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

MEMOIRIST: RONALD SALLOWAY
INTERVIEWER: SANDRA BERMAN
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<Begin Disk 1>

INTERVIEW BEGINS

BERMAN: Today is October 30, 2007. My name is Sandra Berman. I am interviewing Ronald G. Salloway, in Sylacauga, Alabama, for the Esther and Herbert Taylor Oral History Project of the William Breman Jewish Heritage Museum. Thank you so much for agreeing to do this interview today. We are very pleased to be here. Our second little venture into Alabama. I'd like you to begin by telling me a little bit about your own background, when you were born, and then your parents' names.

SALLOWAY: My name is Ronald G. Salloway. Everybody calls me Ronnie Salloway. I was born December 14, 1948, in Sylacauga, Alabama. My mother was Margaret Goldberg Salloway. She was born in 1924 here in Sylacauga. My father is Maurice H. Salloway. He was born March 5, 1920, in Peabody, Massachusetts.

BERMAN: How did your mother . . . let's go back a little bit and tell us about how your family ended up in Sylacauga.

SALLOWAY: My grandfather came from Europe in 1901. He landed in Baltimore [Maryland].

BERMAN: And his name?

SALLOWAY: Hyman Goldberg. They put a pack on his back, and they sent him south. He came to Sylacauga. Actually, he came to Talladega first, where he had some brothers. Then the brothers came to Sylacauga, and he came to Sylacauga. He was a peddler. He had a pack on his back, and he peddled in south Talladega County and north Coosa County. It's funny, a lot of people have told me that they remember, as a child, he as a peddler spending the night with them. He would spend the night at the last stop on his route. Later, when he made enough

money, he opened a store with one of his relatives. He went into business with his in-laws, Harry Witt. They started the Sylacauga Cash Store in 1911. They operated the Sylacauga Cash Store from 1911 until it was closed by my mother and my uncle. My mother, Margaret Goldberg Salloway, and Sidney Goldberg in . . . they closed it in 1975.

BERMAN: I want to go back just a little bit to the peddling. Did you ever have conversations with your grandfather about those experiences?

SALLOWAY: Yes, I did. What they did, each of the Jewish merchants when they came into a town, they would divide up and have certain areas. My grandfather's area was Weogufka, which was in Stewartville, which was in north Coosa County and the southern part of Talladega County. His brother, Dave Goldberg, peddled in Sycamore, Alabama, which is north of Sylacauga. His older brother, Meyer, who opened his store in 1898, Goldberg Brothers, actually peddled all over also.

BERMAN: How were they received in these towns by the population being . . .

SALLOWAY: They were received very well. The people were glad to see them. The Jewish merchants, when they came into an area, came to build a town and grow with a town. Rather than today, some of the merchants that have come in from other countries, aren't as people oriented or aren't as civic minded as they were. Whatever they did, they tried to help. I know my grandfather, whenever any of the little country churches needed money, they always came for donations. He never turned them down. He was always good. His brothers were the same way. There are a lot of country churches around here that had Hyman Goldberg, Dave Goldberg, or Meyer Goldberg when they gave money to the churches. They were very civic minded.

BERMAN: Did he ever talk about the language barrier when he first got here?

SALLOWAY: When my grandfather came over, he landed in Baltimore. He could only speak Yiddish. He learned to speak English from his customers when he started peddling. That is how he learned how to speak English. A lot of them would tell me they remember that my grandfather [when he] would stop at the end of the day, he would play baseball with them or whatever. He learned the language from all of his customers. They remembered him all through his life.

BERMAN: Did he ever talk about the experience of being an immigrant and, probably, leaving Europe because of oppression and then coming to the American South and seeing a disparity between, kind of, the haves and the have nots here?

SALLOWAY: No, I never heard that. My mother always told me . . . my mother married Maurice Salloway. When they first got married, they lived in Massachusetts. In the South, most of the Jewish people that you met, were either doctors, lawyers, or merchants. She never saw a plumber or any other type of blue collar person that was a Jewish person, until she lived up North. The Jewish people in the South were a little different than they were in the North.

BERMAN: Let's go back to the brothers. Your grandfather had the . . .

SALLOWAY: Sylacauga Cash Store.

BERMAN: What about the other brothers?

SALLOWAY: The other brothers, Meyer Goldberg and Sam Goldberg, were the oldest two brothers. They had a store called Goldberg Brothers. Sam Goldberg wanted his children, who were Ike Goldberg and Max Goldberg, to have a Jewish education. He moved back to Baltimore. Uncle Dave, who came over from Europe, was a younger brother of Meyer, went into Goldberg Brothers with Uncle Meyer. So, it was Uncle Meyer and Uncle Dave. They were partners up until Max Goldberg, which is another Max Goldberg. Max Goldberg and Maurice Goldberg being the sons of Meyer Goldberg, got out of college. Then they went into Goldberg Brothers with their father. Uncle Dave opened his own store, called The Leader. The Leader was open until 1957, when they sold out to some other stores.

BERMAN: At one time, how many Goldberg operated stores were there in Sylacauga?

SALLOWAY: Three. They were The Leader, Goldberg Brothers, and the Sylacauga Cash Store. The Leader was the first to close in 1957. Goldberg Brothers closed in the early 1980s. Wait a minute, it was the early 1970s. Then the Sylacauga Cash Store closed around 1975 or 1976.

BERMAN: Were they all general merchandise stores?

SALLOWAY: They were all general merchandise stores.

BERMAN: How was that to have three in the same family?

SALLOWAY: They got along very well. Even at all the Jewish holidays, I remember as a child, we would have Passover¹ either at my grandmother's house or my Aunt Fannie's house. They were good about all having . . . they were really good to each other.

BERMAN: Was there competitiveness in the business?

SALLOWAY: There was competitiveness, but they were brothers. They loved each other.

BERMAN: Did they ever think of going to a different town to . . . and the town was able to support all three of those stores?

SALLOWAY: There were. They were enough to support all three. But I will tell you a real quick little joke. There was a man, Louis Pizitz, who came over from Europe at a later date. He came into Talladega, which is 22 miles from Sylacauga, and several Jewish families. When he came into Talladega, the other Jewish merchants got together, "You know, there are already several other Jewish stores here. We think it would be better if you moved on." He moved onto Birmingham [Alabama] and is the founder of Pizitz Department Store² that later became the largest department store in Alabama.

BERMAN: That's great. Who were some of the other Jewish families in Sylacauga?

SALLOWAY: There were a lot of Jewish families that came and went in the City of Sylacauga. There was the Dimenstein family, who was related to the Goldbergs. They were here at one time. There were several Jewish doctors that came and went. I can't think of the name of those families. There was a store called the Mary Louise Shop, which was Ray Randleman [sp]. They were here for a while. Ray Randleman was the son-in-law of the Pizitz family over in Tuscaloosa. There was also another Jewish store here. It was originally a gentile store. It was called Helen's Lady Shop. It was bought by Molly Gordon. Molly ran that store

¹ 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.

² Pizitz was a major regional department store chain in Alabama that got their beginning in the late 19th century, with its flagship store in downtown Birmingham. By the 1920s, the store became known as the Louis Pizitz Dry Goods Company on the site of its flagship building 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. In 1986, McRae's, a department store chain based in Jackson, Mississippi, announced that it would be taking over the Pizitz chain. In 2000, Bayer Properties acquired the historic building. Pizitz Middle School in the City of Vestavia Hills was built on land donated from the family estate. The school was named in honor of Louis Pizitz.

for several stores. She closed up Helen's probably in the early 1970s. She sold out to somebody else. Those were the predominant Jewish people I remember here in Sylacauga.

BERMAN: Most of the Jewish families came in the late 1800s or early 1900s.

SALLOWAY: That's correct. They were all Ashkenazi. All Russian Jews. Our family was all from Lithuania.

BERMAN: Were there any German Jewish families that were here?

SALLOWAY: Not in Sylacauga. To my knowledge, no.

BERMAN: What were some of your earliest memories of growing up here?

SALLOWAY: As a child, I remember we lived near downtown. Every day I would go to the store. I mean, from the time I was a little kid until the store closed. I was always involved. Like I said, I was just raised in the store. I worked in the store from the time I was in the seventh grade all through high school. When I went to college and was in a fraternity, it was funny not working on a Saturday. I was so used to working in the store. I had a good retail background.

BERMAN: What were the customers like?

SALLOWAY: The customers were loyal customers to the stores. Each of the stores had their own customers. I remember there were several people who were customers of the Sylacauga Cash Store may go in Goldberg Brothers, but they were pretty loyal to whichever Goldberg store that they shopped in. It was really a loyalty that you don't have today in the stores.

BERMAN: Were they mostly from the farming community outside?

SALLOWAY: Yes, they were all from this area. When I was a child, I remember them telling me, and when my mother was a child, the railroad tracks here . . . It was a very active railroad town. I remember them telling me they would come in at midnight when the train shifts would change, people would come in to shop. Also, they remember . . . right now our county doesn't have much cotton in this part of the county. When there was a lot of cotton, schools would get out in the fall of the year, and people would shop. Cotton was a big thing in this area. Today, it's very minor.

BERMAN: You worked all the time in the store? On Saturdays?

SALLOWAY: Right. On Saturdays and after school from the time I was in the seventh grade until I graduated. When I was in college, I used to come home and help during Christmas holidays.

BERMAN: Was Saturday the big day for the farmers coming in?

SALLOWAY: At that time, Saturday was the big day. Today, retail has changed. Saturday is not a big day like it was at that time.

BERMAN: Do you remember a favorite customer of your parents?

SALLOWAY: There were a lot of them. I just remember a lot of my customers would bring my grandparents, if they had a farm or whatever, they would bring them preserves, pecans. They would bring them vegetables. They were always bringing all types of vegetables and stuff, so we always had plenty to eat.

BERMAN: Did your grandparents and your uncles offer credit?

SALLOWAY: Yes, they did.

BERMAN: Was that a big part of the exchange between them?

SALLOWAY: Yes, it was a big part at that time. That was before the credit card. They were big in the credit business. They never charged interest. That was the days before interest. That was a different type of deal. A lot of times you were loaning people money in the spring. You didn't see it until the fall.

BERMAN: But it was probably still that loyalty. Everybody tried to pay.

SALLOWAY: Right. For the most part.

BERMAN: Where did you go to school?

SALLOWAY: I graduated Sylacauga High School in 1967. I went to the University of Alabama. I got a B.S. in marketing in May 1971. I started law school in the fall of 1971. I went one semester. I got a master's in journalism, public relations, advertising in December, 1972. Actually, my diploma says May, 1973, because at the time, there was no graduation in December. Then I went on the road as a salesman.

BERMAN: Was it difficult being a Jewish young person going to school here.

SALLOWAY: Not really. When I was in first grade, I had one cousin, Gail Goldberg, who was in the sixth grade. We were the only two Jewish students in the school. Later, my sister, who is younger than I was, and my cousins, they were in school after me. When I was in the sixth grade, I think there were three Jewish students. Myself, my sister Shirley Salloway [Kahn], and my cousin, Linda Goldberg. By the time I was in high school, it was the same thing.

BERMAN: Did you ever experience any kind of anti-Semitism?

SALLOWAY: Not really.

BERMAN: What about your parents?

SALLOWAY: No. They never really did.

BERMAN: That's what we here of in a lot of places, so it is pretty common. Did they ever feel uncomfortable ever that they couldn't give you a Jewish upbringing or that it was more difficult for you?

SALLOWAY: No. I mean, I wasn't *bar mitzvahed*³ because of it. I couldn't go to Sunday school on Saturdays. That's when they had the Hebrew. I did have a cousin who later was *bar mitzvahed*. But my parents, you know, with the store, we weren't able to go on Saturdays. My uncle, he wasn't *bar mitzvahed* either. Of course, my father was raised in Massachusetts, and he was. But I wasn't

BERMAN: Where was the closest congregation that you would attend?

SALLOWAY: We went to Temple Emanu-El⁴, which was a Reform congregation in Birmingham. Up until the fifth grade, in Sunday school, we went to Temple Beth-El,⁵ which is a conservative temple. We changed temples and went to the Reform temple.

BERMAN: You had mentioned earlier when we were talking, that there was also a small little congregation in Talladega.

SALLOWAY: This was back in the 1920s. There were several Jewish families in Talladega, and they used to have a minyan⁶ on Friday night. This was . . . my mother could remember that. Probably also at the same time in the 1920s, there were probably more Jewish merchants here in Sylacauga. I do remember that there were a couple of other Jewish families. At one time, there was a Jewish mule trader here. I think his name was Cheap Willie Stark [sp]. I think that is what he did. He was a mule trader.

BERMAN: That is great. What about just being with other Jewish children? Did they try to get you into Birmingham on a regular basis? Was an issue?

³ 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.

⁴ Temple Emanu-El is a Reform Jewish congregation in Birmingham which formed in 1881.

⁵ Temple Beth-El was founded in Birmingham in December of 1907 as Congregation Beth-El. It is the only Conservative synagogue in Birmingham.

⁶ A *minyan* refers to the quorum of 10 Jewish adults required for certain religious obligations. According to many non-Orthodox streams of Judaism, adult females count in the *minyan*.

SALLOWAY: Yes and no. We went to temple. We went to Sunday school on Sundays, but not really. It was hard, like you say. When you're in business, it was 50 miles. At that time, the road was not a four lane highway between Birmingham and Sylacauga. It was a little harder to get to Birmingham.

BERMAN: What about the holidays? How were they spent? The Jewish holidays.

SALLOWAY: The Jewish holidays, we were always out of school. All the Jewish merchants of Sylacauga always closed. As a child, I remember my grandfather would go up before the Jewish holidays and would try to get a room at the rooming house near the Temple Beth-El so they could walk to *shul*⁷ on the High Holy Days.⁸ On *Rosh Ha-Shanah*⁹ and *Yom Kippur*,¹⁰ they always wanted to walk to temple. Later, we always drove in for the day and went to the temple and came back. On the Jewish holidays, we were always in temple.

BERMAN: What about Passover? Was that spent with the whole family?

SALLOWAY: Passover was also spent with the family. When I was growing up, when I was a child, we would have it either at my grandmother's one night. We'd have it at my Aunt Fannie's the next night. It was always a big event when I was a child.

BERMAN: Was it a combination of Jewish and Southern recipes?

SALLOWAY: No. It was all Jewish recipes. It was always all Ashkenazi foods. It was all your typical Jewish foods.

BERMAN: Did anybody have a great fried chicken recipe?

SALLOWAY: We had a maid that worked for us from the time I was born until the time she passed away two years ago. She made the best fried chicken.

BERMAN: How would you describe your parents'

⁷ *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.

⁸ The two High Holy Days are *Rosh Ha-Shanah* (Jewish New Year) and *Yom Kippur* (Day of Atonement).

⁹ *Rosh Ha-Shanah* [Hebrew: head of the year; i.e. New Year festival] begins the cycle of High Holy Days. It introduces the Ten Days of Penitence, when Jews examine their souls and take stock of their actions. On the tenth day is *Yom Kippur*, the Day of Atonement. The tradition is that on *Rosh Ha-Shanah*, G-d sits in judgment on humanity. Then the fate of every living creature is inscribed in the Book of Life or Death. Prayer and repentance before the sealing of the books on *Yom Kippur* may revoke these decisions.

¹⁰ Hebrew for 'Day of Atonement.' The most sacred day of the Jewish year. *Yom Kippur* is a 25 hour fast day. Most of the day is spent in prayer, reciting *yizkor* for deceased relatives, confessing sins, requesting divine forgiveness, and listening to *Torah* readings and sermons. People greet each other with the wish that they may be sealed in the heavenly book for a good year ahead. The day ends with the blowing of the *shofar* (a ram's horn).

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BERMAN: interaction with their neighbors. Did they have a lot of friends within the community?

SALLOWAY: Yes. They were involved in all these civic clubs. My father was a merchant. He was in the City of Childersburg, Alabama. He had a store called The Fair Store. He was in the Kiwanis Club there. My uncle, Sidney Goldberg, my mother's brother, was in the Rotary Club here in Sylacauga. My grandfather, Hyman Goldberg, was a charter member of the Rotary Club here in Sylacauga. The other brothers also, Max Goldberg, was in the Rotary Club with my Uncle Sidney. I think Morris Goldberg was in the Lions Club. They were all active in civic clubs in Sylacauga.

BERMAN: What about your mother?

SALLOWAY: My mother was active too. She was in Bridge clubs and different clubs. She was in several garden clubs and things like that. She loved Sylacauga. She loved everything about it. This was her home town. She loved everybody.

BERMAN: Culturally, did they ever feel like they wished they were closer to a bigger city?

SALLOWAY: Never. I never heard them mention that. They were happy in Sylacauga.

BERMAN: How about you?

SALLOWAY: Yes, I'm happy here. You know, it's different today. I can be in Birmingham in 45 minutes. I travel a lot. My daughter lives in Boston [Massachusetts]. My son lives in New York. On business, I go to New York a lot. I go to Atlanta [Georgia] a lot. I enjoy being in a small town. It gives me a break sometimes. We have never have missed anything by not living in a big city. I think we've had a lot of advantages because we had the advantages of going into the big city and then being back in the country town.

BERMAN: How about your own children. Did they enjoy growing up here?

SALLOWAY: Yes, they did. They were involved. My daughter was a cheerleader. She was involved in sports. She was on the tennis team. My son was on the tennis team. He was a state champion in tennis. He was on state championship teams. They were also on the swimming team. They were very active in high school and sports and a lot of things. They were very good students.

BERMAN: That's great. Did they ever think about coming back?

SALLOWAY: No. Someday, maybe my son might come back. I don't know if my daughter will or not. They would probably come back to Birmingham. I don't know if they would come back to Sylacauga. Things have changed. There is not a lot of opportunity unless you are a doctor or unless you are in business or whatever here.

BERMAN: It is hard for you to see how the community has changed and how it is not a place that maybe your children would want to come back to.

SALLOWAY: I think what is happening in this community is true in a lot of the communities. When I started on the road, I was a road salesman, in the spring of 1973. I worked for a company called Saul Brothers out of Atlanta. I traveled northern Mississippi, western Tennessee, and Arkansas. I notice in all the small towns, is when the Jewish merchants went out of business, nobody came back in. All of the merchants always wanted a better life for their kids. My parents wanted me to go to law school. Everybody always thought that whatever the other person was doing, the grass was greener on the other side. As a result, the Jewish communities in the small towns, they've left the small towns. If you look in Europe, it is the same thing. Most of the Jewish people at that time in Europe were in the small towns, little ghettos or *shtetl*¹¹ towns of Europe, until later some of them got into bigger cities.

BERMAN: I think it is a pretty common occurrence throughout the south. What would you attribute the closing of a lot of the stores to?

SALLOWAY: Times have changed. Competition. The Jewish merchants who came into small towns, came to build the towns. At that time, you didn't have the competition of the Walmarts and the big megastores. In a small town . . . manpower, you can only be there so many hours. It's not like a big city where the other stores . . . it's like an army. A small army can't go against a large army. They will kill you with manpower.

BERMAN: When we were coming through Talladega to get here, we noticed that there were still some small stores in downtown Talladega. Are they making it? Surviving?

SALLOWAY: I think they might be surviving. I don't know how they are really doing. We have some here in downtown Sylacauga the same way. They are making a living, but it's harder and harder for the small stores. The only way a small store can do it is if you are a specialty

¹¹ 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.

store or you offer something that the other stores don't offer. You have to find a niche. As far as trying to slug it out with the Goodies, Walmart, the bigger stores, you can't do it. There is no way you can compete.

BERMAN: If we can go back in time a little bit to the 1950s and 1960s. What was it like here during the Civil Rights Movement?¹²

SALLOWAY: We were really unaffected. We never noticed anything.

BERMAN: What about the schools with integration?

SALLOWAY: The schools were integrated when I was a junior in high school. This was 1966. We had the first integration. I was a junior. We had six black students come to our school in my grade. There was one in my sister's grade. My sister was in the ninth grade. The eighth grade, I'm sorry. They had one black student. The next year, my senior year, which, again, my class was the first integrated class. We had about 25 black students. We had a very good school system in Sylacauga for blacks and whites. When I was growing up in Sylacauga, the city school system was probably third in the state of Alabama. We were ranked right behind the Mountain Brook schools for academics. We had a very good school system. I think it was pretty fair for most people. Later, the schools were combined.

BERMAN: Was it a very peaceful kind of . . .

SALLOWAY: Yes. There was never any problem. When my kids were in school, the junior high that they attended was in the black section of town. That school has since been closed. We have a new middle school in a new area.

BERMAN: How did your parents feel? Did they ever talk about the integration? I mean, how was the Jewish community? Did they get involved at all in . . .

SALLOWAY: No. They pretty much minded their own business. They were in favor of equal things for everybody. Sylacauga was a good town. Our town was basically 60, probably 70 percent white, 30 percent black. We always had pretty good racial harmony in the town.

¹² The American Civil Rights Movement encompasses social movements in the United States whose goal was to end racial segregation and discrimination against black Americans and enforce constitutional voting rights to them. The movement was characterized by major campaigns of civil resistance. Between 1955 and 1968, acts of nonviolent protest and civil disobedience produced crisis situations between activists and government authorities. Noted legislative achievements during this phase of the Civil Rights Movement were passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, the Immigration and Nationality Services Act of 1965, and the Fair Housing Act of 1968.

BERMAN: That's great. What about [Ku Klux] Klan activity?¹³ Was there much of that here?

SALLOWAY: The only thing I remember as a child, I remember seeing some crosses burned at the forks here at Sylacauga and different places. There was a little Klan activity but never too bad.

BERMAN: Where was it more problematic in the state? Do you know?

SALLOWAY: Probably in north Alabama. We're in east central Alabama. I think most of your Klan activity was in north Alabama or even in west Alabama in Tuscaloosa. Our part of Alabama was pretty good.

BERMAN: What are some of your fondest memories of growing up in the town?

SALLOWAY: I enjoyed growing up. I was the oldest grandchild of Hyman and Goldy Goldberg. As I grew up, I was always with relatives. Every Sunday, we would go somewhere. On Sunday, my grandmother was from Pell City, Alabama, and her brother lived there. On Sundays, we would go over and visit with him. I'd listen to all the stories. Or, we would go to Atlanta and see my Aunt Bessie and Uncle Manuel. I would visit my cousins there and listen to a lot of the stories. I was always around older people. I learned a lot of things that they knew. I'm glad I did.

BERMAN: Did you ever go to camp? Summer camp?

SALLOWAY: I went to Boy Scouts camp one summer, and that ended my camping career.

BERMAN: Why was that?

SALLOWAY: I just didn't enjoy it. As a child growing up in Sylacauga, I was involved. We had a very good recreation department. Every year, my sister and I were involved on the swimming team. We swam a lot. We were involved in swimming and things like that.

BERMAN: Were you a Boy Scout?

SALLOWAY: I was a Cub Scout and a Boy Scout. I was in the Methodist Church Cub Scout Troop, Episcopalian Church, and the Baptist Church Boy Scout Troop.

BERMAN: That's great. How did you meet your wife?

¹³ The Ku Klux Klan is a white supremacist, white nationalist, anti-immigration, anti-Jewish, anti-Catholic, anti-black secret society, whose methods included terrorism and murder. It was founded in the South in the 1860's and then died out and come back several times, most notably in the 1920's when membership soared again, and then again in the 1960's during the civil rights era. When the Klan was re-founded in 1915 in Georgia, the event was marked by a cross burning on Stone Mountain. In the past it members dressed up in white robes and a pointed hat designed to hide their identity and to terrify. It is still in existence.

SALLOWAY: I met my wife . . . my wife is from Marblehead, Massachusetts. I was up visiting my cousins one summer in Massachusetts. That's how I met my wife, and I brought her back south.

BERMAN: How was that? Was that difficult . . .

SALLOWAY: When we first got married, she traveled with me on the road. So, she got to see a lot of the small towns in the south. She got a good experience there. We bought a house here in Sylacauga, and she got a license to sell real estate. My father took a real estate test also. As we had children, the children were involved in a lot of things, and she got involved in a lot of things. She was president of the local swimming team. She was in charge. She was a chauffeur to the tennis team. Whenever the kids had to go somewhere, she was always involved.

BERMAN: So it wasn't a hard adjustment. That was what I was trying to . . .

SALLOWAY: I think it was probably different. But every year, also, during the Christmas holidays, we would go visit her parents down in West Palm Beach, Florida. We would always, from the time my kids were probably four or five years old, we were never here for Christmas. In fact, this Christmas will be the first Christmas, I think, we'll be in Sylacauga because my father is not well. We'll stay with him. But we've always been out of town during Christmas.

BERMAN: When you were growing up, was it important for you to date somebody Jewish?

SALLOWAY: No, because in Sylacauga, of course, there weren't any Jewish kids. When I went to [University of] Alabama, I dated some Jewish girls because I was in a Jewish fraternity, Zeta Beta Tau. But I had also dated a lot of gentile girls.

BERMAN: How did your parents feel about that? Was it an issue for them?

SALLOWAY: Not really. But when I got married, I married somebody Jewish.

BERMAN: Was it an issue for you? Were you consciously wanting that?

SALLOWAY: Yes and no. I think it just makes it easier in marriages if you have that in common.

BERMAN: Where did you go on your first date?

SALLOWAY: In Sylacauga? Probably . . . we had a lot of dances. Probably to the dance or the movies. I don't remember.

BERMAN: Was there kind of a place where all the kids hung out?

SALLOWAY: We have a very good recreation department in Sylacauga. In the summers, we would have dances in Sylacauga on Saturday night. There would be dances in Childersburg on Friday night. In the summer, in Talladega there were dances on Tuesday nights. All of us would go to all the dances within a 25 mile range. Then I would go sometimes and have dates in Birmingham.

BERMAN: Football must have been big with the high school, too.

SALLOWAY: Football was a big thing. Growing up, I remember . . . in 1961, I went to my first Alabama football game. I went to see Alabama play Tennessee at Legion Field. From then on, every Saturday I went to see college football games. Until recently, I watch them on TV because it is a lot easier, and you just don't have as much time to go. When I was growing up, I went to all of them.

BERMAN: You mention that you went to University of Alabama. Did you think about going anywhere else, like up North or . . .

SALLOWAY: No, that was it. When I went to the University of Alabama, there were a lot of Jewish kids from the small towns that were at Alabama. It's changed. We probably had three Jewish fraternities. There were two Jewish sororities. This was in 1967. My mother, when she went to the University of Alabama, and my uncle, I think there were five Jewish fraternities and three Jewish sororities. The University of Alabama back in the early 1940's, I think probably, I saw some information where there were probably 5,000 Jewish students, and they probably had between 750 and 1,000 Jewish students. Today, my children also went to undergraduate school at the University of Alabama. I hate to jump back and forth, but when I went to the University of Alabama, there was approximately 14,000 students there. When my children were there, there was 21,000 students. There was only one Jewish fraternity and one Jewish sorority. But in between the time I was in school and they were in school, a lot of Jewish students started going into the other fraternities and sororities. Therefore, the Jewish fraternities and sororities fell on some hard times there.

BERMAN: Yes. I do know a lot of young folks from Atlanta that went to the University of Alabama. It's pretty popular. If we would go back to growing up here. Would you ever wanted it to be any different? Would you have wanted something different?

SALLOWAY: No. I think we had a good life here. I can't complain there. Everything was just fine like it was.

BERMAN: You mentioned earlier, too, that cotton used to be really big in the area. What happened?

SALLOWAY: Things just change. There is no cotton gin in this part of the county anymore. I guess as the agriculture and different things changed . . . we have some areas that are good for cotton and some that are not. They just found other uses for the land. The farming just played out in this part of the county. The only cotton in this county, I think, is still in the northern part near Talladega.

BERMAN: What do most people do here now? If they are not farming, what are the occupations?

SALLOWAY: Right now, Sylacauga is going through a transition. Avondale Mills went out of business last year, which at one time was the largest employer. As times changed, Avondale got more mechanized. That was the only way they could keep up with the times. Where you might have 50 people working doing a certain thing, they have one person punching a computer button. Things just changed. It's harder for them to compete with the Japanese. Actually, with the Chinese today. So, the textile business here changed. That is what happened with the cotton.

BERMAN: What do most people . . . what does the population do?

SALLOWAY: I think a lot of people work in Birmingham. There are small industries here, but there is no major industry here in Sylacauga anymore.

BERMAN: How far is it to Birmingham from here?

SALLOWAY: Forty-five miles.

BERMAN: So, it's just a commute. You mentioned a lot of Jewish doctors were in the area. Were they out of Birmingham?

SALLOWAY: There were some that lived here in Sylacauga from time-to-time years ago. Now, any that would have come in, would live in Birmingham. We did have a Jewish doctor that lived here, say, five or six years ago. He stayed about two years and then left.

BERMAN: Are there any Jewish families . . . How many Jewish families are in . . .

SALLOWAY: In the city of Sylacauga, there is my family, which is my wife and I and my father. There is another lady here that is Jewish. She goes to the conservative temple in Birmingham. I guess that would be all the Jewish people that live here in Sylacauga.

BERMAN: Who is she? Why is she here?

SALLOWAY: That is a good question. Her name is Mary Kimerling. She met somebody, and she moved here to Sylacauga. She lives here in Sylacauga.

BERMAN: What about all the other families. Where did they go, that you mentioned earlier?

SALLOWAY: They just moved to different areas. Some of them moved to Birmingham. Some of them moved to Atlanta. Just like my cousins. I have cousins that live in Birmingham and cousins that live in Atlanta. I have one cousin that lives in Tampa. They just moved to different places. There was nothing to come back here to since they didn't have a store or business. The reason I'm here, when I graduated, I started my own business [Ronnie Salloway and Company]. I've traveled out of Sylacauga, and my parents helped me. I still live here. I still operate out of Sylacauga.

BERMAN: You went back to your retailing roots. Law school wasn't your thing.

SALLOWAY: Actually, I'm in the wholesale business. Wholesale ladies clothing. We're in the wholesale business, not the retail business.

BERMAN: Is there anything that you would like to say that we have not covered?

SALLOWAY: I really can't think of anything. Growing up in Sylacauga was just a great city, a good time.

<End Disk 2>

<Begin Disk 3>

SALLOWAY: Our family did well here. They prospered here. It was a mutual thing. The City of Sylacauga was good to them, and they were good to the City of Sylacauga. I guess that's all I really have to say.

BERMAN: Thank you very much. This was really delightful. I'm so glad you agreed to do this. Thank you.

SALLOWAY: Thank you.

INTERVIEW ENDS

<End Disk 3>