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GEORGIA JEWS**

INTERVIEWER: KIM COHEN
MEMOIRIST: RUTH KRUGER SINGER
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INTERVIEW BEGINS

<Begin Tape 1, Side 1>

Kim: [This is Kim Cohen interviewing Ruth Kruger] Singer on August 27, 2001 for the Jewish Oral History Project of Atlanta co-sponsored by the American Jewish Committee, the Atlanta Jewish Federation, and the National Council of Jewish Women. Mrs. Singer, when were you born?

Ruth: I was born on January 7, 1918.

Kim: Can you tell me where you were born?

Ruth: I was born in Tifton [Georgia, United States]. My mother and father were living in Sale City [Georgia] about 30 miles from Tifton. My mother had a brother in Tifton, a brother and his family. In order to give birth, she went there because there was a doctor there and her brother helped care for her.

Kim: What were the names of your parents?

Ruth: My mother's name? Her maiden name? My mother's name was Fannie Kulbersh [Kruger].¹ Do you want her Jewish name?

Kim: Yes, please.

Ruth: She was known as Fannie here, but her Yiddish² name was Freydke which ordinarily would be translated as Freida, but she went by the name of Fannie.

Kim: What was your father's name?

¹ Fannie Kulbersh Kruger (1890-1979) was a resident of Fitzgerald, Columbus, and Atlanta, Georgia. She was a member of Ahavath Achim Synagogue and the Atlanta chapter of Hadassah.

² Yiddish is the common historical language of Ashkenazi Jews from Central and Eastern Europe. It is heavily Germanic based but uses the Hebrew alphabet. The language was spoken or understood as a common tongue for many European Jews up until the middle of the twentieth century. Yiddish is a reference to a person's language and not necessarily their ethnicity, religion, or culture.

Ruth: My father's name was Elex, it was spelled with an "E" which was a choice he made when his brother Abe had the letter A, and they were living in the same town. He was known ever since that as Elex, E-L-E-X, Kruger, K-R-U-G-E-R.³

Kim: What was the name of your mother's brother that was in Tifton?

Ruth: Samuel Kulbersh.⁴

Kim: How did your parents get to the city? Not Tifton. How did they get to that city in . . .

Ruth: Sale City?

Kim: Yes.

Ruth: As I said, my mother had a brother in Tifton. She also had a brother in Atlanta, Georgia whose name was Sam Kulbersh.⁵ She came south from New York . . . where she came to this country . . . to a sister in New York. Living conditions there with a very small apartment where a sister, husband, and already a couple of children were living . . . she moved on south to Atlanta. The brother that went to Tifton also came to Atlanta and then south. I don't know if you understand that nearly all of South Georgia was populated with Jews because the rural South . . . the business was mostly done by peddlers before that time. After about 1910, they started opening stores in these small towns. Rather than traveling to the customer, the customer then started coming to them. That's what my father was doing in Sale City. He opened a store. How did he get there? A cousin of theirs . . . I won't go into the lineage . . . a cousin paid for his passage to America. [He] lived in Doerun [Georgia], with them, with this cousin, and worked for him. After so much time, he outlived and outworked his needs so the cousin offered to help him open a store in Sale City. I guess there were empty buildings everywhere at that time. This was pre-World War [I],⁶ by the way, pre-World War [I]. I think my father came to this country about 1910, and my mother came earlier. She had spent a lot of time in the [United] States before she went to South Georgia, you see. He went directly to South Georgia. With the merchandise in

³ Elex Kruger (1891-1947) was a resident of Sale City, Fitzgerald, Columbus, and Atlanta, Georgia. He was the owner of dry goods stores in each of those cities. In Fitzgerald, he owned the Fair Store.

⁴ Samuel Kulbersh (abt. 1881-1979) was the co-owner, with his brother Harry Kulbersh, of Kulbersh Brothers Department Store, a dry-goods store in Tifton, Georgia. He relocated to Boston, Massachusetts during the 1930's.

⁵ Sam Harry "S. H." Kulbersh (1878-1954) was an immigrant who resided in Atlanta, Georgia where he operated a wholesale shoe business. He was a president of the Shearith Israel Synagogue in Atlanta in 1938.

⁶ World War I, also called First World War or Great War, was an international conflict that in 1914–18 embroiled most of the nations of Europe along with Russia, the United States, the Middle East, and other regions. The war pitted the Central Powers—mainly Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Turkey—against the Allies—mainly France, Great Britain, Russia, Italy, Japan, and, from 1917, the United States. It ended with the defeat of the Central Powers.

hand from the cousin, he went to Sale City and opened up this store. [He] started to pay back the cousin for the passage and whatever else he charged him, I don't know.

Kim: Where . . .

Ruth: In the meantime, there were Jews living in Albany [Georgia], Moultrie [Georgia], Camilla [Georgia], and places like that in that area. I don't know how, but Jews have a way of communicating. Everybody knew each other. They knew that my father was single and that my mother was single. All the people got together and made a match between . . . where else could it happen and how else could it happen that a little woman from Poland and a man from Lithuania would meet and love.

Kim: Very good story. I love it. What was the name of your father's store?

Ruth: In Sale City, I don't know what the name was. We moved to Fitzgerald [Georgia] in 1923.

Kim: Tell me about . . .

Ruth: He bought a store there that Jewish people owned. I know who they are, but I won't go into that. They are a family that wanted to come to North Georgia because they had friends and family in this area. They . . .

<Interruption in tape>

Kim: How many children were in your family?

Ruth: My brother, younger than I.

Kim: His name?

Ruth: His name was Lewis—and nickname which he used, Buddy—Kruger.⁷

Kim: Tell me about your father. I was reading your husband Sol's⁸ story. He spoke so highly of your father and his position . . .

Ruth: Right.

Kim: . . . that he was very outgoing, so if you could just tell us a little bit about your father.

Ruth: He was a very congenial, always happy person. I don't believe I ever saw him in anger but once. He had a way of not being angry at anyone else either, much less people being angry

⁷ Buddy Lewis Kruger (1921-1957) was born in Sale City, Georgia and resided in Fitzgerald, Georgia. He was a University of Georgia graduate who served as a sergeant in the United States Army during World War II. He subsequently joined the family retail business in Fitzgerald, Georgia. He was a member of the Fitzgerald Hebrew Alliance, the Southeast Georgia B'nai B'rith Post, and the Jewish War Veterans local post.

⁸ Sol Singer (1918-2003) was born in Atlanta and raised in Unadilla, Georgia. He resided in Columbus, Georgia for 23 years. In 1962, as president of Singer and Co., Sol moved his wholesale business and his family to Atlanta, Georgia. Sol served as a president of Shearith Israel in Columbus, as a vice president of the Southeast Region of Conservative Judaism, and as a founding member of the Columbus Jewish Federation.

with him. He participated in community affairs, but not to the point that he was ambitious about them. He just participated because it was the right thing to do. Community . . . the Fitzgerald community when we moved there and then the Jewish community around there that developed when I was growing up. He was a good merchant, and the store that he had was called The Fair Store, F-A-I-R Store. It was a single building. As he did well, there was another twin next to that building that he bought. It was a double-store building. For the time, he was successful.

Kim: Tell me about his relationship with the other non-Jewish businessmen?

Ruth: Very good. All of what I am telling you is . . . when I said participate in community affairs, he was on very good terms with the banker. There were not too many other businesses in Fitzgerald at that time. Those that were there were like him. One was his brother Abe [Kruger]⁹ who had a store very similar to his. Most of the merchants were Jewish.

Kim: What was the name of Abe's store?

Ruth: Kruger's Department Store.

Kim: Tell me a little bit about your mother?

Ruth: She was a very talented lady and came . . . when she came from New York to Atlanta, she worked in a hat factory. Whether or not . . . you can't remember it, but women wore hats at that time. Everywhere. They were all very decorated hats. That's what she did. She created hats for Kutz Hat Company, K-U-T-Z Hat Company. She also worked at Regenstein's¹⁰ who was in business at the time. She was a seamstress and helped do alterations in that store. From Atlanta, she went south to join her other brother and his family. Of course that brother also had a general merchandise store. It was called the Baltimore Bargain House. I have a picture that I gave to Sandy Berman that had the sign over the store, Baltimore Bargain House. She helped him in that store. When she married my father in 1914, she went to live in Sale City. I have a vague memory of what my environment was because I was five years old when we left Sale City. I remember the house. For the time, it was a very substantial house but there were no toilet facilities. When I look back on it, you think, how did we do that? But it was . . . everybody did it. It was just something that you took for granted when you lived in a place like that.

Kim: Can you tell me about the Jewish community and growing up in Fitzgerald?

⁹ Abe Kruger (1893-1973) came to the United States in 1911 from Russia and owned a dry goods store in Fitzgerald, Georgia that he sold to the Belks chain in 1954. He served as mayor pro tem in the 1960's and was a leader of the local Jewish community.

¹⁰ Regenstein's was an upscale women's apparel store founded by Julius Regenstein in 1892 on Whitehall Street in Atlanta, Georgia. It was sold to 1976.

Ruth: The Jewish community was not a coordinated community as such. But there were about 12 families, some with children and some not. There were two or three merchants in towns all surrounding Fitzgerald. Fitzgerald became a kind of nucleus or a place where the other Jewish people came. Because the idea of hospitality and being together was so important, they came together a lot in Fitzgerald—at my parents' house and other houses. In turn, we went to other towns. There were families in . . . two families in Ocilla [Georgia] nine miles away.

Kim: Can you tell me their names?

Ruth: Harris and Nathan. I just spoke to the grandchild of the Nathan family this morning. I think there were only the two [Jewish] families in Ocilla. There were people in Douglas [Georgia]. I mentioned Tifton, and Eastman [Georgia], Baxley [Georgia], Abbeville [Georgia], and Rochelle [Georgia]. These towns were so small that it was just one or maybe two [Jewish] families in the whole town. You can see how they needed each other. There was nothing organized about it. It was just a natural coming together. Come over next week. Somehow everybody came over next week. As time went on, and the Great Depression¹¹ came . . . there were very astute businessmen in Fitzgerald who met occasionally. They came up with the idea of creating a loan association because the banks were closed most places. There was no way for merchants to buy or to borrow. Those who had managed to survive in business were able to put like \$5,000 into a pot and they created what became known as the Hebrew Commercial Alliance¹² of Fitzgerald. Believe it or not, through all of that financial difficulty, I don't think anyone went bankrupt at that time. Now I'll have to tell you how they did it because it's unusual. You had to own stock before you could borrow. That was tough, but they knew they had to get the money from somewhere. They had to . . . you could not invest more than \$5,000, but you had to invest \$5,000, and then you were a stockholder. You could borrow. When you borrowed—let's say \$500, which went a long way at that time—you gave post-dated checks to the bank to be

¹¹ The Great Depression was a severe worldwide economic depression in the decade preceding World War II. The time of the Great Depression varied across nations, but in most countries it started in about 1929 and lasted until the late 1930's or early 1940's. It was the longest, most widespread, and deepest depression of the twentieth century.

¹² During the early years of the Great Depression, Jewish-owned stores in Fitzgerald, Georgia banded together in 1929 to form the Hebrew Commercial Alliance. The Alliance lent money to Jewish businesses that did not have the cash on hand to pay their suppliers. It also helped to support an area Jewish Sunday school, and later the Fitzgerald Jewish Congregation. Starting with just 18 members and \$7,500, the Fitzgerald-based alliance had 75 members from 15 South Georgia counties by 1932. At their annual meeting in 1935, the Alliance's president, Phillip Halperin, reported that it had 147 members, some in neighboring states, and \$77,500 in capital. By 1953, the alliance was loaning out almost \$1,000,000 a year. The organization continued into the 1960's. It eventually disbanded when many Jewish owned stores went out of business.

cashed in weekly installments which included interest. It would be very high interest but it allowed you a way to pay back the money as you were using it. I don't know that they lost very much at all in all the time. That bank grew and grew and became a social organization as well as a bank. They had stockholders' meetings. That was a great occasion. Everybody would come, wives, husbands, and grandmothers. Everybody would come to the stockholders' meeting. From that entity, the congregation was born. The need for having services and coming together was created. Also, that was a way of having a *minyan*.¹³ If you had a small town with just a few people in it, you couldn't even have a *minyan*. So the congregation was born. It first did not have a synagogue. We used to meet in a rented hall for the High Holy Days.¹⁴ People paid. There again, there were dues and you had another institution. We were married in 1939. They bought a church that they converted to a synagogue in 1940, so we could not get married in a synagogue. That was . . . it was a miraculous operation. It really created a community all over South Georgia.

Kim: Can you tell me the names of some of those families that were involved with the Hebrew [Commercial] Alliance?

Ruth: My father was one of the founders and his brother Abe was an associate. Abe Harris¹⁵ in Ocilla was an associate. Slakman¹⁶ . . . there was a Slakman family in Fitzgerald; and a Halperin¹⁷ family. I just saw one of the Halperin boys yesterday. Halperin, Slakman, Harris. There were five people who started this. There were more that who became, I guess, board members, but by that time I was married and gone. I don't have a lot of information other than what I've given you.

Kim: What was the name of the synagogue in Fitzgerald?

Ruth: Fitzgerald Hebrew Congregation.¹⁸

¹³ 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*.

¹⁴ The two High Holy Days are *Rosh Ha-Shanah* (Jewish New Year) and *Yom Kippur* (Day of Atonement).

¹⁵ Abraham "Abe" Simon Harris (1888-1946) was an immigrant from Russia who lived in Ocilla, Georgia and owned the A.S. Harris Department Store, the largest department store in Ocilla. He was the chairman of the war finance drives for Irwin County during World War II. He was also one of the founders of the Hebrew Commercial Alliance in Fitzgerald, Georgia.

¹⁶ Harry Slakman (1888-1963) was an immigrant from Russia who lived first in Fitzgerald, Georgia and relocated to Lakeland, Florida in the 1930's. He was a dry goods merchant. He was a founding member of the Hebrew Commercial Alliance in Fitzgerald in 1929.

¹⁷ Philip Halperin (1895-1988) owned the Surprise Store in Fitzgerald, Georgia. It became Halperin's Department Store. He was one of the founding members of the Fitzgerald Hebrew Congregation in 1946.

¹⁸ The Methodist Episcopal Church originally used the synagogue of the Fitzgerald Hebrew Congregation. The building was converted to a Hebrew synagogue in 1939 when the northern and southern branches of the Methodist Church united. It is one of very few synagogues in South Georgia serving several other communities in addition to

Kim: You said . . .

Ruth: It still is there. There is a Jewish cemetery¹⁹ in Fitzgerald.

Kim: How did your family get along with non-Jews in Fitzgerald?

Ruth: Very well. My family . . . in fact, all of the Jewish people got along well. I don't think that I experienced any antisemitism.²⁰ Although you know it was there, it was not overt. It was not anything you could see or feel. All the community fund-raising affairs we participated in. We gave our part. We gave to the churches. We just lived as members of the community like everybody else. Everybody knew . . . all the Jews knew they were Jews and vice versa.

Kim: Can you tell me how you observed the holidays in your home?

Ruth: We observed them to the limit that we could. We didn't have a lot of other family other than my uncle. Later on . . . the brother that my mother went to when I was born [Sam Kulbersh] was a very observant Jew. He couldn't stand it if he was isolated from Jewish life in Tifton. He just couldn't stand it. He and his family moved to Boston [Massachusetts], but in his place, there was a younger brother [Harry Kulbersh]²¹ who came and took over the store there—a brother and his wife. Subsequently, I had more cousins as I was growing up . . . I was talking about . . . I forgot the question you asked me.

Kim: About the holidays.

Ruth: About the holidays. We spent them with them, especially the High Holy Days.²² We all had meals together, a lot of them in our house and some of them in their house. We rented a hall to have High Holy Day services. Passover²³ was the other major holiday. We did celebrate the

Fitzgerald. In 1947, the Fitzgerald Hebrew Congregation hired its first full-time rabbi, Nathan Kohen, who served the congregation for 28 years, until his death in 1975. He remains the only full-time rabbi ever to serve the congregation. Despite this decline in the number of Jews, the Fitzgerald Hebrew Congregation remains active. Since 1975, the congregation has brought in student rabbis from the Conservative Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS) in New York. Currently, their JTS student rabbi comes to Fitzgerald once a month to lead services.

¹⁹ Fitzgerald Hebrew Congregation Cemetery is located within Evergreen Cemetery in Fitzgerald, Georgia. Marking the center is a monument “dedicated to the six million Hebrew men, women and children who met death at the cruel hand of the German Nazi government between the years of 1935 and 1945.”

²⁰ Antisemitism is prejudice against, hostility to, or hatred of Jews.

²¹ Harry Kulbersh (1889-1948) was the co-owner, with his brother Samuel Kulbersh, of Kulbersh Brothers Department Store, a dry-goods store in Tifton, Georgia.

²² The two High Holy Days are *Rosh Ha-Shanah* (Jewish New Year) and *Yom Kippur* (Day of Atonement).

²³ Hebrew: *Pesach*. The anniversary of Israel's liberation from Egyptian bondage. The holiday lasts for eight days. Unleavened bread, *matzah*, is eaten in memory of the unleavened bread prepared by the Israelites 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 *seeder*, the central event of the holiday is celebrated. The *seeder* service is one of the most colorful and joyous occasions in Jewish life. In addition to eating *matzah* during the *seeder*, 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

minor holidays too, but they were not in a community fashion. My father was a very well-informed, educated Jew. He kept up like when *Hanukkah*²⁴ was around. Of course, Passover is a major holiday. We had *seders*.²⁵ I don't recall if my mother changed dishes, but we sure changed our food when Passover came along. We didn't have Passover with other families that I recall. Some of them didn't even celebrate the holidays because when you're an isolated Jew, it's very hard to do that.

Kim: Did you have a student rabbi come to lead the services?

Ruth: Not at that time.

Kim: Just a . . .

Ruth: My Uncle Abe was a *chazzan*.²⁶

Kim: Oh.

Ruth: He led the services. Most of the other people [who were] fresh from Europe were well-able to conduct the services themselves. Now, though, they do have a rabbi who comes every month.

Kim: What is the name of your younger brother and some of your cousins?

Ruth: My younger brother . . .

Kim: I'm sorry. Your mother's younger brother.

Ruth: The younger brother was Harry, the one who came to Tifton when the older brother went to Boston. His name was Harry Kulbersh. I don't know a lot about when he came to this country. It was all about the same time because he married a woman in New York before coming south. I don't know all those particulars.

Kim: What were the names of your cousins, his children?

for Passover.

²⁴ Hebrew for 'dedication.' An eight-day festival of lights usually falling around Christmas on the Christian calendar. *Hanukkah* celebrates the victory of the Maccabees in 165 BCE over the Seleucid rulers of Palestine, who had desecrated the Temple. The Maccabees wanted to re-dedicate the Temple altar to Jewish worship by rekindling the menorah but could only find one small jar of ritually pure olive oil. This oil continued to burn miraculously for eight days, enabling them to prepare new oil. The *Hanukkah* menorah, or *hanukiah*, with its nine branches, is used to commemorate this miracle by lighting eight candles, one for each day, by the ninth candle.

²⁵ *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 a *seder* on both of 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.

²⁶ The *chazzan* (cantor) is the official in charge of music or chants and leads liturgical prayer and chanting in the synagogue.

Ruth: His children, one was Shirley and the other one was nicknamed “Buddy”, but his name was Ivan.²⁷ My cousin Shirley [Kulbersh Marcus]²⁸ has recently died. My cousin Ivan “Buddy” Kulbersh is still in Tifton. I have a cousin . . . Abe Kruger’s children . . . Reuben Kruger²⁹ is still in Fitzgerald. His sister [Evelyn Kruger Edwards]³⁰ married and lives in Tifton. That family is still in South Georgia.

Kim: Did you have a Sunday School that you went to, a Sunday School or religious school?

Ruth: I couldn’t hardly have a Sunday School when there was no religious institution, no formal religious institution. However, when we went to these different towns, I remember we had . . . some of the people would gather the kids together and teach Bible³¹ stories. That’s about all. No, there was no time to explore any more than that.

Kim: Can you tell me about being a Jewish teenager? I know there were dances that you all would have and . . .

Ruth: By the time I was a teenager, a lot of these other kids were teenagers. We used to have dances, Jewish dances. There was a place called Radium Springs in Albany, Georgia, that had a kind of pavilion as part of the property, and they would rent out the pavilion. My Uncle Abe Kruger was a socialholic. He would organize a lot of Jewish dances. There were never hordes of people, but we had a good time . . . and music. It was not live music. It was records. Social life for teenagers, for me, was bad . . .

<Laughter>

Ruth: . . . bad. In fact, it was a heartache for me, and I guess for others too. Going out with Christians was forbidden. There was not too much going out anyway because there we were again in the Great Depression. About all anybody would do was visit one another or go to a

²⁷ Ivan Melvin "Buddy" Kulbersh (1923-2009) was a lifelong resident of Tifton, Georgia where his father Harry co-founded Kulbersh Brothers Department Store. Buddy was a graduate of University of Georgia in Athens. He served as a lieutenant in the United States Navy during World War II. He was a lifelong member and past president of the Fitzgerald Hebrew Congregation.

²⁸ Shirley Kulbersh Marcus (1921-1998) was born in Tifton, Georgia. She was a member of the Fitzgerald Hebrew Congregation in Fitzgerald, Georgia, Adas Yesherum Synagogue in Augusta, Georgia, and Congregation B'nai Brith Jacob in Savannah, Georgia.

²⁹ Reuben Kruger (1920-2011) was a lifelong resident of Fitzgerald, Georgia and the owner of Reuben’s Shoes in Fitzgerald. He was a graduate of University of Georgia in Athens and served in the United States Army Air Corps. He was a leader in the Lions and Elks clubs and the Downtown Business Association, and chairman of the Ben Hill County Board of Tax Assessors. He was president of the Fitzgerald Hebrew Congregation.

³⁰ Evelyn Kruger Edwards (born 1923), spent her childhood in Fitzgerald, Georgia, and resided in Tifton, Georgia after marriage. She was active in the Fitzgerald Hebrew Congregation.

³¹ The Bible (Greek: the books) is a collection of sacred texts or scriptures that Jews and Christians consider to be a product of divine inspiration and a record of the relationship between God and humans.

movie. There was a movie house there. There was very little social activity in Fitzgerald for teenagers. Nobody cared. We didn't get into any trouble. There was no trouble to get into. As we look back on those days, would it ever occur to you to think about drugs or alcohol? It was Prohibition³² in the first place. And alcohol, would it ever occur to you to even think about it? It was not an option. It was not something we had to choose from so we were good.

Kim: What did you do after graduation from high school?

Ruth: I went to the University of Georgia³³ for four years.

Kim: Can you tell me a little bit about that?

Ruth: That was my first experience of living with a lot of Jews. There was a Jewish sorority. It really was not created until my second year in school. There was a women's campus at that time. There was no co-education in 1934. However, I did go to classes at the main campus, some classes. Most of the classes, though, were on women's campus. There were two Jewish fraternities. As I said, that was the most living I had ever done with a bunch of Jews, so it was wonderful.

Kim: Can you tell me the name of your Jewish sorority?

Ruth: Delta Phi Epsilon.³⁴

Kim: You remember some of your sorority sisters who were there?

Ruth: Yes. I gave Sandy Berman³⁵ a couple of pictures of the whole group. I recall a lot of the names. I am not going to recall them now.

Kim: Tell me about meeting your husband.

Ruth: We knew each other in passing, so to speak. He was a Tau Epsilon Phi.³⁶ There was another Jewish fraternity, AEPi [Alpha Epsilon Pi],³⁷ and there was another Jewish fraternity—

³² Prohibition is the legal act of prohibiting the manufacture, storage, transportation and sale of alcohol including alcoholic beverages. The first half of the twentieth century saw periods of prohibition of alcoholic beverages in several countries. Nationwide prohibition did not begin in the United States until 1920, when the Eighteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution went into effect. Prohibition became increasingly unpopular during the Great Depression along with a demand for increased employment and tax revenues. The ratification of the Twenty-first Amendment brought an official end to prohibition in the United States in 1933.

³³ The University of Georgia, founded in 1785, also referred to as UGA or simply Georgia, is an American public research university in the city of Athens in the U.S. state of Georgia.

³⁴ Delta Phi Epsilon (DPhiE) is an international sorority founded in 1917 at New York University Law School, New York City, New York.

³⁵ Sandy Berman is the founding archivist of Ida Pearle and Joseph Cuba Archives at the Breman Museum in Atlanta, Georgia where she worked for 29 years. She is the author of the novel, *Klara with a K*.

³⁶ Tau Epsilon Phi (TEΦ, commonly pronounced 'TEP') is a fraternity founded by ten Jewish men at Columbia University in New York in 1910 as a response to the existence of similar organizations that would not admit Jewish members.

ATO [Alpha Tau Omega]³⁸ which was a group of New York Yankee³⁹ Jews that came south to school because for whatever reason they couldn't go to school up north. It was also a lot cheaper to go to school at the University of Georgia than some of the other schools they had access to. They were nice fellows, but different. They didn't go into the southern selection. In other words, they didn't select guys from the South. I don't think that fraternity lasted very long; I'm not sure.

Kim: When were you married?

Ruth: August 20, 1939. We just celebrated 62 years.

Kim: Happy anniversary.

Ruth: Thank you.

Kim: Can you tell me a little bit about your wedding?

Ruth: That was something else. It was the first Jewish wedding that had ever been held in Fitzgerald. We had quite an invitation list between both families, friends, and all our college friends. We had quite an invitation list. My father was so happy about this whole thing that he would just issue verbal invitations on the street to anybody he liked and saw, "Come to the wedding, come to the wedding." I didn't give that much thought in planning for it. Planning the wedding and having it come off was not easy because it was going to be a kosher⁴⁰ wedding. We knew that whatever came would have to come from Atlanta. There was a person here who worked for Rabbi Louis [Tobias?] Geffen⁴¹ who had become expert at catering occasions. We engaged her. She was known . . . I don't know what her real name was . . . she was known as Mamie Geffen.⁴² They called her by the name of Geffen; her name was Mamie, Mamie Geffen.

³⁷ Alpha Epsilon Pi ('AEPi' or 'AEPi') is the global Jewish college fraternity with active chapters in the United States, Canada, United Kingdom, France, and Israel with a membership of over 9,000 undergraduates. Alpha Epsilon Pi is a Jewish fraternity, though non-discriminatory and open to all who are willing to espouse its purpose and values.

³⁸ Alpha Tau Omega (ATΩ) is an American fraternity founded at the Virginia Military Institute in 1865 during the aftermath of the Civil War.

³⁹ Yankee has several meanings, all referring to people from the United States. In Southern American English, 'Yankee' refers to a Northerner.

⁴⁰ Kosher/*Kashrut* is the set of Jewish dietary laws. Food that may be consumed according to *halakhah* (Jewish law) is termed 'kosher' in English. Kosher refers to Jewish laws that dictate how food is prepared or served and which kinds of foods or animals can be eaten. Food that is not in accordance with Jewish law is called '*treif*'. The word 'kosher' has become English vernacular, a colloquialism meaning proper, legitimate, genuine, fair, or acceptable. Kosher can also be used to describe ritual objects that are made in accordance with Jewish law and are fit for ritual use.

⁴¹ 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.

⁴² Mamie Smith Walden (1902-1976) was a native of Madison, Georgia who learned the rules of *kashruth* from Sara

My mother and I would go to Atlanta, we met with her, and everything like that. Of course there was no way to cook anything so it was going to be cold. What did we have? We had a kind of delicatessen dinner of cold cut sandwiches and assorted things . . . some fruit, potato salad, or something like that. It was all stand up. The reception was held at the American Legion Home, the only place that had an open-space hall that we could use. We were not going to seat anybody anyway. There were buffet tables. It looked nice. It was nice for what was there. The wedding itself was in the high school auditorium on the stage. We walked down the aisles and went up on the stage. Everybody came, those with written invitations and those without. Nobody checked the door to see who was coming. That was fine. Everybody moved to the American Legion Home and we took our place at the door to say thank you. We said thank you no matter what they said. Then when it all seemed to be over, all the food was gone. I mean gone. We had nothing to eat and it was only 8:00 or 8:30. Believe me when I tell you it was hot in Fitzgerald on August 20. It was hot. Air-conditioning was unheard of. Of course I had to be . . . what was it . . . what did I have to be? I had to have a dramatic wedding dress, how I would imagine I should have. What was it? It was a long sleeve satin dress.

Kim: Yes.

Ruth: I'll tell you, I was so hot in that dress that I think I couldn't wait to get rid of it. As the evening came to a close, my Uncle Abe Kruger came over and said, "Okay, you can have this. It's the last Coca-Cola." I'll never forget it. We shared the last Coca-Cola.

Kim: Who performed the ceremony?

Ruth: Rabbi Edmund A. Landau⁴³ from Albany, Georgia. He was a Reform rabbi then, very well-respected. We had invited Rabbi Harry H. Epstein⁴⁴—or rather Sol did—because he married

Hene Geffen, the wife of Tobias Geffen, Orthodox rabbi of Congregation Shearith Israel in Atlanta, Georgia. She worked as a cook in their household and also offered kosher catering services to the Jewish community, where she was known as Mamie "Geffen".

⁴³ Rabbi Edmund A. Landau (1898-1945) was the first permanent rabbi of Temple B'nai Israel, a Reform congregation in Albany in southwest Georgia. He was born in Ontario, Canada and raised in Michigan. His family was originally from East Prussia. In 1909, the small congregation of Temple Beth-El hired Rabbi Edmund Landau to lead services in Bainbridge, Georgia.

⁴⁴ Rabbi Harry Epstein (1903-2003) was a native of Plunge, Lithuania who served as the rabbi of Ahavath Achim Synagogue in Atlanta, Georgia from 1928 to 1982. Under his leadership the congregation began to shift to Conservatism, which they adopted in 1952. He was educated in a yeshiva in Chicago, where his father was a rabbi, and in New York. He was ordained in 1926 after studying at the Slobodka Yeshiva in Lithuania and the Hebron Yeshiva in Palestine. In 1927, he became a pulpit rabbi at an Orthodox congregation in Tulsa, Oklahoma. In 1928, he took the rabbinate position at Ahavath Achim Congregation in Atlanta, Georgia, where he introduced a Sunday school, mixed seating of men and women, and the bat mitzvah ceremony for girls. He earned a B.A. Degree in Philosophy and an MA. Degree in Theology from Emory University in Atlanta and a Ph.D. Degree in Theology

Sol's parents. But Rabbi Edmund A. Landau married my parents, so he came. He did the ceremony.

Kim: Can you tell me about moving to Columbus [Georgia]?

Ruth: We went immediately from the wedding to Columbus. We went on a honeymoon in a car through North Carolina. Of course we were going to buy some furniture while we were there. That's where they made furniture. We went to Lenoir [North Carolina] where they made furniture. Sol had an uncle there. We stayed in their house. We went to Hendersonville [North Carolina] and the mountains. It was a pleasant motor trip. We went to Blowing Rock [North Carolina], did some sightseeing, and came back to Columbus, without ever going back to Fitzgerald—at that trip anyway. We had a lot of presents and stuff. We made a trip later to get that.

Kim: Where was your first home in Columbus?

Ruth: In the Country Club Apartments where our first child came to live when she was born. We bought a two-bedroom home when she was about three.

Kim: Where was that home?

Ruth: That home was on . . . you want to know the address?

Kim: Yes.

Ruth: On Britt Avenue in Columbus. We extended ourselves and bought a \$5,000 house.

Kim: What business did Sol go into?

Ruth: He went into business with his uncle who had a notions business, notions and candy business, which served a lot of the small stores where . . . What kind of stores did we have there? Sort of like an ancient interpretation of a 7-Eleven⁴⁵ where they just had all kinds of things in the store. That's the kind of merchandise that he was in. He was a wholesaler. He served those retail stores like that or stores that had counters in them that sold notions, novelties, and candy.

Kim: What was the name of Sol's uncle?

Ruth: Charlie Kolodkin.⁴⁶

Kim: What was the name of the business?

from the University of Illinois School of Law. He was married to Reva (Rebecca) Chashesman and had two daughters.

⁴⁵ 7-Eleven is a convenience store chain with more than 54,200 stores in 16 countries, of which more than 10,400 are in North America.

⁴⁶ Charles Kolodkin (1901-1954) was an immigrant from Russia who lived in Atlanta, Georgia before relocating to Columbus, Georgia. He was a founder of Kolodkin Brothers Company in Columbus and an executive with Witt Distributing Company in Columbus.

Ruth: Kolodkin Brothers.

Kim: Can you tell me about some of the other Jewish businesses in Columbus at the time?

Ruth: They were retail merchandise businesses and pawnshops. Columbus was an army town. Fort Benning⁴⁷ was there. The war was just getting hot in 1939. In 1941 we were at war. The town really transformed into an army camp. The [army] base was not built to handle a swollen army. There was an infantry school there. They had to build tin huts, tents, and I don't know what else for them to live in . . . for the new conscripts to live in. The town just got big with army.

Kim: Can you tell me about Shearith Israel [Synagogue]?⁴⁸

Ruth: That's the congregation in Columbus?

Kim: Yes. When you first got there . . .

Ruth: When we first got there, it was a rather small congregation. It was an Orthodox⁴⁹ congregation. We belonged and participated. Then . . . let's see how many years after that . . . we became a Conservative⁵⁰ congregation with a lot of influence from Sol and a couple of other young people who just could not continue in that fashion. We became a Conservative congregation and built a new building which Sol chaired. It was dedicated in 1950. That was in the course of about 11 years.

Kim: Did you ever meet Franklin Delano Roosevelt?⁵¹

Ruth: I did not, but Sol did.

Kim: Can you tell me about that?

⁴⁷ Fort Benning is a United States Army post established in 1918 outside Columbus, Georgia with the capability to deploy combat-ready forces by air, rail, and highway. Much of the growth of Columbus can be attributed to the development of Fort Benning.

⁴⁸ Shearith Israel was established 1891 in Columbus, Georgia. The name was chartered as 'Chevro Saris Israel.' In 1950 the name was officially changed to Shearith Israel Synagogue. The original building was on the corner of 7th Street and 1st Avenue in downtown Columbus. In 1951 the congregation moved to a new Synagogue on Wynnton Road. In 2007 the building was sold. In 2013 the congregation moved to its current home on River Road.

⁴⁹ 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.

⁵⁰ Conservative Judaism is 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*).

⁵¹ Franklin Delano Roosevelt (1882-1945) was the 32nd President of the United States and a central figure in world events during the mid-twentieth century, leading the United States through a time of worldwide economic crisis and war. Popularly known as 'FDR,' he collapsed and died in his home in Warm Springs, Georgia just a few months before the end of the war. He was a Democrat. FDR was an avid horse rider and enjoyed an active early life. He was diagnosed with infantile paralysis, better known as polio, in 1921, at the age of 39. Despite permanent paralysis from the waist down, he was careful never to be seen using his wheelchair in public, and great care was taken to prevent any portrayal in the press that would highlight his disability.

Ruth: He was a member of a group who called on Franklin Delano Roosevelt when he was at Warm Springs⁵² [Georgia] which was his second home or his hangout, so to speak. You know he was a polio victim and found Warm Springs—the waters there—beneficial. He came there quite often. He and Morris Abram,⁵³ and I think three other guys from the Debating Society, wanted to give him a membership. They went to Warm Springs. We have pictures of that. You know about that from his interview, don't you? It's interesting.

Kim: Can you tell me about the Jewish soldiers at Fort Benning and your relation to them?

Ruth: We housed them. We fed them. We hosted them. We also had a little Jewish club in Columbus where we rented a space downtown, upstairs in a building. We didn't eat there, but we played cards there and we went there to dance. The soldiers would come and dance with us.

Kim: What was the name of that club?

Ruth: The Standard. That was the Standard. There was another club which was a Reform⁵⁴ club, called the Harmony Club, but the one I'm talking about was the Standard Club.

Kim: Can you tell me about the *seders* you used to have in 1941 and 1942 when the soldiers were there?

Ruth: They had a community center . . . I know that one year that Sol worked very hard on it . . . at the USO [United Service Organizations].⁵⁵ They had every Jewish soldier that could come at

⁵² Warm Springs, Georgia first came to prominence in the nineteenth century as a spa town, because of its mineral springs which flow constantly at nearly 32C (90F). In 1921 Franklin Delano Roosevelt contracted polio. One of the few things that seemed to ease his pain was immersion in warm water. He first went to Warm Springs in 1924 hoping to find a cure. Swimming in the spring waters brought him no miracle cure, but it did bring improvement. Roosevelt built a home in Warm Springs in 1932 while he was governor of New York, prior to being inaugurated as president in 1933. He lived in the home during the time he was president and it came to be called the 'Little White House.' He died there in 1945. It is now a public museum.

⁵³ Morris Berthold Abram (1918-2000) was an American lawyer, civil rights activist and leader in the Jewish community who grew up in Fitzgerald, Georgia. Defending civil rights workers in Georgia in 1963, Abram won decisions that helped overturn the state's insurrection and illegal assembly laws, which had been used against civil rights demonstrators. Over the years, Abram helped bring civil rights cases to the United States Supreme Court. President John F. Kennedy named him the first general counsel to the Peace Corps in 1961. President Lyndon B. Johnson made him United States representative to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, co-chairman of the Planning Committee of the White House Conference on Civil Rights and a member of the Committee on the Office of Economic Opportunity. Abram served as President of Brandeis from 1968-1970. He was the Representative of the United States to the European Office of the United Nations from 1989 to 1993. In 1993 he founded United Nations Watch while he was Honorary President of the American Jewish Committee.

⁵⁴ Reform Judaism is 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.

⁵⁵ The USO (United Service Organizations) is a private, non-profit, non-partisan organization whose mission is to support American troops and their families with programs and services. During World War II, the USO began a

that *seder*. The army, the general—whoever was responsible—gave them new equipment to use, new dishes. I mean that was a kosher *seder* if there ever was one, that year down there. We also had *seders* during the years at home where soldiers came, and we hosted those.

Kim: Can you tell me about being president of the Sisterhood and some of your activities?

Ruth: I don't know what to tell about that except I was president almost before we . . . just before we moved. It was that late. I enjoyed it. It was hard work, but it was like any other presidency. We had devoted people and it was part of our lives.

<End Tape 1, Side 1>

<Begin Tape 1, Side 2>

Ruth: . . . Sisterhood. Sol was president of Shearith Israel [Synagogue] so it was kind of hard.

Kim: Is there anything else you can tell me about Columbus and being Jewish in Columbus?

Ruth: To us, it was just a blessing in that we had the congregation, that we had a community, a Jewish community. I think during the years 1954 to 1957, we had a rabbi who came from his army duty. He was a chaplain in the army. He came to Columbus as our rabbi. He was from Minneapolis [Minnesota] originally. He and his wife—Rabbi Kassel and Shirley Abelson⁵⁶—just made that congregation into something you would never have believed. Everybody became so Jewish in their souls, as you would say. He was not an eloquent speaker, but he was so sincere and loved everybody so much that everybody loved him. I would say those were the years that we were presidents. They had the greatest influence on us as Jews, and our children. It was he who influenced the children to go to Camp Ramah.⁵⁷ As that evolved, we started keeping kosher because they wanted it. When I speak of “they,” it was actually one at a time. All of our children went to Camp Ramah. My oldest daughter met and married her husband from there.

Kim: What is your daughter's name?

tradition of entertaining the troops that still continues. The USO is not part of the United States government, but is recognized by the Department of Defense, Congress and President of the United States.

⁵⁶ Rabbi Kassel Abelson became Assistant Rabbi at Beth El synagogue in Minneapolis, Minnesota in 1948, immediately after being ordained at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America. In 1951, Rabbi Abelson left Beth El when he entered the United States Air Corps as a chaplain. Returning from overseas in 1953, Rabbi Abelson went to Shearith Israel Synagogue in Columbus, Georgia, where, during the four years of his tenure, he became recognized as one of the outstanding leaders of Conservative Judaism in the Southeast. Rabbi Abelson returned to Beth El in Minneapolis in 1957 and retired in 1992.

⁵⁷ During the 1940's, the Jewish Theological Seminary established several programs to reconnect Jewish youth with the synagogue and cultivate leadership. One of these programs was Camp Ramah, a network of Jewish summer camps affiliated with the Conservative movement. The mission is to create and sustain summer camps and Israel programs that inspire commitment to and engagement in Jewish life. The camps operate in the United States, Canada, and Israel. Ramah camps serve kosher food and are Shabbat-observant.

Ruth: Sharon Norry.⁵⁸ They have three children; and they're all married and have children. They all were Camp Ramahniks.⁵⁹ Our daughter Alice⁶⁰ went to Camp Ramah two years. Our son Eric⁶¹ went more than two years and he was a counselor there, a waterfront counselor at one of the camps. He went to Wisconsin and to the Poconos [Pennsylvania]. He is the founder of Camp Ramah Darom.⁶²

Kim: Can you tell me a little bit about leaving Columbus and coming here to Atlanta?

Ruth: It was tough. Moving not just ourselves and our house, but our business . . . moved the business, and that was tough. We had to move a lot of the staff who also came. Sol's brother Marvin⁶³ had already moved here two years ahead, and supposedly that was the foundation for the move. Then we also built a building on Fulton Industrial.⁶⁴ It became a different business than what it was when I was telling you about the candy and notions business.

Kim: Tell me about the business when it moved here. Did it keep the same name?

Ruth: No. It became Singer & Company. It became Singer & Company even before we moved because Sol's uncle died, passed away. He wanted to get out of the business, so he was bought out by Sol's brother. It then became Singer & Company and they built a building. It was a different business. The customers were different, the merchandise was different. It was a larger business, more expanded in every way.

⁵⁸ Sharon Marcia Singer Norry Seidmann (1941-2002) was born in Columbus, Georgia and after marriage, lived in Rochester, New York. She was a professional artist who created Jewish ritual ceremonial objects and attire. She was the mother of Rabbi Hillel Norry who served as pulpit rabbi at the Congregation Shearith Israel in Atlanta, Georgia for 13 years.

⁵⁹ Ramahniks are campers who attend Camp Ramah.

⁶⁰ Alice Singer Pinsky Shapiro was born in Columbus, Georgia in 1944 and has lived in Atlanta, Georgia.

⁶¹ Eric Singer was born in Columbus, Georgia in 1951 and resides in Atlanta, Georgia where he is acquisitions manager for a real estate firm. He is the founding president of Camp Ramah Darom in Clayton, Georgia.

⁶² Ramah Darom (Ramah of the South) is a Jewish overnight camp and retreat center in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains in North Georgia. It opened in 1997. The camp is affiliated with the National Ramah Commission, the national parent organization that oversees all Ramah overnight camps, day camps, and Israel programs. Ramah is sponsored by the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, a main hub for Conservative Judaism.

⁶³ Marvin Louis Singer (1922-2003) was born in Atlanta, Georgia and spent his childhood years in Unadilla, Georgia. He graduated from University of Georgia, served in the United States Army during World War II, and settled in Columbus, Georgia where he joined his brother Sol Singer as a sales manager for Singer and Company, a family wholesale distribution business. He relocated to Atlanta in 1959. He was president of the Atlanta chapter of B'nai B'rith, Chair of the Southeast Region of the Anti-Defamation League, and was board member at Ahavath Achim Synagogue.

⁶⁴ Fulton Industrial Boulevard is a major thoroughfare in the Fulton Industrial area of Atlanta, Georgia, which is a large industrial and business area. One-third of its buildings were constructed during its heyday in the 1970's. Due to competition from other industrial areas in the region, the prominence of the Fulton Industrial area has declined in more recent years.

Kim: Where did you live when you first came to Atlanta? I think this was around 1961 that you came to Atlanta?

Ruth: In 1962. We came in 1962. We rented a house until we saw what we wanted but nothing suited us. So we found this lot. The street was . . . this was part of a piece of farm property and the street was still mud. We bought this lot and built this house which took us . . . the process took us two years, a little over two years. We moved into it in 1964. That's how old the house is.

Kim: A lot of history.

Ruth: Yes.

Kim: Can you tell me about your trips to Israel?

Ruth: We made several trips to Israel. Some of them were on missions and some of them were our own private trips. The last one we took was in 1996. We went for Passover which we thought would be the most wonderful time to go. We didn't consult anybody about that. We just wanted to do it that way. We also didn't want to stay in a hotel. We wanted to get an apartment and just kind of live there, especially at Passover time—and buy our own groceries. We had done that once before when we lived in an apartment for a month. We loved that, so we wanted to do it again. It didn't work out that way. We ended up in—supposedly—a kosher residence hotel that had a little kitchen, a place to eat, and a sitting room. Ideally it would have been fine, but the place was terrible. We got there a couple of days before Passover. They came in to *kasher*⁶⁵ my kitchen which had about two dishes in it and two pots or whatever. That part was all right, but they came and they took all the glasses out to wash them and whatever they did to them to make them kosher for *Pesach*.⁶⁶ They never did bring them back. The place was kept badly. It was a very sour experience. Plus the fact that you didn't stop to think that Israelis go away for *Pesach*. We were in Jerusalem [Israel], but everybody left. They take a holiday. They go to the resorts. That took care of that. Half the time the stores were closed because the two first days and last days are *yontif*.⁶⁷ The stores were closed. To add it all up, it was not the best trip we took . . . plus the fact I was not feeling well. I had the beginnings of a bad back problem. That was my last trip to Israel. I would love to tell you about the others which were altogether better.

Kim: Is there anything else you'd like to talk about? Any lessons for us today?

⁶⁵ To make fit for use; render kosher.

⁶⁶ Hebrew word for Passover.

⁶⁷ *Yontif* is the Yiddish word; in Hebrew it is 'yom tov.' It is generic word for Jewish holidays. It includes all but the High Holy Days of *Rosh Ha-Shanah* and *Yom Kippur*.

Ruth: Lessons.

Kim: Or thoughts.

Ruth: For you today?

Kim: Yes. Jewishly, where you were and where we should go.

Ruth: I'm pretty passionate about Jewishly, not passionate about being observant exactly, although I'm not going to argue with anybody about it. It's the way you're observant that matters. I'm passionate about Jewish education since we didn't have that, neither of us. Maybe that's why we worked so hard here in Atlanta for as many children as want to can have it. Our grandchildren, all that we have—nine—all have had wonderful Jewish educations. One of my oldest daughter's children is a rabbi. Our granddaughter in New York who is getting a doctorate in sociology, she is a very committed Jewess and working very hard for the equality of women in Jewish life. In fact, that is what she is writing her thesis on. I guess we've got . . . we made a mark.

Kim: Can you tell me a little bit about what you did for Jewish education in Atlanta?

Ruth: We . . . my husband was one of the starters of the Epstein School⁶⁸ and has been on the board ever since. He has been the president and was honored in 1995 and also honored in 1980, twice. We are committed to that school completely. Our grandchildren went there. Our daughter-in-law has been a teacher there. Now our youngest grandchild is going to the New Atlanta Jewish [Community] High School.⁶⁹ We are proud of that. That's what we did for Jewish education.

Kim: Thank you so much for your time.

Ruth: Thank you.

<Interruption in tape>

Ruth: You want to talk about that?

Kim: Can you tell me maybe some of your other activities, how you were involved in the Jewish community?

Ruth: Here in house? When we first . . .

<Interruption in tape>

⁶⁸ The Epstein School (also known as the Solomon Shechter School of Atlanta) is a private Jewish day school in the Atlanta area located in the city of Sandy Springs. In 1973, Rabbi Harry H. Epstein and the leaders of Ahavath Achim Synagogue wanted to create a Conservative Jewish day school. The first campus was housed at the synagogue. In 1987 the school moved to Sandy Springs.

⁶⁹ The Doris and Alex Weber Jewish Community High School, formerly New Atlanta Jewish Community High School, is a Jewish high school located in Sandy Springs, Georgia north of Atlanta.

Kim: Mr. Sol Singer just handed me a *Atlanta Jewish Times*.⁷⁰ He was going through some of his records. It says, “Small towns nourish big hearts,” and it’s an article. Can you tell me a little bit about this article? Are you familiar with it?

Ruth: I don’t remember this article.

Kim: [It was] 1995.

Ruth: Oh, yes. This is an article about the Epstein School Honor Dinner in 1995 by Vida Goldgar.⁷¹ It talks about very much what we’ve just been talking about. I don’t want to read it for you, but . . .

Kim: We’ll include that.

Ruth: . . . you can have it. I guess. This is a copy, Sol?

Kim: Can you tell me about some of the other activities you were involved with here in Atlanta?

Ruth: I was . . . when I first came, I had come as a past president of the Sisterhood in Columbus, so I was jumped on immediately by the AA [Ahavath Achim Synagogue]⁷² Sisterhood to take an office. I guess I was just an ignorant country girl, and I took it. I became the vice president there of the gift shop operation. Now that was an experience, especially a very hard work. From there, I didn’t take another office. I just stayed on the board. I was not too active in many things. Our parents about that time moved here from Columbus. My mother was widowed. Sol’s parents moved, and they took up a good bit of our time. Once they became settled, I had a notion that I wanted to go back to school. I was infatuated with Georgia State [University]⁷³ as an opportunity,

⁷⁰ The Atlanta Jewish Times is a weekly community newspaper serving the Jewish community of Atlanta, Georgia. Formerly the Southern Israelite, the publication’s name changed to The Atlanta Jewish Times in 1987.

⁷¹ Vida Daab Goldgar (1930 -2004) was born in Columbia, Illinois and moved from New York to Atlanta, Georgia in 1959. In 1964 Vida Goldgar joined the staff of the *Southern Israelite* and was an important contributor for the next 40 years. In 1979, she purchased the paper. After selling it in 1986, she continued as a contributing columnist. She was the first woman president of the Atlanta chapter of the Society of Professional Journalists and of the American Jewish Press Association. She served on the board of directors of the Cohen Home.

⁷² Ahavath Achim was founded in 1887 in a small room on Gilmer Street. In 1901 they moved to a permanent building at the corner of Piedmont and Gilmer Street. In 1921, the congregation constructed a synagogue at Washington Street and Woodward Avenue. The final service in that building was held in 1958 to make way for construction of the Downtown Connector (the concurrent section of Interstate 75 and Interstate 85 through Atlanta). The synagogue moved to its current location on Peachtree Battle Avenue in 1958. Rabbi Abraham Hirmes was the first rabbi of the then Orthodox congregation. In 1928 Rabbi Harry Epstein became the rabbi and the congregation began to shift to Conservatism, which they joined in 1952. Cantor Isaac Goodfriend, a Holocaust survivor, joined the congregation in 1966 and remained until his retirement. Rabbi Epstein retired in 1982, becoming Rabbi Emeritus and Rabbi Arnold Goodman assumed the rabbinic post. He retired in 2002. Rabbi Neil Sandler is now the rabbi.

⁷³ Initially intended as a night school, Georgia State University was established in 1913 as the Georgia Institute of Technology's Evening School of Commerce. A reorganization of the university system of Georgia in the 1930’s led to the school becoming the Atlanta Extension Center of the University System of Georgia and allowed night students

as a non-campus school that I wouldn't have to get involved with other things. I did go back in 1966. I won't talk about all the things that went into that. I got a degree in the Bachelor of Visual Arts. My emphasis was on interior design. I tried to do some of that by the way professionally, but that was a big turn-off. That too was also a lot of very hard physical work. That is when I started becoming involved in the Atlanta Jewish Federation⁷⁴ and all of the agencies that were coming with them and through them. I become active in the campaign, in the women's division. I was a campaign chairman or co-chair. I was on the board of the Jewish Family and Career Services [of Atlanta]⁷⁵ for years. I was on the board of the Jewish Home⁷⁶ and a vice-president for years. I don't know what else. I just kept on. I loved it. Now, though, I'm just not doing very much. We're busy taking care of each other, going to doctors, and thankful we can keep the appointments.

Kim: Thank you so much.

<Interruption in tape>

Kim: We were just talking about going to Florida for 27 years.

Ruth: For 27 years. Everybody that was born and that was anywhere in the world came back for that trip. We stayed in private . . . each family had their own space which was what made it successful. There was a private place that everybody could go to at the end of the day. Everybody had a wonderful time. We fished, we swam, we ate, and we were together. All of the cousins now

to earn degrees from several colleges in the university system. During this time, the school was divided into two divisions: Georgia Evening College, and Atlanta Junior College. In 1947, the school became affiliated with the University of Georgia and was named the 'Atlanta Division of the University of Georgia.' The school was removed from the University of Georgia in 1955 and became the Georgia State College of Business Administration. In 1961 the name was shortened to Georgia State College. It became Georgia State University in 1969.

⁷⁴ The Atlanta Jewish Federation was formally incorporated in 1967 and is the result of the merger of the Atlanta Federation for Jewish Social Service founded in 1905 as the Federation of Jewish Charities; the Atlanta Jewish Welfare Federation founded in 1936 as the Atlanta Jewish Welfare Fund; and the Atlanta Jewish Community Council founded in 1945. The organization was renamed the Jewish Federation of Greater Atlanta in 1997.

⁷⁵ Jewish Family and Career Services (JF&CS Atlanta) is a group of professionals and volunteers offering programs, and resources for individuals and families of all faiths, cultures and ages. Services include counseling, tools for employment, and support for people with developmental disabilities. JF&CS is a member organization of the Association of Jewish Family & Children's Agencies (AJFCA). JF&CS is a result of the merging of two separate organizations, both of which started as committees of the Jewish Federation of Greater Atlanta. The first, Jewish Family Services was founded around 1890. The agency became an autonomous organization in 1982. In 1979, Jewish Vocational Services was started. It became independent in 1985. The two agencies merged in 1997 to become JF&CS.

⁷⁶ The William Breman Jewish Home, formerly the Jewish Home, is a nursing home in Atlanta, Georgia providing short and long-term dementia, Alzheimer's, and nursing care. It first opened in 1951 at 260 14th Street, NW, on land that had been donated by real estate developer Ben J. Massell. The Home's growth called for a larger, updated facility, leading to the construction of a new building at 3150 Howell Mill Road, NW. The second Jewish Home opened on February 16, 1971. In 1991, it was renamed the William Breman Jewish Home to honor and recognize its third president, Bill Breman, as the prime motivator of the modern day facility.

claim that that was the gel that made it a family. Everybody came together at that time. We used to spend two weeks. Then the time got shorter and shorter. Everybody started making a living and there were so many interruptions in their lives. We finally stopped the year of 1996. My son-in-law was sick and I wasn't feeling so well. It was too much. Travel became a horror to try to get to the Florida Keys from other places in the country. It was just not only expensive, it was logistically a pain for anybody to come and go.

Kim: Now was this just your family or the cousins as well?

Ruth: Just the family, our children and grandchildren. When we finished, there were great-grandchildren.

<Long pause, with background conversation>

Ruth: We started off going out. That was what we did. Then the children were little and meals became very unhappy things. Everybody, they would cry, they don't like this, they don't like that. They'd want to go to sleep. We could never do it to please everybody. Then we started eating at home, so to speak, and everybody participated. I'm not going to tell you it was easy, but everybody could do what they wanted to. They could eat in the living room. They could not eat. Everybody could be free to handle the meal the way they wanted to rather than being organized and processed to sit at a restaurant. It ended up working out to be an advantage. It got to where everybody wanted to make their own recipes. We had fun doing it.

<Interruption in tape>

Ruth: . . . was the executive chef at the Brooklyn Cafe.⁷⁷

Kim: Oh. <Interviewer laughs>

Ruth: Mark Pinsky⁷⁸ and his brother . . . he's not cooking but he's managing a restaurant.

<Interruption with Sol Singer talking in background>

Kim: You know the story I like the best from when I read your interview? It's a story you said about all . . . someone who brought in all the men. You had a meeting to raise money to build a synagogue. They said, "Oh, I don't have it, I don't have it." Then one of the men had a dream during the night. He called up everyone in the middle of the night and said, "Come first thing in the morning. You have to come." You came up there and you saw all these cars, and you went in, and you locked the door. That was my favorite story.

⁷⁷ Brooklyn Café is a restaurant in the city of Sandy Springs, Georgia.

⁷⁸ Grandson of Ruth Kruger Singer, son of Alice Singer Pinsky Shapiro.

Ruth: That did happen.

Kim: That was one of my very favorite stories.

<Interruption with Sol Singer talking in background>

Ruth: He called you at 4 o'clock, but you went at 6 o'clock.

<Interruption with Sol Singer talking in background>

Kim: I was just so impressed also reading how you had some Jewish chaplains tutor your children. I was just so touched by that. It really just showed how important Jewish education was to you that you went that extra step.

Ruth: Yes.

<Interruption with Sol talking in background>

Ruth: We didn't say the same thing. That's good.

Kim: Yes. Listen, I won't hold you. Thank you.

<End Tape 1, Side 2>

INTERVIEW ENDS