INTERVIEW BEGINS

Sandra: Today is January 28, 2009, and I am with Janet Reagan who has agreed to be interviewed for the Esther and Herbert Taylor Oral History Project of the William Breman Jewish Heritage Museum. My name is Sandra Berman. I am the archivist for the museum. I am thrilled and very pleased that you have agreed to participate in this project. I would like to begin by asking you when you were born and how your family came to Birmingham [Alabama].

Janet: I was born in 1947, and my grandfather came from Lithuania to New York [City] in about 1880. He became a peddler. There was too much business in New York, because nine out of ten of the men who got off the boats from Eastern Europe were peddlers. After he married my grandmother and they had one or two children, they heard that there was great business in Knoxville [Tennessee], because there was a steel business, so there would be good business. He moved his family down [to Knoxville], and along the way I think they had another child. When they got to Knoxville, the peddling business, the trade, had been taken over pretty much by Scots. He heard about a steel mill in Birmingham, and he thought that would be a great opportunity. He moved to Birmingham, and my father, who was the last one born, was born in Birmingham. Some were born in Knoxville. On the way down, they ended up with their five children. [My grandfather] sent for all of his brothers and his sister. His three brothers settled here in Birmingham. His sister met someone and stayed in New York. [She] moved to White Plains [New York]. We had four of the five siblings here in Birmingham.

Sandra: Your grandparents’ names?
Janet: Morris and Mary Goldstein.

Sandra: The maiden name of your grandmother?
Sandra:  Do you know the year they emigrated to New York?

Janet:  1889 or 1888.  It was in the 1880’s.

Sandra:  Do you know when they arrived in Birmingham?

Janet:  It was somewhere between 1904 and the end of 1905.  My father was born here in April of 1906.

Sandra:  Your father’s name?

Janet:  Saul.  S-A-U-L.  There were two Goldsteins.  There was a Sol Goldstein, S-O-L, and [my father] was always Saul <pronounces it as if spelled Sawl, to distinguish it from Sol>, Saul Maisel Goldstein.  My mother was Betty Jane DeYoung Goldstein.  She was from Detroit [Michigan] of Dutch heritage and was born into a Reform family.  We always said that Daddy had her converted.  She went from a Midwestern Reform Jew, and he converted her to a Southern Conservative Jew.

Sandra:  Was it D-E-J-O-N-G?


Sandra:  There are some DeJongs in Atlanta.  I just wonder if there is . . .

Janet:  DeJong is in Holland like Smith is in America [very common surnames].  There’s Jewish.  There’s non-Jewish.  I was able to trace my family back through Jewish genealogy to 1792 I think, in Holland, which is great.

Sandra:  Your grandfather comes here.  He is peddling.  I know there is more to the story.  What did he do after he was successful at peddling for a little while?

Janet:  He eventually opened up a pawn shop.  There’s a family history . . . I wish I had it with me . . . of all the pawn shops, which brothers went to which and which sons came in.  I have the family history, which I will email [to] you.  It was an oral history we took from my father in 1985, when he was 79 years old.  He ended up with a store that his step-brother took over . . . I mean his step-son . . . somewhere in the late 1930’s, early 1940’s, which became Robert’s

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

2 A form of Judaism that seeks to preserve Jewish tradition and ritual but has a more flexible approach to the interpretation of the law than Orthodox Judaism.  It attempts to combine a positive attitude toward modern culture, while preserving a commitment to Jewish observance.  They also observe gender equality (mixed seating, women rabbis and bat mitzvah).
Sporting Goods. It was one of the largest sporting goods stores in the ... actually in Alabama. My grandfather’s pawn shop evolved into that.

**Sandra:** Do you remember the name of the pawn shop?

**Janet:** I’ve got it in those records. I will email it to you. One of his brothers ended up with five sons, and they opened up Goldbro, which was a big jewelry ... and then they added appliances, etc. ... store here, and it stood for Goldstein Brothers.

**Sandra:** Are any of those stores still around?

**Janet:** There is one left.

**Sandra:** Goldbro?

**Janet:** Goldbro.

**Sandra:** What about Robert’s?

**Janet:** Robert’s Sporting Goods ... Uncle Robert died probably somewhere in the late 1960’s, early 1970’s. The store had been sold before then, and I don’t think it exists any longer at all, unfortunately. My grandfather’s brother, Simon, opened up ... It was called Goldstein & Cohen in Ensley [Alabama], with Vernon Cohen, who also was a member of this synagogue [Temple Beth-El].\(^3\) They later moved to [Temple] Emanu-El,\(^4\) to the Reform synagogue. It was a clothing store.

**Sandra:** Were the stores all in the general same area?

**Janet:** Birmingham real estate is not that big at that time. Over the mountain had not been developed. My grandfather was in the downtown area, which is called Southside or Jones Valley. Birmingham is on hills and valleys, and when you are on the south side, you are on Shades Valley, and when you are on the north side you are in Jones Valley. My grandfather’s shop was downtown. My uncle Simon was out in Ensley, which probably back then was a long drive, but Ensley to us is 10 minutes from downtown. It’s in the western end of town. There were several Jewish merchants out there. My uncle, my father’s oldest brother, opened a drugstore out in Ensley. More merchants were out there. The Jewish people were not living out there.

\(^3\) Temple Beth-El was founded in 1907 and is a Conservative congregation. The current rabbi (2015) is Randall Konigsburg. On April 28, 1958, during the Civil Rights Era, dynamite was placed outside the synagogue but it failed to explode. The crime was never officially solved.

\(^4\) Temple Emanu-El is a Reform Jewish congregation. The community first held Rosh Ha-Shanah and Yom Kippur celebrations in 1881. Before the synagogue was built, the community met at the Cumberland Presbyterian Church. Land for the synagogue was purchased in 1884 and the building was inaugurated in 1889.
Sandra: Can you tell me the names of . . . When you mention your father’s oldest brother, could you just say the name?

Janet: His brother was Phillip Benjamin Goldstein. He was a pharmacist, and he was Ben. He was very famous for . . . Let me see if I can do it . . . For every child that walked into the drugstore he would put his finger on their belly and go <interviewee makes a squeaking noise with her mouth>. That’s how he became known. Somebody asks me who my uncle is, and I’ll say, “Ben.” They would say, “Oh, he’s the one that went <interviewee makes the squeaking noise with her mouth again>. He eventually moved his drugstore into Crestline Village, which is over the mountain in Mountain Brook where we all grew up.

Sandra: Your dad, say his name again.

Janet: My father, Saul, was the youngest. His brother Ben was the oldest. In between there were three sisters. One was named Lillie, but they called her Lila, because there were two other Lillie Goldsteins in Birmingham. She was an opera . . . a trained singer, and she went to New York [City]. She met a pharmacist and married, and [they] lived in Orange, New Jersey. She was Lila Cropp. Her son also was a pharmacist. Ben was the pharmacist here, and his son Malvin was also a pharmacist.

Sandra: The other two sisters?

Janet: The other two sisters . . . Gussie married into the Witt-Grueson-Weinstein clan that is big through the Southeast. I don’t know if you are talking to Phyllis Weinstein. She is one of the matriarchs of our Temple. It was her uncle that my aunt married. We have always called each other . . . this Southern Jewish geography . . . we are all related. Daddy used to tell me that in every town there was a Jewish merchant. Usually only in the small towns there was one Jewish family, and they were the merchants. When the salesmen would come through, they would take them in their homes. They did it here. My grandfather used to go down to the Tutwiler Hotel and look for Jewish names on Friday afternoon and take them home for Shabbos\(^5\) and to temple [service] the next day. They had a cousin that had a ‘this’ [relative] in the other city, . . . and this one . . . so there were a lot of families that are intermarried in the South into other Southern families. When we are going to Atlanta and somebody says they have a cousin

\(^5\) 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.
[there], it is very likely that cousin could be related to you. For instance, Steven Kornblum, who was president of our synagogue . . . his, I think, first cousin is married to my second cousin, which we were not aware of. His father’s aunt became my step-grandmother. It’s kind of mixed up like that. The third sister was Pauline, and she died in the 1940’s. She married Lou Rosenberg from Anniston [Alabama]. He is related to the Held family here and that group of people, which on the other side is related to the Fillers. It’s kind of a mixed thing. She died before I was born. In fact, my brother was named Michael Paul, after Aunt Pauline. It’s interesting. Of the four brothers, my grandfather Morris, the next one would have been Simon, Julius, and Uncle Sam. I may have . . . they all, after they married, settled in Birmingham and were close friends. Everybody ended up with a child [with a] first name [that started with the letter] M after my grandfather Morris in our clan. On the other hand, in Uncle Sam’s family his wife was Jenny, and they ended up with J’s as the first name on the first child for the grandchildren. My father was in charge of the names in our little strand, so I have . . . my brother was the last one to be born, and my father saved Michael for him. I have Mary Ethel, Myron, Malcom, and Malvin. We were very lucky that Daddy got to choose the names. We had a family reunion in 1985, before my father passed in 1989, and we ended up with . . . we had located . . . We know [where family members are]. It’s not like you have to search for our family. We all know where we are. There were 153 living descendants of my grandfather, and we had 105 at the reunion, which was amazing.

Sandra: Getting back to your parents, what did your father do?

Janet: My father started off . . . He got his master’s degree at Columbia [University] in New York, and it was in English. He really did not have much of a . . . He was a Talmud\textsuperscript{6} student but never was a rabbi. He used to . . . The Witt family that I was talking about had a store in Evansville [Alabama?? Illinois??], and Daddy went to manage that. That’s where he brought my mother when he met her, and that was not for them. The weather in Evansville was not for them, with the allergies and the cold and everything else. He said to my mother, “Where would you like to live? Anywhere.” She chose his hometown of Birmingham, so he came back to

\textsuperscript{6} Hebrew for ‘study.’ The legal code spanning a thousand years and based on the teachings of the Bible, the \textit{Talmud} interprets biblical laws and commandments. It also contains a rich store of historic facts and traditions. It has two divisions: the \textit{Mishnah} and the \textit{Gemarah}. The \textit{Mishnah} is the interpretation of Biblical law. The \textit{Gemarah} is a commentary on the \textit{Mishnah} by a group of later scholars.
Birmingham, and he was a paid traveling secretary for Kappa Nu. He had gone to [the University of] Alabama [Tuscaloosa] and was a [member of] Kappa Nu. This was his job. As family started to appear, and my father knew he had to make a living . . .

<break in tape>

**Janet:** We were talking about my dad. After he got to Birmingham, and the second child . . . me . . . I was on the way . . . he decided he need to make a living. Having been an English major, of course he went into accounting. [It] makes logical sense. <said jokingly> He had an accounting firm for years, and when he was way up into his fifties he went down to the University of Alabama. He roomed with his brother Sam’s grandson, Jerry, and took a little refresher course. He passed the CPA [Certified Public Accountant] exam on the first go-round, so he got his CPA [certification], which is kind of what I did. I had majored in English, and I was in retailing. Then when I was about 48 . . . I never finished college . . . I went back and finished my undergraduate degree. I decided I wanted an MBA [Master of Business Administration degree] and got accepted to the program, but I had not taken any undergraduate business courses. I started taking all the undergraduate business courses, and at age 51 I ended up with a master’s [degree] in accounting. I kind of followed Daddy’s track, except I am not the Talmud student he was. At that point, he became an accountant. Once we were in school . . . we lived on the Southside where everybody lived, in Forest Park, and the house is still standing and beautiful. It’s a revitalized neighborhood now. A lot of young Jewish couples are moving there.

When we moved over the mountain and we got into school, my mother started doing a lot of [volunteer] work for Hadassah. She was president of [the Birmingham chapter of??] Hadassah and she wrote scripts for them, and she wrote the bulletin for them. She had the talent of writing. Eventually, when we got to junior high [school], Mother went to work as the editor of a local newspaper here, the Shades Valley Sun. Once they sold that newspaper, she moved

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7 Kappa Nu Fraternity was founded on November 12, 1911, by six men at Rochester University (Rochester, New York). It was a local organization, and by 1917, there were five loosely connected groups who decided to hold a convention in Rochester and set up the Organization of Kappa Nu as a National Fraternity. In 1959, Phi Alpha merged into Phi Sigma Delta, and in 1961 Kappa Nu merged into Phi Epsilon Pi. In 1969-70, Phi Sigma Delta and Phi Epsilon Pi merged into Zeta Beta Tau, which had begun as a Zionist youth society in 1898.

8 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.
into copywriting at Pizitz.\(^9\) I don’t know if you have heard the Pizitz story here. Louie Pizitz was peddling with my grandfather Morris, so they knew each other during those days. Of course, he started Pizitz, and we had a pawn shop. \(<\text{Interview and interviewer laugh}\>\) My mother went into copywriting, and she worked at Pizitz for many years. Then she worked at Parisian,\(^{10}\) where I was working, for the last part of her career. When she retired and my father became ill, we shoved her out the door three days a week so she could get out. She worked for the Advertising Club, ran their office for them. She was the writer. She wrote for everybody. We could always expect at any family thing that everybody would have a poem or a story or a scrapbook with cartoons cut out that follows the history of your life. They both were very talented in writing. I think out of all the four brothers, basically my father’s family were the intellectuals, which may have come from my grandmother’s side, and the others were more merchants and businessmen. That’s why we never had the money and they did. It didn’t matter. It really didn’t.

**Sandra:** Oh, well. If we can go back in time a little bit . . . Your grandparents that came to Birmingham, did they . . . Well, the synagogue wasn’t founded yet. Were they among the founding families of [Temple] Beth-El?

**Janet:** They were at Knesseth Israel [Congregation].\(^{11}\) In fact, my father grew up at Knesseth Israel but had Sunday school at the Reform Temple, [Temple] Emanu-El, because they didn’t have Sunday school at the Orthodox\(^{12}\) [synagogue]. I am not sure exactly when my grandfather joined [Temple] Beth-El. I know that in . . . I have a loving cup given to him on Shavuot\(^{13}\) 1919

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9 Pizitz was a major regional department store chain in Alabama, with its flagship store in downtown Birmingham. At its peak it operated 12 other stores, mostly in the Birmingham area with several locations in Huntsville and other Alabama cities. The chain was founded as the Louis Pizitz Dry Goods Co. in 1899 on the site of its flagship building in downtown Birmingham. It was sold to McRae’s in December 1986, and all former Pizitz stores became McRae’s. Many of the former Pizitz locations are now closed, but the Pizitz family (via Pizitz Management Group) still owns the buildings of most of its former stores.

10 The Parisian Dry Goods and Millinery Company was founded in 1877 by two sisters, Estella and Bertha Sommers, in downtown Birmingham. The Parisian department store chain spread throughout Alabama and the Southeast, eventually reaching as far north as Michigan. The Proffitt’s Inc. department store chain bought the Parisian franchise in the 1990’s and sold it in 2006 to Belk’s Inc., which discontinued the Parisian brand.

11 The first Orthodox congregation to organize in Birmingham in 1889

12 Orthodox Judaism is a traditional branch of Judaism that strictly follows the Written Torah and the Oral Law concerning prayer, dress, food, sex, family relations, social behavior, the Sabbath day, holidays and more.

13 *Shavuot* is the Hebrew word for “weeks” and refers to the Jewish festival marking the giving of the Torah by G-d at Mount Sinai. It occurs at the completion of the seven-week counting period between Passover and *Shavuot*. Shavuot, like many other Jewish holidays, began as an ancient agricultural festival that marked the end of the spring barley harvest and the beginning of the summer wheat harvest. In ancient times, *Shavuot* was a pilgrimage festival during which Israelites brought crop offerings to the Temple in Jerusalem. Today, it is a celebration of Torah, education, and actively choosing to participate in Jewish life.
from Knesseth Israel, which is the Orthodox. I have donated it to Knesseth Israel. I know that when they had the building committee started here my grandfather was a major part in it. On the wall in the hallway we have in a shadow box the key that was presented by my grandfather and his brother to the president at the time, in 1927, when we went into this building. Somewhere in that time he became very involved in this. Being from Lithuania and being more of a . . . which is where the Zionist movement came out of . . . we had the first ZOA [Zionist Organization of America] meeting in the state of Alabama at my grandfather’s house . . . where the more secular education motivation came from, moving him from Orthodoxy to Conservative was a very logical move. When he moved over here, he became immediately involved. He was a secretary [of the board of directors], and there is another document on the wall making him honorary secretary or giving him a declaration of his term as secretary. Later, my father was secretary of the board. I broke the cycle.

**Sandra:** Did they talk in your family at all . . . Do you have any recollections, even when he did his oral history for you, of what a young man . . . and your grandmother also . . . what they experienced when they came here from Lithuania and ended up in the South with the racial divide? Did they ever discuss what their reaction was to Jim Crow\(^\text{15}\) and all of that?

**Janet:** No. Our family was very open. We always treated . . . as most Jewish families . . . we always treated everybody equal. They never really talked about the feelings. Daddy didn’t. He helped me through what I was going through in the 1950’s, at grammar school, when the other kids would say, “You killed our Lord, Jesus Christ.” Daddy helped me through that. I never felt

\(^{14}\) Founded in 1897, the Zionist Organization of America is the oldest pro-Israel organization in the United States. It is dedicated to educating the public, elected officials, media, and college/high school students about Israel and to promoting strong United States-Israel relations.

\(^{15}\) Jim Crow laws were state and local laws in the United States enacted between 1876 and 1965. The name seems to have originated in the song "Jump Jim Crow," a song-and-dance caricature of blacks performed by white actor Thomas D. Rice in blackface in 1832. As a result of Rice’s fame, “Jim Crow” became a pejorative expression meaning “Negro” by 1838 and the later segregation laws became known as “Jim Crow” laws. Jim Crow laws mandated racial segregation in all public facilities in the southern state of the former Confederacy, with a supposedly “separate but equal” status for black Americans, although in reality this was not so. Some examples of Jim Crow laws are the segregation of public schools, places, and public transportation and the segregation of restrooms, restaurants and drinking fountains for whites and blacks. Private businesses, political parties and unions created their own Jim Crow arrangements, barring blacks from buying home in certain neighborhoods, from shopping or working in certain stores, from working at certain trades, etc. In the twentieth century, the Supreme Court began to overturn Jim Crow laws on constitutional grounds. Rosa Parks defied the Jim Crow laws when she refused to give up her seat on a bus to a white man, which became a catalyst to the Civil Rights movement. Her actions, and the demonstrations that followed, led to a series of legislative and court decisions that contributed to undermining the Jim Crow system. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 officially ended Jim Crow laws.
a real stigma of antisemitism. On the other hand, I went to work [when I was] about 12 years old for a Jewish merchant who had black people working for him. I became very friendly with one, who later became president of a bank. I wanted to invite him over to the house for dinner, and Mother and Daddy said, “We would love to, except we would have a cross burned on our yard. You just have to accept the fact that that’s the way things are here.” They were not happy about it, but my mother also came from Detroit. When the riots were in Detroit, they were a lot worse than what was going on here. There used to some kind of saying about in the South we don’t care how big the black community becomes. We care about how close. In the North they didn’t care about how close they got but how big and important they got. We saw it, growing up, from a Northern and Southern . . . a total American experience, rather than thinking just because we lived in the South we had this problem.

**Sandra:** You said that your father helped you through some of the emotional ups and downs of being Jewish in a very Christian world. Did it happen frequently? Was it a problem? Were you able to join the clubs that everybody else was joining?

**Janet:** No, not really. We were very close friends in school. Outside of school, we had our . . . whether it was Young Judaea\(^\text{16}\) or Kadima\(^\text{17}\) and USY [United Synagogue Youth]\(^\text{18}\) whatever it was . . . we had our activities and they had their church groups. Later on, they went into their sororities, and those who felt like they needed to belong to something we had, in my day . . . of

\(^\text{16}\) Young Judaea is a peer-led Zionist youth movement founded in 1909. Its programs include youth clubs, conventions, summer camps and Israel programs that provide experiential programming through which Jewish youth and young adults build meaningful relationships with their peers, emphasize social action, and develop a lifelong commitment to Jewish life, the Jewish people, and Israel.

\(^\text{17}\) 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.

\(^\text{18}\) See reference 17.
course, I am a baby boomer\textsuperscript{19} . . . we had two AZA\textsuperscript{20} chapters and two BBG\textsuperscript{21} chapters. We had our own little fraternity/sorority type group. Not socializing out of school was not . . . It just never felt like a burden. It never felt like it was strange. It was just this is what they believed and they went this way, and this is what we believed and we went this way. The things that we did in our activities in either USY or BBYO\textsuperscript{22} were so Jewish oriented that it didn’t occur to us that we wanted to mix. Later in years in the South, the gentiles began to accept Jewish kids into their fraternities and sororities. I do remember, growing up, the community over the mountain that was developing at that time, Vestavia [Hills], up on the hill . . . Vestavia, which is now very Catholic, they wouldn’t let blacks, Jews, and Italians in. Catholics. I shouldn’t say Italians. Catholics. There was as much of a prejudice against Catholics as there was against Jews, which is very interesting. Daddy explained to me [that] their cycle to get to G-d is through the Pope, and the other Christian religions have their own personal relationships like we do. However, we don’t believe in Jesus. It was all out of a religious thing. The black/white thing was a different story. When it came to religions, the Jews and Catholics . . . There were many kids who said my mother would rather me marry a Jew than a Catholic. It was just normal. We got on the bus, and we sat in the front, and they sat in the back. We went into restaurants . . . I never saw a black person in a restaurant unless they were serving me. It was just something we knew. You walked into Pizitz or Loveman’s,\textsuperscript{23} the two big department stores, and there were four bathrooms. There was a colored man’s [bathroom] and a white man’s, and a colored woman’s and a white

\textsuperscript{19} Baby boomers are people born during the post–World War II baby boom between the years 1946 and 1964. After the end of World War II, birth rates across the world spiked. The explosion of new infants became known as the baby boom. During the boom, an estimated 77 million babies were born in the United States.

\textsuperscript{20} 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 BBYO (formerly 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).

\textsuperscript{21} B’nai B’rith Girls (BBG) is the female wing of BBYO (formerly B’nai B’rith Youth Organization), a Jewish youth organization for Jewish teenagers in grades 8 through 12.

\textsuperscript{22} BBYO, formerly B’nai B’rith Youth Organization, is a Jewish youth movement for students in grades from 8 through 12. The organization emphasizes its youth leadership model in which teen leaders are elected by their peers on a local, regional and international level and are given the opportunity to make their own programmatic decisions.

\textsuperscript{23} The store was originally founded in 1887 as A.B. Loveman’s Dry Goods Emporium at 1915 Second Avenue by Adolph Bernard Loveman. Moses V. Joseph of Selma, Alabama, soon joined the company and it was renamed Loveman & Joseph. In 1889, the company became Loveman, Joseph & Loeb with the addition of Emil Loeb. The name was later shortened to simply Loveman’s. In 1923, the business was sold to the Philadelphia-based City Stores Company. After City Stores filed for bankruptcy, Loveman’s closed its doors in 1980 after 93 years in business in Birmingham.
woman’s. There were two water fountains, [for] coloreds and whites. It is just the way we grew up. It was something we were used to.

**Sandra:** Do you remember ever thinking about it?

**Janet:** Oh, yes. Definitely.

**Sandra:** Like this was strange or wrong?

**Janet:** Definitely. We had a maid, a retired nurse, that worked for us, and we used to drive to Florida every year to see my grandparents. We would stop at a motel on the way, and of course she was not allowed in. My brother and I thought it would be great, and we took a sack of flour with us. We were going to put flour on her and take her in. It never occurred to us that she wasn’t a member of the family. I have to tell you, being born and raised in Birmingham, and being a rather observant person, as I watched after the Kennedys\(^{24}\) and the Johnson\(^{25}\) [administration] came in and passed laws, I watched the South gradually accept people on a one-on-one basis and then move into bigger acceptance. There was a major, major change in the 1970’s and 1980’s. It was gradual. It was not because it was legislated. The majority of people in the South were not educated. They had come off of farms if they were in the cities. A great majority were farmers, and they really had no sense of pride, in the sense of self worth, except that they were better than the blacks, than the coloreds. This became where the word white supremacy came in. They were better than somebody. I think the reason why Jews never had that feeling is because we know we are better than everybody. <interviewee laughs at her own joke> My father always said that you were born into a family that education is important, grammar, everything. We were just more eloquent, more savvy, more everything, because we were more accepting.

**Sandra:** You mentioned that you had a maid . . . What was her name? . . . who you felt like was a part of your family.

**Janet:** Gertrude. We called her Nursie Gertrude.

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\(^{24}\) John Fitzgerald Kennedy (1917-1963), commonly known as ‘JFK.’ He was the 35\(^{th}\) President of the U.S., serving from 1961 until November 22, 1963 when he was assassinated in Dallas, Texas. He was a Democrat. Robert ‘Bobby’ F. Kennedy, JFK’s brother, served as Attorney General during JFK’s presidency and was a strong advocate for civil rights.

\(^{25}\) Lyndon Baines Johnson (1908-1973), often called LBJ, was the 36\(^{th}\) President of the United States from 1963 to 1968. He came into the office with the assassination of John F. Kennedy in Dallas, Texas on November 22, 1963. He was a Democrat.
Sandra: How do you think . . . I know it’s always hard to know how somebody else feels. Do you think she felt a part of your family or do you think for her it was a job?

Janet: She felt a part of the family. She raised her daughter, her granddaughter, and her great granddaughter, because of the unfortunate cycle of no men in the family. She used to bring them, and we would have them for dinner. We would go to her house. She felt a part of the family. She cooked for us. She bathed us when we were small. That’s what I never understood about people in a different type of community, gentile or whatever, that didn’t allow their maids to come in the front door. They could bathe and touch their children, and put food on the table for them that they had cooked, but they had to come in the back door. To me, it was totally illogical.

Sandra: Do you think that Jewish people had a different attitude toward their black help than the Christian community?

Janet: Yes. I think because of the history of non-acceptance, of being thought of as different and being ostracized or actually evicted from a country, there is a lot more compassion. There was a lot more feeling that this was a person. We didn’t have our roots in the South. We didn’t grow up with families that had slaves. We didn’t grow up with a culture that treated them differently. We migrated to the South into the late nineteenth and mostly twentieth century, so our experience was not plantations and slaves and non-education for blacks. It just wasn’t our experience. I think we did have it probably because of that, that nature of knowing we needed to stand up for every man.

Sandra: How did your family react to the changes in the laws in the late 1950’s [and] 1960’s? Were they vocal about integration, were they working behind the scenes, or were they just hoping things would change because it was a fearful time?

Janet: A mixture of ‘b’ and ‘c’. I think that in their actions they let us know by the way they treated our maid, by the way they treated the delivery boy from the drugstore, by the way when we went to a restaurant they treated the wait staff. It was totally different. They had friends that were very involved in the movement.26 They did not stand up and go to protests, but they signed

26 The American Civil Rights Movement encompasses social movements in the United States whose goal was to end racial segregation and discrimination against black Americans and enforce constitutional voting rights to them. The movement was characterized by major campaigns of civil resistance. Between 1955 and 1968, acts of nonviolent protest and civil disobedience produced crisis situations between activists and government authorities. Noted legislative achievements during this phase of the Civil Rights Movement were passage of the Civil Rights Act of
petitions that would come around. They backed the movement by setting example. That whole era of baby boomers’ parents set the example for us.

**Sandra:** Where were you when you heard there was a bomb at the Temple?\(^\text{27}\) Do you remember what you were doing or . . .

**Janet:** I don’t even remember what year it was in.

**Sandra:** 1958.

**Janet:** [In] 1958 I would have been 11 years old and probably not told about it. There were a lot of things that we just didn’t know that were going on, not to scare us. The Temple was intact, so I guess they felt there was no reason. My parents didn’t tell us about it. I had to read about the Holocaust when I was eight years old. They had to be sure I had that education, but this they didn’t tell me.

**Sandra:** You went to public school. Did you go to public school your whole career in school?

**Janet:** Yes.

**Sandra:** You mainly were friends with people from the Conservative community.

**Janet:** We started out . . . Remember, it was a baby boomer year that I was born, and in my high school graduating class, and there were a few scattered at other high schools, there were out of 600 kids in that class 50 Jewish students. The temple groups mixed. They had their different social life in their SEFTY\(^\text{28}\) and their youth groups that we had with our USY. When it came time to join BBG and AZA, I would say that 95 percent of the kids that were involved in those were Conservative, which was very interesting. The structure is the same as it was in New York. The settlers of the Reform congregations were mostly of German descent. We were the Ashkenazi\(^\text{29}\) Eastern European, and it was that segmentation with our parents and grandparents with the two temples. In those days, the rabbis did not reach out to each other. There was no

\(\text{1964, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, the Immigration and Nationality Services Act of 1965, and the Fair Housing Act of 1968.}\)

\(\text{27 On April 28, 1958, during the Civil Rights Era, dynamite was placed outside the Temple Beth-El, but it failed to explode. The crime was never officially solved.}\)

\(\text{28 The North American Federation of Temple Youth, otherwise known as NFTY, is the Reform Jewish youth movement that fosters leadership at the North American, regional and congregational level. SEFTY is the regional Southeast Federation of Temple Youth. Today (2015), over 500 Reform congregations throughout North America sponsor Temple Youth Groups, bringing the NFTY experience to more than 6,000 high school-age young people in grades 9 thru 12.}\)

\(\text{29 Ashkenazi is an ethnic division of Jews which formed in the Holy Roman Empire in the early 1000’s. They established communities in Central and Eastern Europe.}\)
interaction. Here we can have a panel with rabbis from Chabad,\textsuperscript{30} Orthodox, Reform, Conservative. The rabbis talk to each other all the time, and they hug each other when they see each other. Back then, our rabbi did not reach out in any way to the Reform, and we never saw that.

\textbf{Sandra:} Which rabbi are you talking about?

\textbf{Janet:} Rabbi [Abraham] Mesch.\textsuperscript{31}

\textbf{Sandra:} Rabbi Mesch. Did you date anybody from the Reform community? Was that frowned upon?

\textbf{Janet:} It wasn’t frowned upon. I ended up with a social circle from this Temple, because I was AZA-BBG oriented. When I was growing up . . . it started when I was maybe three years old . . . my father started teaching confirmation. On Sundays he would take my brother, who was a year older, to the four-year-old pre-kindergarten. I would cry and cry, so I was the youngest one in the pre-kindergarten class. I was three years old, because I wanted to come. When we grew up, it was a punishment. If you don’t behave you can’t go to Sunday school. There were years in my life when I spent seven days a week here. Two days Hebrew school, two days bat mitzvah\textsuperscript{32} practice, and then Friday night the family always came to services. Saturday was service followed by bat mitzvah practice, and Sunday [was] Sunday school. This became a home, and I think, in a manner, the same thing happened in the Reform congregations. We were so tied up in those. It wasn’t that we weren’t friendly. It’s just [that] we weren’t in the same group. I was very close friends with a family around the corner, with the daughter Joannie <last name?>. She was Reform, but most of us that ran in that circle were Conservative. It was a neighborhood group of young Jewish girls that played together.

\textbf{Sandra:} You mentioned your mother was very active in Hadassah. Was that mostly Eastern European women, or did the Reform German women join Hadassah?

\textbf{Janet:} In Birmingham, everybody joined Hadassah. If you look through the leadership history of Hadassah, it is mostly Eastern European, the leadership, but everybody joined. Now

\textsuperscript{30} Chabad-Lubavitch is a Chasidic movement in Orthodox Judaism

\textsuperscript{31} Rabbi Abraham Mesch was the spiritual leader of Temple Beth-El in Birmingham, AL, from 1934 until his death in December 1962.

\textsuperscript{32} 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 \textit{bat mitzvah} around age 13, the same as boys who have their \textit{bar mitzvah} at that age. She is now duty bound to keep the commandments. Synagogue ceremonies are held for \textit{bat mitzvah} girls in Reform and Conservative communities, but it has not won the universal approval of Orthodox rabbis.
the girls that are being bat mitzvahed really want somebody to give them a life membership, so they can be a life member of Hadassah. Our directory is the ‘Bible’ of the city of Birmingham, and they want to be in the directory. They want their phone number in the directory. Birmingham has had a large, large Hadassah [chapter]. When my mother was coming through those stages in her motherhood when we were younger days, she wasn’t very active in the Sisterhood. She was very active in B’nai B’rith and moved up to president and some kind of region [position] with Hadassah. Those were her two things. My mother did not grow up with a lot of Jewish connection outside of school. Her father was the advertising director for the Detroit Saturday Night, a newspaper that is no longer in existence. Their biggest advertiser was Ford, so they really downplayed that they were Jewish. In fact, my mother grew up with a Christmas tree, which I thought was appalling. When Hanukkah came she would buy every blue and silver decoration she could find, and we would decorate it. We had a Jewish star this big <interviewee holds up her hands far apart to show how big the star was> that sat on a wall . . . everybody had the front picture windows . . . that you could see from the street with the picture window. Each point had a [light] bulb, so if you passed by our house during the winter holiday time everybody in the neighborhood . . . we had lots of Jews in the neighborhood . . . the Christians had up all their decorations, and you passed by our house and you could see our star. Mother decorated the whole house. I don’t know whether that came from the fact that she was a very celebratory person that celebrated every holiday or the fact that she had a Christmas tree as a child.

33 A group of women in a synagogue congregation who join together to offer social, cultural, educational, and volunteer service opportunities.
34 B’nai B’rith International (from Hebrew: ‘Children of the Covenant’) is the oldest Jewish service organization in the world. B’nai B’rith states that it is committed to the security and continuity of the Jewish people and the State of Israel and combating antisemitism and bigotry. Its mission is to unite persons of the Jewish faith and to enhance Jewish identity through strengthening Jewish family life, to provide broad-based services for the benefit of senior citizens, and to facilitate advocacy and action on behalf of Jews throughout the world.
35 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 rules 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.
36 The Magen David [Hebrew: Shield of David], or as it is more commonly known, the Star of David, is the symbol most commonly associated with Judaism today.
Sandra: Did your friends or your acquaintances in the Reform community have Christmas trees, because that’s very common in . . .

Janet: Some of them did. It wasn’t something they walked around the community talking about. I think it didn’t bother their parents as much as it bothered them.

Sandra: In the home, did you keep kosher? Was it a kosher home?

Janet: No. We didn’t keep kosher, but we had a strong religious background. I came from a very strong Zionist family. We did the Friday night service at home and then came to services [at the Temple]. We did not observe the second day of Rosh Ha-Shanah. We had a big seder. The big things we did, and Daddy always quoted something Talmudic to us. I can hear the words coming out of his mouth. We got a strong Jewish background, but I don’t know of anybody that I grew up with outside of maybe two or three families that still lived on the Southside that kept kosher in the Conservative Temple.

Sandra: Was it ever a thought of you to date anybody that wasn’t Jewish? Did you think about it, or did you date anybody that wasn’t Jewish?

Janet: I did date people that weren’t Jewish. It didn’t thrill my . . .

Sandra: Did you keep it a secret from your parents?

Janet: No. My parents always knew, but they didn’t want the community to know. In fact, I was out for the afternoon at a beach close to Bessemer [Alabama] with a gentile, and that night I went to the Jewish Community Center and accepted the first kavod [Hebrew, Yiddish: honor, dignity, respect] key for service that the community gave out. At 17 years old, I was the first recipient, and that afternoon I had been out with a gentile. My mother was not thrilled, to say the

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38 Zionism is a movement which supports a Jewish national state in the territory defined as the Land of Israel. Although Zionism existed before the nineteenth century, in the 1890’s Theodor Herzl popularized it and gave it a new urgency, as he believed that Jewish life in Europe was threatened and a State of Israel was needed. The State of Israel was established in 1948 and Zionism today is expressed as support for the continued existence of Israel.

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

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

41 A Jewish Community Center or Jewish Community Centre (JCC) is a general recreational, social, and fraternal organization serving Jewish communities in the United States and Canada, as well as in the former Soviet Union, Latin America, Europe, and Israel.
least, and neither was my father, but I was always open with them. I didn’t really broadcast that. I don’t think many of my friends . . . Maybe my best friend might have known.

**Sandra:** Was it hard to date only Jewish guys in Birmingham? Were the pickings slim?

**Janet:** [There were] plenty of guys. Unfortunately they were all buddies. I had known them since I was three years old. I did date one Jewish guy all the way through high school, and everybody thought we were going to get married. It was more we were in the same circles, and we went to the same places. I found out later . . . later in life he told me he would have married me if I had shown any signs. There was never a deep boyfriend-girlfriend . . . We were just always together, so we always had a date for everything.

**Sandra:** Did you attend Jewish camp in the summer?

**Janet:** No. My family was not financially able. We lived in a big house in Mountain Brook, because the education was the important thing, to get us into Mountain Brook [schools]. We drove cards that were five and six and seven years old, not brand new. They were brand new, but we kept them a long time. We didn’t go to summer camp, and we didn’t belong to the Fairmont or the Hillcrest, the two country clubs. However, I don’t remember feeling like I was left out of anything. In later years, as people say, “Oh, I went to camp with them,” and “I went to camp with them,” and they got to know each other, I was able to think back, “Well, when I went to <unintelligible> for Young Judaea, and I went to conventions for BBYO, I met people from other cities, too, that I still [am] friends with.” My brother and I never felt neglected or . . . I can’t remember the words of course, because I’m so old . . . I don’t remember ever feeling either disconnected or that we were deprived of anything, ever.

**Sandra:** How do you think the Jewish community has changed over the years from when you were a young child to today, and is it a good change or not such a good change?

**Janet:** That’s hard. First of all, because I have travelled a lot with my position with **Women’s League** into other synagogues, when I say what I’m going to say, it seems to be everywhere. We had a very synagogue-centered life, and the Jewish Community Center. Those are the two places [where] our family did family things. Our parents dropped us off at the JCC right after Sunday school and didn’t come back until after dark to pick us up. It was very Temple and JCC focused. In today’s world, it’s not. Unless you go to a Jewish day school, your contact is Sunday school. A lot of the parents don’t start their kids in Sunday school until they
are seven or eight years old, rather than three and four years old, because it’s too much trouble to take them on Sunday mornings. They would rather not, and the kids . . . We went to Hebrew school and bar mitzvah practice four days a week. The kids come one day a week and complain about that, because it interferes with soccer and basketball and football. We didn’t have that. We didn’t have all these diversions. We had ballet, and any baseball and football the boys played was in the neighborhood . . . there weren’t set teams . . . or on the playground at school. I think the Jewish community has suffered some from that melding into the world of every outside activity expose your kids to and allow them to do. I hear parents, sitting in the office, calling and saying, “My child won’t be at Hebrew high [school] tonight, because they’ve got a [sports] practice.” That would never have happened in our day. You didn’t miss things because of something else. This was the priority, and every Friday night all families came together. Friday night now is . . . the younger families come with their young children, because it’s at 5:45 so they have that opportunity to still get them home and fed and to bed on time. I remember everybody in the congregation, their ritual was to go home and eat and then get dressed up and come to Temple. It is a different community. What is better about it is that the Birmingham Jewish community has grown stronger, because to raise your children Jewish . . . and our children want to do that . . . with a community of 5,000 Jews you have to seek out other people through activities. You want your kids to be with Jewish kids. I always said, “What is the one thing that a Jewish mother wants for her child? To marry Jewish. What does she want for herself? Jewish grandchildren.” That hasn’t changed. I think that there’s the segment that sends their kids to Jewish day school through seventh or eighth grade, and there’s the segment that says, “When they start Sunday school at [age] seven or eight, it’s fine.” They’ll come to Temple for somebody else’s bar mitzvah. It’s just segmented a different way. It’s not the whole community tying their social lives into [the] synagogue.

**Sandra:** Do you have any regrets that you didn’t spend time in other cities outside of Birmingham, that you were always here?

**Janet:** No. I went to Michigan State University [East Lansing], so I was gone for a while. Of course it was like being at home, because on weekends when people took off I went to Detroit and stayed with relatives. My son and I lived in Chicago for about four years. I liked it, but when I came home and I could walk into my dentist’s office and see three Jewish people I knew or walk into the grocery store and run into people that I grew up with and . . . like the Piggly
Wiggly\textsuperscript{43} in Crestline, I would see somebody that I was in grammar school with, because we all grew up around Crestline Village. I like that feeling. I like that small feeling, but we still have grown into a city with cultural opportunities that might not be as great as Atlanta, but certainly as great as any city our size. We have an opera. We have a ballet. We have multiple theaters. You name it. The only thing we haven’t been able to do here is [professional] football, because of course college football is the leader. We’ve tried it three or four times, and it hasn’t worked. I think the size of Birmingham makes it a real plus to raise a Jewish family, any family. It’s small enough that the neighbors look after each other and that you know your neighbors, and it’s big enough that you have an opportunity to step out and do something else that is not being done in your neighborhood, not in your close group, if you wanted to.

\textbf{Sandra: } Do you think that the Jewish community today gets more involved with the greater Birmingham community than they did in the past?

\textbf{Janet: } Absolutely. There is no doubt about it.

\textbf{Sandra: } Why do you think it has changed?

\textbf{Janet: } I don’t know whether it’s the people, but I think it’s also . . . In my mind . . . everything I am saying is opinion, and I’ve got lots of them . . . In my mind, I think it’s part of integrating a small Jewish community into a bigger community, you have to be involved in it somewhat. Most of the things that the Jewish people are involved in outside of the Jewish community are boards [of directors] of or involvement in non-profits, in education, or the arts. It’s stuff that comes from our culture anyway. My father used to always tell me, “You’re not going to change the mind of everybody to love Jews as a group. You’re going to change them one on one. You have to remember that when you walk out of the house, especially in a city this size, you not only represent the Goldstein family. You represent the Jews that people get to know, and that’s a responsibility. If you are belligerent to a gentile or you don’t’ answer them properly when they accuse you of killing their Lord [or] any of those kinds of things, you may be

\textsuperscript{43} Piggly Wiggly®, America’s first true self-service grocery store, was founded in Memphis, Tennessee in 1916 by Clarence Saunders. In grocery stores of that time, shoppers presented their orders to clerks who then gathered the goods from the store shelves. Saunders, a dynamic and innovative man, noticed that this method resulted in wasted time and expense, so he came up with an unheard-of solution that would revolutionize the entire grocery industry. He developed a way for shoppers to serve themselves. Today there are more than 600 Piggly Wiggly stores serving communities in 17 states. All Piggly Wiggly® stores are independently owned and operated, and though they are located primarily in the Southeast, there are Piggly Wiggly® stores and as far north as Wisconsin.
the only Jew they have person contact with, because we’re a small community, and that’s what they think of Jews.”

**Sandra:** Getting back to the Civil Rights era for a minute, I wanted to ask you a question that we’ve asked everybody else that we’ve interviewed, too. In the 1960’s, there was that whole group of Northern rabbis that came down to get involved in the movement. Do you remember how your family felt when they came? I know that it would have been difficult to have Northern rabbis come to a Southern city, and then they got to go home.

**Janet:** Not in our family. Coming from two different backgrounds and 15 years apart, I don’t know why my parents ended up with the same frame of mind. I’m sure they welcomed any opportunity to involve themselves in ideas that would carry us forward, that were true ideas. They never resented that they lived here and somebody else got to leave after they expressed their opinion. I think that was where you were leading.

**Sandra:** I know that a lot of Southerners, especially those in much smaller communities than Birmingham, have said it was fine for them to come down here and tell us we ought to be more vocal. Then they got to leave

**Janet:** And we’re stuck with people resenting us.

**Sandra:** Right. I think that was very problematic for a lot of Southern Jews, and I was just wondering if that . . .

**Janet:** I think in Birmingham we didn’t have that many. . . I guess you would liken to carpetbaggers. We didn’t have that as much. They went to the smaller towns, where there was more problem. We had people in our community that spoke up for us. We had people in our community that made contact with the black community.

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

45 In U.S history, a carpetbagger was a Northerner who moved to the South after the American Civil War, especially during the Reconstruction era (1865–1877), in order to profit from the instability and power vacuum that existed at that time. The term carpetbagger was a pejorative term referring to the carpet bags (a form of luggage at the time) which many of the newcomers carried. The term came to be associated with opportunism and exploitation by outsiders.
Sandra: Do you know any specific names of people who stood out. They mentioned the rabbi at Temple [Emanu-El] was fairly vocal.

Janet: Rabbi Grafman\textsuperscript{46} at the Temple, yes. I remember Abe Berkowitz.

Sandra: He’s been mentioned a lot.

Janet: Those are the two, and Karl Friedman. Those are the names that stick out to me, because I remember them. There was not a lot of discussion in the family. Everybody knew that people were involved, but you have to remember in those days I was younger. I was involved in my Jewish organizations. The real pain of the movement did not affect me. I can remember when they passed the . . . 1960 . . .

Sandra: 1963, the Civil Rights Act.\textsuperscript{47}

Janet: [The] Civil Rights bill. We had not one black in our school, and we were told one day that we have to sit away from the windows. Do not look out the windows, and stay quiet. A very short while after that, there was a march of black kids coming to protest outside of our all-white school. That was as close as I got to realizing yes, we don’t have any blacks. I should be standing up and waving to them and welcoming them, but I didn’t.

Sandra: It would have been a hard thing to do.

Janet: Yes, and hard was not my choice.

Sandra: Finally, I want to give you a moment to tell me what were your fondest memories growing up in Birmingham.

Janet: It’s two-fold. On a personal level, our family dinner table, because we laughed all the time. All the time. Outside the home was my synagogue. I loved being here. We had two classes of every grade, so there [were] lots of Jewish kids here and there was a common interest. There was Israeli dancing or prayers that I learned by rote. There was a common ground that I didn’t have outside of here. Synagogue life was a big plus to me. I remember we had a yellow Hebrew school bus that used to pick us up at the junior high [school] and bring us here. We got here early, and across the street where the service station is was a delicatessen. We would go

\textsuperscript{46} Milton Louis Grafman (1907-1995) was an American rabbi who led Temple Emanu-El in Birmingham, Alabama from 1941 until his retirement in 1975. He then served as Rabbi Emeritus from 1975 until his death in 1995. He was one of eight local clergy members who signed a public statement entitled “A Call for Unity,” criticizing the Birmingham Campaign, to which Martin Luther King, Jr. responded in his “Letter from Birmingham Jail.”

\textsuperscript{47} The Civil Rights Act [PL 88-352] was enacted on July 2, 1964. It outlawed discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin. It ended unequal application of voter registration requirements and racial segregation in schools, at the workplace and by facilities that served the general public.
over to the delicatessen and buy those great big fat pickles and go sit in the balcony and eat them. They always wondered why did the sanctuary smell like pickles. We felt like we owned the building. When I came back to Birmingham and had some very tough times emotionally with aging parents and other issues that were coming up, I would walk into this Temple and go sit in the sanctuary and find some peace. My fondest memories really are that BBYO and Temple social life with other Jewish kids and the things we did as a family. Our family was very close knit.

Sandra: It leads me to a couple of other questions. You mentioned Gertie.

Janet: Gertrude.

Sandra: Gertrude. Was she a good cook?

Janet: Great cook.

Sandra: Do you still follow any of those recipes.

Janet: No. I never learned any cooking when I was growing up at home. I was the cleanup person. My mother didn’t teach me to cook. [Gertrude] learned to cook a lot of the Jewish recipes which my mother didn’t know, so they were learning them together from the Temple’s cookbook. She served us ‘filthy’ [gefilte] fish.48

Sandra: Filthy fish. <Interviewee laughs>

Janet: She made great chopped liver.49 She also fried chicken, and my mother couldn’t do that.

Sandra: Did your mother learn from here, and she learned from your mother?

Janet: I think they worked together in the kitchen.

Sandra: That’s great. I had one other question, but it went out of my head. This was a wonderful interview. I’m so glad that you agreed to participate, and thank you.

Janet: Thank you very much.

<End disk 1>

INTERVIEW ENDS

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48 Gefilte fish is an Ashkenazi Jewish dish made from a poached mixture of ground deboned fish, such as carp, whitefish or pike, which is typically eaten as an appetizer. The dish is popular on the Sabbath and holidays such as Passover, although it may be consumed throughout the year.

49 Chopped liver is a spread popular in Jewish cuisine. It is made by sautéing chicken livers and onions, seasoning with salt and pepper, sometimes adding hard-boiled eggs, and then grinding that mixture. Traditionally, the fat used is schmaltz, or rendered chicken fat, although oil is often substituted. It is usually served as an appetizer with crackers or rye bread.