INTERVIEW BEGINS

MAZIAR: This is Patty Maziar. I am interviewing Mr. Bernard Smith for the American Jewish Committee, National Council of Jewish Women Project, the Jewish Oral History Collection of Atlanta. The date is January 20, 1993. Thank you for inviting me to your office today. Before we get too far, you mentioned and pointed to some pictures on your wall. Perhaps, for purposes of description, you could tell me what is in them.

SMITH: One of the pictures is a picture of my entire family. We were originally 11 children. Five of them were born in London, England, or in one of the cities in England because my father worked there. Most of the brothers were born in Atlanta, Georgia, except for two. Two brothers were born in Birmingham [Alabama]. The picture underneath it is my father's place of business on Decatur Street. He manufactured wooden barrels known as the cooperage industry. My father had told us when we were young that he made the first barrel for the Coca-Cola Company.

MAZIAR: How did he get involved in that business?

SMITH: My father, in England, was a craftsman and made the cases for baby grand pianos. One of his friends married a girl in England, and her sister lived in Birmingham, Alabama. This was in the 1890s. While his job was secure, he thought the opportunities in the United States might be better. His friend, who moved from London, England, to Birmingham because of his wife's sister, found him a job at Pizitz Department Store making counters, wooden counters to display merchandise. So, he left my mother and four daughters in London and went to Birmingham, Alabama, to work for Pizitz. He had been there a year when he sent her some money to take the four girls for a holiday to Surrey, England, which is on the English Channel.
She had an aunt there. My mother, being a very practical British lady, decided she needed a husband and not a vacation. She packed up whatever she had and went down to Southampton [England]. Being an English speaking lady with a Cockney accent, [she] got a sea captain to give her the passage that she wanted so that her funds wouldn't run out. He took her to Boston [Massachusetts]. When she got to Boston she got a train and went to Birmingham, Alabama. All of this was a total surprise to my father because he was living in a boarding house in Birmingham with one of her friends who had married and moved to Birmingham, Alabama. She had a boarding house to sustain themselves. When she arrived in Birmingham, her friend said, "I want you and your four girls to stay in the bedroom until he comes home."

MAZIAR: What a surprise!

SMITH: All I can tell you, we laugh about it because we said that my father opened the door and there was his wife and four girls. Nine months to the day, one of my brothers was born.

MAZIAR: He must have loved telling that story.

SMITH: Birmingham, being an iron and ore type of city, it was very dirty. They didn't know about EPA [Environmental Protection Agency] and rules and regulations in those days. They lived there almost two and a half years because I have another brother born there. My mother said it was too dirty, and she didn't like living in Birmingham. She wanted to move. My mother had another girlfriend in Atlanta, Georgia, married and living in, what we call a three bedroom house. By this time, my mother had six kids. Her girlfriend said, "Just pack up and come. I know your husband can find something." So, my folks moved from Birmingham to Atlanta. Stayed with her friend for two or three weeks until my mother found a house that they could rent, which they did. It was on Bell Street which is where Grady Homes1 is now, off of Decatur Street. My father bought a horse and a wagon and started to see if he could make a living out of peddling. He got very friendly with the man who ran the Atlanta Athletic Club, which was a Christian club, but who served liquor, although liquor was not legitimate. They imported their liquor from Scotland and wherever they could get it from, and it came in barrels.

MAZIAR: This wasn't during prohibition, was it?

SMITH: Yes. This was 1900. My father began to accumulate these wooden barrels. When he got a backyard full of them, my mother said, “We don't have any more room for

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1 Grady Homes public housing was located in downtown Atlanta. It was built in 1942 and demolished in 2005. Grady Homes was located directly across the highway from Grady Hospital.
barrels. You've got to find something to do with these wooden casks.” My father found out that there was a cooperatorage company in St. Louis, Missouri. He got on a train and went to St. Louis. Knocked on the door of Brockman Cooperage Company, which was in St. Louis. He told them that he was an experienced cooper, which he was not, and got a job. In six months, he learned all there was to know about making wooden barrels. He came back to Atlanta and opened a cooperatorage company. At one point, before I was born in 1915, he had 50 cooperers working for him making wooden barrels. In 1915, the Coca-Cola Company was getting bigger and bigger. They decided that they ought to make their own wooden barrels. They hired 48 of my father's cooperers and opened their own company. [They] ran it from 1915 until 1948 when I purchased their cooperatorage company because they were discontinuing making wooden barrels in 1948. I had been in the service until 1946. [From] 1941 to 1946. We bought Coca-Cola's cooperatorage company and sold the machinery and equipment. My father was very active in the city. His place of business was on Decatur Street, which was right across the street from the police station.

MAZIAR: Before we move on to that, what his response when he had his business sort of stolen out from under him?

SMITH: He was shocked by Asa Candler² because they were good friends. He was really shocked that Asa would do this.

MAZIAR: Personal friends as well as business friends?

SMITH: Personal friends. Yes. Personal as well as business. But he had children that he had to support. He just decided that they wouldn't throw him a curve and put him out of business because he had other business. Don't forget this was 1915, and World War I was already on. He was making barrels for the government as well as for Coca-Cola. He made them for Standard Oil. In those days, there was no such thing as a metal drum. Metal drum came about in 1926. Anything that you . . . food products and any other kind of product, oil, chemicals, paints, anything, all went in wood barrels. It may seem a little strange, but the wooden barrel was designed to hold anything and did. He still had a good business, and they survived. In 1915, my oldest sister, who is now 93, drove a truck. She was a young lady. She was 15 years old. When you talk about being pioneers and doing things, my father was an innovator. His challenges were

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² Asa Griggs Candler (1851-1929) was an American businessman who made his fortune selling Coca-Cola. He started his career as a drugstore clerk and manufacturer of patent medicines. In 1888 he bought the formula for Coca-Cola from its inventor John Pemberton and several other shareholders for $550. Candler made millions from his investment, allowing him to establish the Central Bank and Trust Corp. and invest in real estate. Candler became a major philanthropist and also served as the 44th Mayor of Atlanta from 1916 to 1919. 
easy for him to overcome, evidently, because my mother raised ten living children. We've been very saturated in Atlanta. My father was really very civic minded and very civic oriented.

MAZIAR: It sounds like he wasn't afraid to try anything either.

SMITH: No, he wasn't. I was telling someone yesterday, in the early 1900s, not one bank would make loans to Jewish people. No sir. They would not. As strange as it may seem, Atlanta was a Christian town. My father got . . . Fulton National Bank was the first bank that would lend any Jews money on a very limited scale. Because they wouldn't lend Jews money, my father and a group of men from the AA [Ahavath Achim] Synagogue, they were very lodge oriented like the Masonic lodge. I don't recall because it wasn't my period of time, but they belonged to a lodge. Together, this group of men, decided that they would start what is known as the Free Loan Association. The Free Loan Association would lend you money if you were young and energetic and had some get up and go about you and were going into business and you couldn't borrow from the bank. When you think about a person that couldn't borrow even $500 in 1908, it's tragic as I look at it. But my father said there was a need for somebody to do this, and they started the Hebrew Loan Association. If my memory is right, and I can find out, in about 1946 they decided to disband it. It ran all that time. Whatever money they had, I believe it was about $12,000, they gave this money to the Jewish Federation because they felt that there was no more need for lending money to people. The banks were better. Business was better, and people were more established. They discontinued that. Some of the history of my family, I mean, I'll tell you about it. My father also started with Mr. Friedman. He was Eli Friedman's father and a couple of other men, Mr. Morris Baum, a thing called Atlanta Ma'ot Chitim Society. They collect money for poor people to make sure they have matzahs and food on Passover. That

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

4 The Jewish Federation of Greater Atlanta raises funds which are dispersed throughout the Jewish community. Services also include caring for Jews in need locally and around the world, community outreach, leadership development, and educational opportunities. It is part of the Jewish Federation of North America (JFNA).

5 Ma'ot Chitim is a term in Hebrew that means "wheat money" and refers to money collected prior to Passover to assist the needy to buy matzo and other Passover foods.

6 Matzo, matza, or matzah is unleavened bread 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. Leavened products are forbidden on Passover and there is a commandment to eat matzah on the first night of the festival of Passover. The sages concluded that after eighteen minutes the dough ferments making the dough rise and ultimately forbidden.

7 Hebrew: Pesach. The anniversary of Israel’s liberation from Egyptian bondage. The holiday lasts for eight days.
organization still exists. Each year they ask people to contribute to it because we still have poor people in the city of Atlanta who need assistance. Back in those days, in the 1920s, people coming from Russia could not come here unless somebody put up a cash bond. Unless you had the money . . . they had relatives, but they couldn't get up the cash. My father was able to bring several people from Russia to Atlanta. They became very successful. All of this was done just because of feelings not because of monetary reasons. My father never made any money on anybody that he had loaned money to or any of that.

**MAZIAR:** It was interest free? The loans?

**SMITH:** Interest free. Yes.

**MAZIAR:** His business prospered?

**SMITH:** Yes. In 1926, the Owens-Illinois Glass Company manufactured the first glass for commercial use. Glass had been made for medicinal products but not commercial like food products and things of that sort. They were out of Virginia. Ohio, excuse me. Ohio. They came to Atlanta. They were looking for someone to handle their products as a jobber. They needed somebody to warehouse small amounts of their product. My father was recommended. They came to see him, and they started an association that is still in existence today. My two nephews, Harris and Myron Smith, who are my brother Morris’ children, operate Smith Container Corporation. They still represent Owens-Illinois and many, many other companies. They are the largest distributors of glass products and plastics in the southeast. It's been an ongoing thing since 1926. They've never even thought about anybody else handling any of their products. They also handle many other products.

**MAZIAR:** It's that family reputation. It sounds like your dad had a real nose for business.

**SMITH:** Yes, he did. My father, when he died . . . my father died in 1946. *The Atlanta Journal [Constitution]*, put his picture on the front page. The headline in two-inch letters was "The Mayor of Decatur Street Dies." My father's funeral . . . can't believe that I remember all this, started at 11 o'clock in the morning. He was so well thought of. Two synagogues insisted that his body be taken in his casket out of the hearse into the synagogue where they had a service

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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.
and then placed back. It was AA Synagogue on Washington Street and then down the street to Shearith Israel.\(^8\)

**MAZIAR:** Really. There were so many people.

**SMITH:** The black people, who adored him . . . my father knew no color barriers, lined the streets of Washington Street for three blocks, just standing three or four deep as though royalty was being passed over there. Normally people sit *shiva*\(^9\) for one week. We did it for five and a half weeks. We had so many people coming to the house. It was amazing. It really was. Even today, people tell me, "I remember your father well." What he did and what he didn't do. Things of that sort. My father was very much into the courts. He and the judges were the best of friends. If you got a ticket for speeding or something else, he was always on hand to help somebody out. He had a theory of his own. He would go to the trial and see the judge. Most times, the judge would say, "Well, you're going to try this case anyway, so just sit up here on the bench." He would do it fairly. He would not cost them any money, but he would make them either go to synagogue for four nights running on Friday night or Saturday. If you were Christian, he would insist you go to services at church for one month every Sunday.

**MAZIAR:** I don't understand. Your dad was acting as judge?

**SMITH:** Acting as judge.

**MAZIAR:** How could they do that?

**SMITH:** They just did it. There were different rules in those days.

**MAZIAR:** Small town.

**SMITH:** In those days, they didn't have as many courts as they have now. The police department only had one court who tried domestic, traffic, and misdemeanors all in one court. There were three judges back in those days. There was Judge [A.W.] Calloway. The Chief of Police was named Butler, I believe. My father's place of business was right across the street from the police station, and all the policemen knew him. He had a huge area. They needed

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

9 *Shiva*, literally “seven,” is the week-long mourning period in Judaism for first-degree relatives: father, mother, son, daughter, brother, sister and spouse. The ritual is referred to as “sitting *shiva*.” Immediately after burial, first-degree relatives assume the status of “mourner.” This state lasts for seven days, during which the family members traditionally gather in one home and receive visitors. At the funeral, mourners traditional rend an outer garment, a ritual known as ‘*kerish*.’ This garment is worn throughout *shiva.*
somewhere to park their cars, and they would park for free on his yard. You can understand that when you were a policemen and your salary was not very big, if you had to pay a monthly parking fee, it would be devastating for a man with a family or anybody. It just would be. He had a lot to do with civic affairs because kosher\textsuperscript{10} people could not stay open on Saturday. In those days, back in the early 1900s, people were prone to be more kosher than, I would say, than they are today, but today it's coming back.

\textbf{MAZIAR:} He was observant.

\textbf{SMITH:} Yes, he was observant. He went to the city hall. He and the mayor, Mayor [James L.] Key\textsuperscript{11}, and my father were very good friends for years. Mayor Key used to come to our house every Wednesday or Thursday for lunch, which was dinner in my house because my father ate his big meal at noon. I remember he went before the mayor. He said, "We have these people who have stores, and they cannot keep open on Saturday because that is the Sabbath."\textsuperscript{12} Blue laws\textsuperscript{13} existed in Georgia. I don't know if they've ever been repealed or not. But my father got a special dispensary from the mayor where kosher people could stay open on Sunday that allowed . . . [Max] Siegel had a restaurant. [Louis] Epstein had a restaurant. Mr. Gold had a delicatessen and a couple of others. Mr. Gilmer had a meat, butcher shop. In order to survive, they had to stay open on Sunday because they were closed on Saturday. Of course, in those days, there was a rabbi . . . I don't remember who he was, but he was the \textit{shochet}\.\textsuperscript{14} He made sure that people were kosher because people that kept kosher had to be assured that they were living according to the book. It isn't like today where you have doubts about whether what you're buying is . . . even in a regular grocery store, you want to be sure that what you're buying is okay. When you do

\textsuperscript{10} Kosher/Kashrut is the set of Jewish dietary laws. Food that may be consumed according to \textit{halakah} (Jewish law) is termed ‘kosher’ in English. Kosher refers to Jewish laws that dictate how food is prepared or served and which kinds of foods or animals can be eaten. Food that is not in accordance with Jewish law is called ‘\textit{treif}.’ The word ‘kosher’ has become English vernacular, a colloquialism meaning proper, legitimate, genuine, fair, or acceptable. Kosher can also be used to describe ritual objects that are made in accordance with Jewish law and are fit for ritual use.

\textsuperscript{11} James L. Key (1867-1939) was the 45th and 48th Mayor of Atlanta.

\textsuperscript{12} \textit{Shabbat} (Hebrew) or \textit{Shabbos} (Yiddish) is the Jewish day of rest and is observed on Saturdays. \textit{Shabbat} observance entails refraining from work activities, often with great rigor, and engaging in restful activities to honor the day. \textit{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 \textit{havdalah} blessing.

\textsuperscript{13} Blue laws, also known as Sunday laws, are laws designed to restrict shopping or ban the sale of certain items on specific days, usually Sunday.

\textsuperscript{14} A \textit{shochet} is an adult male Jew who is trained and accredited by a rabbinic authority in the Jewish dietary laws. Specifically, a \textit{shochet} slaughters animals in a way prescribed by Jewish dietary laws to avoid pain to the animal as much as possible, and to safeguard the health of the consumer.
kas\texttext{her},^{15} it's a little different. Personally, I'm not that well versed in it, so I can't tell you. Half of my family still keep kosher. The other half, more on the Conservative\textsuperscript{16} Reform\textsuperscript{17} side, do as they please, so to speak. My dad was very much into city politics.

**MAZIAR:** How did he get that way? Was his own family . . . when we started you didn't say anything about his parents. I don't know, were they from England? Or were they from Eastern Europe?

**SMITH:** No. His parents were from Russia. My dad was one of 14 children. My father had two brothers who were teachers. They were scholars. One of them used to come from Russia every summer to the States, to the South. Taught Hebrew during the summer to kids. Made his money. Went back to Russia. All winter long he was dealing with the Torah.\textsuperscript{18} Those are really what they call scholars, people who love the Torah and devote their lifetime to it. I can't explain any part of that because it's not something that I've ever done. I had a brother, Morris, that could read that Torah frontward and backwards. He was very much involved with the synagogue. As a matter of fact, my brother, Morris, is the reason that AA synagogue has a minyan\textsuperscript{19} now in the morning and in the evening. Anybody who is observant, a minyan is very important to them, because if you lose a parent or if you lose a child, people want to say Kaddish.\textsuperscript{20} They want to go to the synagogue and pray, and AA was falling apart. The Reform synagogue certainly never had it. They don't have it today, but that's no draw back on them, it's

\textsuperscript{15}To make fit for use; render kosher.

\textsuperscript{16}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 mitzvahs).

\textsuperscript{17}A division within Judaism especially in North America and Western Europe. Historically it began in the nineteenth century. In general, the Reform movement maintains that Judaism and Jewish traditions should be modernized and compatible with participation in Western culture. While the Torah remains the law, in Reform Judaism women are included (mixed seating, bat mitzvah and women rabbis), music is allowed in the services and most of the service is in English.

\textsuperscript{18}Hebrew for 'teaching.' Torah is a general term that covers all Jewish law including the vast mass of teachings recorded in the Talmud and other rabbinical works. 'Sefer Torah' refers to the sacred scroll on which the first five books of the Bible (the Pentateuch) are written.

\textsuperscript{19}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.

\textsuperscript{20}Kaddish (Hebrew for 'holy') is a hymn of praises to G-d found in the Jewish prayer service that is recited aloud while standing. The central theme of the Kaddish is the magnification and sanctification of G-d's name. Along with the Shema and Amidah, the Kaddish is one of the most important and central elements in the Jewish liturgy. Mourner's Kaddish is said at all prayer services and certain other occasions. Following the death of a parent, child, spouse, or sibling it is customary to recite the Mourner's Kaddish in the presence of a congregation daily for 30 days, or 11 months in the case of a parent, and then at every anniversary of the death. It is important to note that the Mourner's Kaddish does not mention death at all, but instead praises G-d.
just the way their religion is. AA did not have one, and my brother, Morris, took it upon himself. He would get men to come in the morning and in the evening. He did it so diligently that it became a fashion for you to go to minyan. They have a plaque on the wall dedicated to his memory for what he did. I think it's lovely that he did that. My brother also built the first mikveh in Atlanta. People that don't understand what a mikveh is, it's very important to those who are religious because it's a cleansing bath. It's something that you must do on Friday before Shabbos because the Shabbos is supposed to be the best and the holiest of all holidays.

MAZIAR: So your whole family would go to the mikveh?

SMITH: Not mine. No. My father went and my brother went. I didn't go. I never went to the mikveh. Went swimming in there when I was a little kid. Went skinny dipping.

MAZIAR: I never knew men used a mikveh. I thought it was purely for women.

SMITH: No. It was for both. As far as I know, it was both. He built it on University Avenue next door to Shearith Israel Synagogue. It still exists. As a matter of fact, three years ago . . . I do a lot of work for Federation, and I had Rabbi [Emanuel] Feldman's card. This is the older rabbi, not the son. Not Ilan. I told him I wanted to come see him. He said, "There's no need to do that." I said, "Yes, I have to come see you. I cannot do this over the phone." I went to see him. He looked at me and he said, "Did you ever have a brother named Morris Smith?" I said, "Yes, I did." He said, "I want to tell you, without your brother's help, I would not have stayed in Atlanta." He said, "Your brother built the mikveh and maintained it. Because of that, I was able to do what I felt was part of my religion." He said, "I'm going to tell you now, that's the reason I am here in Atlanta. Your brother's thoughts and the constructive ways he did and the legacy that he left." I thanked him very much. I felt a little bit . . . because I don't do these things.

MAZIAR: Were you much younger?

SMITH: I'm the baby of all 11.

MAZIAR: So, you were the most Americanized?

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21 A mikveh is a pool of water, gathered from rain or from a spring, which is used for ritual purification and ablutions.
22 Yiddish for Sabbath.
23 Emanuel Feldman (b. 1927) is an Orthodox rabbi and Rabbi Emeritus of Congregation Beth Jacob of Atlanta, Georgia. He was born to a family of Orthodox rabbis dating back more than seven generations. During his nearly 40 years at Beth Jacob beginning in 1952, he nurtured the growth of Atlanta’s Orthodox community from a city with two small Orthodox synagogues to a community large enough to support Jewish day schools, yeshivas, girls’ schools and a kollel. He is a past vice-president of the Rabbinical Council of America and former editor of Tradition: The Journal of Orthodox Jewish thought published by the RCA. In 1991, his son, Rabbi Ilan Feldman, succeeded him.
SMITH: No. They were pretty Americanized. I tell everybody my mother came to this country from the East End of London. If you look on that wall, that's their marriage certificate, right there.

MAZIAR: Oh, how wonderful.

SMITH: One side is Hebrew. The other side is English. That's real parchment. In the corner it says, "East London Synagogue." She's one of the few ladies I know that came to this country with a Cockney accent and came to the south and had to learn how to speak Southern.

MAZIAR: Learn how to speak English as it's spoken in the South?

SMITH: I do want to tell you about that synagogue because I think it's interesting. You are asking me about my family.

MAZIAR: Yes. We'll skip around and come back to some of the things. There is always so much. Go ahead.

SMITH: In 1960, I went to London for the first time. My mother died when I was 19 years old. I said, "I'm going to find that synagogue because I've had that certificate ever since I was 19." I met some people in London who were from London. They asked me what I wanted to do. I said, "The one thing I want to do is I want to go to the East End of London." I said, "I have a purpose." They were not Jewish. They said, "My goodness, why do you want to go to the East End? That's an all Jewish section." I said, "I have a definite reason. My mother was born there." So, they took me down there, and it was totally different than anything I've ever seen. It's the first time in my life that I have been anywhere, and I travel a lot. Every name on the door is Jewish. I kid you not.

MAZIAR: Isn't Bloom's [kosher restaurant] down in East London?

SMITH: Bloom's. Yes, but it wasn't where the synagogue was. Yes, it's there. Anyway, there were two little old ladies sitting on the bench, and I went over there. I have a very definite southern accent, and they were Cockney. Between their Cockney and my southern, neither one of us could understand each other. I speak a little bit of fractured Yiddish. I asked them about the synagogue. They said, "Dort unten, geh dort unten" [Yiddish], which means, "Go down there." We went, and we didn't see anything. Then again, coming from the States and going to Europe, you have no conception of what a synagogue looks like. In the States, they're pretty fairly imposing buildings, no matter how big they are. Even if they're little, they look like something. In Europe they don't. I was with a friend of mine, and he said, "Bernie, doesn't every
synagogue have a stained glass window?” I said, "I don't know about that, but I think most of the synagogues in the States dress them up because they're very pretty." It's sort of a Christian concept. Christian people have it, and Jewish people wanted it, so they do it. He said, "I see a stained glass window. It must be fourteen inches square in the building on the corner." We went down there, and it was all covered with barbed wire. I looked downstairs, and there was the name on the door, East London Synagogue. It was the synagogue my mother and father were married in before 1900. We went upstairs and knocked on the door. There was a rabbi there. He said that he was the rabbi of that synagogue. He said we could come in but we couldn't take any pictures.

MAZIAR: How come?

SMITH: He didn't want us. He didn't want to do that. As we were going down these steps, my friend whispered to me that he's got . . . in those days the only good camera around was Leica. It's from Germany. He had this huge Leica camera. He whispered to me. He said, "Bernie, if you keep him talking, I'll take all the pictures you want." And he did. I have them. I brought them back. My sisters and brothers had never seen this before. It was a magnificent little synagogue. It was built in 1830. It was never touched. Never changed. Their [Holy] Ark24 was carved rosewood and teak that they had brought back from the Orient to do this with. It was magnificent. On one wall it had a prayer to the queen. On the other wall it had a prayer to the king. I had never seen this anywhere before in a synagogue. Like I said, I'm not the best student about Hebrew. I had no idea until that rabbi said to me, I said, "I've never seen that before." He said, "If you look in your prayer book, there's a prayer to the president of the United States." And it is. It's in our prayer books. Both Reform and Orthodox.25 And Conservative. It's something that all religions do, I guess, because everybody wants the president to be well and do a good job. That's what the prayer to the king and the queen is. But they had it on the wall. The other thing about it was, my mother was five foot seven inches tall.

MAZIAR: That's very tall.

SMITH: Yes. The balcony was only five feet tall. In order for her to pray, she had to bend

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24 The Holy Ark [Hebrew: Aron Kodesh, sometimes called the “Torah Ark”] is the holiest place in the synagogue and where the Torah scrolls are kept when not in use. The Aron Kodesh is situated in the front of the synagogue and is usually an ornate curtained-off cabinet or section of the synagogue built along the wall that most closely faced Jerusalem, the direction Jews face when praying.

25 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.
her head. So, she was constantly with her head bent when she was in that synagogue. I couldn't believe it. I said something to this rabbi about it. He said, "Well, in 1900, most people were short. Your mother must have been an exception." I said, "Yes, she was an exception. She raised ten kids, who never been any taint with them. Never been in trouble. Never been in jail, and they're all in good shape." That's the way it was. At one time, in my family, when you're talking about my family, I have over 150 nieces and nephews. Most of them in Atlanta. As a matter of fact, this past Saturday I was at one of my great-great-nephews bar mitzvah.26

MAZIAR: How wonderful. I'm surprised my husband is not related to you because the Mazis are the same way. Do you still have family in London?

SMITH: Just some cousins who live in Brighton. They live there in the summertime and live in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, in the winter. My cousin there married an American man and had one son. They divorced, and she went back to England and remarried a man from England. But her husband stayed in the States. He's dead now. She and her husband are still living.

MAZIAR: How did your mother and father . . . we don't have the story about how your father wound up in London. How did they . . . ?

SMITH: My father was in the Russian army when he was about 19 years old or 18. Whenever they conscripted them. He got a frostbitten toe. While they didn't amputate his toe, he lost the feeling in his toe, big toe. Evidently, the Russian army felt like he was not . . . they tell me when you get into the Russian army you stay there almost a lifetime. Anyway, they discharged him. When they did, he and two of his friends decided they would go to London. My father was one of 14 children. He had a brother that went to Johannesburg, South Africa. Two brothers, like I said, stayed in Russia. The brother that was in Africa, went to England first. So, his brother was already in London. When he went to London . . . we don't know how he really got started in this factory, but he worked in this factory before he became foreman of five factories. He was, evidently, very crafty with his hands. That's all I can tell you that he did.

MAZIAR: It sounds like he had tremendous leadership potential and a certain charisma that people really responded to.

SMITH: Three of his sisters married and moved to New York. One of his brothers lived in

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26 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.
Asbury . . while he really lived . . not Asbury Park. He lived in Asbury Park later, but lived in a little town in New Jersey. They were very close. Two of his nephews had restaurants in New York. One on Long Island and one in the garment district, who I used to visit, one of the nephews. It's strange to me because I never thought about my father, his looks, until I saw both of his nephews who look exactly like he did. We're a combination. The children are a combination of my mother and father, so none of us really looked exactly like my father. We were mixtures and being so many kids, we were really different. I mean, just in looks. We were a very close family.

MAZIAR: Before we get into your family here. Were there any relatives who remained in Russia?

SMITH: Yes. They lost them during [Adolf] Hitler.27

MAZIAR: Did they fight in the Russian army?

SMITH: No. They were too old. We lost . . . after one of his brothers came here up until about 1930 and taught every summer. When he went back, the war really started at about 1930. People don't know it, but it was. They just engulfed him, and they were gone. Whether Hitler got them or the Russians got them, we don't know. We lost complete contact with them forever. My father had cousins in England, and that's how he got to England, I guess. Because in 1965, I was back in London and decided to look up one of these cousins and did. She was a lady about 85 years old, but she was married to my father's cousin. She was not his cousin. She didn't know too much about it. but she did give me some history of the family. He had a niece and nephew who migrated to Philadelphia [Pennsylvania]. They kept up with the American brothers and sisters.

MAZIAR: What was their family name? I trust it wasn't Smith.


MAZIAR: He changed it when he was in London?

SMITH: He changed it after he was in England. He worked for a Christian man named Smith. In 1890, Jews were being, sort of like Jewish pogroms were in England. His boss was very enamored of his work and himself and liked him very much. My father was really a very

27 Adolf Hitler (1889-1945) was a German politician who was the leader of the Nazi Party, Chancellor of Germany from 1933 to 1945, and Führer (“leader”) of Nazi Germany from 1934 to 1945. As dictator of Nazi Germany, he initiated World War II in Europe with the invasion of Poland in September 1939 and was a central figure of the Holocaust.
strong person. He went down to the Tower of London and changed his name to Smith. Came back. It cost 50 cents. Came back and said, "Your new name is Harris Smith. You're not known as Shevinsky anymore. Nobody will bother you anymore." Of course, he met my mother when he had been working in England for about eight years. She was about 17 years old. He was six and a half years older. They went together for three years until she decided that she would marry him. My mother was very prim and proper and very English in her ways. Believe me, she was. She wouldn't talk about it too much because my mother never walked around in my house without being fully clothed. Never. You didn't either. Don't you dare come out of that bedroom if you're not dressed.

**MAZIAR:** With all those kids . . .

**SMITH:** I kid you not. She didn't talk about things like that. Sometimes, when I was alone with her, being the baby, I would ask her questions because I was very inquisitive. I said, "In all the three years that you went with him, didn't he try to make love to you or something?" She thought about it for a while. She said, "Yes, he tried, but he didn't do it." She really believed . . . she had a creed of her own. She used to tell us, this was her favorite thing. She said, "A man can get down in the sewer and wallow in the sewer. He can get up out of the sewer, take a shower, put on clean clothes, and he's still a man. A woman that gets down in that sewer and wallows in that sewer, can get up and take a shower, but she's a tramp." I don't know where she got it from, but we used to hear that all the time. My sisters grew up with that in mind. We had a fun house. My father was a big practical joker. I can tell you when I was a little boy, three years old, I remember, four years old, my sister, oldest sister . . . of course, when I was three and a half, my oldest sister married. When I was four and a half, I was already an uncle. But the other sisters that were home said . . .

**MAZIAR:** No wonder you have a great nephew.

**SMITH:** I have great-great-great [nephews]. My sister said, "Hang a stocking by the fireplace." We had a very old Victorian house that had 12 rooms in it. No air conditioning, high ceilings, and big rooms, and we all survived. We'd hang up the stockings, and my sister would put fruit and nuts in it. My father would wake up in the morning, empty it out, and he'd put gravel in it because he had a gravel company next door to him. He'd say, "You don't need to be Christian tradition. You need to be Jewish." Of course, my sisters wanted us to have a touch of Christmas because we lived in a mixed neighborhood. All the kids were getting Christmas
presents, while we did get Hanukkah\textsuperscript{28} presents. My father was a great card player. I can truthfully tell you that by the time I was four years old, I could play casino, spit in the ocean, and pinochle.

MAZIAR: Could you beat him?

SMITH: Yes. When it came time for Passover, my mother would send him to the Atlanta Orphan Home\textsuperscript{29} and pick up two girls each Passover. We had them for seder.\textsuperscript{30} There was never anything like a stranger in my house. Whoever was in our house was welcome, and we had them all the time. My father, being so active in synagogue circles and civic affairs, there were people who we now call visiting rabbis. Actually, they were men who came to get money for whatever charities they could support. My father would see that they would get some money and go on their way. Also, if a man came to this city and he didn't have any money or a place to stay, he found his way to our house no matter who he was. We never had any problems, never in our house. Two of our seders had over 60 people. My mother seemed to be able to . . . she had help. She was never without help. As a matter of fact, I had a mammy, black mammy, from the time I was born until 11 years old, who was six feet two inches tall. [She] called me Little Jesus in a very kosher house. Her name was Mattie. I remember her very well because she used to take me, in those days, what is now Martin Luther King Jr. Drive. [It] was known as Hunter Street. The parades went from Five Points to Oakland Cemetery. Parades for Labor Day, Fourth of July, and whatever. Mattie wanted to make sure that her Little Jesus saw everything, whatever was going down that street. She was six feet two inches tall. I was sitting right on top of her head. I

\textsuperscript{28} 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.

\textsuperscript{29} The Hebrew Orphans’ Home was located at 478 Washington Street in Atlanta, Georgia. The residence facility was open from 1876 to 1930. It was originally called the Hebrew Orphans’ Asylum and was originally an actual orphanage. In 1901, the name was changed to the Hebrew Orphans’ Home. Then its services phased into placing children in foster home care and helping with adoptions instead of an actual orphans' home, during which time it was called the Jewish Family and Children’s Bureau (and another variation—Jewish Children’s Services). Finally it got out of the children’s institutional care business entirely. In 1988, the organization’s mission changed and it became the Jewish Educational Loan Fund (JELF) with the goal of providing low-interest post-secondary education loans for Jewish students.

\textsuperscript{30} Seder (meaning “order” in Hebrew”) is a Jewish ritual feast that marks the beginning of the Jewish holiday of Passover. It is conducted on the evening of the fifteenth day of Nisan in the Hebrew calendar throughout the world. Some communities hold seder on both the first two nights of Passover. The seder incorporates prayers, candle lighting, and traditional foods symbolizing the slavery of the Jews and the exodus from Egypt. It is one of the most colorful and joyous occasions in Jewish life.
didn't miss a trick.

MAZIAR: How did your mother let her call you Little Jesus?

SMITH: She didn't mind. My mother was busy with whatever she was doing. Mattie was just like one of the family. She lived in our house. People talk about . . . in the old days. When I was young, we had a cow. We had a cow, pigeons, chickens, ducks, geese, turkeys. My mother had her own way of doing things. If she was going to fatten up a chicken, she would pen it and feed it nothing but corn for five or six weeks. You've got to remember that my mother was from the old school. She made all her own cheese. She made all her own bread. She made all her own jams. In the summertime she would can, I would say, at least a thousand jars of provisions because my father was . . . being the kind of business he was in, he was very friendly with the people at Produce Row.

<End Tape 1, Side 1>

<Begin Tape 1, Side 2>

SMITH: They would call him up when produce was beginning to go a little bad, especially in summertime. Peaches, apples, and things of that sort. They would tell him to come by. They knew he had a lot of children. They would give him whole cases of strawberries, blackberries, raspberries, anything that was available, blueberries. He would bring it home. My mother would make it into jellies, jams. The same with vegetables. There was never a time when there wasn't soup on our stove. At our house, being an old house and being a big family, we had a wood stove. It had six eyes on it. A gas stove, which was a very modern convenience. My mother was not really crazy about it. Believe it or not, we had two bathrooms.

MAZIAR: Wow. Indoor?

SMITH: Indoor bathrooms. We were the only house in the whole neighborhood.

MAZIAR: What street did you live on?

SMITH: Kelly Street. It's right off of Woodward Avenue. It was right near . . . Shearith Israel Synagogue was on Hunter Street in those days. Rabbi [Tobias] Geffen, who everybody knows about, lived about two blocks from us. We were a mixed neighborhood. No blacks but Lebanese. A lot of Christians and a lot of Jewish people. We were about six or seven blocks

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31 Rabbi Tobias Geffen (1870-1970) was an Orthodox rabbi and leader of Shearith Israel in Atlanta from 1910-1970. He is widely known for his 1935 decision that certified Coca-Cola as kosher. He also organized the first Hebrew school in Atlanta, and standardized regulation of kosher supervision in the Atlanta area. Rabbi Geffen and his wife Sara had four sons and four daughters: Joel, Samuel, Louis, Abraham, Lottie, Bessie, Annette, and Helen.
from Washington Street. As a boy, I went to Fair Street School, which is now Ed S. Cook School. I went to Hoke Smith High School and then Boys’ High [School].

<Interuption in tape>

SMITH: What else can I tell you?
MAZIAR: We were talking about your family and what it was like. What kind of a group you were?
SMITH: We were a good group. I had six living sisters and three brothers. All of my sisters and brothers married and had children.

MAZIAR: Did they all marry Jewish people?
SMITH: Yes. All married Jewish people. Some of the nieces and nephews didn’t, but my mother’s children did. They were all in business. All of my sisters, amazingly, worked with their husbands in their business. All were successful. Very active. Within in the framework of the family, one of my sisters-in-law was big Hadassah.\(^{32}\) My aunt was the district president of Hadassah. Because of my father we were, more or less, charitable organizational minded. We all were involved. I, personally, was involved a lot with the synagogue, AA Synagogue. I started the first USY [United Synagogue Youth]\(^{33}\) they had. Also the first Cub Scout troop they had. I was very active in B’nai B’rith.\(^{34}\) All of us were associated with something. We were not standbys. We were doing something all the time. Involved.

MAZIAR: Very good areas, too. What about your mom?
SMITH: Mom was a very quiet lady, who, unfortunately, was ill after I was born.

MAZIAR: What happened?
SMITH: She just, after having 11 children, she just gave out. Period. She never was aggressive at all. My father was the one who was very aggressive. My mother was a very quiet

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\(^{32}\) 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.

\(^{33}\) 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.

\(^{34}\) B’nai B’rith Youth Organization (BBYO) 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.
spoken lady who . . . her family was her whole life. My mother used to bake and cook. We grew up in a happy, happy house.

MAZIAR: She made you feel very cared about.

SMITH: Yes. On holidays . . . I do have to tell you this because I think it's important. In those days, people in the little towns like LaGrange, Griffin, Fort Valley, and Athens, they didn't have any synagogues. When the High Holy Days came, they had to come to Atlanta. I want to tell you that I slept on the floor many a time because families came every year. Some of the same families came and stayed in our house for the holidays so they could walk to the synagogue and . . .

<Interruption in tape>

MAZIAR: You were talking about what the High Holy Days were like with families coming in town.

SMITH: These families really had . . . when I was little and a family came in . . . staying in a hotel was not the same as today. Staying at a hotel for a real Jewish person was sort of like being off limits. If they stayed with a family, it had the meaning that's really attached to Jewish life. I don't know how other people felt about it, but my mother was very strong about this. My mother also cared about children a lot. Most of the neighborhood kids would come from school to my house, eat a bowl of soup and a piece of bread, and then go out and play or do whatever they had to do. I know, to this day, there are two or three that I see in Atlanta said that they would not have survived had it not been for my mother and her doings. Like I said, my mother was one of five children. Three sisters and one brother. Her brother was 29 years older than she was, her oldest brother. He was married and had three kids by the time she was 11 years old.

MAZIAR: Were they both by the same parents?

SMITH: Same parents. Her parents didn't live long. I don't ever remember any grandparents or any talk about grandparents. We've lost that completely in our family, and I'm really very upset about it. But one of my nephews, to get a little diverse, has made a family tree of the Smith family. It takes about six feet to unroll where you can see where all of it is, which is really wonderful. Some of our pictures I have given to the Jewish archives at the [Atlanta Jewish] Community Center. Copies rather. That on the wall is, both of those are originals, and

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

36 Atlanta Jewish Community Center was officially founded in 1910, as the Jewish Educational Alliance. In the late 1940s it evolved into the Atlanta Jewish Community Center and moved to Peachtree Street. It stayed there until
I don't want to give those away. I want my grandchildren to have it.

MAZIAR: But your mother never talked about her parents?

SMITH: No. She did not. She did not talk about London either. My mother really was an orphan, and she lived in an orphanage for a number of years.

MAZIAR: What about her siblings? Were they all together or were they already older?

SMITH: Older. Like I said, she had two sisters that never had any children. One lived in London. One lived in, believe it or not, Philadelphia. After my mother came to this country and began to have more children, she lost contact with both of those, but she stayed in contact with her brother and her sister in Chicago. Her sister was older, and she had children. When I was born . . . three months after I was born, her sister in Chicago got very ill, and my mother left me with my mammy, went to Chicago and nursed her sister for nine months. But her sister died, and she brought the youngest child of her sister back to Atlanta, and she raised her. She married an Atlanta man and had a child. Both she and her husband are dead now, but she lived in our house for many years.

MAZIAR: That's quite incredible that she left you for that period of time.

SMITH: It was the only sister that she really knew.

MAZIAR: But still, she had so many children that needed her.

SMITH: That's true, but she felt like . . . she made us very independent when we were young. None of us minded it. We all had some duties to do in that house. When we got up in the morning, if you were sleeping two in a bed, one of you made that bed on Monday. The next one made it on Tuesday. We had servants. My father was never rich, but he was never poor. But you cleaned that room, you hung up all your clothes, and you came out of that bedroom fully dressed. My mother did not believe in you sort of wandering around the house in bedroom shoes or anything. When you came to her table, she felt like that was her castle, and it was a way to be addressed. People should do a little bit better of it now days.

MAZIAR: She probably learned that in the orphanage, too.

SMITH: Right. She was, like I said, very quiet. My mother taught herself how to read and write because the orphanage didn't do that. She was a marvelous seamstress.

MAZIAR: Was she taught that in the orphanage?

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1998, when the building was sold and the center moved to Dunwoody. In 2000, it was renamed the ‘Marcus Jewish Community Center of Atlanta.’
SMITH: No. She was taught to bake. My mother at the age of eight was a master baker. At the age of 11, she was earning a living. So, if you have children and you think about the age of 11 and a child out on the street making her own living. I do have to tell you one or two stories about my uncle, her brother. Like I said, he was much older, and he liked to drink beer. The bitters. In England, it is called bitters and off and off. Whatever it is. I'm not a drinker, so I don't know. But he found out that if he would give her . . . the smallest amount was a nickel. You could have a penny, but they wouldn't sell you a penny's worth. They would sell you a nickel's worth. She would take a bucket and go to the pub. Girls were not allowed in the pub. No ladies were allowed in English pubs until World War II. She would knock on the door, hand them the nickel and the bucket, and since she was a girl, they would fill it up. If my uncle sent one of his sons to the pub with the same nickel, they would only give them half. So, he being a very crafty Englishman, decided that she should go. One other thing I'm going to tell you about my uncle, my mother's brother, he lived in Chicago. He had three children. When the Boers in South Africa fought the British, he thought the Boers were right in what they were doing. He left his wife and three children and went to Africa and fought in the Boer War.37

MAZIAR: Just because he thought like it was the right thing to do?

SMITH: Right. It was the right thing to do. I have to tell you, this man was, without a doubt, the most English of anybody I’ve ever seen. He came and stayed with us for months on end, he really did. He had thinning hair, but every hair had to be in place. He had a small mustache. He trimmed that mustache, I think, every single day. He was so proper and so prim in everything thing he did. He was very macho. Not anything like you might think about, being such a dude. He was kind of slight. He was not as big as my mother. My mother was five foot seven. She was not fat, but she was just a nice person. My mother had chestnut colored hair, and it came down below her knees. She was very proud of that. Half of my family . . . some of them, not half . . . three or four were absolute towheads. Blond. Two or three sisters had chestnut hair. The rest of us had sort of black hair.

MAZIAR: So there weren't any sisters or brothers who could fill you in on what the parents were like either.

37 The Second Boer War (11 October 1899 – 31 May 1902) was fought between the British Empire and the South African Republic (Republic of Transvaal) and the Orange Free State, over the Empire's influence in South Africa. It is also known as the Boer War, Anglo-Boer War, South African War or Anglo-Boer South African War.
SMITH: No.

MAZIAR: How fascinating because it must have been . . .

SMITH: In the past ten years, I have tried to find . . . my father had a sister who was the youngest in New York. She's dead. I wrote her daughter a letter and asked if she had anything of the family, but they didn't. They didn't have anything. Then I wrote . . . my father had a daughter from Russia who lived in Philadelphia. She is a woman about 92 years old, but I wrote her when she was about 85.

MAZIAR: You mean your father had a sister?

SMITH: A niece. His brother's daughter lives in Philadelphia. She, too, had no record of it. But I did find . . . it's strange when you talk about families. We always thought my father's name was . . . my father's father's name was Morris Edward because that was my brother's name. I found a cousin, who was a first cousin . . .

MAZIAR: Morris Edward Shevinsky.

SMITH: Right. I found a cousin who lived in Rochester, New York. His father and my father were brothers. We became friendly in later years. I wrote a letter and asked him if he had any record of his father's father, who was my father's father. He wrote back and says that his grandfather's name was Isaac. All these years we thought my father's father's name was Morris Edward. It just strikes me as rather odd that you lose sight of the things that are really most precious to you that when you don't record it and have it down on paper and what have you.

MAZIAR: When your dad was buried, what name did you . . .

SMITH: Bury him under?

MAZIAR: Yes.

SMITH: Smith.

MAZIAR: What was his Hebrew name?

SMITH: His name was Hershel. His English name was Harris.

MAZIAR: We're talking about his father. Where did the name Isaac come in?

SMITH: That was his father's real name. I didn't learn that until after Papa was dead five or ten years. Now, there are only three of us left. Four, I take it back. I have three sisters and me.

MAZIAR: A lot of families are doing what we are doing now, doing oral history just to keep some of this. When you were in London, they didn't have any family records then?
SMITH: No, but I did check with the Tower of London and got my sister Ada, who is my oldest sister's birth certificate, which she never had. One of my sisters was born in Wales, Scotland because the man my father worked for had a factory there, and my mother and he lived there for a while. Another one was born in Liverpool [England]. One was born in Birmingham, England.

MAZIAR: The four oldest and then everybody else was born here?

SMITH: I had two brothers born in Birmingham. Then the balance of the children were born in Atlanta.

MAZIAR: How old are you?

SMITH: I'm 76.

MAZIAR: You're a very young 76. We've had all this family and family stories. It sounds like your family has a very colorful history. How old was your dad when he died?

SMITH: My dad was 76 when he died. He died in 1946.

MAZIAR: Your mother was how old?

SMITH: 60 when I was 19.

MAZIAR: She was a young woman. How old was she when you were born?

SMITH: My mother was 40.

MAZIAR: Did she go through a depression, do you think?

SMITH: No. She had diabetes, and it was a devastating disease. While she tried to control it, she did pay attention to her doctors. She was very concerned about her health, but she was zapped of all her strength after all these children. Physically, she was worn out. I asked her when I was a little boy, I said, "Mama, why did you have so many children?" She said, "Because I wanted them." There was never any thought in her mind not to have her children. That was the greatest thing she could have was children.

MAZIAR: Did she ever talk to your sisters about some of the things that motivated her? Perhaps being in an orphanage and wanting to create a sense of family or how she must have felt losing her parents at such a young age and losing her sisters?

SMITH: I don't know. I really don't know because my sisters are all older. One of my sisters, the oldest sister is paralyzed, and she lives in a Jewish home. The next sister is 87. She moved away from Atlanta when she was 19 years old, so she really didn't have a youthful time with my mother. My time spent with my mother was when I was a little boy, and I wasn't even
going to school. I went to first grade when I was five years old. She would be sitting there in the kitchen, and sometimes she would talk about the things she did as a girl. She would tell me that along the Thames River the banks would be covered with watercress, and she would go as a little girl and gather up this watercress. English people make soup, salads, and use it in sandwiches. I love watercress, I really do.

**MAZIAR:** Probably because of your mother.

**SMITH:** She would talk about some of the things that she did, but her memories were so . . . they were not good. I once asked her when I was about 10, I guess, or 12. I asked both she and my father why they never went back to England. My mother said she was mistreated, and she had no reason to go back to England. There was nothing there for her. My father felt, more or less, the same way. I kind of think he would have gone if he had the opportunity to just take time off. When we were little, we would go to Stone Mountain as a family, all 10 kids and my mother and father in an open steering car, sedan. She would make food to take out to Stone Mountain, and the kids would climb the mountain and picnic out there. My father had friends who had, what they called farms. They were just places that had a creek or something. They didn't raise anything. It was a summer place. So, we were not vacation oriented like people are now.

People get on an airplane now and go to Europe and stay three days and come home.

**MAZIAR:** People didn't back then.

**SMITH:** No. It was mostly family oriented. He was caught up in his business so much that he just didn't take all that time off. When I was about four years old, we went to Macon [Georgia]. It took all day long to get to Macon. They had friends and family there. As a matter of fact, when I got in the service I was sent to Macon at the beginning. A family down there called me up and asked me to come for Friday night dinner. I thought it was very nice of them. I didn't know them at all. Their name was Hirsch. I went over there for dinner. Had Sabbath dinner. It was really lovely. This man says to me, "I'll tell you, the reason I'm here in America is because your father brought me here." I didn't even know the man, but it seems that he wanted to come to America, and through my father's brother, he instituted papers and brought that man to the states and his wife. He didn't have any children at that time. They raised three children. I thought that it was incredible that here I was, totally a stranger to this man, and he was doing something that he felt was warm to his heart. That his benefactor had brought him to the states, and he was going to show me something about reciprocation.
MAZIAR: It was a very meaningful thing to him.
SMITH: Yes. After my father died, many people came forward and told us some of the things that he did for them. We never even knew. One man brought us a check for $3,000. He said he owed it to my father for 10 years. We would have never known that that man owed any money because Papa didn't do that.
MAZIAR: He was very generous.
SMITH: Very charitable, he really was.
MAZIAR: Did he and your mom have a good relationship?
SMITH: Excellent. I've got to tell you this since you asked about that. After she died, and I have to tell you, my father was not a mourner. He didn't believe in it. He did not sit shiva but one day. One day.
MAZIAR: How did the rabbi let him do that?
SMITH: He didn't. He said that he had a very good life, that they lived together for 42 years. They had a most happy marriage, and he was not about to get married. Like I told you, he was five foot eight inches tall and an ox of a man, absolutely. He was nice looking. I wouldn't say he was Clark Gable, but he was nice looking.
MAZIAR: He wasn't that old.
SMITH: The ladies wanted him, but he made up his mind that he was going to be single. We had a housekeeper. She was in my house for 58 years.
MAZIAR: This is different from the nanny?
SMITH: Yes, different. She took care of our house. She kept kosher. He just said he never would marry again, and he didn't. That's the way it was. They had a very happy marriage. You've got to be kidding. I'm telling you, my house . . . when I think about my children and my grandchildren, they don't know from beans. We had more fun. My dad was a practical joker. He would call my mother up on April Fool's Day and tell her that Leo wanted to talk to her. My mother would say, "Who is Leo?" He said, "I don't know. Here's the number." It would be this zoo. Leo the lion.
MAZIAR: Would your mother laugh? Did she think it was funny?
SMITH: Yes. She enjoyed all those things. Of course, back in those days, before you were born, they had things called Hanukkah balls and Purim38 balls. The synagogues did it. It was a

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38 A Jewish holiday that commemorates the deliverance of the Jewish people in the ancient Persian Empire from
way of raising money. You would bake. Mama would bake. She was a marvelous baker and a marvelous cook. None of us were skinny. We weren't really fat, but we weren't skinny.

MAZIAR: You were well fed.

SMITH: Yes. They would bake, and people would buy the baked goods that you donated. Then the synagogue would take that money and run their Hebrew school or whatever programs they had to run. It was just that way. Don’t forget, Atlanta was not tremendous in the 1900s. It was a small city. In 1900, the AA Synagogue was on Gilmer Street. I don’t know when they moved to Washington Street. I think it was later. My father was treasurer of that synagogue.

MAZIAR: I think, perhaps, if we can, get together and talk another time. I want to talk to you more about what it was like socially in Atlanta. Some of the things that your father did, he was very involved with the Jewish community, but I presume the Eastern European Jewish community not the Reform Jewish community? I'd really like to know more about what that was like. There are so many institutions that we don’t know about, just the social context.

SMITH: I’d be glad to. My father belonged to every synagogue in Atlanta in 1915 or 1920.

MAZIAR: He wanted to support them all?

SMITH: He believed in it, he really did.

<End Tape 1, Side 2>

<Begin Tape 2, Side 1>

MAZIAR: This is Patty Maziar for the Jewish Oral History Collection, a project of the American Jewish Committee and the Atlanta Jewish Federation. The date is February 10, 1993. I'm with Mr. Bernard Smith. This is tape two. The last time we talked, we were beginning to discuss the social climate between the various Jewish groups in Atlanta, one of them being the Or VeShalom,39 the Sephardic40 group. I'm wondering if your family had very many contacts

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39 Or VeShalom was established by refugees of the Ottoman Empire, namely from Turkey and the Isle of Rhodes. The Sephardic/Traditional congregation began in 1920 and was based at Central and Woodward Avenues until 1948 when it moved to a larger building on North Highland Road. The current building for Or VeShalom is on North Druid Hills Road.

40 Sephardic Jews are the Jews of Spain, Portugal, North Africa and the Middle East and their descendants. The adjective “Sephardic” and corresponding nouns Sephardi (singular) and Sephardim (plural) are derived from the Hebrew word ‘Sepharad,’ which refers to Spain. Historically, the vernacular language of Sephardic Jews was Ladino, a Romance language derived from Old Spanish, incorporating elements from the old Romance languages of the Iberian Peninsula, Hebrew, Aramaic, and in the lands receiving those who were exiled, Ottoman Turkish,
with the Sephardim and how they were perceived.

SMITH: My father just felt that he should belong. There were only six synagogues in Atlanta, that I can remember, when I was a little boy. My father felt very strongly about each of them. He was a member of Or VeShalom. The Spanish Jews were not given the status that they enjoy today. They were frowned on for some reason or another. As a matter of fact, their synagogue was on the other side of Washington Street. Whether that had any meaning or not, but it seemed like it had to be distant from the others. Shearith Israel was down below Rosen [sp] Street. The AA Synagogue was at the corner of Woodward Avenue. The Temple, originally, was down on Pryor Street, but it had moved up on Washington Street for a short time. Then it became the Standard Club. Then it moved out to Peachtree Street later on.

<Interruption in tape>

SMITH: My father felt that equality of everything had to go hand in hand. He became very active in politics of the city of Atlanta. James L. Key lived about four blocks from us. He was mayor of Atlanta for 25 years. He and my father were very, very close friends. I don't know if I told you this before, but the Jewish merchants, those who were Orthodox, closed on Saturday.

MAZIAR: Yes, and your father was instrumental.

SMITH: Yes. He was instrumental in getting a law passed to operate on Sunday. He was very active in politics because the city jail was across the street from his place of business. He knew all the judges, police, and firemen. Everybody knew him. He was very active in everything there, business wise, social wise, or religious wise.

MAZIAR: Did the Sephardic community approach him for help? Apparently, a number of people had financial problems?

SMITH: I'm sure that some of them did. A group of Orthodox Jews formed a Free Loan Association, and they didn't discriminate as to who they loaned money to. I'm sure that, back

Arabic, Greek, Bulgarian and Serbo-Croatian vocabulary.

41 The Temple, or ‘Hebrew Benevolent Congregation,’ is Atlanta’s oldest Jewish congregation. The cornerstone was laid on the Temple on Garnett Street in 1875. The dedication was held in 1877 and the Temple was located there until 1902. The Temple’s next location on Pryor Street was dedicated in 1902. The Temple’s current location in Midtown on Peachtree Street was dedicated in 1931. The main sanctuary is on the National Register of Historic Places. The Reform congregation now totals approximately 1,500 families (2015).

42 The Standard Club is a Jewish social club that started as the Concordia Association in 1867 in Downtown Atlanta. In 1905, it was reorganized as the ‘Standard Club’ and moved into the former mansion of William C. Sanders near where Turner Field is now located. In the late 1920’s the club moved to Ponce de Leon Avenue in Midtown Atlanta. Later, the club moved to what is now the Lenox Park business park and was located there until 1983. In the 1980’s, the club moved to its present location in Johns Creek in Atlanta’s northern suburbs.
then, many people couldn’t borrow. You’ve got to realize that $500 in those days is like $5,000 or more today. You could do a lot more with $500 in those days than you can today because of the fact that things weren’t as restricted, and you were able to buy things and make a living. That's what counted. In my father's place of business on Decatur Street, there must have been 20 Jewish merchants on Decatur Street. While it was never referred to as a ghetto, it was just that they all made a good living on Decatur Street. Of course, from Decatur Street emanated Pryor Street. There again, you had mostly Jewish merchants who were in, what is considered, the wholesale trade.

MAZIAR: How far were you from your home? Did you live near Washington Street?

SMITH: No. We lived on Kelly Street, which is six, eight blocks, from Washington Street but was only about six blocks from my father's place of business.

MAZIAR: Is that street still there?

SMITH: No. The expressway took the building. Decatur Street is still there, but where my father's place of business was, is now part of the [Interstate] 85 expressway. My father's business moved out to Hapeville [Georgia] and still operates. I have two nephews that still operate it.

Smith Container Corporation.

MAZIAR: Where you lived, was it a primarily Jewish neighborhood or what was that?

SMITH: No. We were a mixed neighborhood. We had Jews, gentiles, and some Lebanese families. We had small grocery stores. Mr. Segal had a grocery store and later moved to Washington Street and had a kosher market. Mr. Gilmer had a kosher market on Capitol Avenue. Capitol Avenue seemed to be the street for Jewish business. The [Jewish Educational] Alliance[^43] was on Capitol Avenue right at Woodward. Mr. Gold had a delicatessen on the corner of Woodward and Capitol Avenue. The Merlins. Two Merlin[^44] families had restaurants across the street from each other on Capitol Avenue. There was a Jewish bakery on the corner of Capitol and Woodward Avenue. The Taylors had also a Jewish bakery on Capitol Avenue just down the street from Mr. Gold's delicatessen.

MAZIAR: So that area could remain open on Sunday?

SMITH: Yes.

[^43]: Atlanta Jewish Community Center was officially founded in 1910 as the Jewish Educational Alliance.

[^44]: Mitchell (also known as Michel) Julius “M.J.” Merlin (1885-1969) was an Atlanta grocer who was born in Dubrono in the Russian Empire (now Dubrowna, Belarus). He was one of the founding members of the Arbeiter Ring (Workmen’s Circle) in Atlanta, Georgia.
MAZIAR: It must have been very busy on Sundays.

SMITH: Yes. Anybody that likes bread, would like it hot and fresh. In those days, bagels were not as well-known as they are today. It was mostly bread. Rye bread, white bread, and things of that sort. Challah and what have you. A lot of people baked. My mother never bought bread other than what she baked because she was a good baker. But the other people did.

MAZIAR: What about the Sephardic Jews? Were they part of this community too or more the Reform community?

SMITH: I remember a family named Amelah. A-M-E-L-A-H. I don't think any of them live anymore, but he had a shoe store on Capitol Avenue, a repair. Shoe repair. That's what he did. But there were a few little businesses up and down Capitol Avenue. It only was about two blocks. The Levitts had a fish market. I remember it as a kid. They later became Capitol Foods. It was a close knit neighborhood, and most of the people were very close together. If they weren't social, they belonged to the same synagogue.

MAZIAR: What about the non-Jews?

SMITH: We never had . . . you mean, living with them?

MAZIAR: Yes.

SMITH: It was excellent. I grew up with a young man named R.A. Day that became the head of the English Department of Emory University. He became a Ph.D. R.A. and I were like brothers. We were at each other's houses. We were very close. Very good. We never had difficulties. Even the Lebanese. We grew up and we were close knit and just had a good time. We just never had problems.

MAZIAR: Do you ever remember any kind of antisemitism?

SMITH: No, not until I was older. Not until I was out of the service, which was 1946. I was fully grown by then. We never had antisemitism. As a matter of fact, the Ku Klux Klan\(^\text{45}\) used to bring my father tickets for functions they had, and he thought that it was the thing to do. He bought tickets. I remember him doing that.

MAZIAR: He was an equal opportunity philanthropist.

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\(^{45}\) The Ku Klux Klan (or Knights of the Ku Klux Klan today) is a white supremacist, white nationalist, anti-immigration, anti-Jewish, anti-Catholic, anti-black secret society, whose methods included terrorism and murder. It was founded in the South in the 1860’s and 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.
SMITH: The Klan existed, but it never really bothered Jewish people.

MAZIAR: No?

SMITH: No. Not that I know of. The only time it really bothered anybody was before my time I was born. That was the Leo Frank incident. That was something that never should have happened, but then again, it's history.

MAZIAR: What did your parents tell you about that?

SMITH: Not really much. Not really. My father never talked about ugliness and things of that sort. He was too busy. My father was in the court house, I believe, every day of his life that the court house was open. People had problems and needed help, and he was able to do it. He was a real politician. I kid you not.

MAZIAR: What would you call somebody like that?

SMITH: He was like a lobbyist, except he didn't think so. He just felt that the need was there to do whatever he could do and he did it.

MAZIAR: To represent people?

SMITH: Right. Back in those days . . . and you're too young. I remember holidays, Jewish holidays, particularly *Hanukkah*, the different synagogues would put on, like they do in the gentile community, fairs. They would auction off things. People would bake, and they would sell their cakes and things of that sort. I remember my mother baking 10 or 12 cakes for my father to take to the *Hanukkah* thing they were having at the AA Synagogue. People who, probably working people, I was too little but I remember them doing it. Then they would talk about the success that they had from selling this stuff. Then they would use the money to further the education of children, Hebrew education, because that was at Hebrew school. Even there, when you talk about the Spanish *shul* and ours, the Spanish synagogue spoke Ladino, they

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46 Leo Frank (1884-1915) was a Jewish factory superintendent in Atlanta, Georgia. In 1913, he was accused of raping and murdering one of his employees, a 13-year-old girl named Mary Phagan, whose body was found on the premises of the National Pencil Company. Frank was arrested, tried, convicted and sentenced to death for her murder. The trial was the catalyst for a great outburst of antisemitism led by the populist Tom Watson and the center of powerful class and political interests. Frank was sent to Milledgeville State Penitentiary to await his execution. Governor John M. Slaton, believing there had been a miscarriage of justice, commuted Frank’s sentence to life in prison. This enraged a group of men who styled themselves the “Knights of Mary Phagan.” They drove to the prison, kidnapped Frank from his cell and drove him to Marietta, Georgia where they lynched him. Many years later, the murderer was revealed to be Jim Conley, who had lied in the trial, pinning it on Frank instead. Frank was pardoned on March 11, 1986, although they stopped short of exonerating him.

47 *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.

48 Also known as ‘Judeo-Spanish,’ Ladino is a Romance language derived from Old Spanish originally spoken in the
call it. It's a form of Spanish and Yiddish. Of course, in Hebrew school you spoke Hebrew. But some of those kids came to the Hebrew school that I went to because they were getting an education in Jewish religion. Not necessarily Spanish or Russian or whatever you want to call it. The young kids, if you were popular, you mixed a lot. Not being presumptuous, but I went with The Temple girls, Spanish Jewish girls, and the regular.

MAZIAR: How did you all meet each other?

SMITH: Social functions. People giving parties.

MAZIAR: Was there one place?

SMITH: No. Well the Alliance was a good place. Alliance held no barriers. Alliance was a great place to go to for, you name it, sports.

MAZIAR: That was what, the forerunner of the Jewish Community Center?

SMITH: Yes.

MAZIAR: When was that formed?

SMITH: Probably 1900. Somewhere in there. They had all kinds of programs for young people. The AZA [Aleph Zadik Aleph] started out of there. I never belonged to one. Don't ask me why, I just never did. They had clubs. The Aaronean [Club], the SIJ [Shearith Israel Juniors]. Different ones. They had leaders like they do today, among youth groups. Your synagogue was very strong. Sunday school. Made a lot of social contacts at Sunday school.

MAZIAR: Did everyone go to services on Saturday, too? What was that like?

SMITH: Services on Saturday?

MAZIAR: Yes. Or was it Friday night?

SMITH: No. Saturday. I don't ever remember going to Friday night service. We used to go to the synagogue on Saturday. Of course, for somebody like me, they were long. Five hours. Five and a half.

MAZIAR: With Rabbi [Harry] Epstein?51

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

50 This youth group, also known as the SIJ Club, is related to the Shearith Israel synagogue in Atlanta, Georgia and is part of Young Judaeas. It was organized in 1928 when the synagogue was located on Hunter Street in Atlanta.

51 In 1928 Rabbi Harry Epstein (1903-2003) served as the rabbi of Ahavath Achim from 1928 to 1982. Under his leadership the congregation began to shift to Conservatism, which they adopted in 1952. Rabbi Epstein retired in
SMITH: He was not the first rabbi. I remember the first rabbi was named [Abraham] Hirmes.\(^{52}\) H-I-R-M-E-S. I was a very little boy, and he didn't speak good English. I think the reason they got rid of him was because he was European, and he really couldn't communicate with the people. Then they got Rabbi Epstein, who was very young and had a lot of pizzazz. Still does. The first holiday that Rabbi Epstein made a speech, people talked about it for days afterwards.

MAZIAR: Really?

SMITH: Yes. Of course, The Temple, because I went with a lot of girls and boys from The Temple, talked about Rabbi [David] Marx,\(^{53}\) who had his own theory about how Jewish you should be. It didn't sit well in our house. It just didn't. A lot of people were crossovers. They got tired of being Orthodox, I guess. They wanted something new and something different. Reform seemed to present a different type of belief.

MAZIAR: Was your dad involved in any of the other synagogues or just AA?

SMITH: Shearith Isreal and AA, very much so, because both of them were close to us. Shearith Israel was only four blocks from us. It was on Hunter Street, which is now, I believe it's called Martin Luther King Jr. Drive. That's the only place you had to go in those days. You didn't have any private clubs.

MAZIAR: What about in high school? Was there mixing between Jews and non-Jews?

SMITH: Yes.

MAZIAR: Dating and that sort of thing?

SMITH: Very much so. I wouldn't say it was as loose as it is today, but you did date other than . . . if you had enough money to take a girl on a date. Most of the young people that I knew in high school had a job on Saturday to make enough spending money so they could do whatever they wanted to. Truthfully.

MAZIAR: Did you work in your father's business or what did you do?

SMITH: No, I did not. I always worked outside of his business. Well, one thing, he didn't pay you very well.

\(^{52}\) Rabbi Abraham Hirmes was the first rabbi of the then Orthodox congregation. In 1928 Rabbi Harry Epstein became the rabbi.

\(^{53}\) Rabbi David Marx was a long-time rabbi at the Temple in Atlanta, Georgia. He led the move toward Reform Judaism practices. He served as rabbi from 1895 to 1946. When he retired, Rabbi Jacob Rothschild took the pulpit that Rabbi Marx had held for more than half a century.
MAZIAR: Special rates for family.
SMITH: Right, and other people would pay you. So, I would work. Sometimes when I worked, I would spend the night in whoever's place I was working because they lived right there. I would work until 11 o'clock at night. It was very difficult to get home, particularly if you had money in your pocket. You didn't want to go home at 11 o'clock at night. It was just different. Not that you were totally afraid of anything, but you'd worked all day and you were dead tired. Time to take a bath and go to bed.
MAZIAR: What kind of work did you do when you were a teenager?
SMITH: Selling, grocery stores, clothing stores, shoe stores. The people I worked for, I worked for maybe one or two years straight. Jobs weren't easy to get. Once you got a job, if you could keep it, you were happy as a lark.
MAZIAR: This was part time after school and that sort of thing?
SMITH: I never worked after school. Never.
MAZIAR: Just Saturdays?
SMITH: Just Saturdays and holidays. I just didn't have time to work after school.
MAZIAR: What did you do during the summers?
SMITH: Family wise?
MAZIAR: Yes.
SMITH: Go on picnics. One summer my father took us down to Macon, Georgia, when I was about four or five years old. It took us all day long to get down to Macon, Georgia. Seemed like it was 5,000 miles away. We stayed down there for about two weeks. As a teenager, we used to do a lot of things. We used to go . . . the trains ran in those days. You could go to Chattanooga [Tennessee] for $1. If my memory serves me right, I believe it was round trip. So, you could go down to the depot, which is right by the state capitol and catch a train that went to Chattanooga, or either over there. The station isn't there anymore. It was on Broad Street. For $1, you could go round trip. You had friends, most of us did have friends in different places, Birmingham and Chattanooga. But we never went to Birmingham because most of the activities, the fun, was in Chattanooga at the mountains. They had a big old recreation area with a lake that you could swim in. If you had a date, you would pack a picnic lunch and you would go. There were plenty of things to do here. When I was younger, there was this place called Dixie Lakes.
In Broadview, there was a lake called Mooney’s Lake. Mooney’s Lake was really something. It's dried up now, but it was great when we were kids. They had a big old cable thing you could walk up two stories and catch a hold of the thing and ride this cable down into the water, if you had enough nerve. We all did it. You can't be chicken about things when you're growing up. You go with the tide. But really, I never lacked for anything to do.

MAZIAR: You had all your siblings too.

SMITH: Yes. I was very fortunate. My sisters were older, and they taught me how to dance, so I was a good dancer. When you're a good dancer when you're young, everybody wants you to come to their party because you're a good dancer. Not only that, if you were good company, that counted, if you weren't a bore. Particularly, if you got invited to a party, you tried to be on your best behavior, more or less. There weren't any, not when we were really young, you didn’t . . . the sexual part didn't come into it. When you started to go with a girl and you went steady with her, you didn't do those things. Maybe some people did but you didn't. I mean, it wasn't in that vein, if you know what I'm saying. It was more or less having a good time, being a gentleman, and hoping they would invite you back. That's, more or less, what it was all about. I needed a social calendar, to be very truthful. One of my best friends was a dentist, going to a dental school, and I went to every dance that they ever gave. I was very fortunate. My father always had five or six automobiles. I had access to an automobile. Of course, that immediately will tell you something about somebody who has a mode of transportation. It can take you a lot of places. I never had any problem. I was active when I was young with various things. I tried to do a little bit of theater and things of that sort.

MAZIAR: Where did you graduate from high school?

SMITH: Boys’ High School in 1933.

MAZIAR: Then you went . . .

SMITH: Then I went to work and went to Georgia State [University] at night.

MAZIAR: How come you went to work?

SMITH: Because I was anxious to make money.

MAZIAR: Your father, it sounds like . . .

SMITH: I didn't work for my father.

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54 Mooney’s Lake was a summer swimming area in Buckhead that was in business from 1920-58. Today the area is occupied by the I-85/GA 400 interchange and Lindbergh Plaza.
MAZIAR: No, but it sounded like he was comfortable enough, and he could have provided you with a good education.

SMITH: He was of the opinion that if you wanted an education, you should do it on your own. I was the only sibling that went to college.

MAZIAR: Really?

SMITH: Yes. That's right. The rest of them all worked from the time they got out of high school.

MAZIAR: None of them worked for your father?

SMITH: Oh, yes. I had one brother that worked for my father. My sisters, when they were younger, they worked there. But to be perfectly honest, I didn't like his business. I didn't like what they did. It was not my cup of tea. I was a little more sophisticated. I had made up my mind early on that I wanted to own a men's store and sell fine clothes and things of that sort. I worked in a men's store for a while. I also worked for Davidson's, which is now Macy's. I worked for Macy's for about two years. I worked part time in the men's furnishings. My major job was in the advertising department. When I went to college at night, I majored in accounting. Everybody seemed to think that that was a good position to do. When my mother died, I quit college and opened my own business, which was a part of my father's business originally, which I bought out and paid for. I didn't get an inheritance. I was very independent. Always had been.

MAZIAR: You were in the service also?

SMITH: Yes. Four years.

MAZIAR: Then when you came back, your father had died. Is that right?

SMITH: No. Father died just after I . . . he died in 1946. In January of 1946. That's when I got out of the service, just before he died.

MAZIAR: When did you buy part of the business?

SMITH: In 1939.

MAZIAR: So, was your father already getting out of the business?

SMITH: No. He just . . . I had another brother who came to work for him, and he took over. After my mother died, my father sold off part of his business to one of my brothers and myself.

MAZIAR: Why did he do it?

SMITH: He couldn't operate it himself. He was too old and not well. I thought it was
better if we buy that part of the business and see if we could do anything with it. Of course, when we bought it, he was doing just a small amount of business, and we made it into a really fine business. I ended up with it because I bought out my brother. After 20 years of being together, I bought him out. When I bought him out, we were doing $125,000 a year. In a few years, I was doing $6.5 million a year. My brother retired for about 10 years or 11 years and then went to work for a similar company as mine but in another city and worked there until he died. But my brother, the other brother, took over my father's business, which was the container business, as far as glass goes. They are a $50 million company today.

MAZIAR: Is this the one that owns Corning [Ware]?

SMITH: Yes.

MAZIAR: Your business was?

SMITH: Steel drums. Originally, we made barrels. We really didn't make them, we renovated them. Our customers, in those days, were Campbell Soup, syrup companies down in Roddenberry down in South Georgia. In 1926, the first steel drum was made, but they weren't really very progressive with it. They were testing the market. Up to that point, every item of any kind, food, oil, chemical, paint, went into a wooden barrel.

MAZIAR: There wasn't any kind of tin or anything?

SMITH: No. After the steel drum industry became more progressive with their . . . World War II really catapulted the steel drum industry because they were able to parachute drums of oil and gasoline into places where they could fly over and just drop them out of an airplane. They couldn't land there. That was the only way they could get this gasoline and oil and whatever they needed, supplies, was drop them by airplane.

MAZIAR: Was your father already manufacturing them at that point?

SMITH: No. He was small. In 1939, his company was cleaning about 100 drums a day. In 1975, we were cleaning 3,000 a day, maybe more before that. It was something that I thought would work into something and something that was a challenge. It was more my speed because that would be me putting myself into something that I thought I could do.

MAZIAR: Did it require a lot of marketing too?

SMITH: Yes. You had to really work at it. It was not an easy job. I have no regrets. I love my business. I love my work. I was still very active socially. For five years, I was active in
the Progressive Club’s\textsuperscript{55} entertainment. For 14 years, I was the governor of entertainment in the dining room at the Mayfair Club.\textsuperscript{56} I decided I’d had enough of it. Besides, my business was growing bigger and bigger. I quit all of it. Then a friend of mine got elected to the Standard Club’s board, and he became the governor of entertainment in the dining room, which he knew nothing about, absolutely nothing. He got someone to call me up and have lunch with me. The fellow knew me very well. He said, “You’ve got to do this because you have the experience.” Reluctantly, I took it on. I’ll tell you the truth, I’m the only person that the Standard Club had in that section that made money for that club. I had five years of fabulous experience. I was very active with the MCA,\textsuperscript{57} which is a tremendous corporation now. Absolutely nothing in my day. Just a little bitty agency that was trying to make a living booking entertainers and what have you. I’m here to tell you that I booked from Xavier Cugat, Woody Herman, Keely Smith, and Dick Haymes. You name them. We had entertainers parading back and forth. While I was governor of the dining room at the Standard Club, the Piedmont Driving Club\textsuperscript{58} had a young man who was also kind of lost in what he was doing. This was a difficult thing because you had to make a decision in one hour about getting a band. These agencies would call you from New York and say, "I've got a band who's going to be in your area two and a half months from now for two nights and we want X number of dollars. Can you book them?" Well, being an organization that couldn't pay that kind of money, I just took it upon myself and called this fellow at the Driving Club and introduced myself over the telephone. To this day, I've never met him. We got together, and the Piedmont Driving Club would have that same orchestra on Saturday night, which was more expensive than the Sunday night, and the Standard Club would get it on Sunday night. If the thing cost $2,500, they would pay $1,800 on Saturday night because gentiles liked

\textsuperscript{55} The Jewish Progressive Club was a Jewish social organization that was established in 1913 by Russian Jews who felt unwelcome at the Standard Club, where German Jews were predominant. At first the club was located in a rented house until a new club was built on Pryor Street including a swimming pool and a gym. In 1940 the club opened a larger facility at 1050 Techwood Drive in Midtown with three swimming pools, tennis and softball. In 1976 the club moved north to 1160 Moore’s Mill Road near Interstate 75. The property was eventually sold as the club faced financial challenges and the Carl E. Sanders Family YMCA at Buckhead opened in 1996.

\textsuperscript{56} The Mayfair Club opened in 1938 at 1456 Spring Street in Midtown Atlanta. The two-story club was a focal point of Jewish life in the city for more than 25 years. The club was founded in 1930 and first met at the Biltmore Hotel. Eleanor Roosevelt, Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir, mayors Ivan Allen and William Berry Hartsfield, senators Herman Talmadge and Richard Russell, and Governor Carl Sanders visited the club. Fire destroyed the Mayfair Club on December 4, 1964.

\textsuperscript{57} MCA Inc. (Music Corporation of America) was an American media company. Initially starting in the music business, the company became a dominant force in the film business and later expanded into the television business. MCA published music, booked acts, and ran a record company.

\textsuperscript{58} The Piedmont Driving Club is a private social club founded in 1887 in Atlanta, Georgia. It is still in existence and has a reputation as being one of the most prestigious private clubs in the South.
to go to dances more on Saturday night than Jews did. Sunday was a church day, and they didn't really want to do it. Jewish people, they went to synagogue on Saturday, if they went at all. So, we would pay $700. You can see what an advantage point that we had. We just had a really wonderful two or three years together.

MAZIAR: Was that a voluntary job?

SMITH: Voluntary. Strictly voluntary. Some of the people, young married people, men and women, would get such a kick out of doing all these things. We would dream up different things to have and different things to do. It was most successful.

MAZIAR: What's happened to that kind of thing?

SMITH: You can get theater as much as you want now, even in Atlanta. People have bars in their homes, and they're not interested in that. In those days, people had young kids. They were glad to get out on a Sunday night even if they didn't have help. They could get a babysitter in those days for 50 cents an hour. A dollar an hour. Today, it's $5 an hour. It was a chance to be entertained. Sometimes, like Standard Club's biggest dance was Thanksgiving Eve. It was strictly formal. Biggest blowout you've ever seen. I mean, just nine yards. We would know in advance that every Thanksgiving Eve we had to have a good orchestra, so you would start making inroads into the industry. There were one or two agencies here in Atlanta who still exist but they never became anything. MCA was fabulous. I booked Alan King, Mickey Katz, Tommy Leonetti. He was a big star on the Hit Parade.

MAZIAR: Where was MCA out of?


MAZIAR: How did you find them?

SMITH: Through others. I had a good time.

MAZIAR: When did you start your family? When did you get married?

SMITH: I got married in 1943. I was in the service. My first child was born in January 31, 1945, I believe.

MAZIAR: Your wife is from?

SMITH: Atlanta. We have two children. Her name was Yudelson. Edith Yudelson. We had a boy first and a girl second. In her family, she's the oldest of five. Neither one of her sisters or brothers married until we had been married six or seven years and had two children. My children are like the first of the first of the first. They enjoyed it. She had a brother who was
three years old when I married her. In another three years, we had a child, and he became an uncle at the age of six. Whereas, I became an uncle when I was not even four. She has a sister and a brother here and a sister in St. Louis and a brother who is a professor in Rochester, New York.

**MAZIAR:** Did your wife work?

**SMITH:** Goodness gracious no. Are you kidding? She has never worked. No. She's a homebody. Never had a job.

**MAZIAR:** What about your kids? Are they in Atlanta?

**SMITH:** No. One is. One isn't. My daughter lives in Boston. She has a position with Lotus. She's a writer. She writes the technical manual for their software. My son is in the finance business in Atlanta. He married a girl who had two children and then they had two more. His oldest is married. His next one is in the Medical College of Georgia. The third one, is his child, and is at Brown University [Providence, Rhode Island]. The little girl, she's 15. Is at Holy Innocents’ [Episcopal School] private school.

**MAZIAR:** What is your son's name?

**SMITH:** Richard. My daughter's name is Janet.

**MAZIAR:** Is she married and have a family?

**SMITH:** No. Never married and don't want to be. She wants to be a career lady, and that's what she is.

**MAZIAR:** How old is she?

**SMITH:** Janet is 45.

**MAZIAR:** Your son is?

**SMITH:** Just turned 48 in January.

**MAZIAR:** You have a lot of relatives here. You have all your nieces and nephews here?

**SMITH:** I have over 150 nieces and nephews, great-nieces, great-great nieces, and great-great-great-nieces and nephews. I don't have left but three sisters. No brothers.

**MAZIAR:** Let's go back. Did anybody continue the family business or that was just sold? You sold the business?

**SMITH:** No. My part is out.

**MAZIAR:** You sold it?

**SMITH:** No. I gave it to my son. Unfortunately, he couldn't run it. He wasn't capable of
running it. He's more into finance than he is business. He closed it up. But my brother's 
business is still running, which stemmed from my father.

MAZIAR: That's the glass?

SMITH: Yes. They call themselves a container company because they sell both plastic and 
glass. We still have a big family. Really big. It's wonderful. It really is. When you talk about 
families. Ten kids. Then their kids got married, and their kids got married. So you can readily 
see. Back when I was younger, we had ... after my mother died, we formed what was called a 
Smith club. We would meet once a month. We would pay a small amount of dues. We'd have a 
party every year. The last Hanukkah party we had over 100 little kids. I'm not talking about big 
one. I'm talking about little ones. We decided that each family would not spend over a dollar a 
present. You couldn't buy but maybe five presents. That meant, you weren't spending but $5. It 
got so big, we couldn't hold them anywhere. We had to go to a public hall. So, we stopped it. 
The purpose of our club was, we got this money, and when we had enough money, we would 
donate it to charity in memory of my parents. We bought a room at the Piedmont Hospital way 
back when it was just ... and some of the other things we did, but then we disbanded because we 
got too big. Then everybody felt like they wanted to do things on their own. I mean, whatever 
charities they liked, they wanted to be active in it. I, personally, was very active in the Jewish 
Home, Jewish Federation, United Way. It's just the things that I do that I like to do.

MAZIAR: It sounds like you had your dad's spirit of community involvement.

SMITH: I guess I got it from him because I give a lot of time to it. I really enjoy it. I 
really do.

MAZIAR: Were any of your other siblings as involved? They picked up his mantle?

SMITH: My sisters were involved in Hadassah. Very much so. One of my brothers was 
very involved in synagogue activities.

MAZIAR: Was that Morris?

SMITH: Morris. Yes.

MAZIAR: You mentioned it on your other tape. He was involved in AA.

SMITH: Yes. But none of them have done Federation work or the Jewish Home work like 
I have. One of my sisters has volunteered for several years at the Jewish Home, but then she got 
ill, and she couldn't do it.

MAZIAR: What work did you do for Federation?
SMITH: I was on several committees there. I'm on their endowment fund board. I'm on their aging board. I work with the part of Federation that contributions come in. That I do. I'm chairman of the “clean up” campaign for the last two years. That's over a $1 million.

MAZIAR: What's the “clean up” campaign?

SMITH: That's people who just drag their feet and don't pledge and don't pay. My group sees to it that we get all that in because it's very vital to the efforts of the community. Federation is a fine organization, and it does a good job. There's just a need for it. Atlanta is growing by leaps and bounds. There is so much need for . . . and things are becoming more Jewish oriented, which I'm glad to see. While I'm not Orthodox, and I don't know if that makes you think different, which I don't think it does. I think that the need for Jewish education and charities and things that need monies, are most important. I think young kids growing up today, with so much assimilation, and if they are made aware of their heritage, to me, they're better off.

MAZIAR: Do you feel that that was done in your generation?

SMITH: Yes.

MAZIAR: What was the biggest influence? In your family?

SMITH: Yes. Definitely. I guess you would say my folks were really of the old school, so they weren't modern parents. The most important thing to my mother was her children. I suppose my father too, although he was really very active. We experienced a lot of things that people didn't experience because there was no such thing as a stranger in our house. My father would bring home visiting rabbis or whatever they were. He also had a brother who came here from Russia every winter, I mean, every summer and taught school here.

MAZIAR: You mentioned that in the last tapes.

SMITH: There was no such thing as a stranger to us. But we did have . . . it's a different feel.

MAZIAR: It sounds like everything that your father did, it seems like it was part of a very extended family. Even his political involvement, it was a part of his extended family. I wonder if that is what has changed in Atlanta. People still maintain their Jewish community, but are there still those ties to . . . the fact that people lived and worked in the same vicinity and really just tread the same steps day in and day out, covered the same territory, seems to have made a difference.

SMITH: That doesn't exist today. That does not exist today because people are caught up
in their businesses. Social wise, some people have a different interpretation of what is social, going to parties. As you get older . . .

SMITH: . . . soccer, baseball, and sports. I don't ever remember my father taking me to a baseball game.

MAZIAR: To the Atlanta Crackers?\(^{59}\)

SMITH: No. I went, but he didn't take me. That wasn't the important thing in those days. Today, people put more emphasis on where their kids are going to end up or try to make them end up, so to speak. I just don't think . . . you don't get the same feeling today as you did back when I was a little boy. A young boy, not a little boy.

MAZIAR: The process of life back then. Just the everyday act of living, feeding, and nurturing in terms of a family was very different than it is now.

SMITH: Yes. Today, you've got restaurants and coupon books. Who had ever heard of a thing called McDonald’s? It didn't exist.

MAZIAR: It sounds like people were much more self-sufficient but really had much more initiative, too, in a way?

SMITH: I think they did. They were more respected in yesteryear than they are today, I think. I know you get recognition for what you do, at least people do recognize what you do. [They] may not talk to you about it, but somebody will say, "You're doing a good job." If you're doing a good job, then you feel good about it. If you're doing a bad job, then you shouldn’t be doing what you're doing. But not everybody is geared to do all that. Not everybody can go and ask people for money. They just don’t do it. They don’t take time to do something for somebody else.

MAZIAR: It is amazing to me, having done a number of these interviews, how much more personal life seemed to be back in that generation. I consider it my in-law’s generation. Your children are the same age as my husband. It was just a much more personal . . . you seem to interface with people in a different sort of way than people do now. If you were able to turn back

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\(^{59}\) The Atlanta Crackers were minor league baseball teams based in Atlanta between 1901 and 1965. The Crackers were Atlanta’s home team until the Atlanta Braves moved from Milwaukee in 1966. The Crackers played in Ponce de Leon Park from 1907 until a fire destroyed the all-wood stadium in 1923. Spiller Field (a stadium later also called ‘Ponce de Leon Park’), became their home starting in the 1924 season.
the clock, what would you do?

SMITH: Would I go back to the old times?

MAZIAR: Or what would you do differently. What would you want to see happen now?

SMITH: Not really much. I'm satisfied. Really, I am. I shed a few tears. Had a lot of laughs and don't have any regrets. None whatsoever. But I can see it in my children. They're not as close as I was with my brothers and sisters. They love each other. I'm not saying they don't, but they're not as close. Maybe it's because people get caught up in their own whirlwind. When you say about circle of friends, people don't mix as much as they used to. Clubs tend to disseminate people. They join a club and then they change. I'm the opposite. I don't need a club to make my social life. I really don't. I never did. We were very fortunate in that we were one of five couples that just met in Florida last week. Two husbands are dead, unfortunately. There are two new ones to take their place. But we're still close. We still regard each other as very personal friends, and that's something that you can't buy today. You don't see people do that, stay together all that time.

MAZIAR: Are these people you've known since . . . ?

SMITH: Since I was a little boy. I went to school with two of them, all through school.

MAZIAR: That's wonderful.

SMITH: Grade school, middle school, and high school. In my day, you had six years of grammar school. They didn't call it middle school. Then you had three years of junior high and then three years of high school. That gave you 12 years of education. Today, they do it a little different. I think it's seven, two, and four, or whatever it is. But really, I don't see any reason for wanting to do anything differently. Maybe I'm a rare breed in that our life was so good that we just had a lot of good things happen in our family.

MAZIAR: It sounds like it. It sounds like your father was very positive. You had this feeling of anything's possible.

SMITH: Like I said, he had a good personality. He was strict, that he was. He was strict. But then again, he was 50 years old when I was born. That made a big difference. When I got old enough to be independent, and in those days, at 11 or 12, you were pretty independent. You just went your own merry way and did what you wanted to do. When I tell people that I drove a car when I was 12, they think I'm crazy. They didn't have licenses then. I told you that before.

MAZIAR: Did you see Home Alone?
SMITH: No.

MAZIAR: It's about growing up in a very big family, and the youngest one manages to get lost. He goes his own way and does his own thing. You'd probably get a good chuckle out of it only from that perspective. Because everybody else is all busy with everything, and then this youngest one has all kinds of ideas about what he wants to do.

SMITH: I have memories about my sisters dating and things that they did. One sister, in particular, her husband was a real sport. I was 15 when they were dating. He never left me out of anything. This man took me horseback riding and introduced me to a lot of things.

MAZIAR: Did he offer or did you invite yourself?

SMITH: He offered. They went on many a date that I went with them, particularly on Sunday. He was just as nice as he could be. Then I dated his sister. It was different. I loved her to the day she died. I really did. We never thought about marriage or anything like that. We were really just really good friends. It's hard to explain that to a lot of people. You could be in love with somebody other than the wife you're married to, or the girl you're married to, and not really have physical love, just deep feelings for each other.

MAZIAR: Share a lot.

SMITH: Yes. She was a fantastic lady. She really was. It's just hard to put into words what you feel for somebody else.

MAZIAR: It sounds like you've had a lot of very rich experiences in your life. You've been able to do a lot of very nice things.

SMITH: A lot of people say I should write a book. I said that would be terrible. Literally, let all my secrets out on printed word.

MAZIAR: Someone might find it very interesting. Is there anything else that you can think of that you would like to have put in these tapes, speaking of writing a book?

SMITH: No, not really.

MAZIAR: Anything about Atlanta?

SMITH: No, just that it's getting bigger and bigger. It's a very good city and a progressive city. Politics are a little different today than they used to be.

MAZIAR: Do you think Jews are as involved in politics now as they were then?

SMITH: More. And good that they are.

MAZIAR: In a more formal sort of way?
SMITH: Right. It also gives the other side a chance to look at Jews in a different vein. To me, it does. Because the Jews who are in politics, particularly the women, are very bright, very articulate, and very dedicated.

MAZIAR: They take it very seriously.

SMITH: Yes. They talk about women being . . . this is the year of the woman. That's not so because it's been the year of the woman since 1920. She's making her mark and rightfully so. I never thought that men were superior to women anyway.

MAZIAR: Now women are really able to make their mark.

SMITH: Like I told you before, all my sisters worked and ran hell of a nice businesses and made a good living. They sure didn't shirk anything where their children were concerned.

MAZIAR: Your wife didn't work, though.

SMITH: No. Never did.

MAZIAR: You weren't interested in that or she wasn't interested in that?

SMITH: I didn't want her to work. I really didn't. My wife is a very pleasant lady, who was very artistic and is not into organizational work. Never did anything as far as collect money or things like that. She's not capable of doing that. Some people just can't do that kind of work. She went out for Hadassah one time, and she felt like giving everybody that she was asking money from money herself. She's always been a homemaker.

MAZIER: Those were her interests.

SMITH: Her mother worked when she was a girl, but after she got married she never worked. Her sisters never worked. It's kind of a pattern, I guess.

MAZIAR: Things did change in that generation. I think that was a very significant generation. Thank you very much for your time, and we're going to close.

INTERVIEW ENDS