INTERVIEW BEGINS

<Sampling Begins>

Sandra: My name is Sandra Berman and today is November 19, 2007, and I am here with Rosalind Spector, who has agreed to be interviewed for the Esther and Herbert Taylor Oral History Project of the William Breman Jewish Heritage Museum. Thank you so much for doing this today; I'm very glad you're here. Rosalind, I'd like to begin with just asking you, how are you related to Lucille Selig [Frank]?¹

Rosalind: Lucille Selig was my father's aunt, so that makes her my great-aunt. She was the sister of my grandmother.

Sandra: I should say Lucille Selig Frank for the purpose of this interview.

Rosalind: Yes.

Sandra: Tell me a little bit about your family. Do you know much about how they first came to Georgia? How they arrived here?

Rosalind: You know, it's very sketchy. I know that . . . I believe that they came close to the mid-1800’s. They were, at least on my grandmother's side, the Selig’s side, here for many years.

Sandra: Where did they come from originally Do you know?

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¹ Lucille Selig Frank (1888-1957) was the wife of Leo Frank, the only Jewish man ever to be hanged for criminal punishment in the United States. During the infamous Leo Frank case, his wife Lucille became a national figure when he went on trial for the murder of Mary Phagan in Atlanta in 1913. After his conviction, his wife led a campaign to save him from execution. Historians believe that much of her work led to Governor Slaton commuting Leo's sentence from death to life in prison. (However, a mob broke him out of prison and lynched him.) Even at the time of her death in 1957, the Frank case was still an emotional issue in Georgia, and a proper funeral could not be held for her. Forty-five years after her death, it was revealed that in the early 1960s, family members quietly took her ashes to Oakland cemetery and buried them at her parents' gravesite. The Broadway play "Parade" is based on the relationship between Leo and Lucille.
**Rosalind:** My grandmother’s side, Sarah Selig Marcus, I believe was . . . her family was from Germany. My father’s side, Alexander Marcus was his father. He was from Poland.

**Sandra:** Just for the purpose of this interview, tell me the names of Lucille's parents.

**Rosalind:** Lucille's parents. I believe it was Jonas Loeb Cohen, and her grandmother. . . Josefina [Josephine Cohen Selig] was somewhere in there . . . I think it might have been Josefina. I'm not sure.

**Sandra:** What kind of work were her parents in? Do you know, her parents, what they did?

**Rosalind:** Her parents? I’m not sure.

**Sandra:** That's okay, don't worry about it. Do you know how she met Leo [Frank]?

**Rosalind:** A lot of what I feel like knowledge that I know now . . . since I've gotten to this point in life, I'm not sure what I was really actually told, what I have read, and what has just been gathered through going through life. I believe that he moved to Atlanta and became part of the social scene. My Aunt Lucille being single, I believe that's how they met. They both belonged to The Temple, which was the Hebrew Benevolent Congregation. I believe that's how they got together.

**Sandra:** How did you first hear about what happened to Leo Frank?

**Rosalind:** My family didn't talk about it very much. I can remember. . . I was actually the only granddaughter of the only grandchildren on my father’s side of the family. My grandmother Sarah and Alexander Marcus . . . my grandmother Sarah, as I have said before, was one of the three. She had two sisters. Three girls. Rosalind did not have any children and Lucille, of course, didn't have any children. Sarah was the only one that had children. Sarah had two sons and from those two sons, one son had two sons, and the

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2 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.
other son had a son and a daughter. I was the only girl. It seemed that it was kind of a ritual, when I was very, very young, that late Sunday afternoon we would go and spend time with my grandmother. My grandfather had deceased many years before that. My Aunt Lucille always lived in the same building as my grandmother. They lived in two different buildings in my lifetime. I don’t know about their lifetime, but in my lifetime. There were times that my mother . . . . After we had visited my grandmother for a while, my mother would say, “I want us go see Aunt Lucille. Let’s call her and see if she's home.” Of course she was always home. We would go and we would visit her.

After we visited her many times, I guess I must have been around eight years old, that I finally asked my mother. I said, “Mother, why, why did she not have a husband? Why is there no one else in her life?” She said, “Well, she lives alone.” I said, “Was she ever married?” She said, “Yes.” I said, “What happened to her husband?” It being right after the war, I started thinking ‘whatever.’ But my mother said, “He died,” not, “He was killed.” “He died.” And I thinking maybe it was in the war. “No, it wasn’t in the war.” Of course it was a very abrupt answer, like giving you a psychological glance that that's all you're going to get.

As I got older, I guess I was in my teenage years, [when] my Aunt Lucille passed away before my grandmother, and it was written in the obituary, “Leo Frank's widow passed away.” I can remember my father saying to my grandmother at some point, right after this, “Can you believe they’re still. . . they won't forget it.” It brought up the conversation again. I said to my father and my family, “What about Leo? What do you mean they won't forget it?” “Well, he was killed.” I said, “Oh, he was killed,” and I started asking more questions. I wasn't going to get any answers. Here I was a teenager already. I could handle it. I didn't really know about it until I was in college. I went to the University of Georgia in Athens [Georgia]. In those days—I don't know if it's true now—when you are senior, in order to graduate, you had to take a Georgia history course. That was very . . . it wasn't completely described, but there was the whole thing about Mary
That's when I was home one weekend, I told my parents, “Now, come on. Tell me what's going on.” That's when I heard.

**Sandra:** You must have had a lot of questions. Did you? What was their reaction?

**Rosalind:** My father really didn’t want to talk about it very much. It was very hard for him. He was a child when this happened. I believe he was somewhere still in single digits. I think he was around nine when the vigilantes came and stormed the area. After the situation where they came and they got Leo . . . It was just a night of horrors, when he was lynched. I imagine it was in that same timeframe that vigilantes were going to Governor Slaton's mansion, the governor's mansion. They were . . . my family was very afraid that probably they might storm their residence as well. They fled in the middle of the night. My father was in pajamas and they just grabbed him up. I kind of get emotional thinking about it right now. He was just very besieged with all these horrible images from his childhood. Things in our childhood make an impression more than anything. I think that was the situation.

**Sandra:** My next question was, “Was it often discussed in the family?” I can cross that one out . . .

**Rosalind:** Yes.

**Sandra:** . . . because it really wasn't. What was your relationship like with . . . It’s your great-aunt, right?

**Rosalind:** Yes.

**Sandra:** . . . with your great-aunt?

**Rosalind:** My relationship was that I found her to be a very sweet individual. I probably got . . . I don't think any child could get close to her because she was always so sad. We would go to her apartment and it was always dark. I remember in . . . like I said before, she lived in two buildings in my lifetime. The first building was on Ponce de Leon [Avenue]. She had a sweet little room, area really, that was kind of three sided that projected out from the living room. The living room was large. I guess it was really a combination living room-dining room, but she didn't have a dining room. She had this other little area, which was kind of like a sun porch I guess, which was like her bedroom.

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3 Thirteen-year-old Mary Phagan worked in a pencil factory in Atlanta in 1913. She was found murdered in the basement of the factory at around 3 a.m., on April 27. Her murder led to the conviction and hanging of Leo Frank by a lynch mob in 1915 in Marietta, Georgia. Frank was later pardoned.
She had violets all around it. She loved to take care of her violets. She really didn't like to go out very much that I know of, because she was always afraid that she would be questioned when she went out. She would come to our house. She did have a car. She drove. She had a beautiful car, a big LaSalle, which anybody who is a car fancier . . . They were beautiful cars, way back then. I think that's what she had. She would drive out to our house to have Thanksgiving dinner with us. She didn't do that very often. She didn't take her car out very often. Amazing that it would always run. She never had—I don't remember hearing of—any car trouble. She did get out a little bit, but not very much.

Sandra: I've talked to some people—some older people who are not really around anymore; they were friends with her, and I know she was in a mah... either canasta or mahjongg group. She did have some sort of social life.

Rosalind: Yes she did. Her brother-in-law, her sister Rosalind's husband . . . Many years ago there was a lovely store in Atlanta called J.P. Allen's. When they only had one store, back when my great-uncle had what they called concessions on the first level, one of the concessions was gloves. She had a job selling gloves. Gloves were very popular, all lengths from wrist all the way up. There was a special technique of how to put the glove on. She would always show me how to do that. She really loved getting out to do that. I think she felt like maybe people were coming shopping [and] they really didn't know who she was. That was pleasing.

Sandra: She was so young when this happened, and so much pressure was placed on her by the lawyers—the attorneys—and the family to try to help in his case. Do you ever marvel how she handled it all at such a young age?

Rosalind: Sandy, that is just the most remarkable thing to me. That was something else I didn't know until I was really a young adult. I . . . it was almost like the way I knew her
and the way I grew up knowing her, it was like coming in at the end of the movie, and then seeing the beginning. What I saw was a very quiet, sweet, and kind person, which I'm sure she always was. I'm not trying to say she was anything else. What I'm trying to say is, when I hear about all the letters that she wrote, all the contacts that she made, and all the heroism that she tried to project, or do, in trying to free her husband—her love, her innocent husband—it is just amazing. This is a time before suffrage, women's suffrage, which came in the 1920's. This is in the Teens. It is just mind boggling. I think that, maybe sometimes why she was so quiet was because she was exhausted. I just think, besides all the sorrow that she felt in her life, and when she lay down in the bed and closed her eyes . . . I just think that she probably could have been just exhausted.

Sandra: Yes, I think so too, when you look back and see what she did for him, it was an amazing.

Rosalind: Right. What I would also like to say, and I don't know if this was part of the question or not, is that she had friends. I know that she had a friend that was a man who lived out of state. We've seen some letters. I know that when she had some health issues. They didn't have e-mail back then. They did lots of letters. She would write to him and tell him about her ailment here or her ailment there, or what she should do to get out and she was afraid to go out. He would console her and help her. She did have another lady friend in Atlanta that she was really close with. Basically, it was a telephone conversation back and forth very often, not lunch dates I don't think.

Sandra: This is probably all tied up into the last question. She was so young. Do you ever wonder why she never really dated or got remarried?

Rosalind: No, I can only speculate. I don't know. I don't mean to give the aura that she was a recluse. She was not that by any means. She did get out. She did her little grocery shopping, whatever she needed, go to the doctor, and go to a friend’s house. She did get out from time to time. She didn't get out and socialize like [it] was the big attraction. She didn't do that.

Sandra: So you never discussed, because she had passed away before you really knew the story of Leo Frank, so you never [and] she never discussed. . .

Rosalind: No.

Sandra: Did she have photographs of him in her home?
Rosalind: I don’t remember any photographs.

Sandra: Some people have asked in the last couple of years that a marker be put on her grave site. I know we discussed this a few years ago. I was just wondering what your thoughts were on that whole issue of trying to place a marker on her grave when her wishes were that there wouldn't be one.

Rosalind: I am very adamant about that, Sandy. I just think that you have a last will and testament. You also have desires that come from the heart that may not be in black and white, written down. Just the way that she wanted her physical, earthly self to be taken care of after her passing . . . I think [it] is just a very good reminder that she didn't want anything like that. She did not want to be pointed out: “Well, here is Lucille, who” . . . for her history to be out there. I think it's making a spectacle out of her, and I think that's just the wrong thing.

Sandra: Would you like to see this subject finally put to rest, or is it something that you think is important enough that you'd like to keep it alive?

Rosalind: There’s an A and B answer to that. Yes, I would like to see it put to rest. The B part is that if there could be just . . . it's impossible [and] there's not enough evidence at this point, but if there could be a complete exoneration of Leo Frank . . . The discussion . . . I will say, because you did ask if we had any discussion in our family, and after I became a young person we did have discussion. I did talk to my father about it. A lot of what he knew was an impression because he was so young. Leo was just a gentleman's gentleman. The impression and from the conversation that I had with my father and from the artifacts that I had . . . We had an album with all his college pictures in there from Cornell. He very much wanted to be part of a group of friends. Photography was his hobby I believe. He took lots of pictures to prove it. I believe some of them are here. I think that album is here. Basically he was a very quiet person. I think there are times psychologically that quiet personalities get taken advantage of. I don't care what era it is. I think that was one of the sad factors with his life and with this whole circumstance.

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8 Cornell University is a private Ivy League university in Ithaca, New York. It was founded in 1865, and intended to teach and make contributions in all fields of knowledge, from the classics to the sciences. It currently has 1,600 academic staff members, with nearly 14,000 undergraduate students and about 7,000 graduate students. (2105)
Sandra: Do you think that we have learned anything? This trial, this case, is studied. It’s researched. In part it became, his denial of due process, later became legal precedent. It influenced our own legal system. Do you think that we have learned something and that we will continue to learn something from this?

Rosalind: It’s almost Pollyanna\(^9\) to say, “Yes, I hope we have.” How many times has history repeated itself? That’s a very sad thing. It could even happen within the same generation, sometimes. It's not just with people, it can be with countries. We can look at World War II, who our friends were in World War II, and what goes on now. I hope we have learned something because it was a great injustice. It was, to use a simile, like having so many hurricanes coming in at once. His moving down here from the North, that's number one. From it being not really that long after the War Between the States [American Civil War]\(^10\) then, we all know about that. Then, on top of it his religion. There were so many crescendos there that it was just a very hard thing. We can use all of our examples in trying to justify a situation that may be going on in our modern day, day-in-day-out problems that we have. I don't know if it will really change things. There is just so much injustice.

Sandra: The perfect storm, we like to say, is what happened to him.

Rosalind: Yes.

Sandra: Finally, if you had the opportunity to talk with Lucille now, is there something you'd like to ask her? Is there anything you'd like to say to her?

Rosalind: Oh yes. I think, when any loved one passes away, whether it's a relative or a friend, especially when they're in a generation above you . . . Everything was prim and proper then. There are certain things, children were to be seen and not heard. To know

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9 ‘Pollyanna’ is a fictional character created by Eleanor H. Porter in 1913 and has come to mean ‘an incurably optimistic person.’ The original book is now considered classic in children’s literature. Eleven books followed written by another author.

10 The American Civil War, widely known in the United States as the ‘Civil War’ or the ‘War Between the States,’ was fought from 1861 to 1865 to determine the survival of the Union or independence for the Confederacy. In January 1861, seven Southern slave states declared their secession from the United States and formed the Confederate States of America. The Confederacy, often called the ‘South,’ grew to include 11 states, and although they claimed 13 states and additional western territories, the Confederacy was never diplomatically recognized by a foreign country. The states that did not declare secession were known as the ‘Union’ or the ‘North.’ The war had its origin in the issue of slavery. After four years of bloody combat, which left over 600,000 Union and Confederate soldiers dead and destroyed much of the South’s infrastructure, the Confederacy collapsed, slavery was abolished, and the difficult Reconstruction process of restoring national unity and granting civil rights to freed slaves began.
what she had gone through, I would have loved to have been a friend to her. I would have loved to have been a substitute daughter for her. I think that she was a worldly person even in her younger years, because she was very young when all this came about. Yes, I would like to ask her [about] the books that I read on the subject that have come out since her passing. The very first one might have . . . I don't know if she was still living then or not. More than just asking her questions about what happened, because I think that would have opened up sore wounds, I just really would have liked to try to be a comfort to her.

**Sandra:** One more, one final question. I've heard from so many people about always how remarkable she was, always how courageous she was, but also that she always signed instead of Lucille Frank, she always signed “Mrs. Leo M. Frank.” What do you think she was trying to say?

**Rosalind:** I think that she was . . . I think that there was really a little love affair going along with Leo. He always referred to her in the letters, in some of the letters that you have in the exhibit . . . that even when he wrote a letter: “Please get in touch with my wife, Mrs. Leo Frank.” I think she was trying to honor him, because she surely didn't want to bring attention to herself. So, I think it was really an honor thing.

**Sandra:** I agree.

**Rosalind:** Yes, it was really kind of maybe like one of the last things she could do for him.

**Sandra:** I appreciate this so much. Is there anything at all you think we might have missed? Is there anything else you'd like to say, just thoughts or memories? You can take a minute and think.

**Rosalind:** I just would like to leave the thought that I thought she was just a very sweet person. I believe that in my generation—considering my brother and my two cousins—that probably I did know her a little bit better than they did. I would like everyone to know that if they don’t know how she stood by her man, that she went beyond . . . When I say “beyond” it was because it wasn't recognized in those days for a woman to stand out and to come to the cause. I admire her so much for that.

**Sandra:** I do too. Thank you.

**Rosalind:** Thank you.

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