was, I guess you'd call it a night club. You know, you would go, and in fact I said to somebody recently, "What did we drink when we went there?" We did not drink alcohol.

Sandy: Drink liquor, I was going to ask.

Phyllis: I mean, I don't know what we drank. And they must have hated to see us coming . . .

<Laughs>

Sandy: . . . Cherry cokes . . .

Phyllis: . . . You know, the owners. Yeah. I guess that the guys sometimes would have a drink, if they . . . I don't remember anybody . . .

Sandy: . . . Did you smoke? Did the girls smoke?

Phyllis: Unfortunately, yeah.

Sandy: Yes?

Phyllis: Yeah, I started smoking at a very young age, and I hated it, that I did that. I mean, looking back on it, but I did. But I've got . . . not in my stacks of pictures, it seemed like every special occasion of growing up was marked by an evening at the Paradise Room with dates. And then brides would go there for luncheons. There was always . . . there was somebody there . . . whenever the girls started getting married, there was always a luncheon at the Paradise Room. But one thing we did is . . . there was music, live music, so there was dancing. We got all dressed up.

Sandy: Where did you shop? I mean, did you go to Rich's to look for your clothes or did . . .

Phyllis: . . . Yeah . . .

Sandy: . . . You said someone made your gowns for you, and remade.

Phyllis: Yeah. Rich's, Davidson's it was at the time instead of Macy's. There was a shop that a lot of the girls shopped at. It was more expensive.

Sandy: And what was that called?

Phyllis: I never bought anything . . . called Leon Frohsin's.

Sandy: F-RO- . . .

Phyllis: -H-S-I-N. And Isaacson's was around even in those days.

Sandy: Oh.

Phyllis: It was a little . . . it was on the first level of the Henry Grady . . . same corner I'm talking about.

Sandy: Oh

Phyllis: Had a little small shop there. They were still around.

Sandy: So, those who could afford it went to those fancier places to get their gowns and their clothes.

Phyllis: Uh-huh. Oh, and J.P. Allen⁴² and Reganstein's. I almost forgot those. Those were really [inaudible]. J.P. Allen was a very good place to shop. Reganstein's was a little fuddy-duddy, a little older.

Sandy: Your mother might . . .

Phyllis: . . . Yeah, that's right . . .

Sandy: . . . shop there.

Phyllis: That's right.

Sandy: And through all this your mother . . . did she enjoy this, dressing you up, getting you . . .

Phyllis: . . . She loved it. And she . . . my family did not have any wealth in those years, certainly, and in fact my father built back from the Depression . . .

Sandy: . . . The store in Carrollton?

Phyllis: Yeah, he built that store up. And the family was always comfortable, you know, at that point. I never knew we didn't have anything. Do you know what I mean? When we didn't have it, I didn't know it.

Sandy: Uh-huh.

Phyllis: And my mother always just maintained a very lovely demeanor and a lovely kind of home. I mean, it was simple, but it was always with such taste. It really was. She was quite a lady. She would just . . . as far as buying us clothes and doing that sort of a thing, it was, "These were the years when you need it," she would say. Sometimes I'd say, "Mama, you don't buy for yourself. You know, why are you doing this?" And she'd say, "Well, you need it." And she'd say, "I don't. I've got enough. I don't need anything." That would be her attitude about things. But she was very sweet. But this was actually . . . this was a privileged group of girls, I will say that. The big thing was to have an occasional sweater. <Laughs>

Sandy: Well, we are coming to the end of the tape, so we'll talk a little more about the social scene in Atlanta next time, and then get on to your years in college and . . .

Phyllis: . . . Sounds good to me . . .

Sandy: . . . and married life, and how you met your husband and all that.

⁴² J.P. Allen was a Department Store located on Peachtree Street and Cain Street (renamed Andrew Young International Boulevard) in Atlanta Georgia.

Phyllis: I met Joe during those years.

Sandy: The early years? Oh, well, we'll have to pursue that next time, then. Okay?

Phyllis: I feel like this is a lot of nothing.

Sandy: It's very important so that people will know what it was like growing up, because this is what it was like growing up here in Atlanta during those years, during the fifties.

Phyllis: Well, and the thing that probably made Atlanta so different as a town were the colleges here.

Sandy: I see.

Phyllis: And the fact that the . . .

Sandy: . . . You mixed with the college students? . . .

Phyllis: . . . that the college guys were dating thirteen and fourteen-year-old girls.

Sandy: Well, golly, we'll have to talk about that more next time.

Phyllis: Yeah, that was bad. That was not healthy.

Sandy: Okay. Thank you, Phyllis.

<End Tape 1, Side 2>

<Begin Tape 2, Side 1>

Sandy: This is Sandy Leff, and I am conducting my second interview with Phyllis Gershon Arnold for the Jewish Oral History Project of Atlanta, co-sponsored by the American Jewish Committee, the Atlanta Jewish Federation, and the National Council of Jewish Women. The date today is Thursday, December first, 1994, and we are currently in Phyllis's home at 2625 Mercedes Drive in Atlanta. And I see Phyllis has accumulated lots of materials since I was here last time, so she can elaborate on some things. Phyllis, did you want to start on some special . . .

Phyllis: . . . Well . . . what I really want to start with is I was thinking a lot . . . I went to the reunion at the Jewish History.

Sandy: You're talking about the Creating Community Exhibit?

Phyllis: Yeah, Creating Community Exhibit. A week ago, Sunday night, they had the reunion of Atlanta clubs.

Sandy: Did that jar a lot of memories for you?

Phyllis: Oh, it really did. It really did. A lot of memories, not only from the video which was marvelous, and the exhibit which was wonderful. I mean, I think everything that's been done there is outstanding. And for the group of people that have put time and effort into something that's just turned out beautifully. And, but that day, you didn't need videos or pictures or anything, it was people. It was just full of everybody in the know. Everybody was there. And although you see these people in Atlanta frequently, seeing everybody together for the reason that everybody was there was a very, very emotional experience for me. And they were taking the pictures of all the clubs, all the teenage clubs that we had, individual pictures, they would group people together, after the videos. And that was fun. That was really nice.

Sandy: Phyllis, I just thought of something . . . is that your dishwasher . . .

Phyllis: . . . Let me turn it off . . .

Sandy: . . . in the background? Do you mind?

Phyllis: Not a bit.

Sandy: I'll remind you before I leave -

Phyllis: Let me get it. Okay. <Interruption in tape>

Sandy: Phyllis, thank you for turning off the dishwasher. <Laughs> And now we're back talking about Creating Community, the Jews of Atlanta, 1845 to the present. And you were telling us about your visit there.

Phyllis: Well, you just see, it's on tape, Sandy. I do wash dishes. <Laughs> I do sometimes do something domestic around here. Anyhow, it was a wonderful evening. And everybody was so happy to see everybody else. It was almost like it was this huge family reunion. And it was just great. It was a wonderful evening. And hearing about a lot of it made me think about how many of the things that were being said on the video by, well, Lyons Joel particularly, I guess, was my contemporary.

Sandy: Now, what is that name again?

Phyllis: Lyons Joel. And in the video . . .

Sandy: . . . Is that L - . . .

Phyllis: L-Y-O-N-S. He was talking about the same era that I grew up, when he spoke. And then there was Meyer Balsler and Sidney Feldman, and they were talking about things of when the community started growing and expanding from the south side to the north side. And those are memories. I mean, all of those things came flooding back and how all these things felt and what they meant to us. We grew up in a wonderfully privileged time. We really did . . .

Sandy: . . . You felt secure . . .

Phyllis: . . . My generation. Secure, innocent, but tremendously idealistic. It was like growing up in the best in . . . of many worlds. We lived in a city that was growing, very vibrant, went to schools with Jewish and non-Jewish people, obviously, had friendships in school but not a lot of out-of-school friendships. Because the out-of-school friendships were all Jewish, all centered around the clubs, the Alliance. So, we had the best of all worlds there. I, personally, rarely encountered any kind of anti-Semitism or prejudice from anyone. And it was like being in a very protected society as far as the years of growing, almost like a small town would be. Atlanta even then wasn't small. Maybe it was partially a Southern Jewish community. I don't know how much that impacted on it. I'm not certain. I started thinking about the things that really influenced me, and I feel like I'm rambling.

Sandy: No, it's good.

Phyllis: But one of the big influences in my life originally, and I wonder about other people who are my age, was the Second World War. Second World War really, really formed a lot of feelings. I can remember that was . . . I'm going back, now, of course, before the teenage years and then this time was the time I lived in Carrollton. That was in . . . the War started in 1941, I was seven. And it was a lot of patriotism, a lot of good feeling about this country.

Sandy: For Jews as well as non-Jews?

Phyllis: Uh-huh. Uh-huh.

Sandy: Jews felt very patriotic.

Phyllis: You know, us kids would go out and collect scrap metal and tin foil and all the things for the war drive. In school, we would buy savings stamps. They used to sell – did you know they used to sell not just bonds, but you could buy a book, like a green stamp book, except they were savings stamps. And you filled up the book with stamps, and when you got the book full . . . you could go turn that in for a bond.

Sandy: And children did that?

Phyllis: Children did that. In school, usually . . . every week, you'd take your money to buy your savings stamps from the school.

Sandy: Was that almost before you used to keep the little blue boxes for Israel?

Phyllis: Well . . . no. Blue boxes were before that.

Sandy: Before that?

Phyllis: Yeah, in Hadassah⁴³, blue boxes were always . . .

Sandy: . . . They were always in your kitchen. Do you remember a blue box in your kitchen . . . ?

Phyllis: Yeah, yeah. Always.

Sandy: All the time?

Phyllis: Always. Even living out of Atlanta, my mother had a blue box in the kitchen. That was just something you did.

Sandy: In Carrollton and . . .

Phyllis: . . . If something good happened, you put the coin in the *pushke*.⁴⁴ If something . . . not so good happened, you put a coin in the *pushke*. You know, it was just something, it was habit. I've got one. It's not sitting out but it's in the Cabinet, but on Shabbos⁴⁵ I put a coin in the *pushke*. You know, it's just habit.

Sandy: Ingrained in you now.

Phyllis: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

Sandy: And so, you applied those same principles almost to saving for the war effort?

Phyllis: Yes, and we would - in fact . . . we would have contests as I got a few years older. We would go out in the community and try to sell bond, and you'd receive prizes. I remember the year I received a prize. This was in Carrollton. I received a prize of a bond for selling the most bonds. It was . . . everything was towards the war effort. The country, or at least that little town, was united as one working together towards the war effort or for the war effort.

Sandy: I know you told me last time you were so affected by the Holocaust, and that that had left its mark on you, you felt.

Phyllis: Uh-huh, uh-huh. I think it did.

Sandy: At the time, do you remember hearing stories? Did you know what was going on?

⁴³ *Hadassah*, the Women's Zionist Organization of America, is a volunteer organization founded in 1912 by Henrietta Szold, with more than 300,000 members and supporters worldwide. It supports health care and medical research, education and youth programs in Israel, and advocacy, education, and leadership development in the United States.

Hadassah Greater Atlanta (HGA), the metro Atlanta chapter of *Hadassah*, was founded in 1916.

⁴⁴ Yiddish, from the Polish word '*puszka*,' which means 'tin can.' A box in the home or the synagogue used to collect money for donation to the poor.

⁴⁵ *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.

Phyllis: To a degree. You knew that it was bad. You knew it was really bad for the Jews. Yeah, you knew that.

Sandy: Did you know about the immigrants that were being turned away from the . . .

Phyllis: No, I did not personally. As a child, I never heard that. Of course, Franklin Roosevelt⁴⁶ was the hero of my father's whole life. I mean, he stacked right up there with Chaim Nahman Bialik⁴⁷ and Shalom Aleichem⁴⁸ and all of those people that my father admired so much. But we would sit . . . I can still see the chair and the radio and everybody . . . my father would sit in his chair with the radio at his ear. We would all go, “shh, shh,” quiet, listening to Franklin Roosevelt's fireside chats. I mean, nobody uttered a sound. That was a very important moment in our family. I mean, if you ask people now, young people, where were you when Kennedy was assassinated, they can tell you.

Sandy: Right.

Phyllis: Well, I can tell you exactly where I was when Roosevelt died.

Sandy: Where were you?

Phyllis: I was at the Ten Cent store on the Square in Carrollton with my girlfriend. And when we heard that Roosevelt was dead, I knew I had to go home.

Sandy: For your father?

Phyllis: Uh-huh. And it was very important to go home. Of course, the radio was just as vivid as any television accounting of the funeral. You remember the Cortège that would be . . . the train that

⁴⁶ Franklin Delano Roosevelt (1882-1945) was the 32nd President of the United States and a central figure in world events during the mid-twentieth century, leading the United States through a time of worldwide economic crisis and war. Popularly known as ‘FDR,’ he collapsed and died in his home in Warm Springs, Georgia just a few months before the end of the war. He was a Democrat. FDR was an avid horse rider and enjoyed an active early life. He was diagnosed with infantile paralysis, better known as polio, in 1921, at the age of 39. Despite permanent paralysis from the waist down, he was careful never to be seen using his wheelchair in public, and great care was taken to prevent any portrayal in the press that would highlight his disability.

⁴⁷ Chaim Nachman Bialik (1873-1934) was a Jewish poet who wrote primarily in Hebrew but also in Yiddish. Bialik was one of the pioneers of modern Hebrew poetry. Bialik ultimately came to be recognized as Israel's national poet. Bialik was born in the village of Radi near the city of Zhitomir in the Ukraine area of the Russian Empire. In 1903 Bialik was sent to investigate the Kishinev pogroms and prepare a report. In response to his findings Bialik wrote and published his poem *In the City of Slaughter*, a powerful statement of anguish at the situation of the Jews. Bialik's condemnation of passivity by Jews against antisemitic violence influenced the founding of Jewish self-defense groups in the Russian Empire, and eventually the Haganah in Palestine.

⁴⁸ Shalom Aleichem (Yiddish: “peace be with you”) was the pen name of author and playwright Solomon Naumovich Rabinovich, born in Russia in 1859 (d. 1916). Shalom Aleichem wrote in Russian and Hebrew at first but only in Yiddish after 1883, which earned him a place as a prominent Yiddish author by 1890. As pogroms raged through Russia in 1905, Aleichem immigrated to New York City, New York, but later joined his family in Geneva, Switzerland. The family moved to the Lower East Side of Manhattan, New York in 1914. Shalom Aleichem died of tuberculosis and diabetes in 1916. The musical *Fiddler on the Roof* was based on his stories about ‘Tevye the Milkman.’

went from Warm Springs to Washington. You listened to that on the radio, hour after hour. And it was very, very important. And I think these are the things that . . . I think all of these memories and feelings of patriotism, which unfortunately I don't think people feel today. I mean, I don't want a war to happen to cause patriotism, but I think . . . patriotism is very important for a nation to be able to rally around the flag, you know, to have that feeling. And it was a good feeling. It was good to be proud of your family, proud of your country, proud of your religion.

Sandy: You said last time your dad was so pleased to be an American.

Phyllis: Absolutely.

Sandy: How did he feel about Harry Truman and the creation of the State of Israel in 1948?⁴⁹

Phyllis: Just as enthusiastic. <Laughs> Very enthusiastic. I think that Truman really captured the imagination and the total delight of little people, of ordinary people.

Sandy: Were people like Eleanor Roosevelt⁵⁰ heroines to you?

Phyllis: Oh, yeah. She came for the . . . I think it must have been a . . . I don't remember the occasion. I know it was Jewish welfare of some kind, some kind of Jewish Federation. And the Tenth Street building . . . it was the AA Sunday School building on Tenth Street, which is now a union building in Atlanta. You know, it borders the park. Tenth Street comes down to . . .

Sandy: . . . Oh, okay . . .

Phyllis: . . . to Piedmont. And there's a building there, one story, long . . .

Sandy: . . . And that was the AA?

Phyllis: That was the AA Sunday School building. And it . . .

Sandy: . . . It wasn't on Washington Street?

Phyllis: It was, but as people moved north, it was the annex.

Sandy: So, they had the Sunday School on Tenth Street?

⁴⁹ Following a recommendation by the United Nations, the state of Israel was officially established in 1948. It is the world's only Jewish-majority state. The Declaration of Israel's Independence in 1948 noted that, "The Nazi holocaust, which engulfed millions of Jews in Europe, proved anew the urgency of the re-establishment of the Jewish state, which would solve the problem of Jewish homelessness by opening the gates to all Jews and lifting the Jewish people to equality in the family of nations. The survivors of the European catastrophe, as well as Jews from other lands, proclaiming their right to a life of dignity, freedom and labor, and undeterred by hazards, hardships and obstacles, have tried unceasingly to enter Palestine." It continued that, "It is, moreover, the self-evident right of the Jewish people to be a nation, as all other nations, in its own Sovereign State."

⁵⁰ Eleanor Roosevelt (1884-1962) was the wife of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, the President of the United States from 1933 to 1945. She supported the New Deal policies of her husband and became an advocate for civil rights. After her husband's death in 1945, Eleanor continued to be an international author, speaker and politician and activist.

Phyllis: The Sunday School took place on Tenth, and on the High Holy Days, services were there. And that was for overflow, number one, and it also served the need of people like my mother who didn't want to travel on the holidays, in a car. So, we would walk. I would walk with her from Vedado Way to Tenth Street.

Sandy: Vedado . . . ?

Phyllis: Vedado, which was a little street right near Henry Grady High School.

Sandy: That's where you lived, right.

Phyllis: Yeah, uh-huh.

Sandy: Right.

Phyllis: And we would walk to Tenth Street for services. And . . .

Sandy: . . . And you remember Eleanor Roosevelt coming one time?

Phyllis: There was a big benefit of some kind held in the auditorium of that building. And I was a little girl, and my parents took me. It was a dinner. I don't . . . I know it was for some Jewish Federation, some charity, but I don't know what, but she spoke. And it was very important to them that I be there. They didn't usually take me to things like that with them. But it was important to go just to see her.

Sandy: What about Golda Meir⁵¹ or were there other heroines for you growing up?

Phyllis: I don't think Golda Meir was, not growing up. Later.

Sandy: Later.

Phyllis: But not growing up, no. Were there other heroines or heroes at that time?

Sandy: I mean, did you still hear . . .

Phyllis: . . . Oh, let me think a minute. I guess Jane Addams was my hero, my all-time heroine. Jane Addams with her Hull Street Social House . . .

Sandy: Social work.

Phyllis: Settlement house, yeah.

Sandy: Uh-huh, social worker.

Phyllis: She was my hero. I just . . . I wanted to grow up and be just like Jane Addams, which unfortunately, it didn't happen.

⁵¹ Golda Meir (1898-1978) was an Israeli teacher, politician and the fourth Prime Minister of Israel.

Sandy: Well, I think you've done good in many ways. You've reached out, and we'll get to some of those ways a little bit later on.

Phyllis: But . . . I'm trying to think, to answer your question, Sandy, and I guess really . . .

Sandy: . . . Your father?

Phyllis: Oh, always, always. You know, this is kind of like the question that Rabbi Goodman asked not long ago in one of his sermons . . . he raised, rather, about the man in the field. Were you there?

Sandy: Yes, absolutely, uh-huh.

Phyllis: Did you give that much thought?

Sandy: Uh-huh.

Phyllis: I'm going to interview you. <Laughs>

Sandy: I thought it was really interesting.

Phyllis: It was a wonderful sermon, and . . .

Sandy: . . . It was one of the best sermons.

Phyllis: Uh-huh.

Sandy: That was for the High Holy Days⁵² this year. Who was the man in the field for you?

Phyllis: The man in the field, uh-huh.

Sandy: And was that your father . . . the man in the field for you? You can have lots of men in the field, he said.

Phyllis: Yeah, I think at every stage of life, you could have different ones, I think. Probably, I was lucky in that I loved my parents very much. And no hang-ups in that store. So . . .

Sandy: . . . You were lucky.

Phyllis: Yeah, yeah. I was very lucky. And they were good. They were good people.

Sandy: That's wonderful. Well, and I know you had a good example to follow: Jane Adams and your father and all that he had done. Did he continue? That was one of my questions, did he continue to help the Russian community? Before you were born, he went back there.

Phyllis: He went there a lot.

Sandy: And he did a lot for them. What about . . .

Phyllis: He unfortunately . . . the Depression wiped him out of any kind of financial means. And although he was never a wealthy man . . . he had made enough money to be secure. And at the time of the Depression, my father was a man of, you know, he was in his late fifties with an extremely young

⁵² The two High Holy Days are *Rosh Ha-Shanah* (Jewish New Year) and *Yom Kippur* (Day of Atonement).

family. I was born in 1934. My sister was born in 1931 and my brother a couple years before that. So, he had four very young children and he was and a young wife. And he was totally wiped out. So, I think he had to put his attentions and his efforts and his real labors into supporting his family at that time. And that's when we moved to Carrollton.

Sandy: Uh-huh.

Phyllis: I guess probably mostly what he did at that time, he always headed up the Welfare Drive for the small towns in the area where we lived, Jewish Welfare Fund,⁵³ and he raised the money for that. But as far as . . . it was called UJA at that time, strictly UJA. It wasn't the . . .

Sandy: . . . United Jewish Appeal.⁵⁴

Phyllis: Yeah. It wasn't . . .

Sandy: . . . Atlanta Jewish Federation.

Phyllis: Yeah, yeah, that's right. And so those are the kinds of things he did. No, he was not able to continue his real work.

Sandy: Uh-huh. Well, I see you have a wonderful picture here that you said a good friend of yours just sent you.

Phyllis: Yes.

Sandy: You want to tell me about it and describe it for the transcriber?

Phyllis: Well, this is my glamour pose <laughs> in 1951, and it was the Sweetheart of Atlanta AZA 518.

Sandy: That was the chapter.

Phyllis: Yeah. And it was from . . . one of the AZA chapters in Atlanta. At that time, it was 518, 134, and 357. I think there were several others at this date. But Atlanta teenage social life really centered around clubs and sports, the Alliance, and friendships of that sort. It was a wonderful, wonderful time to grow up in this city.

Sandy: And a very good friend of yours, Barbara . . .

⁵³ The Jewish Welfare Fund was one of the preceding organizations of the current Jewish Federation of Greater Atlanta. Its function was to fundraise for the Jewish community centrally and disperse it throughout the Jewish community (locally, nationally and internationally) rather than each Jewish institution trying to raise money individually.

⁵⁴ The United Jewish Appeal (UJA) was a Jewish philanthropic umbrella organization that collected and distributed funds to Jewish organizations in their community and around the country. UJA existed from 1939 until it was folded into the United Jewish Communities, which was formed from the 1999 merger of United Jewish Appeal (UJA), Council of Jewish Federations and United Israel Appeal, Inc. After World War II, the Jewish Federations worked with the United Jewish Appeal (UJA), the United Palestine Appeal (UPA) and the Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) to help resettle Jewish concentration camp survivors and helped refugees create new lives.

Phyllis: . . . Barbara Orkin sent this to me.

Sandy: Is her name Barbara . . .

Phyllis: . . . She was Barbara Hartman.

Sandy: Barbara Hartman, okay.

Phyllis: Uh-huh. And Barbara came in from a small town, just like we came from a small town, to Atlanta. We would gather in Atlanta on Sundays for Sunday School, the kosher meat market, and all that. I think Barbara lived in Thomaston, I think it was. So, she came from the south, and I came from the west, about sixty miles each way.

Sandy: And she saved this wonderful picture of you . . .

Phyllis: . . . She saved this picture . . .

Sandy: . . . this gorgeous gal. It says, "Second to None." Do you think that was the chapter or that was you . . .

Phyllis: . . . No, that was . . .

Sandy: . . . that was second to none?

Phyllis: I think that was an AZA conclave, and I believe they were sponsoring me for the region.

Sandy: Was that when you were Queen of Ballyhoo?

Phyllis: No, that was something different.

Sandy: That was something different. I understand you were Jewish Girl of the Year? Is that . . . you have some information about that?

Phyllis: Well, that . . . no, I don't have Jewish Girl of the Year information.

Sandy: What did that mean? Do you . . .

Phyllis: . . . That was an award that was given by the adults of the community. And it was for the youngster who had contributed most as far as community service in the town for the year. There was one boy, one girl.

Sandy: Is that right? And that was during high school?

Phyllis: That hasn't continued, I don't think. Well, in those days, we had a Youth Council, Sandy. All the clubs were individual, and then at the Alliance there was a Council. And every club had representatives to that Council.

Sandy: You told me a little bit about that last time. Was there a Welfare Fund for you?

Phyllis: Yeah. We did that, too. By the way, I found this. I was going to check. Remember you asked me if DOZ had any significance other than a social club?

Sandy: Right.

Phyllis: I had saved this. I didn't even know I had it until Barbara sent this picture. Then I started looking for what I had, and I found this. This is *The Dozer*. It's the Tenth Anniversary of the club, and this is the year I was president.

Sandy: You were president of DOZ one year?

Phyllis: Yeah, uh-huh.

Sandy: Is that the year that you won the award? I want to find out why . . . what did you do that you won that award? That's what I want to know.

Phyllis: What did I do?

Sandy: I mean, you must have been very special of all the girls in the city to be chosen for that award.

Phyllis: No, I mean, I think that it was the same kind of things that you do today as an adult. You work for Federation, you try to do a little charity, you try to . . . those are the things that was done.

Sandy: What was the charity work that . . . I mean, did you go to . . . will it explain it in . . .

Phyllis: . . . Maybe it was . . . it's not in here at all, but it does explain – what I wanted to bring this up about was the club: we were Club of the Month this year. We were cited because of our “. . . service, cooperation and participation. We have chosen them the Youth Council's first Club of the Month.” Okay . . .

Sandy: . . . So, being chosen . . .

Phyllis: . . . The club.

Sandy: That you were president of that year?

Phyllis: Yeah . . . that was not the year I was chosen, but the club was chosen. And it's [inaudible] for those kinds of activities. So, it was the same kinds of activities that individuals were chosen for.

Sandy: But you don't remember specifically. It wasn't like going down to Grady as a . . .

Phyllis: . . . Well . . .

Sandy: . . . and helping down there in the clinic or . . .

Phyllis: . . . These are the kinds of things that we did. We had our fun and our social, but here we have an article about charity.

Sandy: Okay.

Phyllis: And it says, “Giving of charity is one of the first principles governing the DOZ Club, Daughters of Zion. Of all our varied activities, we feel the most important are our charity projects.” So, yes, there was always that component of whatever we did. Whether we raised money for a . . . we may have raised

money for a banquet, but a portion of that money always went to a charity. And in this particular year, we're talking about the Jewish Home for the aged . . .

Sandy: . . . Okay . . .

Phyllis: . . . that we gave to. It was a newly built haven at that time. And we had sent, we say, a substantial . . . this was written by us, you know.

Sandy: Uh-huh, right.

Phyllis: It received a substantial portion of the allotted sum that we had to give. And then I think I mentioned to you that we gave money to the Scottish Rite Hospital, but that some of us went there and worked with the children. Every Saturday we would go and work with the . . .

Sandy: Isn't that interesting. You'd go on Saturday, Shabbat? Would that be . . .

Phyllis: Well, that's right. That's right. We did . . . *shul*-going on Saturday, for some reason, was not part of our agenda.

Sandy: Is that right?

Phyllis: Isn't that interesting?

Sandy: Yes.

Phyllis: It was not there.

Sandy: You felt very Jewish . . .

Phyllis: . . . It's changed . . .

Sandy: . . . and you had Jewish friends, but . . .

Phyllis: . . . Very much.

Sandy: . . . Shabbot services . . .?

Phyllis: No.

Sandy: Did you go Friday night to services?

Phyllis: No. No.

Sandy: Did you have Friday night dinner at home?

Phyllis: No, because my parents would be in Carrollton on Fridays.

Sandy: Working.

Phyllis: Working. They would go Friday night usually and spend the night there. And Saturday was a real work day in my family. It's interesting how Jewish one can feel without active synagogue going. I enjoy going to synagogue now. I don't do it, you know, religiously. <Laughs>

Sandy: Right. On a regular . . .

Phyllis: . . . I'm trying to say regular . . .

Sandy: . . . On a regular basis.

Phyllis: On a regular basis. I try to, but you know, it's a habit one forms like anything else. And when I'm on a roll, I go every week. And then something will interrupt, and you go out of town.

Sandy: It's easy to get out of it.

Phyllis: That's right. But I try, and I enjoy it when I do it. But as a youngster growing up, no.

Sandy: That was not a way of life for you?

Phyllis: Uh-uh, no.

Sandy: So, on Saturday, very often you went to Scottish Rite to . . .

Phyllis: Well . . . it was Scottish Rite's Aidmore Hospital. It was actually not called Scottish Rite at that time that we went.

Sandy: Scottish Rite . . .

Phyllis: . . . the Aidmore, A-I-D-M-O-R-E. And it was the hospital where the cerebral palsy children were. And that's where we went.

Sandy: What did you do for the . . . were you the Sunshine Girls?

Phyllis: We would go, and we would play with the children. We would feed them. Many of them were terribly, terribly afflicted and weren't able to hold the spoon and feed themselves. Being like any other institution of its kind, they never had enough people to sit and actually feed the child. Many of these children were from families who didn't live in Atlanta. They lived out of town and their child stayed at the hospital. It was almost like a resident hospital, and they would come in to visit occasionally, but not always. They couldn't, either because of funds or neglect, I don't know why. But these kids really had nobody to just come and love them. And I remember the day I had one little boy that I kind of always gravitated to, and I taught him to say "Mama," because his mother did come regularly. I just taught him how to say that. I remember how overjoyed, they told me later, that she had been . . .

Sandy: . . . To hear him.

Phyllis: . . . when he did that. I mean, these were the kinds of things that we did individually. But the club fostered this, I mean, by choosing that as a place to give our money.

Sandy: Okay. And . . . you want to read a little more to me from there?

Phyllis: Let's see what else it says.

Sandy: Again, you're reading from the Tenth Anniversary, *The Dozer*, Tenth Anniversary Edition.

Phyllis: Yeah. Oh, here it talks about the young State of Israel. <Laughs>

Sandy: Now the date of this is March 19 . . .

Phyllis: . . . 1952 . . .

Sandy: . . . 52. And it talks about the young State of Israel.

Phyllis: "The young State of Israel can boast the addition of several new trees to its ever-growing forest because of DOZ's purchase of tree certificates." So, I mean, it was a . . . alright, "Willingly and enthusiastically, each DOZ member gave to the last Jewish Welfare Fund Drive." That was an individual contribution we did. Oh, here it is. This is probably what . . . I think this is why I won that thing.

Sandy: Why you won the Year . . .

Phyllis: . . . "This year, as last year, in addition to financial aid, several individuals from DOZ had consented to help launch and carry through a successful campaign," by starting a youth division. That was the . . . of the Welfare Federation. You know, there is one now.

Sandy: Today, right.

Phyllis: Yeah. And this was when it started.

Sandy: And Phyllis Arnold was instrumental in starting that.

Phyllis: How about that. <Laughs>

Sandy: Well, we finally got to it, yes.

Phyllis: How about that. I forgot about that.

Sandy: Okay. So, you were instrumental in starting . . .

Phyllis: . . . I'd forgotten that, Sandy. I sure had forgotten all that.

Sandy: Well, it seems like it is something very important to bring back.

Phyllis: Well, these things are fine.

Sandy: Your kids should know about it and I'm sure they, without saying it, your kids know how you felt.

Phyllis: But you know, Sandy . . . well, all of these things that we talk about, I mean, it sounds like . . . it's nothing for anybody to toot their horn about, whether it was then or now. These are the kinds of things we all ought to be doing. What we do . . . you do so much, and I wonder . . . I mean, I think we . . . sometimes wonder why some person does it and another person doesn't do a lot. I don't mean . . . I mean with equal time and effort and ability. I think a lot of it is just you do it because you can't . . . there's no way you cannot do it. It's you.

Sandy: Well, I think it's you . . .

Phyllis: . . . I mean it's the right thing to do . . .

Sandy: . . . because of your upbringing. Now, we can see what kind of influence your father must have had on your life.

Phyllis: Well, I think in my life, probably so. I always felt like to live in this world, we're so privileged. We really are so privileged to have what we have and to . . . the benefits, the country, the freedom. You know, it's like any other organization. You've got to pay your dues.

Sandy: Well, you had a sense of giving back, and not everybody had that same sense of giving back. And I can understand why you were recognized for that, even as a young girl. There was the dating scene, which was very important, but you also had another aspect to your life, a very important aspect to your life at that time.

Phyllis: Well, many of my friends also. And I think probably that's . . . you choose those kinds of people to be your friends if those things are what's important to you.

Sandy: Important to you. But you said even at fourteen, kids were dating.

Phyllis: Uh-huh.

Sandy: What did your family think about . . . I know your family must have admired this community work that you did. How did they feel about your dating at age fourteen and fifteen?

Phyllis: It was alright.

Sandy: It was alright. It was accepted?

Phyllis: It was okay, yeah. My mother felt that she had instilled the right values as far as morality, and I don't think it ever worried them that we dated.

Sandy: You dated on Friday night and Saturday . . . I mean, Friday night as well as Saturday night?

Phyllis: Even then when there were any kind of functions on Friday night, you know, whether it be fraternity or sorority or whatever, it was . . . we tried to do some Jewish component, but not as much as the kids do today. Yeah, I mean, we weren't as aware, and we didn't pay as much attention to Shabbat.

Sandy: Uh-huh.

Phyllis: Whether it was Friday night or Saturday.

Sandy: But you felt very Jewish?

Phyllis: Uh-huh, always.

Sandy: Did you . . .

Phyllis: . . . I mean . . .

Sandy: . . . Did you go to the movies? What did you do on dates? Did you go bowling? I mean, what

kinds of things did you kids do together?

Phyllis: Bowling, hay rides, movies. There were usually . . . each organization once a year had the big blowout, you know, the dance.

Sandy: Did the kids have cars?

Phyllis: Some did.

Sandy: How did you get to . . .

Phyllis: Some did, yeah.

Sandy: So, when you had a date, usually you went out in a car. You didn't take a bus?

Phyllis: Except when I dated Joe, we went on a bus. Joe lived on the other side of town and he would come on the bus, and we would go out on the bus. Then when we would double date with other people, we would have a car. But he didn't have a car. And . . .

Sandy: . . . How did you meet Joe Arnold?

Phyllis: I met Joe probably at the Alliance, you know. I mean, where you met everybody. We were all there always. It was either dances or the Alliance or . . .

Sandy: . . . How old were you? . . .

Phyllis: . . . Progressive Club.

Sandy: Do you remember how old?

Phyllis: I met Joe first when I was fourteen, yeah. And I think we dated probably from fourteen on. And then I was very lucky. I married a man very much like my father, the same values as my parents. And I see it in my father, but my mother was a strong influence, too. But, I mean, Joe is probably one of the best people I've ever known, Sandy. I mean, here's a person who rarely does anything of any fanfare, rarely does anything that is public, but is so good to so many and doesn't need . . . he's secure in who he is. He doesn't need any recognition. He makes enough money to be comfortable and he doesn't have any great . . .

Sandy: . . . He doesn't have great demands? . . .

Phyllis: . . . he doesn't need a lot of money. I felt he's very charitable. But more . . . I'm not talking about money, now, I'm just talking about . . .

Sandy: . . . Goodness.

Phyllis: Yes, goodness, and what he gives of himself to people. It's very -

Sandy: It isn't always seen by others or recognized by others, but you see it.

Phyllis: And the recipients know it. Yeah, but that's all that know. You'll never know it from him.

Sandy: But you saw that quality in him, apparently, when you were very young.

Phyllis: Well, I just thought he was the smartest boy I had ever known.

Sandy: You admired his intelligence.

Phyllis: His intelligence, so smart.

Sandy: How much older is he than you?

Phyllis: Oh, just three years.

Sandy: Three years difference.

Phyllis: But Joe won every prize there was, every academic prize that was ever out there to win.

Sandy: Did he go to Grady High School, too?

Phyllis: No. He went on the south side of town to Smith High. I dated him for his high school graduation, and I was so proud. He was valedictorian and he was the speaker. He was . . . and that's the way, you know, I was just really proud of him. That was always very important to me.

Sandy: Uh-huh. Did you always hope that you would get married? I mean, did you always feel that way?

Phyllis: Well, no, no, uh-uh.

Sandy: Last night, Rosalyn Carter was on Jay Leno and she was talking about dating Jimmy from when she was fourteen years old, too.

Phyllis: Really, really?

Sandy: Yes. And how she felt about him. Jay asked her, and I'll ask you, do you remember when he asked you to marry him?

Phyllis: Well, you know, I had a detour in the middle there, from the time we dated until we got married years later. I married and had two children.

Sandy: You did?

Phyllis: Yes.

Sandy: Oh.

Phyllis: So, you don't even know that?

Sandy: I don't even know that, no.

Phyllis: You don't even know that because Joe has melded the whole family . . .

Sandy: . . . Together . . .

Phyllis: . . . together. I mean . . .

Sandy: . . . Okay, so two of your children are not Joe's children?

Phyllis: That's right.

Sandy: Well, can you share some of that? So now we have to go back and find out. So, you dated Joe early on.

Phyllis: Yes.

Sandy: And then you . . .

Phyllis: . . . Well, Joe stuck to his ambition, his goals, his aim in life which was medicine always. And . . .

Sandy: . . . He was three years older . . .

Phyllis: . . . Yeah . . .

Sandy: . . . And he went on . . .

Phyllis: . . . But he couldn't . . . see, he had to do that in the way that it took him a longer time because he had to go into the service, so he could get a scholarship for the med school. So, he came from a family who could not . . . who supported his ambitions but who couldn't, you know, pay for his ambitions. His father died when he was twelve. So, anyhow, he did all of that. And I guess I got a little bit impatient, you know how it is.

Sandy: You went off to the University of Georgia.

Phyllis: Yeah, but before that I met somebody that . . .

Sandy: . . . In high school . . .

Phyllis: . . . who shall remain nameless . . . <laughs> . . .

Sandy: . . . So, you're not even going to . . .

Phyllis: . . . for purposes of this tape. No, I . . .

Sandy: . . . tell?

Phyllis: I mean, anybody that knows me knows, but I just don't even want to put it on tape.

Sandy: Just the name, just for the record?

Phyllis: Am I being ridiculous?

Sandy: Well, we can't force you to say anything, but just for the record, you don't have to state your feelings about him or anything, but were you married and divorced or just . . .

Phyllis: . . . Yeah.

Sandy: How long were you married?

Phyllis: Five years. I had an intermarriage.⁵⁵ I married - I was one of the - I was one of those people who intermarried. I married somebody from the Temple.

Sandy: Oh. <Laughs> Okay.

Phyllis: But in those days, it was pretty much intermarriage. In fact, I remember, Sandy, shortly after I was married getting a call from the rabbi of the Temple, would I please come teach Sunday School over there. I must have been nineteen years old.

Sandy: How old were you when you got married?

Phyllis: Nineteen.

Sandy: Nineteen.

Phyllis: And, so, I went, "Well, what makes you think I can teach Sunday School, you know, that I know how?" I had no training in that field. But I was educated in a Conservative synagogue at the AA, so I must know more than they knew at the Temple, he felt. Well, isn't that funny?

Sandy: And the Rabbi was Rabbi Rothschild⁵⁶ at the time?

Phyllis: Rabbi Rothschild.

Sandy: Yes.

Phyllis: Yes, that's who it was.

Sandy: Did you ever teach Sunday School there? Or you did refuse?

Phyllis: No, but I . . . at that time I just didn't . . . frankly just didn't feel adequate about doing it. And a year or so later when I thought, well, gee, maybe I should, I was pregnant and had a child, and that was the end of it, you know, as far as teaching Sunday School at the Temple. But . . .

Sandy: So, for the record . . .

Phyllis: . . . I just thought it was funny that he asked.

Sandy: That he asked you to do that. But you met somebody else then in high school. At the time, you were very proud you went to Joe's graduation and all.

Phyllis: Oh, yeah, uh-huh.

⁵⁵ Jewish leaders have historically looked upon intermarriage of Jews and non-Jews with strong disfavor and it remains a controversial issue today. According to a nationwide survey called *The National Jewish Population Survey 2000-2001: Strength, Challenge and Diversity in the American Jewish Population*, which was conducted by the United Jewish Communities, 47 percent of Jews in the United States marrying between 1996 and 2001 married non-Jews.

⁵⁶ Rabbi Jacob Rothschild was rabbi of the city's oldest Reform congregation, the Temple, in Atlanta, Georgia from 1946 until his death in 1973 from a heart attack. He forged close relationships with the city's Christian clergy and distinguished himself as a charismatic spokesperson for civil rights.

Sandy: But he went off to school and then you met somebody else.

Phyllis: Yes.

Sandy: And you were married right out of high school or started . . .

Phyllis: . . . No, not right out of high school . . .

Sandy: . . . at Georgia?

Phyllis: I went to Georgia first for a year, and then I got married and went to night school for a long time after that.

Sandy: It was not unusual for Southern girls at that time to just go to school for a year and get married?

Phyllis: Oh, no.

Sandy: Is that right?

Phyllis: Oh, no. Well, it was not unusual for a lot of my friends just to get married straight out of high school.

Sandy: Married very young.

Phyllis: They graduated usually in May, and June and July . . . that first year after graduation, oh, gosh, I can name a half a dozen marriages that took place with my very close friends.

Sandy: And so, you don't want to . . . just for the record, since it's part of history . . .

Phyllis: . . . Oh, I guess, Sandy, I was married to Howard Massell.

Sandy: Okay. Howard Massell. How do you spell that? M-A-

Phyllis: -S-S-E-L-L.

Sandy: Okay. Was he related to Sam Massell?⁵⁷

Phyllis: Brother.

Sandy: A brother of Sam Massell.

Phyllis: Yes.

Sandy: Okay. And you were married to him for five years and you had two children. So, you came back to Atlanta, and where did you live?

Phyllis: I never left Atlanta. I mean, we . . .

Sandy: . . . Even to go to University of Georgia?

⁵⁷ Sam Massell, Jr. (b. 1927) is a native Atlantan and former commercial real estate broker who served from 1970 to 1974 as the 53rd mayor of Atlanta. He is the first Jewish mayor in his city's history. A lifelong Atlanta resident, Massell has had successful careers in real estate brokerage, elected office, tourism, and association management.

Phyllis: Oh, yeah, I thought you meant during marriage. We lived at that time over on Morosgo Drive – Adina Drive was the name of it.

Sandy: A-D-

Phyllis: A-D-I-N-A. And it's right there off of Lindbergh and in the Morosgo Apartments.

Sandy: Morosgo is spelled?

Phyllis: M-O-R-O-S-G-O, Morosgo.

Sandy: Morosgo.

Phyllis: Young Jewish people either lived in the Rock Springs Apartments when they got married or around Morosgo Drive.

Sandy: Uh-huh. And this would have been around 1954?

Phyllis: Yes.

Sandy: When you were around nineteen or twenty.

Phyllis: And . . .

Sandy: . . . And you had young kids at that time. Big responsibility.

Phyllis: Well, my daughter was born when I was twenty, my first child. And Kim, the second, was born at twenty-three.

Sandy: Okay. Well, thank you. We're going to end this side of the tape and then we'll go on.

Phyllis: Have we been talking forty minutes?

Sandy: Yeah, I think so. Doesn't seem like it, but it looks like it. Thanks.

<End Tape 2, Side 1>

<Begin Tape 2, Side 2>

Sandy: This is Side Two. This is Sandy Leff and I'm continuing my interview on December first with Phyllis Arnold. We're here at Phyllis' kitchen table, and she is sharing some of her memories of the past years. And I just want, if I may, just look at this one picture and tell you how beautiful Phyllis looked when she was Queen of Ballyhoo. And we talked about that last time. And can I read what it says underneath your name, Phyllis, if you can find it for me.

Phyllis: I don't know what it says.

Sandy: A very elegant and glamorous lady, from this particular publication which is the Ballyhoo publication. And she was the bookkeeper for Club Ballyhoo, apparently. And it says, "Glamour and hard work are two fine attributes of this excellent secretary, Atlanta's answer to famous Dagmar, and then some." Now, what did they mean by that?

Phyllis: Dagmar was some big buxom blond . . .

Sandy: . . . Oh, is that right? . . .

Phyllis: . . . on some television program.

Sandy: Is that right? So that . . .

Phyllis: . . . That's not a big deal.

Sandy: But that's a beautiful picture of you, and that's the year you were Queen of Ballyhoo. It says December 24th and 25th. Does it give the year?

Phyllis: I don't know what year that was. Let's see if it does anywhere.

Sandy: See if it does give a year.

Phyllis: 1951.

Sandy: 1951. Okay. Well, we left you back in Atlanta with two young children. Your first child was Mark . . .

Phyllis: No, Leslie.

Sandy: Leslie, your daughter Leslie.

Phyllis: Uh-huh.

Sandy: And your second child was . . .

Phyllis: . . . Kim . . .

Sandy: . . . is Kim. Okay.

Phyllis: Also, a daughter.

Sandy: A daughter. Okay. Oh, so you had two – Leslie and Kim. You had two daughters when you were very young. So, your time was devoted to them. Did you go back to school at night while you . . .

Phyllis: Yeah, yeah. When I was divorced, Leslie was three and a half and Kim was just a baby. She was very young, before she was a year. And . . .

Sandy: . . . Were you the first person in your family to . . .

Phyllis: . . . Ever, ever. <Laughs> First person I ever knew who was divorced.

Sandy: Is that right? You mean, it was not common . . .

Phyllis: . . . In fact, Sandy, I'm going to tell you something funny. I can remember the years that I was divorced, I was single, and the girls and I lived again on . . . we had lived . . . after the Morosgo Apartment I told you about, then I lived in a couple of little rented houses, one on Middlesex and one on . . . let's see Kim was born . . . Leslie was born on Middlesex and Kim was born when I lived on Jett Road. But when I left there, she was just . . . let's see, she was born in February. I think I left there in October of that year.

Sandy: Wow.

Phyllis: That was it. So, anyhow, so we moved to an apartment. We first lived with my parents for a few months, and then after I got my wits together, we moved to an apartment on Morosgo Drive again. It was near Broadview Shopping Center which is now, I think, called Lindbergh Square. We lived there for quite some time. And I had a young woman that lived . . . from Carrollton, a young black woman, who lived with me.

Sandy: To help you with the children?

Phyllis: Yeah. Yeah, she and I and the two girls lived there.

Sandy: Did you get a lot of support from your family, your parents and your sisters?

Phyllis: Uh-huh, lots of support. My parents had not been happy about my marriage, to begin with. So . . .

Sandy: . . . And it wasn't because he was from the Temple.

Phyllis: No, no, no, no, no, no, not at all. That was said half in jest, but . . . of course, that was the division in Jews in Atlanta then . . .

Sandy: . . . Right . . .

Phyllis: . . . As you probably have heard about. But no, that was not their reason. But anyhow, so what did I do in those years? Well, Leslie went to Rock Springs Elementary School which was a stone's throw

from the apartment. And I went to work. I worked at Dwoskin's⁵⁸ half the week and I worked at Colgate Mattress Company the other part of the week, and I went to school at night.

Sandy: Were you a busy lady.

Phyllis: I was busy. But it was important to me to do those things at that time. At first, I needed to be busy, but it was important that . . . I wanted to get more education. I always kicked myself for not having finished schooling. And that's how we, you know, that's kind of how . . . that was our existence between that and family, and you begin, you know, a date here and there. But the funny part of it to me was that, actually nobody was divorced then. Nobody got divorced. And one by one over the few years before Joe and I hooked up again, young women would call me that I didn't know and said, "So and so told me about you. May I come talk to you?"

Sandy: Young Jewish women?

Phyllis: Young Jewish women. And they just wanted to talk to me. Either one was contemplating a divorce, or one had just separated, and it was like I was this oddity out there that had done it and do you know, this continued for a few years after Joe and I were married. People would call me about what it was like to be divorced.

Sandy: So, you were kind of a shoulder to cry on, to sympathize with?

Phyllis: Uh-huh. It was inter—yeah, I mean . . . I mention it not because I was, you know, as you say empathetic or anything, but because it was that rare, it was that unusual in those years.

Sandy: But you didn't let yourself get blue or . . .

Phyllis: . . . Well . . .

Sandy: . . . think about too much. You just had a program for yourself, it sounds like.

Phyllis: Yeah.

Sandy: You went right to work and to school.

Phyllis: And I had lots of family support. I did. I did have a lot of support from my parents, from my sisters, my brother . . .

Sandy: . . . Who had all settled in Atlanta?

Phyllis: Yeah, everyone was in Atlanta. I had a single male cousin at the time, and he would check up on me whenever I would have a date, make sure the guys got out of there on time and proper. He

⁵⁸ Morris Dwoskin (1878-1938) was the founder of Dwoskin & Sons., an Atlanta based wallpaper company which specialized in wall painting, murals and interior design for clubs, churches, synagogues, and expensive homes. Morris emigrated to Atlanta from Russia.

would, you know, he would drop in by my apartment at any time. I mean, I never knew when he might come. <Laughs>

Sandy: You couldn't get away with anything.

Phyllis: It was really funny when I think back on that. Unfortunately, he's no longer living, either. But . . .

Sandy: . . . How long were you alone before you got married again?

Phyllis: It was, let's see . . . four years.

Sandy: Four years. And then Joe Arnold came back into your life.

Phyllis: Yes.

Sandy: And was he a physician at that time already?

Phyllis: He was. He was still in Augusta when I first began . . . he didn't actually enter – we double dated. I was dating a cousin of his, and we went out together. And it was . . . I think I had a sudden appendectomy and had gone to my parents to recuperate. Joe and his cousin came to pay a sick call on me. And my daddy said, “You've got to get him. You've got to go after him.” And I said, “Daddy, I don't know how to do those things.” And he says, “Oh, sure you do,” you know. I remember that. But I . . .

Sandy: . . . Because they liked Joe very much, then?

Phyllis: Oh, yeah, always, always. But, anyhow, then Joe came to Atlanta and went to work at DeKalb General. At that time, the emergency room was staffed by physicians and who worked for the hospital who worked for the hospital, much as it is again today.

Sandy: It's gone back to that.

Phyllis: Right. But he did this not for a permanent thing, he did this just while he wanted to look around Atlanta and see where he wanted to practice. So, he was there for, I think, a year. And I truly – this was nothing contrived – I woke up one morning, Sandy, with a terrible tendinitis. I seem to get all these aches and pains, you know. Well, I woke up on a Saturday morning and I called my doctor. And he said, “Well, I don't inject. I can't do it for you.” And I had had injections by the orthopedist. He says, “Call the orthopedist.” So, I called the orthopedist, and he didn't work on Saturday. And I couldn't bear the pain.

Sandy: So, you had to go to the emergency room?

Phyllis: So, I called Joe. I said, “If I come out there, is there something you could do for me?” And he said, “Certainly.” And I did. And he took me back in his room where he stayed – he had a room where he stayed at the hospital – and he injected my wrist, and this magic took place. I mean, it was like

immediate relief. I was so overjoyed. And I was asking my sister Elinor, I said, “Elinor, I’ve got to do something to repay him. He wouldn’t let me pay him any money. What can I do?” She says, “Well, do you know anything about him? What does he like?” I said, “Well, I think he mentioned one time that he liked *National Geographic*, the magazine.” So, she said, “Well, why don’t you send him a subscription?” I thought that’s an excellent idea. So, I call, and it was too much money. A year’s subscription was, I think, like twenty-four dollars. But luckily, they had a six-month subscription. <Laughs> So, I sent him a six-month subscription. And really, that’s all I could afford. I mean, I did have two children, you know. So, I think he was impressed with the fact that I was very frugal, and I sent him a six-month subscription, and he called me for a date. So, that’s how that got started again.

Sandy: Uh-huh. And where were you married?

Phyllis: At the AA.

Sandy: At the AA.

Phyllis: Uh-huh, in the chapel.

Sandy: Did you have a big . . . in the Elman Chapel there? . . .

Phyllis: . . . Yes . . .

Sandy: . . . At that time. And your two daughters, were they in the wedding?

Phyllis: Not in the wedding. We didn’t have . . . we had a regular ceremony and it was large because my family and his family are both very large.

Sandy: And Rabbi Epstein married you?

Phyllis: Rabbi Epstein married me.

Sandy: Had he married you the first time?

Phyllis: Yes, yes. And he had secured the *get* [Jewish divorce document] for me and all of that. Rabbi Epstein was a very integral part of our family’s cycles, always.

Sandy: Was he supportive when you wanted to get the divorce?

Phyllis: Yes, yes. Yes, he was very, very kind. He really was . . . I’m trying to remember. Let’s see, the attorney at the time was Sam Eplan who was very well-known in this community. And my daddy and I would go to Mr. Eplan’s office, and, yes, everybody was just very kind. They really were. As I say, this was pretty . . .

Sandy: You were breaking some ground?

Phyllis: . . . Yeah. This was very . . . it was pretty unusual.

Sandy: Well, I didn’t realize when I was going to interview you that . . .

Phyllis: . . . But, anyhow . . . You didn't know that was . . .

Sandy: . . . To talk about, I didn't know . . .

Phyllis: . . . my past. My past. My purple past.

Sandy: Well, just before we start talking about your wonderful family and some of your activities as a married woman, you talked about camp. AJECOMCE you did . . . what y'all did in camp? You forgot to tell me.

Phyllis: Well, now, that was . . . you were just talking about the teen years and what was important. That was the summer act. I always worked AJECOMCE, the Atlanta Jewish Community Center day camp.

Sandy: Every summer as a teenager.

Phyllis: Yeah. But, the camp . . . in those days, Sandy, there was no Zaban Park⁵⁹ or anything of that nature. And the Peachtree, where the Peachtree Street building now stands was an old house, and that was the Atlanta Jewish Community Center, this old house that was on that property.

Sandy: That wasn't the Alliance?

Phyllis: No. The Alliance was Capitol Avenue.

Sandy: Okay.

Phyllis: And it had meeting rooms and a room upstairs for banquets, and just an old barn in the back where athletics took place. That's where you spent Sunday because everybody had, you know, ball games. And in the summertime, we played softball at Piedmont Park. And later we played on the grounds, the playing fields of the Jewish Community Center on Peachtree. But it was just an old house.

Sandy: And that's where the camp was held?

Phyllis: Well, camp started there and rapidly outgrew that house. And I remember we used to go . . . we would meet at the Temple, in the basement of the Temple, some groups, and some groups would be at the Center, and we would take the kids swimming to the Progressive Club and to the Mayfair Club, because there was no swimming pool in any of those places, of course. So, a lot of the camp time was bus time, you know, busing to pick up the kid, busing to go swimming at the clubs. I remember, I was a bus counselor because I lived on the bus route at that time. And Dr. Charles Gershon was one of my little children, and Dr. Steve Garber was one of my kids. And it's funny. I made a condolence call not long ago on a woman and her daughter, or a boarding woman, rather . . . on her family, and her daughter is sitting

⁵⁹ Zaban Park in Dunwoody is home to the Marcus Jewish Community Center of Atlanta. The area is named for philanthropist and community leader Erwin Zaban who gave and raised money for what was formerly undeveloped pastureland.

there, and she was looking at me and looking at me. She says, "I know you. You were my counselor." And I thought, God, you're as old as I am, you know. You must be, right. Anyhow, it was a very . . . we had a lot of fun with that. I mean, that was a lot of fun for . . .

Sandy: . . . So, you enjoyed children . . .

Phyllis: . . . those of us who taught at camp.

Sandy: Uh-huh.

Phyllis: We had wonderful administrators, too, at that time . . . the professionals who ran it, the staff. But it was good.

Sandy: Uh-huh.

Phyllis: It was a real good period.

Sandy: So, you had a lot of experience with children. Your daughters Leslie and Kim, do they live here in Atlanta?

Phyllis: Leslie lives here and has two sons.

Sandy: Uh-huh. So . . .

Phyllis: . . . Kim lives in California with a little girl.

Sandy: Did they marry Jewish people, Jewish men?

Phyllis: Well, he's Jewish now. <Laughs>

Sandy: Oh, okay.

Phyllis: Kim's not married now.

Sandy: Okay.

Phyllis: But Leslie has a Jewish husband now. He didn't start out that way.

Sandy: Uh-huh. But he converted.

Phyllis: But he is. Uh-huh, uh-huh. Very sweet, nice, fine young man.

Sandy: Uh-huh. Does she observe Jewish . . .

Phyllis: . . . Yeah, yeah . . .

Sandy: . . . holidays and that kind of thing?

Phyllis: Yes, they do.

Sandy: Okay. So, you met Joe, and he took on this family with two young girls.

Phyllis: Yes.

Sandy: And where did you live with him?

Phyllis: We bought a little house on Holly Lane.

Sandy: Holly Lane.

Phyllis: Yes. We've only lived in two houses, Holly Lane until we outgrew it . . . which we did very rapidly.

Sandy: Because you had four children with . . .

Phyllis: . . . Well, no, Joe and I had three children together, and so it's five altogether.

Sandy: Five, okay.

Phyllis: And we rapidly outgrew Holly Lane. So, we must have lived there, let's see, Danny, the youngest, was a year when we moved from there, so that was . . . I guess we lived there about six years. And then we moved to this house.

Sandy: Okay. Did you get involved . . . I mean, I know you were very involved with your children in those early years of marriage. Did you get involved in the community? Is there anything that stands out in your mind?

Phyllis: Yeah. Well, let's see, in those years . . . well, of course, I guess City of Hope for a while was an organization that I was really active in. I think my biggest activity, my most time-consuming activity where I . . . expended most of my efforts at that time probably, other than, you know – Federation was always a big part of everything for me, as far as working for campaign and all that. I think it was . . . in those years, I think I served on the Board at Federation. But the PTA became very important. The children . . . we lived near Kittredge School, and the children went there. There was a large Jewish community at Kittredge. It was probably fifty/fifty. I guess what stands out in my mind right now is the educational process of what took place with the PTA Board at that school. My personal responsibility at the school, as part of the PTA, was that we staffed the clinic. I don't know what schools do right now. I don't think they have anything that's similar to this. But we had a full . . . well, not a full clinic, of course, but we had a room that was staffed full-time by parents, by mothers, all day, every school day.

Sandy: The nurse . . . you served as kind of a nurse . . .

Phyllis: . . . Yeah, yeah, we did. But of course, we weren't . . . that was not part of our duties to be a nurse, but we were there for children if they felt badly, if they needed to be . . . either to just rest or if they were ill and needed to go home. And if we couldn't contact parents, they would stay in the clinic with a mother. So that was my responsibility, was running the clinic, which I did for several years at Kittredge. I really did enjoy that, but I enjoyed the people I met. There was a wonderful student body at Kittredge. We had a lot of the Emory faculty people and there was a large medical community that had sent their people to Kittredge School. I guess a lot of the doctors lived at that time in Victoria Estates. There was a very large

Jewish community. So, we had a good school. And the PTA Board was made up of some very interesting people. And in those years, there weren't winter holidays. It was all very, very religious in the school. And having grown up in a small town, I was . . . never felt that was unusual because Christmas was the big deal. When you're the only Jewish person in a town, you don't make waves as far as saying you can't do that. But here we were fifty percent of the population in the school. So, the PTA through the Board began educating the non-Jewish board members to the fact that this was . . . offensive is too strong a word, but that this was not right, and how we felt about it.

Sandy: So, did you . . .

Phyllis: . . . And it was amazing, Sandy, how these educated, lovely, lovely people had never thought about what it was like not to be the majority.

Sandy: And you tried to sensitize them to that?

Phyllis: Well, not I only, I mean . . .

Sandy: . . . But your group.

Phyllis: Yeah, yeah, the group. And it was a very painful time that we went through for, oh, I guess all of one year. But then one by one, the people began to say, "You know, I never . . . you've raised my consciousness. You've made us think." And it changed. That school changed drastically. There was . . . not that it brought in . . . the point was -- we didn't want Hanukkah to have equal time. That was not what we were asking for. We were asking to eliminate the religious aspect totally from the celebrations in the school. The Christmas tree, all of that we felt was inappropriate. And it came around to being a very happy -- truly a winter holiday.

Sandy: Uh-huh.

Phyllis: Thinking back on it, I think what was accomplished there wasn't the fact that the winter holiday was instituted. I think more importantly what was accomplished was that these really intelligent people on that Board had something opened up to them that they had never realized. I think that probably as the years went by, that probably made a difference in the people that they encountered. Because I imagine years after we left that school, I imagine it reverted back to Christmas celebrations. I really do. But those people who were involved in that whole metamorphous, I think really benefited.

Sandy: Uh-huh.

Phyllis: And that really was as important time.

Sandy: And you felt good about it . . .

Phyllis: . . . Yeah, I think we all felt good about that . . .

Sandy: . . . what you accomplished.

Phyllis: That was a good group of people, both Jewish and non-Jewish, that worked together.

Sandy: Have you remained friends with any of those people, or are most of your friends today Jewish people?

Phyllis: Most of them . . . but yeah, I still . . . living in the same area, I still see . . .

Sandy: . . . See them . . .

Phyllis: . . . a lot of these people.

Sandy: And you have mutual respect, do you feel?

Phyllis: Yes, very much so.

Sandy: Did you belong to any clubs, you and Joe?

Phyllis: Well . . .

Sandy: . . . Any, like the Progressive Club or . . .

Phyllis: Briefly, briefly. That wasn't our thing, really, but we did belong briefly. The Medical Society was a big part of . . . well, the auxiliary rather, was a big part of my life.

Sandy: Were you . . .

Phyllis: . . . At that time. Yeah, I held office every year in that. I used to do . . .

Sandy: . . . Were you ever president of the Medical . . .

Phyllis: . . . No, uh-uh.

Sandy: No. But you helped with the various projects.

Phyllis: I didn't want to be president.

Sandy: You never wanted to be president.

Phyllis: That' s too hard. That' s too hard. No, but I was always an officer, and always involved in it in those years.

Sandy: Were there any particular projects that you spearheaded?

Phyllis: Not that I spear-headed, but the one that stands out in my mind is the safety project. Did you ever hear about the little house that we built . . .

Sandy: . . . No . . .

Phyllis: . . . over at the health center on Wynn Way.

Sandy: No.

Phyllis: Mary Morgan and Caroline Trotter and I were the chairmen that year, the co-chairmen. We had some marvelous times. What we did, we built a little house, the House of Hazards it was called.

Remember Pat Fein? Did you ever hear about her being the green safety lady?

Sandy: No, I didn't. I did not.

Phyllis: <Laughs> Oh, this was a very . . . it was fun. It was lots of fun.

Sandy: Well, but was the idea for people to visit and show hazards in the house?

Phyllis: To show, yeah, the House of Hazards. It was showing exactly where accidents take place in the home, how to child-proof, safety-proof your home.

Sandy: Well, that was wonderful.

Phyllis: So, we built . . . it was a house, I guess maybe as big as this room. I don't know. And we had . . . it was loads of fun. It was like playing dolls because we had lots of the furniture built, and we bought a lot of the little miniature furniture and placed things around. And it was very well-done, to scale. Anything Mary Morgan does is thorough.

Sandy: But this was for the community, right?

Phyllis: Uh-huh.

Sandy: So, the community . . .

Phyllis: . . . For DeKalb community.

Sandy: DeKalb community. How long was the house set up?

Phyllis: For years it was open.

Sandy: For years it was open.

Phyllis: It was years over there at the . . . in the lobby of the DeKalb Health Center on Moon Lake, for years and years. And it was refurbished at times, and it was loads of fun. That was my big hurrah, I mean.

Sandy: Oh, it sounds like a wonderful project. What about in the synagogue? I know in recent years you have been on the Board of the synagogue.

Phyllis: Yeah, well, I think probably I became more involved at the synagogue . . .

Sandy: . . . And we're talking about the Ahavath Achim synagogue.

Phyllis: Yeah, yeah. Probably with the . . . Beth and Mark and Danny in their U.S. Wine Ball.

Sandy: They were always very much into . . .

Phyllis: . . . Yeah, that interval . . .

Sandy: . . . where the boys were into United Synagogue Youth.

Phyllis: Uh-huh. And getting involved with that and being available as . . . first as a participating parent, and then later as Chairman of the Youth Commission for a few years.

Sandy: Chairman of the Youth Commission at . . .

Phyllis: . . . At the AA . . .

Sandy: . . . AA synagogue.

Phyllis: Yeah. That was fun. That was a lot of fun.

Sandy: Uh-huh. What were some of your goals that you can remember? I mean . . .

Phyllis: . . . Well, I think probably the thing that I liked the best, that I had anything to do with, was opening our United Synagogue Youth⁶⁰ group to children throughout the city if they wanted to belong. I felt that to have a synagogue youth chapter restricted or limited to just the children from that synagogue was not a good idea. I mean, it needed to be open to anyone who wanted to belong. And we did that year. We opened it up to children from any of the synagogues or any other part . . . any Jewish children in the community who wanted to belong. And I think that that has served as one of the biggest strengths to that U.S.Y. chapter at the AA. I know that children from the Temple belong and . . . well, also the other thing we did was we began to have some exchanges between the various youth groups in town. And the [inaudible], you know, was also with the chapter. But we would have exchanges with the Temple youth group and this way the kids could come together and not just be limited to your little group, but to know kids throughout the city. And I think it strengthens the group.

Sandy: Uh-huh.

Phyllis: Because it makes them want to participate. So, I think that was . . . that pleases me as much as anything that I ever did personally with it.

Sandy: What about anybody . . .

Phyllis: . . . But it was wonderful to my children. Their experience there was marvelous.

Sandy: At the AA synagogue?

Phyllis: Yes, yes.

Sandy: How was it different for them growing up than it was for you, their teenage years? Was it any different?

Phyllis: Well . . .

Sandy: . . . I mean . . .

⁶⁰ United Synagogue Youth (USY) and Kadima are the official youth organizations of the Conservative Movement. USY was founded in 1951 and has grown from a handful of chapters to an international organization with thousands of high school age members. In 1964, Kadima was formalized as a separate entity for pre-USY age young people. USY was conceived as a means of meeting the social, educational, religious, and recreational needs of Jewish teenagers. The organization seeks to involve teenagers in synagogue life and help build the Jewish community of the future. As a Zionist organization, it also works to build a relationship between Israel and Jewish youth in America.

Phyllis: . . . Yes and no. Again, I think that the biggest difference, of course, is the size, you know, the exposure. I think that we had it much easier growing up and much simpler, much fewer influences from without the Jewish community. Distance began playing a very important role in children growing up in their times, and of course I think it gets . . . I don't know, today I would think that it's even greater.

Sandy: Uh-huh. Family life is different because . . .

Phyllis: . . . Distances . . .

Sandy: . . . everybody is farther away.

Phyllis: I mean everything – you had to get in a car to go everywhere now. I mean, I think the happiest time of one of the boys' lives was the day he could get on his bicycle, and he liked to ride a bicycle, and he could go somewhere without me driving him. I think that was the happiest day of his life. I mean, to be so dependent on cars and, you know, your mama to drive you . . .

Sandy: . . . Uh-huh . . .

Phyllis: . . . must be a terrible way to feel. And we didn't have that growing up. I mean, first of all, if you didn't have a friend with a car, you got on a street car or a bus and you went. I mean, you weren't dependent on your automobile.

Sandy: Uh-huh.

Phyllis: And I think that's a shame that that's the way we live now. Because, I mean, it's the only way you can get anywhere in Atlanta.

Sandy: In Atlanta today, uh-huh.

Phyllis: In Atlanta today.

Sandy: Right. Not too many kids use public transportation today.

Phyllis: That's right. That's right.

Sandy: I was going to ask you about your . . . where did your kids go to high school?

Phyllis: Lakeside.

Sandy: They went to public high school, Lakeside. And then where did they go to college?

Phyllis: Mark went to Washington University, and then when he decided on architecture, he transferred to Georgia Tech. Beth graduated from the University of Georgia.

Sandy: So, they all followed in your footsteps . . .

Phyllis: . . . Yeah . . .

Sandy: . . . and Daddy's.

Phyllis: Danny went to the University of North Carolina. Kim went to art school, for photography.

And . . .

Sandy: . . . Leslie?

Phyllis: Leslie did not go to college.

Sandy: And let's see what else I wanted to ask you about. Three of the five are married now, is that right?

Phyllis: Uh-huh.

Sandy: Three of your five children are married. And do they come back here? Do you make a big Hanukkah celebrations and . . .

Phyllis: . . . Uh-huh . . .

Sandy: . . . you celebrate the holidays?

Phyllis: Shall I show the burns from this year's Hanukkah?

Sandy: Really, from making potato latkes . . .

Phyllis: . . . Oh, yeah . . .

Sandy: . . . You have the scars to prove . . .

Phyllis: . . . In fact, I think I asked you when you walked in, Sandy, did it still smell like latkes because, I mean, it smells like latkes for days after a latke party.

Sandy: Well, it's a wonderful smell, isn't it? Another project that I know you were involved with was at Margaret Mitchell. Do you want to tell a little bit about the tutoring program that you were so instrumental in pursuing there?

Phyllis: I think it's an excellent program that we have going from the AA synagogue at Margaret Mitchell⁶¹, which is really peopled by children from very young poverty pockets around the Margaret Mitchell area. And these kids come there with very few advantages, and most of all the advantage they're missing is somebody with enough time, not with enough love but with enough time to give them, to read with them, to work with them on their studies. As a result, a lot of them have fallen behind. And even those that maybe are grade level just need that one on one attention.

Sandy: So, you were involved there for four or five years . . .

Phyllis: . . . Yeah . . .

Sandy: . . . as a tutor yourself, right?

⁶¹ Margaret Mitchell is a neighborhood in the northwest part of the city of Atlanta. It is bounded by Moore's Mill Road on the south, Interstate-75 on the east, and the Paces neighborhood on the west. The neighborhood is named for *Gone With the Wind* author Margaret Mitchell. It was developed in the 1950's and was originally called Cherokee Forest.

Phyllis: Uh-huh.

Sandy: And as a coordinator . . .

Phyllis: . . . Yeah . . .

Sandy: . . . of the program working with some of the churches.

Phyllis: We worked together with the Northside – no it wasn't Northside, it was Trinity Presbyterian Church, I'm sorry . . . and as a group effort, and worked also with the people who lived in the neighborhood whose . . . probably their own children had gone to the school many years ago but had moved away and so did not send their grandchildren there. Besides the children who live in the neighborhood today, there is beginning to be a resurgence of young people in that neighborhood. But they go to private schools. But it's a very active neighborhood over there, and a few of the parents had always supported the school and they were the core in making this whole thing work.

Sandy: Let me ask you also to touch upon your Planned Parenthood involvement and also your involvement with politics. Have you been involved with political campaigns and some of our civic leaders here in Atlanta at all?

Phyllis: Well, let me think a minute. As far as Planned Parenthood, that's just something that I'm a volunteer occasionally. I don't do anything important with them. I'd like to. I think it's a very important organization and it very well may be where I put more emphasis in the future.

Sandy: You were off to a meeting at Planned Parenthood . . .

Phyllis: . . . Yeah. Well . . .

Sandy: . . . last time after our interview.

Phyllis: Yeah. But, as I say, lately what I've been doing mostly are just volunteer projects that have a beginning and an ending without a long, long commitment.

Sandy: And what about politically? Have you been involved?

Phyllis: Not as much as I should be. I guess my . . . really just with the candidates the Jewish candidates that I've known . . . we work for Leana Levitan here in DeKalb County. When Elliott Levitas ran, of course, he was . . . it was fun. That was fun to support Elliott. Not only is he a good friend and married to a life-long best friend of mine, Barbara Hillman, but he's probably . . . he's what this country needs. He's such a . . . he was such a wonderful person to have . . . I know he was up there in Congress, and it's a shame that we don't have the benefit of his counsel there now. But . . .

Sandy: . . . Did you know Sam Massell very well also?

Phyllis: Yeah, yeah, I did. And for that matter, I addressed envelopes for Sam when he was running

for re-election – well, was it re-election? Yeah, as mayor.

Sandy: Did he lose his re-election?

Phyllis: I'm trying to remember exactly what happened. It's been a long time ago. I think he did. But . . . he was something to be proud of, to be the . . .

Sandy: . . . The first Jew and only Jewish mayor . . .

Phyllis: . . . Uh-huh, of the city of Atlanta. It was a lot to be proud of.

Sandy: We cannot end this tape without your telling me about your reunion. You just had a wonderful reunion with some of your family from Russia, and you've got a big smile on your face and some tears in your eyes.

Phyllis: Well maybe, Sandy, that's where my efforts ought to be . . . I'll continue . . . maybe I'll be lucky enough to . . . fortunate enough to be able to continue some of my father's bringing Russians to America. I would just love it if they could come here. It was a marvelous reunion.

Sandy: Is this your father's family?

Phyllis: No, this is my mother's family.

Sandy: Mother's family, from what area?

Phyllis: Well, they are living in Yekaterinburg which is in the Ural Mountains, twelve hundred miles east of Moscow.

Sandy: Wow.

Phyllis: So, this is deep Russia.

Sandy: How do you spell that?

Phyllis: The town, the name of . . . ?

Sandy: Yeah.

Phyllis: Y-E-K-A-T-E-R-I-N-B-U-R-G.

Sandy: Did you visit them there last year?

Phyllis: Yes. Yes, yes, yes.

Sandy: How did you get there? I mean, did you take . . .

Phyllis: . . . We . . .

Sandy: . . . And you took a plane, obviously, to . . .

Phyllis: Airplane . . . when I came back, Joe had all kind of articles cut out of the paper for me where the United States government says, "Do not under any circumstances fly Russian airlines. Do not fly Aeroflot." Well, we flew Aeroflot.

Sandy: And you went to visit these people with your brother?

Phyllis: With my brother and . . .

Sandy: . . . Herb . . .

Phyllis: . . . My brother, Herbert Gershon, and my cousins, Eunice and Sidney Steiner.

Sandy: And then they came back here to visit, the relatives came . . .

Phyllis: . . . We brought them over . . .

Sandy: . . . Who came to visit you?

Phyllis: Only the couple that we actually stayed with, the one whose home we stayed in.

Sandy: And they came back here this past month to visit you.

Phyllis: It was amazing.

Sandy: Do they want to come to the United States?

Phyllis: Whenever they get here, I think they do.

Sandy: After the way you treated them.

Phyllis: They didn't know they wanted to come here. Yes, they want to come here. There's no opportunity for them. It's . . . first of all, you . . . Sandy, it's not just another world and having visited there and coming here, it's not just another world, it's another planet.

Sandy: What is the largest city that this is close to? Is it . . .

Phyllis: . . . Well, this is a large city . . .

Sandy: . . . Is it near . . .

Phyllis: . . . This is a city of a million and a half people.

Sandy: Is it near Leningrad?

Phyllis: No.

Sandy: No, it's even . . .

Phyllis: . . . No, no. Moscow is the closest . . .

Sandy: . . . Is the closest city.

Phyllis: Yekaterinburg is now, with the break of the Soviet Union, it is now the third largest city in Russia. Moscow, of course, being the biggest, St. Petersburg the second.

Sandy: Second.

Phyllis: And then Yekaterinburg which is a city of a million and a half people.

Sandy: Wow.

Phyllis: You don't have the feeling that it is when you're there, because it's very primitive, really, much

of it. And we went to Dacha which was right at the Asian border. You talk about . . . I thought I had gone back a hundred years.

Sandy: Now, D-A-C-H-

Phyllis: A. That's their summer . . . a little summer place where homes are. You feel like, it was like stepping back in . . . the faces of the children were like the faces from the old photographs that my father had. The muddy rutted roads, no bathroom facilities.

Sandy: It was like *Fiddler on the Roof*⁶² time?

Phyllis: It was . . . uh-uh, uh-huh, uh-huh.

Sandy: Farm . . . a rural community in some parts?

Phyllis: Well, it is a rural community . . . yeah, that's what it is, where we were, the Dacha, that's [inaudible]. But it was an experience I'll never forget. You know what a . . . have you been in a *banya*?

Sandy: A *banya*, B-

Phyllis: A *banya*, B-A-N-Y-A. The *banya* is the weekly steam baths, and you go in. It's a little room and you go into that's wood heated from the outside. There's an outside entry where their son had built the fire that heated up a [inaudible] where on the inside you'd pour aromatic water over it, and the steam would build around it.

Sandy: And you partook of that?

Phyllis: Yes. And they used birch branches and they actually set up them aside, so they'd hit you with birch branches.

Sandy: Oh.

Phyllis: And of course, I was there . . . and I was lying on the shelf . . .

Sandy: . . . When in Rome, do as the Romans . . .

Phyllis: . . . and being hit with the birch branches and covered . . . the leaves start falling off and you're covered with leaves. It was the most exciting time. It was thrilling.

Sandy: Well, I think it's appropriate that we end our tape with your going back to your roots, in some ways, and I hope that you will get to see your Russian family even more. I had hoped that we could talk about them a little bit more. Do you think they'll come back to see you in the United States?

⁶² The Broadway musical *Fiddler on the Roof* was based on *Tevye and his Daughters* (or *Tevye the Dairyman*), a series of stories by Sholem Aleichem that he wrote in Yiddish between 1894 and 1914 about Jewish life in a village in the Pale of Settlement of Imperial Russia at the turn of the 20th century.

Phyllis: Well, we're in touch. We're in close touch by mail and by phone. I can't speak to them because they don't speak English, but Herbert London is my cousin. And Herbert speaks very fluent Russian.

Sandy: So, he was there as translator?

Phyllis: So, he . . . yeah, well, in Atlanta.

Sandy: Atlanta.

Phyllis: Yeah. And he is in close touch with them by telephone. So, we are doing what we can. We'd like very much for them to come back. We'd like for them to come here permanently.

Sandy: So, that your family would be together.

Phyllis: Well, they're . . .

Sandy: . . . You have a lot of family here, and then this would add . . .

Phyllis: . . . They've missed a lot. They've missed a lot.

Sandy: Let me ask you one other thing, too. Who else do you think we ought to interview? Who would give us a good oral history about Atlanta? Do you have some suggestions? People we haven't interviewed yet that you would suggest we interview.

Phyllis: If you want just straight Atlanta history . . .

Sandy: . . . Jewish Atlanta history . . .

Phyllis: Yeah, I know, yeah, that's what I mean. Not necessarily involvement or, when I say involvement, I mean not necessarily but more of a family-oriented . . .

Sandy: . . . Impression . . .

Phyllis: . . . people-oriented impressions, I have two sisters-in-law who are wonderful historians.

Sandy: And what are their names?

Phyllis: Sarah Ellison and Charlotte Rich.

Sandy: And they're a little bit older than you are?

Phyllis: They are both . . . one is eighty and one is eighty-three or four. And they have all their faculties and they are sharp, and they are funny, and they remember . . .

Sandy: . . . They have some wonderful stories.

Phyllis: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

Sandy: Well, Phyllis, I wish we could just continue on and on, but you have been terrific, and I can see how your involvement reflects your upbringing and the way you act in the Jewish community and the way you respond to others . . .

Phyllis: . . . We . . .

Sandy: . . . are a direct result of your . . .

Phyllis: . . . We have a wonderful Jewish community, Sandy. We are very fortunate here, don't you think?

Sandy: I think so. It's terrific.

Phyllis: And having come from somewhere else, you see it maybe from different eyes, but I think God knows nobody . . . has taken it by storm like you have.

Sandy: Well, we're here talking about you, and I just think it's wonderful how you have always been a leader in many ways in community outreach and not always applauded for all that you do and did do in the community. And I thank you for taking the time to talk to us, and it's been a wonderful experience for me personally as well as I'm sure for the Oral History Project. Thank you.

Phyllis: Thank you.

<End Tape 2, Side 2>

INTERVIEW ENDS