Sandra: This is Barbara Schneider interviewing Helen Spiegel on October 29, 1993 for the Jewish Oral History Project of Atlanta cosponsored by the American Jewish Committee, the Atlanta Jewish Federation, and the National Council of Jewish Women. Helen, thank you for allowing us to speak with you. Let’s begin by talking about your family. Tell us where you were born, where you lived, your parents’ names, where they were born, and your family’s decision to come to the United States.

Helen: I was born in Nuremberg, Germany in 1923. [I was] one of the daughters of a well-to-do Jewish manufacturer in the city, growing up very unconcerned about anything, being brought up by a governess, and having a very nice time until I was about ten years old. I only had a sister. We went to a public school. I had two sets of grandparents: one who lived in the same city we did—Nuremberg—and my grandfather was part owner of a shoe factory. My other grandparents lived about two hours away in the city of Bamberg [Germany], which is a beautiful old city with a large cathedral. They were hops merchants, which was quite a Jewish profession.

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1 The American Jewish Committee (AJC) was founded in 1906 to safeguard the welfare and security of Jews worldwide. It is one of the oldest Jewish advocacy organizations in the United States.
2 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).
3 The National Council of Jewish Women is an organization of volunteers and advocates, founded in the 1890’s, who turn progressive ideals in advocacy and philanthropy inspired by Jewish values. They strive to improve the quality of life for women, children and families.
4 Nuremberg [German: Nürnberg] is a city in Bavaria, Germany on the Pegnitz River and the Rhine–Main–Danube Canal. It is distinguished by its medieval architecture. The Nazi Party held its massive annual rally in Nuremberg from 1927 to 1938. The event was held at the Nazi party rally ground and each were propaganda events to showcase the power of National Socialism to the rest of Germany and the world. The city was severely damaged by Allied bombing from 1943-1945 and further devastated by intense German resistance as United States troops advanced into the city at the end of the war.
5 Bamberg is a historic city in central Germany, located on the Main River, approximately 55 kilometers (34 miles) north of Nuremberg. After World War II, Bamberg was one of the largest cities in the northernmost part of the American zone of Germany, close to the Soviet zone. The city is home to the Bamberg Cathedral, one of the most famous cathedrals of Germany, which was completed in the 13th century. It can be seen from a long distance.
They bought hops all over Europe and then sold it to breweries. For some reason or other, that became quite a Jewish profession.

**Sandra:** Could I interrupt you for a moment? Could you give us your parents’ names and your grandparents?

**Helen:** Okay. My parents were Hans and Selma Wasserman. My grandparents’ names were Izodor and Hedwig Wasserman. My other grandparents were Moritz and Ava Grausmann.

**Sandra:** Okay. We’ll continue now about their professions.

**Helen:** My father had a shoe factory, which my grandfather was partner in. My other grandparents had this hops business in Bamberg. The women at this time, of course, didn’t work. They stayed at home, and kept the house, and supervised the help, and entertained. [They] never went without gloves and hats any place. In fact, you never made a visit without a little card, which you put on a plate. I still have the case that my mother owned that the cards were in. All these niceties were supposed to last forever. Well, all these niceties didn’t last forever because the First World War caused quite a bit of a [economic] depression, and inflation, and lots of people were without work.

There was a Communist regime fighting with the Socialist regime, and then came Hitler, who started the nationalistic society. One of the biggest platforms in this political party was, “The Jews are our misfortune. The Jews have all the money. The Jews have all the jobs. The Jews take advantage of us and we must get rid of the Jews. If we are rid of the Jews, we will be a healthy people. We will be a strong people and we will be again at the top of the world.” One of the greatest horrors of the German government at that time was that they didn’t have an army.

They also accused the Jews that they had sold them out at the end of the First World War because they were for signing peace treaties, which of course was a lot of rubbish because there was no Jew ever in any position to ever tell any government official anything and certainly not in the army because the Jews did serve in the First World War—very enthusiastically. They were 120 percent patriotic Germans but there were very few that got over the rank of 1st lieutenant. Any kind of field soldier certainly had no right to sign any kind of peace treaty so this was an absolutely hog wash idea. But it played well.

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6 The National Socialist German Workers’ Party (NSDAP), commonly known as the ‘Nazi Party,’ was a political party in Germany active between 1920 and 1945. The party’s leader was Adolf Hitler. Initially, Nazi political strategy focused on anti-big business, anti-bourgeois and anti-capitalist rhetoric. In the 1930’s, the party's focus shifted to antisemitic and anti-Marxist themes.
Slowly Hitler won over more and more of the different political positions for these people. By 1933, with the fire in the Reichstag in Berlin, President Paul von Hindenburg turned over the government to Hitler and Hitler was the man in Germany who called all the shots. Slowly, he had written a book, *Mein Kampf*, in which he had outlined every step of the way what he planned to do—the destruction of the Jewish people. Of course everybody thought he was a crackpot. I doubt that many Jews even opened that book and read it. Nobody believed in it until he went methodically ahead step by step to fulfill all the prophecies he had written in his book, which he had written while he was incarcerated as a political troublemaker in Landsburg.

Sandra: Can I ask you at this point how was this affecting you and your family?

Helen: At that time, I was still going to a public school. Everybody in Germany goes for six years to a public school. Then, depending on your grades and your financial situation—because high schools were . . . you had to pay for them. They were not free. As a girl, you went to a Lyceum and as a boy, you went either to a Realschule or to a Gymnasium, which has nothing to do with exercise. That was the way the world went before Hitler.

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*The Reichstag fire* was an arson attack on the German parliament building (Reichstag) in Berlin on February 27, 1933, just one month after Adolf Hitler had been sworn in as Chancellor of Germany. The coalition government (Nazis and the German Nationalist People's Party) falsely portrayed the fire as part of a Communist effort to overthrow the state. Using emergency constitutional powers, Adolf Hitler’s cabinet issued a Decree for the Protection of the German People on February 4, 1933. This decree authorized the police to ban political meetings and marches, effectively hindering electoral campaigning, allowed the regime to arrest and incarcerate political opponents without specific charge, dissolve political organizations, and to suppress publications. It also gave the central government the authority to overrule state and local laws and overthrow state and local governments.

In the manifesto, Hitler outlines his political ideology and future plans for Germany. *Mein Kampf* [German: My Struggle] is an autobiographical manifesto written by Nazi Party leader Adolf Hitler while imprisoned following the failed Beer Hall Putsch of November 1923. In the manifesto, Hitler outlines his political ideology and future plans for Germany.

Landsberg am Lech is a town in southwest Bavaria, Germany, noted for the prison where Adolf Hitler was imprisoned in 1924. During his imprisonment he wrote his book *Mein Kampf*. His cell, number 7, was a place of pilgrimage for fervent Nazis during the Nazi era.

In Germany, primary level education is known as “Grundschule” and is similar to grammar school or elementary school in the United States (grades 1 to 5).

In Germany, the secondary school system was originally what's called a "dreigliedriges Schulsystem" or "three-parted school system. After completing the Grundschule (primary education similar to Elementary school in the United States), students go in one of three directions dependent upon their intended path and, typically, their socio-economic status. Hauptschule is the lowest level of secondary education, which encompasses grades 5 to 9 and was meant to give the bulk of the population a basic education. The next level, the Realschule, encompasses grades 5 to 10 and is a kind of middle ground for those who will go on to start some kind of vocational training. Finally, the
When I got ... The last year in grammar school, I already noticed that things had changed drastically. I was hardly ever called on by a teacher to recite my homework. If I did get called upon, I never heard a word of praise. It was, “Sit down.” The children that I used to play around with more or less drifted apart. Just the Jewish children ... we sort of formed a circle. We weren’t invited to any more birthday parties and they didn’t come to ours. Then my parents made an application to the Lyceum that was close by. I was turned down. No more Jewish children were allowed.

I must say that the city I lived in—Nuremberg—was the worst city for a Jew to live in. Every law that pertained to Jews was first tried out in Nuremberg for the reason that we had Julius Streicher who was the most rabid antisemite and printed a newspaper called Der Stürmer, which came out weekly. It was the worst trash. It depicted all the Jewish as all the males were seducers of the pure Aryan women, the spoilers of their plot, or else they were taking wild advantage in business of you. This [newspaper] with these caricatures came every week to the people’s houses and of course was a miserable thing to behold. It was exhibited all over Nuremberg, too. The newspaper sold all over Germany, but in Nuremberg everybody had to take it. Also Nuremberg was the town for the Reichsparteitag [German: the annual rally of the Nazi Party]. Those were the yearly convocations that started in 1935, where there were thousands and thousands and thousand of Nazis came to town to parade and to listen to the Fuhrer.

[The rallies were where] the Fuhrer explained all the new laws as they came along. Amongst the main laws—what we call the Nuremberg Laws—was against the Jews. The Nuremberg Laws were passed on November 15, 1935. They formed the cornerstone of the German Nazi Party’s racial policy and heralded in a new wave of antisemitic legislation that brought about immediate and concrete segregation. They were based on the Nazi’s racial laws, which asserted the superiority of the “Aryan race,” and based on a specific racist doctrine, which claimed scientific legitimacy. These policies targeted Jews, Gypsies, homosexuals, handicapped people, and others who were labeled as inferior in a racial hierarchy to the “master race” of Germans.

Gymnasium encompasses grades 5-12 and is for students who will go on to University. The lyceum in Germany was known as an old term for Gymnasium for girls.

Julius Streicher (1885-1946) was born in Nuremberg, Germany and was an early member of the Nazi party. He was the founder and publisher of the newspaper, Der Stürmer, and other antisemitic books. Der Stürmer, [German: Der Stürmer] was a "tabloid style" newspaper published by Julius Streicher from 1923 almost continuously through to the end of World War II. It was a central element of the Nazi propaganda machine. It was highly anti-Semitic, featuring articles with stereotypical hook-nosed Jews and elaborating on all their nefariousness.

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back three generations. If one part grandparents was Jewish, you automatically became a Jew. Then came the law that if there was an intermarried couple, they had to be divorced. Otherwise, the other one—the non-Jewish partner—would be treated equally with the Jewish partner. Then came later on, the boycott laws that you couldn’t buy [from a Jew]. There were signs on stores [that said], “Do not patronize Jews.”

Then came . . . like my father had . . . the factory was gone. My father worked then as a representative for two big companies . . . as a shoe rep. In 1938, there was an unofficial law that, as a Jewish salesman, you had a heck of a time to solicit a non-Jewish merchant. It was beneath the dignity of the non-Jewish merchant to be solicited by a “dirty Jew.” You could not . . . Your livelihood was just slowly going down the drain.

By that time, everybody was frantic to look for a way out of Germany. Even the most optimistic people . . . and my father was a very optimistic person who had from 1933 on to 1936 and 1937 said, “This is going to blow over. Germany is going to wake up. Besides, Germany can’t exist without the Jewish enterprise, and the Jewish ideas, and the Jewish culture,” which really was true. If you looked at in the movie, and in the theater, and in the newspaper, and in the writing world, it really was at that time dominated by Jewish names. One couldn’t fathom that all this would go on without us. Maybe we were just very over confident.

It is now said that after Hitler, except for Günter Grass, there is no outstanding German writer now that is known to the world.¹⁵ There are very few famous movie stars or movie directors that come from Germany. Commercially, they had done very well afterwards—after the total collapse. The Marshall Plan helped Germany get back on their feet, but at least they used it well.¹⁶

In 1937, my father finally got cold feet and decided he should look around and find some relative, anywhere to get out. Luckily, my mother in her family had several uncles who had gone to America in the 1890’s or something like that. There were so many kids in the family and there wasn’t enough business to go around and they decided to strike out [on their own]. My father found a cousin who had been sent to America because he was the black sheep in the family. He

¹⁶ The Marshall Plan was an American program that was designed to rehabilitate the economies of 17 countries in Western Europe. The Marshall Plan, also known as the European Recovery Program, channeled over $13 billion to finance the economic recovery of Europe between 1948 and 1951. Its name comes from one of the plan’s architects, George Marshall, who became Secretary of State after World War II.
had gambled and won an enormous amount of money. I remember that story. It was always told. [He] never told his father. He was all of 16 years old. He packed himself up one day, went to Berlin, and spent thousands of Marks until his father heard about his misdeed or his winning and all that, packed him up and sent him to America. Luckily, he was a forgiving soul and he did bring some of his cousins and brothers to America. There were quite a few black sheep who later on really became the saviors of their families.

We didn’t get an affidavit from a black sheep. We got an affidavit from a very, very well to do German Jewish family in Philadelphia [Pennsylvania] who had immigrated also in the 1800’s. They were bankers in Philadelphia. They really . . . to call them a relative was really farfetched, but through a cousin of my mother’s who they had brought over before and settled in Philadelphia, and by her very actively begging really, to give an affidavit to us, we did get it. If you think of it, to give an affidavit doesn’t sound like much but at that time it entailed a lot of responsibility because we were a family of four—two small children, a man in his 50’s who didn’t speak any English, and a housewife who was 40 and never worked. By giving an affidavit, you signed a piece of paper that you were responsible for the welfare of these people. If they were sick, if they couldn’t find work, if they got into trouble, you were responsible for them. It is quite a responsibility to take upon yourself and you didn’t do it lightly unless you were very rich.

Sandra: Do you remember the name of this family?

Helen: Yes, the name was Loew. They were very well known people in the German Jewish society of Philadelphia. In fact, I met the old lady when I was 18. I was going to Texas to stay with some friends. She entertained me. She lived in the Warwick Hotel in Philadelphia in the penthouse, up there. She invited me and this cousin who had been instrumental to come to lunch. I know I was very impressed. She had this butler . . . There was this little old lady and she had a butler and a maid to serve us—three people—this enormous lunch in this big hotel room with this old antique furniture. She was very gracious. She gave me this beautiful handmade hand-crocheted bag. I remember that her mother had made as a souvenir, a memento from her. When I came home, I opened up the bag and there was $20 in it. She died shortly afterward. I must say she saved our lives. I am forever grateful to little Mrs. Loew.

Sandra: What did you have to go through on your end . . . before you could . . .

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17 The Warwick Hotel is an iconic landmark located in the Rittenhouse Square neighborhood of downtown Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The limestone building was designed in the 1920’s by Frank Hahn and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Today, the building has been divided into condominiums and a hotel.
Helen: In Germany, as I said, I was turned down at the lyceum. Everybody had to go to a Jewish school from then on. After 1938 in Nuremberg, you could not go to a non-Jewish school. There was only one small, very Orthodox Realschule in Fuerth [Germany].18 Now, Fuerth is the neighboring city to Nuremberg. It’s like Atlanta and Decatur.19 You had to take a streetcar there. The school had never had girls before, but under the circumstances . . . it had to go with the time. It was a matter of necessity. Either we had no education or we had to go there. So the Kultusgemeinde [German: Jewish community] . . . In Germany, you had a Jewish cultural society—not only cultural, it took care of all your needs. It was like the [Jewish] Federation.

One thing I must say: in Germany the church and state was not separate. The churches were supported by the state, by the taxes that you as a citizen paid. The Jewish taxes went to . . . the Kultusgemeinde and they distributed it to the different synagogues and the teachers and the schools. They decided this school must change its policies. They decided it must become more or less a public high school for Jewish boys and girls. Whether they were Orthodox or not Orthodox, it didn’t matter. They had to come. We took the streetcar for 45 minutes everyday. We went to this small school that kept adding and adding little subdivided rooms. We had to have little recesses because not everybody fit in the little courtyard where you had your lunch. Incidentally, that’s the same school that Henry Kissinger went to.20 He was a grade above me. But at that point, he was just an ordinary kid. Nobody knew he had such a big future before him.

The teachers really did their very best. In spite of the tremendous pressure on the pupils who didn’t know when they were leaving or the teachers who also were trying to leave. They did teach us. We knew that whatever we could cram into . . . [education] was something we could take with us. They couldn’t take [it] away from us. They probably would take everything else away. We really did apply ourselves. There wasn’t much time for fun anyhow because you couldn’t go to the movies. We couldn’t go to the theater. We couldn’t go to any public bathing place. In Nuremberg, you couldn’t go any place. You never knew when somebody was going to beat you up. If somebody was going to beat you up, nobody was going to help you because

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18 Fuerth [German: Fürth] is a city located in northern Bavaria, Germany, just outside the city of Nuremberg.
19 Decatur is a city in Georgia, approximately 6 miles (10 kilometers) northeast of Atlanta.
20 Henry Alfred Kissinger is an American political scientist, diplomat, and political advisor. He was born Heinz Alfred Kissinger in 1923 in Fuerth, Germany. In 1938, his family fled to England from Nazi persecution and then immigrated to the United States. They settled in New York. He served as National Security Advisor and later concurrently as United States Secretary of State in the administrations of presidents Richard Nixon and Gerald Ford. He played a prominent role in United States foreign policy between 1969 and 1977, especially in regard to the Vietnam War.
nobody was going to take it upon himself the onus of being a “Jew-lover.” I mean, what worse could you do to yourself? Not only that— it wasn’t only you that was punished if you did that, but it put a black mark on your family because [the thought was], “He probably heard it at home that whatever was done to the Jews wasn’t right.”

We had, for example, in our house a family and that shows how bad Hitler was with “good Germans” . . . this guy had a high position in the police department. He was very, very Catholic. He was a devout Catholic. They went to mass every day. They had two sons. One was my age and one was my sister’s age. The son that was as old as I am, Herman, was always a nice kid and he felt very bad that he couldn’t talk to us . . . in what position we were put. The other one who was four years younger embraced Nazism with full arms. He joined the Hitler Youth, he sang, he danced, he spit at us, [and] he kicked us whenever he could. He was all into it. The brother still went to mass and refused to join the Hitler Youth. Helmut [the younger brother] was going to denounced his own brother for being a traitor. So . . . the parents sent off Herman to Austria, where he had an uncle who was a high . . . he wasn’t a bishop or a cardinal . . . he was some kind of a higher up in the priesthood. They sent him to this monastery because they were afraid he was going to be . . . something was going to happen to him. This was the effect of Hitler on a non-Jewish family.

Sandra: When your parents made the decision to come, you mentioned they needed a visa. Tell us about that.

Helen: We contacted this Loew family and they sent us the visa after some time. Now, if you just got the papers, that doesn’t mean you can pack up and leave. You’ve got to pass an examination at the American Consulate. What nobody knew in Germany at that time was that the American Consulates were instructed by the government unofficially to be as strict as possible because they didn’t want an overbalance of Jews coming. They checked you from “A” to “Z.” I mean, physically and mentally.

Now, you have to figure out that you knew your life depended on this visa, to pass this examination. Of course you were nervous. Some people probably forgot their name and their address in this excitement. The men were sweating profusely; their hearts were beating very hard. They were turned down [because of] high blood pressure, [an irregular or rapid heart rate], or all these kind of things that were really not a chronic condition. It was just a matter of stress. They had questions for us. Name for us the 48—at that time we had only 48 states—capitals. Or,
name for us what is the capital of North Dakota. I didn’t know what North Dakota was if you asked. I wouldn’t even have known about Atlanta probably much except for “Gone With the Wind.” They had the weirdest questions. Even though we studied . . . we didn’t even know what we studied—we just studied things that somebody had written out as a guidebook, so to speak.

A lot of people who didn’t make it to America even though they had [affidavits] from relatives were due to the nastiness of the Consulate personnel. The one we had to go to was in Stuttgart [Germany]. I think he was a very enthusiastic anti-Semite. He was only too glad to find fault with whoever applied. Many were turned down. We were very fortunate that we passed the examination by good luck. It was really good luck.

When we came back in 1938 and just before the visa was due—we were leaving at the end of 1938—came Kristallnacht.\(^{21}\) In Nuremberg [it] was one of the worst nights. The excesses in Nuremberg were unbelievable. Women being beaten and kicked and everything being destroyed. The synagogue, our synagogue burned. We had a gorgeous synagogue. It was like Saint Philip’s cathedral. I mean, just as big and beautiful and made out of stone and it was just amazing. It was just a really beautiful synagogue. Most of the German synagogues really were built in the cathedral style and it took a lot of dynamite to destroy the synagogue. It burned for three days. They had a cordon of firemen around—not to protect the synagogue but to protect the houses next to them, which were business houses. It was on a square in Nuremberg.

We were the most fortunate people in Nuremberg this night. It was due to my mother. We had already taken all our belongings . . . The packers for this lift were coming the following week. Before you can pack, you had to have everything on the floor and out of the cabinets because you had an inspector coming from the German government who checked everything and then what you had, he put a tax on it. Every used or unused handkerchief had to have a penny or two of tax for the privilege of taking it out of the country. We had everything on the floor or piled up in packs all over the big apartment. My mother had a Rosenfield service as we called it for 36 people. She had silver for 36. Silver you could still take along. Jewelry you couldn’t. You

\(^{21}\) On November 8 and 9, 1938, the Nazis started a state-sponsored nationwide pogrom. Across the country (and in Austria) Jewish synagogues, homes and businesses were looted and burned, Jews were attacked on the streets and 91 were killed. Thousands of Jewish men were sent to concentration camps for several weeks and released only when they agreed to leave the country as soon as possible. The Jews were made to pay for the damages to their premises. The pogrom was called ‘Kristallnacht,’ which means ‘Night of Broken Glass,’ because of all the damage done to Jewish shop windows.
couldn’t take cameras along. You had to give up weapons. That’s another story I might tell in a little while.

Here come . . . there was screaming on the street. There was hollering on the street. You knew that things were going on. Here come these six half drunk SR men banging against the door with their boots. They always wear boots. In fact, when I came to America, for the longest time, I couldn’t buy myself a pair of boots. I had a Freudian slip about boots. Boots and Nazis were one thing in my mind but I conquered it. Now I have several pair of boots. They came in.

My father had been in Munich that week to wind up some business. As he was leaving, it was the day Kristallnacht really started. He always stayed in the same small hotel in Munich [Germany]. They guy was in the known. He was an old native Munich person. He says, “You know, Mr. Wasserman, something is going on. I understand they are going to arrest Jews at the stations. I don’t think you should go home tonight. I’ll put you up in the attic. I’ll bring you breakfast and I’ll call your wife for you. Stay overnight, just to see what’s what.” That saved my father from being arrested because when they came in each house that night, they arrested all the men and all the young males over 17. My father was saved from arrest because the man kept him. The next day, he found out all the Jews were arrested from all over. My father stayed up in this attic for three days until the arrest wave was cancelled. By that time, they had every Jew more or less that they wanted.

Anyhow, they came in and they see this on the floor. One turns to the other and he says, “Das Juden Schwien—[German] the Jewish sow—made it easy for us. We don’t even have to take it out of the cabinets. We can just stomp on it.” There was my mother’s pride and joy—her Rosenfield service. How she thought of it I have never understood because my mother was such a nervous person. She said, “Wait a minute! You cannot touch anything. I have to show you something. Wait just one minute.” She disappeared and she came [back] with the American visa, which was a very official looking document with all kinds of seals on it. She marched up to this man who was in charge and she put it in front of him. She said, “You see? It says here we are under the protection of the American government and all this belongs now to the American government. If you destroy it, you destroy American government [property]. You might get into trouble.” He looked at her—she was a little woman—and he looked at this document. They were

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22 Munich is the capital of the German state of Bavaria. It is located on the River Isar, north of the Alps, about 170 kilometers (105 miles) south of Nuremberg.
half drunk. He couldn’t thank G-d read English—which didn’t say a word about this being American government property—and said, “There are so many other dirty Jews in town. Why should we bother with this one?” He turned and walked off.

We were the only ones in Nuremberg that I knew who had everything in order [property not destroyed on Kristallnacht]. That was because my mother had this brilliant idea. Afterwards, when we asked her, she said she didn’t know what made her do it. She said all of a sudden she just knew she had to save this stuff for her children. And she did.

Sandra: Was this packed and it came over with you?

Helen: Yes. I can show it to you later on. I hardly ever use it, but whenever I do use it, I have to think of my mother. It was really a very noble thing.

Sandra: An inspiration.

Helen: It was an inspirational thought. It didn’t help us, though, when a year before my father . . . whenever they had these Reichspartei parties, every Jew in Nuremberg tried to get out of town if at all possible. We always did. That one year, we couldn’t because my father had some kind of appointment or something that he couldn’t change. We didn’t go. He was in town. A troop of SR men started to march by him. The Germans had a custom that when they carried this swastika flag that was called their blood flag—the reason they call it the blood flag is because all the members of this troop would stand around when they get this flag and cut their wrists and put a few drops of blood on it and that was it. It was a holy flag. Nazism really was a pagan religion and Hitler was G-d. Anyhow, you had to stand still whatever you were doing, and put your hand on your belt, and lift up your hand, and salute, “Heil Hitler!” My father was there. He was in this quandary. As a Jew, if he saluted the holy flag, he would be sacrilegious. If he didn’t salute the flag, it would be a sign of no respect. What to do? He ducked into a doorway and figured he’d wait until the troop passes and he’ll go on his way, which he did. But he didn’t realize somebody had watched him and was following him.

That night, there came the clattering of boots. They were at our door, banging with the boots and looking for the “Jew sow [German: pig] Wasserman.” It was very easy for them to know who my father was because we were the only Jewish sounding name in this apartment house. My father came to the door. There was my sister, my mother, and I, and the governess who in the meantime had been helping with the household and everything else because she was very lovely and she stayed with us. Incidentally, you couldn’t have any household help under 45
because that was to protect the pure [German] blood from the seducing Jew. They said to my father, “Would you please take your glasses off?” My father did. They systematically beat him very, very badly. We screamed. We cried. Nothing in the house moved.

Then my bleeding father pulled himself up after they left and we called the one Jewish doctor. Incidentally, after 1939 you couldn’t go to a non-Jewish doctor or non-Jewish hospital either. We had one little Jewish hospital in Fuerth. That was a 45-minute ride. But there was one Jewish doctor living near us and we went to his apartment and he patched up my father. We were afraid that they . . . They had said, “We’ll be back to teach you another lesson.” We packed up and we went in the night . . . my father wore dark glasses and his head bandaged and over his face practically to hide all the black eyes. We went by train to Bamberg to stay with my grandparents. This was the life of fun and entertainment in Nuremberg for a Jew.

Sandra: When you had your visa and you were packed and you were ready to leave, how did you get your tickets? What form of transportation . . .

Helen: The tickets you had to buy as soon as you had your visa. Those you bought with your own money. You could buy them from whichever boat line you took. We were able to get some from this American ship line . . . The boat was called SS Washington.\(^2\) We went out of Hamburg. We had to go via Berlin. At that time already, you had to have permission as a Jew to travel. You had to go the police, lay out your route, and get their okay. We had to go via Berlin to Hamburg. We had to stay in Berlin overnight because that’s how the tickets read. Then you had to find a hotel in Berlin. There were several that were on the list of Kultusgemeinde that were either Jewish owned or for some reason or other were allowed to have Jewish clients or guests. We stayed in one of those.

Sandra: This was the four of you—your mother, and father, and sister, and you?

Helen: Yes. My grandparents on my father’s side had already died in the meantime. My grandparents on my mother’s side—especially my grandfather was in his 80’s. [He] absolutely did not want to hear of leaving Bamberg. He [believed he] was an honored citizen, he had many friends, and nothing was going to happen to him. My uncle insisted in 1938 they have to look for papers to leave. [My uncle and his wife] had no children.

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\(^2\) Helen, her father Hans, mother Selma, and younger sister Edith arrived in New York City aboard the SS Washington on December 9, 1938 before settling in Brighton, Massachusetts, a suburb approximately 6 miles (10 kilometers) west of Boston.
My grandfather got pneumonia. He had a cold and got pneumonia. My grandfather—which we didn’t know but then found out—had never taken the medicine the doctor had given him because he had willed himself to die. He did not want to leave. My grandmother—who was at that time also in her 80’s—went with my uncle and aunt. We had already left at that time.

They went . . . my uncle was in the hops business and travelled all over Belgium and Holland on business all the time. He had friends in Belgium. They went to Belgium. Of course, Hitler came to Belgium. They went to France—first to the unoccupied zone. Then they were rounding up the Jews and they had to go to the occupied zone, to the Vichy zone, where they imprisoned them in *Camp de Gurs*.24 Luckily, in another month if the war hadn’t have ended, they would have been on another transport to Auschwitz-Birkenau. The French very secretly allowed the Germans to transport the Jews out of the French camps to Auschwitz-Birkenau. They were . . . It was just sheer luck that their number hadn’t come up at that time. We went back from Berlin to Hamburg.

As an aside, my husband was in Berlin on business a few years ago. We were invited by the big shots of AEG25—that’s like Westinghouse of America.26 Most of the people were young, except there was one elderly gentleman there. He had what we call in Germany a [unintelligible German, sounds like “Schmist,” 18:20]. That was one of those dual marks like the old German *Jungen* [German: boys] had. I saw this and it worked on me like a red flag on a bull. He of all people was the one who asked me if I had ever been in Berlin before. Usually I have pretty good manners. I looked at him and I said, “Yes,” I was in Berlin before but under very bad circumstance. But on the other hand, under very good circumstances because I was able to leave Germany still alive. There was a deathly pall along the table. One of the other men said, “That was a very dark chapter in our history which we will never, never repeat.”

**Sandra:** You boarded the boat in Hamburg . . . the four of you. What kind of boat?

**Helen:** It was a luxury liner. At that time already, food was getting scarce all over Germany—I mean, the finer foods. The Jews of course had even less food because we could only

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24 *The Gurs transit camp was located in the Basque region of southwestern France, near the village of Gurs. It was one of the earliest and biggest transit camps for Jews established in prewar France.*

25 *Allgemeine Elektrizitäts-Gesellschaft AG (AEG) [German: “General electricity company] was a German producer of electrical equipment founded as the *Deutsche Edison-Gesellschaft für angewandte Elektricität* in 1883 in Berlin. AEG was defunct by 1996, but Electrolux acquired brand rights.*

26 *The Westinghouse Electric Corporation was an American manufacturing company. It was founded in 1886, as Westinghouse Electric Company and later renamed Westinghouse Electric Corporation. The company was dissolved in 1999 after a series of acquisitions and sales, although in 1998 the Westinghouse Electric Company was formed from the nuclear power division and continues to operate.*
buy in certain stores and what they got of course was very inferior stuff in very small quantities. My father said, “We are going to eat the menu up and down.” This was the kind of food that we hadn’t had for many years. My father was quite a gourmet and he loved to eat. But it was such a stormy trip that unfortunately three-quarters of the people on this gorgeous luxury liner with all this gorgeous food couldn’t eat a darn thing!

The other thing that was very sad on this ship [was that] there were many, many men on this boat who had gotten out of the concentration camps. In 1938 and 1939, if you had a visa, some of the men were still discharged out of the concentration camps. You could tell them from miles way because their heads were all shorn and they never were any place without either a cap or a hat. Even in this grand dining room—if you did go the few times that the boat stopped rocking a little—there they were sitting with their caps or hats—a reminder of what you got away from.

Sandra: The boat docked in what city?
Helen: It only docked once in Cherbourg, which is [a port city in northern] France. We got out to get rid of our seasickness for a little while. Then it came straight into America. It took us almost two weeks because it was in December [1938] . . . It was so stormy and so foggy. That was the time before radar and all this other stuff, so you stood in the middle of the ocean and you rocked up and down and up and down. I was really horribly seasick. We had a very cute steward and he asked me what I wanted. I said, “A revolver!” Really I didn’t care if I ever got to America. All I wanted to do was stop it!

Sandra: What city did the boat dock?
Helen: In New York [City].

Sandra: You went through which immigration . . .
Helen: They had . . . It was just . . . nothing very traumatic. They check you out. Everybody looked like heck because everybody had been seasick.

Sandra: Was this on Ellis Island?
Helen: No it was on the regular boat docks. We had some relatives that were waiting for us. My father was one of the very fortunate. He knew exactly he was going to Boston [Massachusetts] because he had this friend in the same business had opened up little leather factory.27 My father had been a fantastic salesman in Germany and he had great hopes . . .

27 Boston is the capital and largest city of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts in the United States.
<End Tape 1, Side 1>

Helen: . . . was going to go as a salesman for his friend who was manufacturing small leather articles. That really was an act of confidence of Mr. Neumann, his friend, because here was my father with hardly any English and he was supposed to go out and sell to American customers and be a super salesman. My father really surprised us all. He managed very well with the help of a dictionary. His customers began . . . after a while . . . really loved him and he did very nicely. The funny thing was, when he first started out on the road, my father looked like a typical German brewer. He was not too large, very corpulent, with a round face, little nose, big blue eyes. All the people in New England, which was his territory—he was traveling out of Boston . . . all the customers were Jewish. They were either the drugstore’s or the men’s stores or the department store buyers. Here comes this German wanting to sell to them, and they are full of Hitler doing this and that, and they are supposed to buy from this German? They were very rude. They were practically throwing him out. My father couldn’t understand it at first. They told him they wouldn’t have anything to do with Germans. My father said, “But I’m Jewish!” [They said,] “Ach! We don’t believe it at all!” My father got to the point where he was reciting for them the Shema [daily prayer] to prove to them he was Jewish. After that, they thought it was very funny. They created a very nice atmosphere and he did very well.

Those were the problems as a refugee. For example, in England, they put all the Jewish male refugees during the war into a quasi-concentration camp because they were afraid there were German spies among them. 28 Or they gave them this choice either to go to this island or Australia or New Zealand. I have at least three cousins who wound up in Australia or New Zealand because they were young fellas and they didn’t want to stay in the Isle of Man and do forced labor.

Sandra: On entry [to the United States] then, you went directly to Boston?

Helen: To Boston, yes. I went to school a year and a half. I worked as a babysitter to make . . . We all worked—my sister, my mother and I—as babysitters to make money. Now

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28 At the outbreak of World War II, thousands of male Germans, Austrians and Italians living in Great Britain—some of whom were British citizens—were rounded up and sent to internment camps for fear they might be spies. The majority were interned on the Isle of Man, where internment camps had also been set up in World War One. More than 7,000 internees were deported, the majority to Canada, some to Australia. By 1941, all but about 5,000 had been released due to an outcry in Parliament.
when I see what babysitters get, I could die. I got 50 cents a whole night and occasionally the permission to have a glass of milk or cookie. Now I think it’s $4 an hour or something.

*Sandra:* Tell me the kind of place that you lived in.

*Helen:* We lived in . . . We had this German furniture still and all the good stuff [that we had brought with us], but we found an apartment on Commonwealth Avenue in Boston.

Incidentally, that was one of the most horrible experiences we had in America. We were looking for an apartment—my mother and I. My mother spoke the best English. In Boston, you went to the [superintendent of the building] to ask about apartments. We saw this one, which would have been on the second floor, which would have been much better. We wound up on the third floor, with very steep stairs. He asked my mother where she came from. My mother said we came from Germany. He said to her, “Oh, I love to have German tenants. They’re so neat, and orderly, and clean.” My mother said, “Oh, but we are not Germans. We are Jews. That’s why we left Germany.” He said, “Wait a minute. I think this apartment is rented. You cannot have it.” We went home. We were so crushed. We didn’t go [out anymore] that whole day to look for apartments. To come to Boston and be told, “You can’t have the apartment more or less because you’re Jewish,” was really more than we could take that day. Then we were told that some of the [superintendents] were very anti-Semitic. Some were Irish that didn’t like Jews. Nobody [in America] lost much sleep over it. But of course coming from Germany, we lost a lot of sleep over it that night.

We did find an apartment up on the third floor. I remember when the guys came with the delivery to bring that heavy furniture up. I think they became rather anti-Semitic too at that point. <laughing> We didn’t have too much fun or tip them either. We settled. It was a two-bedroom apartment with a small living room and dining room. We had this big hand carved furniture. My mother decided that in order to save money—which we needed not for ourselves but to give her mother and family out of Europe—she was going to rent the extra bedroom. We rented the extra bedroom—it had one bath—to a bachelor. My sister slept on a couch in the living room and I slept on a couch in the dining room. It was quite a bit of togetherness.

My father went on the road with the train and the bus because he never learned how to drive. In Germany, he had a chauffeur. He never liked to drive. Life was not too easy for him either because he had to schlep all his samples along. But he managed. I remember at first, their
little factory—which built into a big factory at the end. Mr. Neumanska became a very wealthy man. He did very well.

Was near the wholesale meat market in Boston. My father would go on Friday or on Thursday sometimes and buy whatever was cheap. The cheapest thing was they had calves tongue—little calves tongue. They were ten cents a pound. We would eat calf tongue. Every week, we would have calf tongue. It was cheap. But my mother made it very good. She made it with a pecan sauce. She bought capers. We had very good . . . over noodles, over rice, over mashed potatoes . . . calf tongue. I remember that. Nowadays I don’t mind eating them again but for a long time, I wouldn’t go near them.

Sandra: How long did you live in Boston? Were there any Jewish agencies that helped you? Did you go to religious school?

Helen: I went to high school a year and a half. We didn’t really use much of the help per se because due to the fact that my father had a job, he didn’t need any help financially, but we did use the agencies for advice on how to expedite . . . how to help my uncle, my aunt and my grandmother in France and get papers for them. Since we weren’t citizens, we couldn’t give them papers. It was very difficult. They did later on make provisions that people could bring their relatives over even if they weren’t citizens. They came under HIAS’ auspices. I didn’t go to any religious school, no.

We belonged to the Temple in Boston, which was a big Reform synagogue, which most of the German Jews joined. Then, in 1940, there were so many German and Austrian Jews in Boston that they formed what they called “The IMAS,” the Immigrant Mutual Aid Society. They even hired for the High Holy Days [Rosh Ha-Shanah (Jewish New Year) and Yom Kippur

29 HIAS was founded in 1881. Its original purpose was the help the constant flow of Jewish immigrants from Russian in relocating. During and after World War II, they had offices throughout Europe, South and Central America and the Far East. They worked to get Jews out of Europe and to any country that would have them by providing tickets and information about visas. After World War II, they assisted 167,000 Jews to leave DP camps and emigrate elsewhere.

30 The Immigrants Mutual Aid Society (IMAS) was founded in Boston Massachusetts in 1938 by a group of Central European refugees. Its purpose was to ease immigrants' adjustment to the economic, spiritual, cultural, and social life of the American community and to provide mutual assistance to its members and aid to other immigrants. In its early years, IMAS was primarily concerned with securing affidavits for émigrés, and providing them with English lessons, as well as assisting them in finding jobs and homes. IMAS was also concerned with providing social and cultural activities for its members, such as lectures and dances, in addition to offering religious services for the High Holy Days. IMAS provided financial assistance to its members and, in 1960, established the IMAS Mutual Aid Fund, with a grant from United Helf, Inc. IMAS also on occasion granted scholarships to its members. The organization functioned without paid staff, and without a permanent office or formal ties to other Jewish organizations. IMAS ceased operations around 1980.
(Day of Atonement), some German cantor\(^\text{31}\) and some German rabbis who were only too glad to make some extra money because they weren’t hired by American congregations. We had our own services. Mr. Neumanska happened to be the president. He was really very socially minded and active. He founded that. He saw to it that they even had a cemetery. He even bought cemetery lots for them—not for them, but that you could buy.

They had a very active . . . they met socially and they helped each other. I’m still friendly with the children of some of these people. They had a very active social life there. I remember being very culturally inclined. The Germans found out that if you go on certain nights to the Boston symphony, you could get standing seats. That was a big deal then.

Helen: I moved to Galveston, Texas just before the war—I alone.\(^\text{32}\) We had non-Jewish friends. My uncle had non-Jewish friends who had moved to America from Germany. He was a brew master. He was an anti-Nazi. He refused to fly the Nazi flag. They were going to beat him up and really get after him. He got himself a job in America. They were always looking for German brew masters. They had no children. They came to visit in Boston. They had a big house and they were doing well in Galveston, Texas. They prevailed upon me to come and visit for a little while, maybe I’ll like Texas and stay a little while.

I had graduated high school. I had not too good a job. I worked in an office as a file girl. Assistant secretary. I figured I had nothing to lose—why not see the world? They were going to give me the ticket, so I decided to go to Texas. I did and stayed.

Sandra: What was the name of those people?

Helen: The friends of my uncle were Mr. and Mrs. Carl Bram (12:39). He was brew master of the brewery there and she had a big hotel there. I worked partly for her there in the hotel, keeping the books. Then I worked partly for a lawyer, a Mr. Zinn. I worked for him for the four years I lived in Texas. I was going for four weeks and stayed for four years because the war broke out. In a small town, it was much easier. Besides, it was paradise for a young woman. You had the army, the navy, and the coast guard, and the air force all around Galveston. I became

\(^{31}\) The chazzan (cantor) is the official in charge of music or chants and leads liturgical prayer and chanting in the synagogue.

\(^{32}\) Galveston is an island city on the Gulf Coast of Texas.
secretary at the Temple. I took that as a sideline for Mr. Isakson. I had a wonderful time in Galveston, Texas I had lots of friends.

My husband was stationed . . . At that time, I didn’t know him. He was . . . I kept in touch with a girlfriend of mine, whose name was Marion Spiegel, who had emigrated at the end . . . really the last boat to America. We found each other and we wrote. She wrote me after the war broke out that her oldest brother had enlisted in the Army and he was stationed in Texas. [She wrote,] “Texas is a big state, but would Camp Wallace be near Galveston?”33 I wrote her back [that] Camp Wallace is a half an hour from Galveston. She gave him my address and he came [to visit with me]. We had very good food and we were very friendly. That’s how he got stuck with me . . . while he was stationed in Camp Wallace, Texas. After the war, we got married. Frank, my husband . . . he also came in 1939 but he came by himself as an eighteen-year-old boy. That was [still] during the [Great] Depression in America.34 He had a job filling fountain pens, ironing handkerchiefs, and all kinds of jobs, which he didn’t really like and didn’t think he had much of a future [doing]. He went to HIAS and said, “Isn’t there something else I can go do?” They said, “Well, they’re planning to send 18 young men to Georgia to an agricultural school. If you would want to be part of them, that would be nice . . .” He could go.

Sandra: You were living where?
Helen: I was at that time living in Boston.

Sandra: You married in Boston?
Helen: We met during the war in Galveston, Texas. I got married in Boston, then moved to Atlanta, where he was living and had brought his parents. I came to Atlanta in 1945. I went to work as a secretary to the president of the Big Apple Supermarket,35 Simon Maltek. I worked for them for over five and a half years until I got pregnant. At that time, when you had children, you quit. You stayed home and raised your children.

33 Camp Wallace was designed as a training center for antiaircraft units in World War II. It was formally opened just outside of Galveston, Texas on February 1, 1941, and named for Col. Elmer J. Wallace. For two years, Camp Wallace served as an antiaircraft replacement-training center. On April 15, 1944, the camp was officially transferred to the United States Navy as a naval training and distribution center and was used as a boot camp. After the war, it became the Naval Personnel Separation Center. It closed in 1946.
34 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.
35 Big Apple, later Food Giant, was a chain of over 100 grocery stores that were headquartered and operated out of Atlanta, Georgia. Russian immigrant Louis Alterman started it as a wholesale food operation called L. Alterman & Son in the 1920’s. The company opened its first retail store, called Big Apple, in 1949. The company existed until the 1980’s.
My husband was a traveling salesman. Most of my friends’ husbands were all traveling salesmen. Atlanta really was built up . . . the Jewish community really was built up by travelling salesman who travelled out of Atlanta. It was the most centrally located place. Nobody ever thought anything of it, that you were home with your kids and your husband was traveling all over the world and was gone two or three weeks at a time because that was before expressways and people used trains. You had to stay at home.

Sandra: What were the companies that he worked for?
Helen: He doesn’t like to change jobs. He’s worked for 45 years for the same company and he’s still a consultant for them. It’s an electrical motors and supply distributing company. Their name was Brownell and they were bought out about 5 years ago by a conglomerate called Avnit.

My in-laws lived with us. In some ways, I really had time to myself that I could get away. I always liked organizing, or as somebody says, “bossing people around.” I decided I ought to do something a little more than just be around babies. First I got involved in our synagogue, Beth El, which didn’t last long. We were sort of avant garde—we were young people with no money. We thought we could run a synagogue on idealism and no money. It didn’t work because the rabbi we hired wanted to eat and we couldn’t pay his salary after a while. I think we were one of the first synagogues that went bankrupt. Now when I read the Jewish Times, I see there are 23 synagogues [in Atlanta]. I could cry. If we had had a little more patience and the rabbi hadn’t been so hungry, we might have made it.

Sandra: Tell me where Beth El was located and where you lived.
Helen: By that time, we lived already in the house we are still living in now. No, we lived on Seal Place, off of Boulevard, which is now Monroe Avenue or . . . Beth El was in a little dip on University Drive. The grounds were donated to us by Dr. [Herbert] Taylor—Judy and Mark’s father-in-law. They donated the grounds. We built a pre-fab building. We just couldn’t make it.

36 The Atlanta Jewish Times is a weekly community newspaper serving the Jewish community of Atlanta, Georgia, United States.
37 Herbert Taylor (1895—1997) was a native Atlantan. His father was a founding member and the first secretary of Ahavath Achim synagogue in 1887. Herbert began his career as a pharmacist before venturing into a successful construction and real estate business. Herbert married Esther Kahn (1905—1992), the daughter of Marcus Kahn, one of the founders of the Shearith Israel. Herbert and Esther often donated materials and time to philanthropic projects in Atlanta. They had one son, Mark Taylor (1928—). Mark and his wife, Judith Grossman Taylor (1936—), are also active members of Atlanta’s Jewish community and involved in many philanthropic activities. The Esther and Herbert Taylor Family Foundation supports The Esther and Herbert Taylor Oral History Collection at the Cuba Family Archives.
We didn’t have enough money to make a go of it. We dissolved. It was very heartbreaking. At that time, we had started a new tradition. We had a break the fast dance, which was open to the whole community. Somehow or another, I was in charge very often. I always did the speech making. Colleen Weston, who was at that time one of the machers of Hadassah, said to Eleanor Levin, “This girl we’re going to hire, we’re going to get for Hadassah.” We got through with Beth El. She approached me to get active with Hadassah. Lo and behold, I worked myself up to group president and chapter president.

Sandra: That was which chapter?

Helen: The group president was Hadeema. The chapter was . . . At that point we had seven chapters that made up all of Hadassah and at that point Hadassah had 2,700 members in the city of Atlanta. It was the biggest women’s organization in Atlanta and at that time, the women’s organization in Atlanta. I remember I was very frightened when I did become president. I had heard about the prejudice toward—which my boss had told me about against the “Deutsche . . .” the German Jews. The dowagers of Hadassah were: Ida Levitas, Betty [Cohen] Goldstein—who ironically later became the mother-in-law of my daughter; and Irene Schwartz; and Mrs. [Reva] Epstein, Rabbi Epstein’s wife; and Rae Frank was another one; Sonya Rabinowitz; Charney Abelson. They were the governing body, so to speak, of it. I

Family Archives for Southern Jewish History at the Breman Museum in Atlanta, which consists of a thousand oral histories that document Jewish life in Georgia and Alabama.

38 Colleen Weston served as Hadassah chapter president from 1966 to 1968.

39 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. Hadassah Greater Atlanta (HGA), the metro Atlanta chapter of Hadassah, was founded in 1916.

40 This may be a reference to Sarah Levin, who was Hadassah chapter president from 1954 to 1956.

41 Ida Goldstein Levitas was born in Bialystok, Poland and grew up in Atlanta. Ida was active in the Jewish Educational Alliance and served as an Atlanta Hadassah chapter president from 1929 to 1931. Her son Elliott Levitas was a Congressman from the 4th Congressional District in the United States House of Representatives from 1975 to 1985.

42 Betty Cohen Goldstein (1929—2015) was very active in Atlanta’s Jewish community, including serving as a Hadassah chapter president. She and her husband Leon had four children, including Bobby, whom Helen’s daughter married.

43 Irene Schwartz was a Hadassah chapter president from 1952 to 1954.

44 Reva (Rebecca) Chashesman Epstein (1905—2001) was the well-educated daughter of an Orthodox rabbi. Her family immigrated to Chicago, Illinois from Poland after World War I. In 1929, she married Rabbi Harry Epstein (who served the Ahavath Achim Congregation in Atlanta, Georgia for 50 years) and had two daughters. Reva served as a Hadassah chapter president.

45 Rae Frank was an influential member of the Jewish community of Atlanta and a president of Hadassah. The theater at the Marcus Jewish Community Center of Atlanta is named for Rae and her husband Morris.

46 Sonya Abelson Rabinowitz (d. 2004) was a Hadassah chapter president from 1970-1972. Sonya and her husband Ben were active members of the Atlanta Jewish community until they moved to Jerusalem in 1991.
knew they were... I was very worried. But they became—one of my staunchest supporters. I got along very nicely with them. I had no problems whatsoever being president of Hadassah. At that time, it was a very rewarding job because the vice-presidents and all the committee chairmen, everybody really took their job seriously. It was a responsibility and you did it. People really had an easier lifestyle. I mean, they had help [at home]. I had help, too, part-time. Nobody was working [outside the home]. This was part of your life and your responsibility. You took it seriously.

Sandra: This was what years?
Helen: This was 1968 to 1970 and then [I was president from] 1972 to 1974 or something like that. I have a plaque there. I should have looked at it. I enjoyed it. I found that it was some way of repaying for what I had gotten when I came to America to the Jewish people as a whole. It was always I think my raison d’être [French: purpose] for taking Federation jobs or anything else. I felt I should do it; or rather I must do it. I did it.

Sandra: What were some of the things you accomplished during your term as president?
Helen: I think Hadassah was very active in making their quotas. For the size of the city of Atlanta, we sent a lot of money to Israel. We always made our quotas. We had fantastic study groups, really good study groups at that time. We also had some really enjoyable cooking groups I remember. The other thing was that Hadassah at that time was also more social. It helped new people to make friends. At that time, we had all these social clubs. It was no great problem where to meet. You had the Progressive club. You had the Mayfair Club. You didn’t go so much to the Standard Club, but the two other clubs you had meetings there. You had socials. It was the

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47 Charnye Bressler Abelson (1899-1990) was a Hadassah chapter president from 1938 until 1940. She and her husband, Jake, ran the Jefferson Hotel in Atlanta and were active in the Atlanta Jewish community.
48 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.
49 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.
50 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
“in” thing to go, and to be seen, and to do. Israel became a state and you felt a responsibility to help. You were part of, a witness to a great thing and you felt you had to help make it an established growing concern.

**Sandra:** What was the attitude of the Jewish community, and the non-Jewish community as well, toward the formation of Israel?

**Helen:** I think there was no problem at all in the non-Jewish community, especially since this is the ‘Bible Belt.’\footnote{The Bible Belt is an informal term for a region in the southeastern and south-central United States in which socially conservative evangelical Protestantism is a significant part of the culture and Christian church attendance across the denominations is generally higher than the nation’s average. The Bible Belt consists of much of the southern United States extending west into Texas and Oklahoma.} They felt like it was part of a prophecy coming up. I remember when Israel was declared a state [in 1948], at the AA synagogue, which was that time on Washington Street, we had a citywide celebration where they had invited every preacher, all the city government, the state government, and all the Jewish community. It was a tremendous thing. The only thing I remember at that time was they handed out *yarmulkes* at the door. The only one who refused to take a *yarmulke* was Rabbi [David] Marx of the Temple at that time.\footnote{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.} \^{laughing} I so happened to be standing on the sidelines when this happened. I thought it was very paradoxical. It was a tremendous thing. I remember that. Many of us of the German Jewish decent were saying, “If only this would have happened years ago.” It would have saved a lot of lives.

Then about ten years ago, the Anti-Defamation League came up with a new project.\footnote{The Independent Order of B’nai B’rith, a Jewish service organization in the United States, founded the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) in October 1913. It is an international Jewish non-governmental organization based in the United States. Describing itself as "the nation's premier civil rights/human relations agency," the ADL states that it "fights antisemitism and all forms of bigotry, defends democratic ideals and protects civil rights for all," doing so through "information, education, legislation, and advocacy."} They felt that the public should be educated on the Holocaust. They started to approach non-Jewish public schools to incorporate the lesson of the Holocaust within the time when they teach the Second World War or when they read Anne Frank’s diary.\footnote{Anne Frank was a German-Jewish girl whose family fled to Amsterdam and eventually went into hiding with four others. After almost two years, they were discovered and deported to concentration camps. Anne died in Bergen-Belsen in April 1945, at the age of 15. Anne’s father, Otto Frank, is the only one of the eight people in hiding to survive. After the war, Anne became world famous because of the diary she wrote while in hiding.} They thought it may be a good idea to have somebody who lived through this time—either in a concentration camp or in

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The site of Georgia State Stadium (formerly Turner Field). 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.
Germany—so they decided to recruit a quorum of people who would go to these schools and do this. Alex Gross, and Lola Lansky, and I, and Ben Hirsch I think were one of the first ones who did that. I approached my lectures always from the point of view that I was a teenager like they are during this Hitler time and the terrible consequences intolerance has on the world and on the people who live within this tyranny and dictatorship. I must say it has been a very worthwhile project for me. Many of the teachers make their pupils either write an essay or a letter. I have received some very moving, beautiful letters. Also the questions are very fascinating that some of the kids come up with. I’ve done this for the ADL as well as for the [Atlanta] Bureau of Jewish Education for many years and still do it.

Sandra: Can we go back a little to the time when you moved to Atlanta? Tell me about your neighborhood, where it was, how people lived, how you raised your children... kind of day-to-day life.

Helen: When I first got married, we moved into my in-law’s apartment, which was on Washington Street, which is now the baseball field. In fact, I think my honeymoon bed must have probably stood somewhere near the second base. That was really the heart of the Jew community—that area. You had two kosher stores there, you had the AA, you had Shearith

55 Alex (Yankele) Gross was born in Palanok, Czechoslovakia in 1928. He, his five brothers, and one sister survived the Holocaust. Alex immigrated to the United States after World War II and settled in Atlanta, Georgia. His oral history is available from The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives.

56 Lola Borkowska Lansky (1926-1999) was a Polish Jew who survived the concentration camps of Auschwitz-Birkenau, Ravensbruck, Buchenwald, and Bergen-Belsen. In 1964, she co-founded Eternal Life-Hemshech, a membership organization for survivors living in Atlanta, and in 1965 led the campaign to have a Holocaust monument erected in Atlanta. Her efforts resulted in the Memorial to the Six Million at Greenwood Cemetery. Lola was married to Rubin Lansky, another Holocaust survivor. Lola and Rubin’s papers and oral histories are available from The Cuba Family Archives for Southern Jewish History at The William Breman Jewish Heritage Museum.

57 Ben Hirsch is a Holocaust survivor from Frankfurt, Germany. He and four of his siblings were sent on a Kindertransport to France and then the United States and Atlanta. Ben is an architect who designed the Holocaust Gallery at the William Breman Jewish Heritage Museum as well as the Memorial to the Six Million in Atlanta’s Greenwood Cemetery. For a more detailed version of the construction of the Memorial, please see Ben’s oral history for the Herbert and Esther Taylor Oral History Project available from The Cuba Family Archives for Southern Jewish History at The William Breman Jewish Heritage Museum.

58 Founded in 1945, the Atlanta Bureau of Jewish Education was created to coordinate Jewish education efforts in the local community.

59 The Atlanta-Fulton County Stadium served as the home ballpark to the Atlanta Braves of Major League Baseball (MLB) from 1966 to 1996. The stadium was built in Downtown Atlanta in what had previously been a residential area and the center of much of Atlanta’s Jewish community from the late nineteenth century through the first half of the twentieth century. The neighborhood was razed in the early 1960’s to make way for Atlanta–Fulton County Stadium and its parking lots.

60 Ahavath Achim (often also called ‘AA’) was founded in 1887 as an Orthodox congregation. In 1921, the congregation constructed a synagogue at Washington Street and Woodward Avenue. In 1928, the congregation began to shift to Conservatism, which they joined in 1952. The synagogue moved to its current location on Peachtree Battle Avenue in 1958.
Israel there. Everything was on Washington Street—whatever Jewish thing you needed. Even the [Jewish Educational] Alliance was on Capital Avenue, which was on the next block. That was right after the war for the next five or six years.

Then came . . . in German you say, “der Drang nach den Osten,” [German: the urge to the east] the urge to the east. In this case, it was the northeast. The Jewish population started to move northeast to Johnson Road and Lenox Road. Wildwood was then the new section. In the meantime, we had bought what was a smaller house of Boulevard. Boulevard also was a Jewish section at that time. After I was married about five years, when I was pregnant, we decided . . . My in-laws lived with us at that time, too. My in-laws lived with us for 27 years until my father-in-law was not able to and had to go to the Jewish Home.

We bought a house then off of . . . After we bought the house on Seal Place, we lived there for four years. That was off of Boulevard. Then when I was pregnant with Elizabeth, we moved. We bought this house off of Briarcliff Road, near Emory [University]. Incidentally, that was the street that Mr. Candor had a whole big lot. Mr. Candor had bought [the lot] to build the AA synagogue—this street where I now live. Then the board decided they wanted to buy a lot further out, so he subdivided this lot where we now live and sold it for houses.

I remember when we bought it and moved here, everybody says, “My G-d, you’re moving so far out! You won’t be able to be visited by . . . ” and all this. Now, where I live is practically downtown compared to my daughter. When my daughter bought a house in Cobb

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61 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 1960’s, 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.

62 The Jewish Educational Alliance (JEA) operated from 1910 to 1948 on the site where the Atlanta-Fulton County Stadium was located. The JEA was once the hub of Jewish life in Atlanta. Families congregated there for social, educational, sports and cultural programs. The JEA ran camps and held classes to help some new residents learn to read and write English. For newcomers, it became a refuge, with programs to help them acclimate to a new home. The JEA stayed at that site until the late 1940’s, when it evolved into the Atlanta Jewish Community Center and moved to Peachtree Street. It stayed there until 1998, when the building was sold and the center moved to Dunwoody. In 2000, it was renamed the ‘Marcus Jewish Community Center of Atlanta.’

63 Wildwood is a neighborhood in Atlanta’s Buckhead area, just north of Downtown. The neighborhood was originally developed in the 1930’s. It is bordered to the west by Interstate-75.

64 The Jewish Home is a nursing home in Atlanta providing short and long-term dementia, Alzheimer’s, and nursing care. Formerly the Jewish Home, it first opened in 1951. 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.

65 Emory University is a private university in northeast Atlanta.

66 Helen and her husband lived about 5 miles northeast of downtown Atlanta, in the Morningside—Lenox Park neighborhood of Atlanta, on a street of homes built in 1953. The street is close to Herbert Taylor Park, named for Mr. Taylor, who donated 28 acres of land to the city in the 1970’s.
County and somebody asked my husband, “Where does Elizabeth and Bobby live?” he said, “In south Chattanooga.” Now I read just recently in the paper that Atlanta’s coming closer and closer to south Chattanooga, so he was right. Anyhow, we lived, and I still live in the same house. We’ve been living in this house now 39 years. It is a dead-end street with 18 houses. When we moved here, there were 17 Jewish families on this street and one non-Jewish woman with her son. She called herself the “DG,” the “displaced goyim.” But she fit in beautifully. We loved her dearly. The interesting thing is everyone had children and was a family unit. We had 27 kids on the street. Due to the fact it was a dead-end street, everybody played on the street. Everybody had a friend their age and they are still friendly with them. It was a wonderful way of bringing up children. One-third of the children went to the Hebrew Academy. The others went to public schools. Now, on our street there are about seven of the original owners still there—with no children of course, only grandchildren. There’s one single solitary child on this whole street. There are two gay couples, and several divorcees, and widows. I think it’s a microcosm of how Atlanta has changed. Halloween is coming up and nobody will knock on the door except for little Nicholas. We couldn’t have enough candy before!

Sandra: Can you remember the names of those 17 families?

Helen: Yes. I think so. There were: the Linklers that are still there; the Sanders who are still there; the Spiegels who are still there; the Joels who are still there . . . Then there are new people . . . Then there were the Sopersteins, and the Sankers, and the Frankels, and Hoffman, and Wallenstein, and [Ondrej] Steiner—who incidentally built the AA [synagogue], he was an architect; and Fred and Sylvia Hirsh—he comes from the same town as my husband did; and the Alperins—they are still living there; and the Kraars. Mr. Weiss, who lived on our street came from Austria. The Hoffmans and the Steiners came from Czechoslovakia. The Sanders came from Austria. We had a very international street.

67 Marietta is the county seat of Cobb County, Georgia, United States, and approximately 18 miles (29 kilometers) northwest of Atlanta. Chattanooga is a city in the southeastern part of the American state of Tennessee. It is approximately 193 kilometers (120 miles) northwest of Atlanta, Georgia.
68 Goy [plural: Goyim] is a Yiddish term meaning “people” or “nation.” In common usage, it designates a non-Jewish or Gentile person.
69 The Katherine and Jacob Greenfield Hebrew Academy was the first Jewish day school in Atlanta, and was founded in 1953. As of mid-2014 the Greenfield Hebrew Academy (grades pre-K through 8) and Yeshiva High School (grades 9-12) merged into one college preparatory day school now called the Atlanta Jewish Academy.
70 Ondrej (also known as Endre, Andre, or Andrew) Steiner (1908–2009) was a Czechoslovak-American architect. He was a Holocaust survivor who later immigrated to the United States and settled in Atlanta, Georgia. In Atlanta, Steiner established himself as a well-known architect, designing everything from houses to the Ahavath Achim Synagogue. His testimony is available from the Breman archive.
Sandra: Are most of those people still in the Atlanta area, whether they are on this street or not?

Helen: Yes. Some of them have died in the meantime.

Sandra: After Beth El disintegrated, what congregation . . .

Helen: We joined Shearith Israel because we had a Hebrew school together with them. I swore to myself at that time . . . I was so disappointed that we couldn’t make a go of the synagogue. There was so much love and idealism that went into this that I swore to myself that, “I am going to join the synagogue. I’m just going to become a member and nobody’s going to say, ‘Boo.’ Nobody’s going to see me and I’m going to melt into the woodwork.” I really tried this for a whole year and I didn’t succeed too well. They pulled me out of the woodwork and I got sort of active in the sisterhood again.

Then about eleven years ago, we had a very fantastic rabbi — very social-minded rabbi — by the name of Mark Wilson — a very dear man. He sat on the board of all the clergyman. He heard always what the churches did for the homeless and for the poor. He said he always had a rather funny feeling about that he had nothing to offer from the Jewish side. Then eleven years ago [in 1983] we had a horrible winter. They had three homeless people who froze to death. He decided that it was really time that the Jewish community does take part in this responsibility, to fight this inhumane condition that people had to freeze on the street. He came to the congregation and proposed that we should use Ignite, our education building, in the winter for a shelter for homeless women. We weren’t equipped to house couples. We were only going to have one bedroom. The synagogue was at least at first a little aghast because it had never been done anywhere, in any synagogue anywhere in the United States. Then we decided to go along. We thought it was the right thing to do. Rabbi Wilson was always kidding me about being a yekke. Yekkes are organizers. Yekkes like to boss, he used to say. Knowing how bad it can be not to have a home, he thought I would be the right person to head it along with another woman by the name of Sarah Blum. So we did. Thinking we were going to do that for a year or two. It is now our eleventh year. I am still co-director of this shelter.73

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71 Rabbi Marc Wilson is a retired rabbi, community activist, and syndicated writer living in Greenville, South Carolina. He became rabbi for Shearith Israel in 1975.
72 A yekke [Yiddish; also Jecke] is a Jew of German-speaking origin. The term carries the connotation that German Jews are notable for attention to detail and punctuality, but is vernacularly used to imply a bossy woman.
73 Rebecca’s Tent is a homeless shelter housed in Congregation Shearith Israel in Atlanta, Georgia that provides hot meals and beds to women during winter months.
It has been a very rewarding and a very much-needed undertaking. We’ve enjoyed the support of a great deal of the Jewish community and the non-Jewish one. I’ve worked with several churches. The one thing that I find, which makes it very interesting to me is that, I have of all of a sudden, in working with a lot of non-Jews in a very direct face-to-face way, I really think this shelter and the Temple church (who does the same thing—they also work with churches), it does more for brotherhood than the combined brotherhood affairs that they have all over the city where only the clergymen talk to the other clergymen. But the really down to earth people—the membership—doesn’t get exposed to the Jews and the Jews don’t get exposed to the Christians. This way, they work in the shelter, they plan with us, and they find out that we all are the same people and we all have the same concern. I think it’s done a lot of good things for the city of Atlanta.

**Sandra:** In your neighborhood . . . if I can go back just a little bit because I know they want to make you identify by name . . . We have the last names of the people who lived on your street. Is it possible to remember . . .

**Helen:** Okay. Alright, I’ll go by the houses so that I can remember that. Bill and Lena Linkwald. Arthur and Herta Sanders. Frank and Helen Spiegel. Rita and Bob Joel. Rose and Lewis Soperstein. Louie and Becky Sanka. The Frank’s first names I don’t remember. Lou and Joan Hoffman. I don’t remember the Wallenstein’s—I think her name was Betty. Sylvia and Fred Hirsch. Andre and Gladys Steiner. Joe and Helen Alperin. Abe and Sarah Kraar. Becky and . . . I don’t know Mr. Weiss’ first name, but they’re both dead. The Friedman’s lived there, too. They’re from Lithonia. They got divorced. I’ve forgotten now what their first names were.

**Sandra:** Now you have children. Can you tell us about them?

**Helen:** I would be delighted. Which mother isn’t?

I have a daughter who married [a man from] an old, old Atlanta [family]. She married Bobby Goldstein, who is Abe Goldstein’s grandson.74 Mr. Abe I think was known as “Mr. Jewish Atlanta.” He’s the one who really was instrumental in the Jewish Home, the Jewish Federation,

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74 Abe Goldstein (1989-1982) was a business and Jewish community leader. He was active in Ahavath Achim and Israel Bonds, the Anti-Defamation League, the Atlanta Jewish Welfare Federation and many other community causes. He founded Prior Tire Company in 1920 and remained active in the business throughout his life. He also served as a member of the Georgia Governors staff under three different administrations. In 1966, the Anti-Defamation League Southeast Region began awarding the Abe Goldstein Human Relations Award to honor community involvement.
the ADL—in fact, they still hold this Abe Goldstein dinner in his honor. He really was enormously involved in the Jewish community. She is . . .

Sandra: Her name is?

Helen: Her name is Elizabeth Spiegel Goldstein. On her mother-in-law’s side is the Cohen family: Gerald Cohen, whose been very active, Rae Alice Cohen . . . Considering that we came without any family . . . when she married into this family, I was told that by now I’m related to one-fourth of Atlanta. Now I got in this habit where I walk to the grocery store and I smile at everybody. G-d forbid I forget a relative! It was very overwhelming for her for a while, but she got into the swing very nicely . . . Elizabeth has two children: a boy and a girl. She teaches full time in Marietta. This year, this summer we had a bat mitzvah. We went with eight families to Israel. Sherri had her bat mitzvah with three of her cousins and nine other kids. It was really a wonderful occasion because all of a sudden I had a bus full of relatives.

Sandra: What is your grandson’s name?

Helen: Adam. Adam and Sherri belong to Elizabeth and Bobby.

I have a middle son. He’s 39 years old. He’s not married. He’s a stockbroker. He’s dating right now a lovely girl. I’m keeping fingers and toes crossed.

Sandra: What is his name?

Helen: His name is Mark Spiegel. He’s right now very much into . . . He’s got a lot of publicity and business too incidentally . . . His specialty is Israeli stocks and bonds. He’s gotten into this . . . Israeli technology is very much advanced. They are now selling their stocks and bonds all over. He’s a portfolio manager for them. He travels all over. Right now he’s in Texas speaking on this. People are very much interested in wanting to invest, doing something tangible for Israel.

My youngest son is married. He’s a lawyer. He lives in Washington, D.C. He works for an Atlanta firm. He works for Kilpatrick and Cody. He has two children.

Sandra: What is name?

Helen: His name is Walter and his wife’s name is Sharon. She comes from Ohio. They have two children: Jeremy and a little baby girl, Shira.

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75 Milton W. Candler and William S. Thomson founded the law firm in Atlanta, Georgia that would become Kilpatrick & Cody in 1874. The firm became in-house counsel for the Coca-Cola Company, and as early as 1893 secured federal registration of the Coca-Cola trademark. After two mergers in the 1997 and again in 2011, the firm is now part of Kilpatrick Townsend & Stockton, an international law firm headquartered in Atlanta, Georgia.
So that makes the family.

**Sandra:** If we could go back. I know you’ve spoken about Hadassah, which is very dear to your heart. Some of the other organizations in Atlanta around the time that you moved here: what do you remember about them?

**Helen:** Sure. I joined many of them. I was very much attracted to—I never worked for them but I joined them almost immediately—the National Council of Jewish Women due to the fact that they had this program of resettling [refugees]. I did help Hannah Wiestein—now her name is Antel—who started that program to resettle refugees. That was right after the war when they came out of DP camps and out of Europe. I helped with that. I used to take people to the doctor. They couldn’t speak English. Most of them spoke some German because they were in concentration camps or they were in DP camps in Germany, or else they spoke Yiddish. If I turned around my German, it came out sort of like Yiddish so we could understand each other. I did that.

I also belonged to B’nai B’rith Women. I joined ORT. I never did anything for ORT except pay my dues. I feel whatever each organization does with the dues is also a worthwhile program. I also used to belong to Brandeis. I belonged to the American Jewish Committee. I’m actively involved with ADL. Then I’ve always done jobs for the Federation. I had chairmanships and things like that.

**Sandra:** Which committees?

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76 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.

77 B’nai B’rith Women was founded in San Francisco, California in 1909. It was originally a social organization designed to attract young, single adult members with parties, picnics and dances. As women emerged into the public sphere it expanded into cultural activities, philanthropy and community service. Their announced aims are to perpetuate Jewish culture, enrich their communities and ensure the religious survival of their sons and daughters.

78 World ORT is a worldwide charity whose aim is to work for the advancement of Jewish and non-Jewish people through training and education. Active in over 100 countries, World ORT is the world’s largest Jewish education and vocational training NGO (Non-Governmental Organization). The Atlanta ORT chapter was founded in 1970 by Rabbi Harry H. Epstein.

79 Brandeis University National Women’s Committee, Atlanta Chapter was founded in 1949 with Leah Janis elected as its first president. Brandeis University National Women’s Committee chapters raises funds in support of the University Library and promotes interest in Brandeis University—a private, nonsectarian research university founded by the Jewish community in 1948 in Waltham, Massachusetts.

80 The American Jewish Committee (AJC) was founded in 1906 to safeguard the welfare and security of Jews worldwide. It is one of the oldest Jewish advocacy organizations in the United States.

81 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).
Helen: Usually it was some of the education and the fundraising committees. In fact, one year, I was involved with writing . . . We were writing . . .

<End Tape 1, Side 2>

<Begin Tape 2, Side 1>

Helen: The last big thing I did is we wrote this prospectus for the Federation. We had Monica Kaufman and another guy narrate it with music and everything else. It was the first time I’ve ever seen anything I wrote on television. It was very interesting. They used it for several years until they have added so many new projects and new buildings that it is now obsolete. But it was very thrilling to see it on television and see my name underneath. I was proud of this.

Sandra: This prospectus was about?

Helen: Federation work and projects.

Sandra: That was about what year?

Helen: About eight or ten years ago.

Sandra: 1983?

Helen: The early 1980’s, yes. They used it for several years.

Sandra: In the Federation, what other things have you done?

Helen: I helped with workshops when we used to have these mini conferences in Unicoi [State Park]. I was active with that. I used to go for many years. Now when I look around most of the people are under 45. I really feel like I’ve done my duty and I’m out of place. I’m glad to see others carrying on the work. That’s really the main thing that you want—that whatever you started continues, and it grows, and it prospers. I think that the Federation does now. They have marvelous paid help now. I know when I sometimes now go to meetings—I sit on a committee called People Power—one of the women came in who is helping, she’s a market manager. She said, “You have to market you product and you have to this and this.” It’s like a new, different language and a different thing. We used to say, “We’ll go, and we’ll call, and we’ll do this, and we’ll write letters . . .” To see projects now being marketed and validated and all this is something very strange. I think it’s for the young ones to do.

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82 Monica Kaufman Pearson (b. 1948) was a television journalist and broadcaster who made history as the first African American to anchor one of the local newscasts in Atlanta, Georgia. She is well known for her occasional TV specials, which often feature in-depth interviews with nationally known celebrities and world leaders.

83 Unicoi State Park and Lodge is in the Chattahoochee National Forest, near the alpine-themed village of Helen, in the northeastern portion of the state of Georgia.
Sandra: When you began working in Hadassah, by contrast, how did you contact members?

Helen: Everything was done personal, by phone, and you visited. Everybody lived within the most a half an hour apart—not even. I remember when I was chapter president, when the people moved northwest . . . past North Fulton Park. That was far away then. One of the presidents then moved there.

<interview pauses, then resumes>

Helen: The furthest I remember was when one of our presidents moved to Crest Valley Road, which was northwest, past Chastain Park. That was a long trip for us. We thought, “What’s gonna happen?” Pretty soon, people moved further and further out. Hadassah had to be geographically subdivided. People just didn’t want to come from Marietta to a meeting in the Northeast and the people in the Northeast didn’t want to go to Dunwoody and Sandy Springs for meetings. Then ORT got into the same position and I think B’nai Brith for a while had to subdivide. In a way it was good and in a way it was bad because you lost contact with people that you knew and you liked to see at meetings. You didn’t see them anymore because they wouldn’t come to your meeting and you wouldn’t go out to where they were living. It sort of ghettoized in some ways the organizations. I noticed that Hadassah and B’nai Brith and some of the others are trying now again to have a few overall meetings where everybody gets together and sees each other. It’s very nice.

Sandra: Hadassah divided into how many groups?

Helen: At one point, we were eleven chapters. Then we went down to seven chapters. Now we are four chapters. The other thing is that now all the organizations have night groups because people are working in the daytime. You have to have one group for the people who don’t like to travel at night and don’t work and you have to have some for the night groups. That’s what now all the organizations are doing. Otherwise you don’t ever see your members.

Sandra: This has been a way that at least the Jewish women’s organizations have changed?

Helen: Right. I am sure it’s not only the Jewish women. I’m sure it’s the non-Jewish women too. I noticed that many of the churches also have meetings at night because also their members are working too. The age group of my daughter who is in their late 30’s or early 40’s—

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84 Chastain Memorial Park (originally known as the North Fulton Park, commonly known as Chastain Park) is the largest city park in Atlanta, Georgia. It is a 268-acre (1.08 km²) park near the northern edge of the city. Included in the park are jogging paths, playgrounds, tennis courts, a golf course, swimming pool, horse park and amphitheater.
I would say that three-quarters of her friends are working. They live in very nice fancy houses, they have hardly any help, but they are working.

Sandra: At the time when you were raising your children . . .

Helen: None of my friends were working. No, very . . . I had one or two [friends] work in their husband’s businesses but the average woman wasn’t working. Not that it was a disgrace or anything. It just wasn’t done. Neither would there be openings for the women like there are now. I mean, if you worked as a woman, you worked as a teacher, a nurse, or in the office.

Sandra: Not in the professions?

Helen: Not in the professions, no. I mean, there were a few, but I think the only professional lawyer I knew was this Mrs. Kingloff, who just got married at the age of 80. She was a lawyer. She said she was the first woman lawyer in Atlanta.

Sandra: Were you here at the time of the Anti-Defamation League forming?

Helen: No, the ADL was already formed. That was during the time of the [Leo] Frank case. No, that was before my time. But I did know Mrs. Frank, the widow of this man. In fact, she was a friend of my mother[-in-law]’s best friend. In fact, I picked up my mother[-in-law] one time at a party of Mrs. Shwartzman. I met this Mrs. Frank and I talked to her. She was very nice. I said afterwards to someone, “She’s such a sad looking woman.” Somebody said to me, “If you would have gone through what she went through, you would be sad looking too.” That’s the first time I really had contact with this tragedy.

Sandra: That was about what time?

Helen: That was about 30 years ago that I met her.

Sandra: That was considerably after . . .

Helen: Yes. She was an old lady at that time. I remember she had an aura of sadness around her.

Sandra: That was the first time you had heard about that?

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85 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 lead a campaign to save him from execution. Historians believe that much of her work lead 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. She never remarried after his death.
Helen: I had heard about it because, when I was living in Galveston, this Rabbi [Henry] Cohen, who was a revered person—he had been very instrumental in this Frank case . . .

Sandra: That was Henry Cohen.

Helen: That was Rabbi Henry Cohen. There was a book out about him. There was this whole chapter about him and how upset he was that this should happen in America to a Jewish person. That’s how I knew about it. At that time, I had no idea I would ever wind up in Atlanta or meet the widow of this man who was hanged.

Sandra: You spoke about your street as being a microcosm of different origins. In the city of Atlanta as a whole, what were some of the origins of the community in the Jewish community?

Helen: I think the main components of the Jewish community were the Russian and the Polish Jews—from that background. Then you had the Temple, which was the German Jewish community. Then you all of a sudden had the new German Jewish community coming in during Hitler’s time, which was made out of Germans, Austrians, and then later on Czechs and Hungarians. Then you had again, now the last few years, the Russians. It’s sort of an evolution and repetition from past to present.

Sandra: How did those early groups mingle and get along, or did they?

Helen: From what I understand, until Hitler, the Polish and Russian community and the Spanish and the Germans didn’t intermingle at all. From what I hear, they had a very bad . . . practically a caste system. The Germans were on top, the Russians in the middle, and the Spanish at that time on the bottom—which is a very ironic thing because in Europe for a long time, the Spanish Jews were the elite. Then when Hitler came and all the trouble with the Jews came—they had to be helped, the German Jewish populations realized that they couldn’t swing this by themselves. This was really a matter for all Jewish communities. That started to band all the communities together. Of course, Hitler’s march all over Europe—in Spain and Greece and

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86 Rabbi Henry Cohen (1863—1952) was a British-American rabbi, scholar, community activist and writer who served most of his career at Congregation B’nai Israel in Galveston, Texas, from 1888 to 1949.

87 As a neutral country during World War II, Spain was a refuge to thousands of Jews fleeing Europe in the 1930’s. By 1940, however, Spain began tightening its restrictions on immigration, issuing far fewer visas and detaining refugees caught crossing the border illegally before returning them to German-Occupied France until the Allies began pressuring Spain to allow more refugees to enter the country as long as someone else would provide for their care and help the refugees leave the country as soon as possible. The Joint Distribution Committee mainly provided for the refugees. Between the summer of 1942 and the fall of 1944, some 7,500 Jews fled to Spain and were given temporary refuge. Nonetheless, in January 1943, when the German embassy in Spain told the Spanish government...
the Isle of Rhodes—brought in the Spanish Jews, too. Then it became a Jewish matter, a Jewish affair to help and to do. The barriers of where you came from fell and they had a lot of [so-called] “intermarriages” [between different Jews] at that point and that was before the other intermarriages [between Jews and non-Jews] appeared. This was the picture at that time.

**Sandra:** Through what means did these groups work together?

**Helen:** They got together for bombarding the government, and collecting money, and lobbying for bills, and all this. It became a community concern. Israel became a concern, too.

**Sandra:** Do you remember any particular people who prominent in that movement? Were there any Jewish women who were prominent?

**Helen:** Yes. For example, in the early settlement for the German-Jewish refugees was Mrs. Josephine Heiman, who just recently died, and a Mrs. Josephine Shulherfer . . . was very instrumental in that. In the Federation, there was a Mr. [Edward] Kahn—[Edward] Kahn—[Edward] Kahn—[Edward] Kahn—[Edward] Kahn—the that was before Mr. Geringer came—who was very instrumental in helping [people] like my husband—young people—settle in Atlanta and help them. For the Zionist causes, Ida Levitas was a big spear-carrier, so to speak, locally. [She was] decisive, loud, but she got things done. I think each organization had usually one spokeswoman or spokesman who brought their concerns to the public. Then the Jewish paper was a great help, too. It wasn’t a very good paper, but at least you could read what was going on in the Jewish community and also where you could maybe put your talents to work.

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that it had two months to remove all of its Jewish citizens from Western Europe, Spain failed to act in time to save some 4,000 Spanish Jews living in German-occupied areas.

88 The Germans defeated the Greek army in the spring of 1941 and occupied Greece until October 1944. Even though deportations did not start until March 1943, Greece lost at least 81 percent of its Jewish population during the Holocaust. Between 60,000 and 70,000 Greek Jews perished, most of them at Auschwitz-Birkenau.

89 Rhodes is a Greek island in the Aegean Sea, off the southwest coast of Turkey. It is the largest island of the Dodecanese archipelago and serves as the capital of the Greek Islands. Although Rhodes was part of Italy during World War II, the 2,000 Jews on the Island were relatively safe until Germans occupied the island in September 1943. On July 20, 1944, the Jews of Rhodes and the neighboring island of Kos were sent by boat to the Greek mainland and eventually deported by train to Auschwitz-Birkenau. Only 151 Jews from Rhodes survived the Holocaust.

90 Edward M. Kahn (1895-1984) was an immigrant from Bialystok, Poland. He became a leader in Atlanta’s Jewish community and served as executive director of several organizations including the Jewish Educational Alliance (presently: Atlanta Jewish Community Center), the Atlanta Jewish Welfare Fund, and the Atlanta Federation of Jewish Social Service (presently: Atlanta Jewish Federation of Greater Atlanta), an earlier incarnation of the current Jewish Federation of Greater Atlanta and the Morris Hirsch Clinic (presently: Ben Massell Dental Clinic). Mr. Kahn also became Executive Secretary of the Atlanta Jewish Welfare Fund and of the Atlanta Jewish Community Council. He held these various positions until his retirement in 1964. Kahn was prominent in both local and national social work organizations as well as in Jewish organizations such as B’nai B’rith, the Jewish Children’s Bureau, the Jewish Home and the Atlanta Bureau of Jewish Education. He also worked with Southern Israelite as a writer and adviser.
Sandra: At that time, the Jewish paper was called what?
Helen: The *Southern Israelite*.91
Sandra: Do you remember who the editor was?
Helen: Yes, Mr. Adolf Rosenberg.92 Then, *Meyer Goldberg* took over for him. In between there were others. It was always a very good instrument in the Jewish community that helped you find your way around—if you wanted to find you way around. I think that we probably have 30,000 or more Jews that you would never even hear of or see. Mr. Geringer at one point had a wonderful word for them—submarines—because they were submerged and didn’t want to be found. I remember making calls for the Federation and for *Hadassah*. For a while, we wanted to get new members. We looked for Jewish names [in the phone book]. There were enormous amounts of Jewish names that were not affiliated or in any indexes of any [Jewish] organizations.
Sandra: This was in the phone book?
Helen: We took them out of the phone book at that time. We cross-indexed them. It was an enormous amount of work. This was before computers. We would call them up and they would say, “Oh, we have a Jewish name,” or, “My husband is Jewish,” or, “We’re not Jewish anymore,” or, “We’re not affiliated with anything,” or, “We don’t go to any churches.” They were lost by the wayside and there was nothing you could do with them. There are lots and lots of them here.
Sandra: I know that you came from Boston to the South. Do you remember a point at which there was perhaps a greater movement into Atlanta from others places—maybe north or west?
Helen: Yes, I think I noticed a lot more people about 8 or 10 years ago. You started to have a larger influx of [Jewish people and] a lot of elderly people too, who came to be with their

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91 The *Southern Israelite* was a publication that covered news of southern Jewry and issues that involved Jewish populations throughout the nation and world. Rabbi H. Cerf Strauss originally established the *Southern Israelite* as a temple bulletin in Augusta in 1925. It became so popular he expanded it into a monthly newspaper. Strauss eventually sold the paper to Herman Dressauer and Sara B. Simmons, who moved it to Atlanta, where it began circulating statewide and eventually throughout the South. Even in these earliest years, the paper not only covered the news of the southern Jewry, but also the issues that involved Jewish populations throughout the nation and world, including the Holocaust and later the creation of the Jewish state of Israel. In 1987, its name changed from *Southern Israelite* to the *Atlanta Jewish Times*. Today the paper is owned by Michael Morris and continues as a weekly publication with a distribution of 15,000 copies per week. (2018)

92 Georgia native Adolph Rosenberg (1912—1977) was a journalist, most recognized for his work as editor of the *Southern Israelite*, to whom ownership of the paper was transferred in 1951.
kids and wanted to get away from . . . [They came to Atlanta because] a, the climate and b, we were at that time more or less crime free. They came here because the thought it was an easier and a safer way of life. The climate is still the same. The crime is debatable.

Sandra: At the time that you moved to Atlanta, you said that your husband travelled. What was the transportation situation? How did people get around the city?

Helen: Without a car, you were always lost in Atlanta. Even with MARTA, you still are lost.\(^93\) That’s another reason why a lot of the older people are getting lost in the shuffle in Atlanta because they don’t like to drive, they don’t drive, or they don’t have cars. To get to anything in this town, you’ve got to have a car or you’ve got to have a good transportation system, which we don’t have. Even if you want to go [somewhere] with MARTA, in many places, you’ve got to get with a car to MARTA. It doesn’t really help you if you don’t have a car. If you don’t have a car, MARTA doesn’t help you that much either. It helps you from having to go a long distance to town or something like this, but to get to it you still need a taxi or car. These people are lost to us because most of the meeting places are off the beaten track. They’re not exactly on the MARTA line anyhow. Without a car, you can’t . . . The city has spread in every direction. There is no such thing as a Jewish center anymore. I mean, like a Washington Street and Pulliam [Street] and Capital [Avenue] used to be or Johnson Road and the Lennox [Road] corridor used to be. Jews are everywhere from Snellville to Jonesboro.\(^94\)

Sandra: By contrast, when you moved here . . .

Helen: Everybody lived more or less within a radius of half an hour at the most. Neither was traffic that bad, nor did you have an expressway, so everything was on the service roads. It was just easier to get together.

Sandra: In the area that you lived—you were talking about Washington Street . . .

Helen: That was only the first few years.

Sandra: Yes. Can you describe that area a little?

\(^93\) MARTA is the common term for the Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority, which was created in 1965. During the 1970’s, MARTA began acquiring land in and around the city of Atlanta, Georgia for construction of a rapid rail system. Today, MARTA operates a rail system with feeder bus operation and park-and-ride facilities throughout the metropolitan Atlanta area.

\(^94\) Snellville is a city in Gwinnett County, Georgia, United States, east of Atlanta. Jonesboro is a city in Clayton County, Georgia, United States, south of Atlanta.
Helen: Now that I look back on it, I guess you could describe it as a shtetl. Even so, you didn’t have the very Orthodox Jews. Now, when you walk on Lavista [Road] on a Shabbas morning, it really makes you think of New York [City] because you have people . . . You see very few with a shtreimel and a black kaften but you see them walking in masses along Lavista—no cars. That now I would think is the center of the Orthodox [community]—this Lavista section. Of course, you also have the two kosher butcher stores there, which are an anchor to the Jewish community. But the young ones that are not Orthodox are in all directions of the city.

Sandra: By contrast, where you first lived, how was that?

Helen: You lived there but you knew it wasn’t . . . when I came already, it was something that you were going to get away from because it was depreciating . . . the houses were getting very old and decrepit. It wasn’t a nice neighborhood anymore, as it had been 20 years before. The younger people all wanted to get away from there. Even the synagogues were getting away from there. The minute you move your synagogues, you move your population, you move your congregant. Shearith Israel at that time was Orthodox. That was before Beth Jacob. You knew that those people wanted to live where they could walk. If the synagogue moved northeast, you knew darn well that the congregants were going to move northeast too. That’s what happened.

Sandra: This was an area around Grant Park?

Helen: No. It was, as I said, where now the stadium is.

Sandra: The Atlanta-Fulton County Stadium.

Helen: Yes. It’s near the [Georgia State] Capitol area.

Sandra: How about politics? We haven’t talked about politics.

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95 The Yiddish term for town, ‘shtetl’ commonly refers to small towns or villages in pre–World War II Eastern and Central Europe with a significant Jewish presence that were primarily Yiddish speaking.
96 A shtreimel is a fur hat worn by many married Orthodox Jewish men, particularly (although not exclusively) members of Hasidic groups, on Shabbat and Jewish holidays and other festive occasions.
97 A kaften [Yiddish] is a long overcoat, usually made of a shiny, silky cloth that is worn by Orthodox Jewish men—particularly (although not exclusively) members of Hasidic groups. It is worn on Jewish holidays—mainly on Shabbat—and other festive occasions.
98 Beth Jacob is an Orthodox synagogue on LaVista Road in Atlanta founded in 1942 by former members of Ahavath Achim who were looking for a more Orthodox congregation. Beth Jacob is now Atlanta’s largest Orthodox congregation. The congregation first met in a rented grocery store on Parkway Drive. It moved to a permanent location on Boulevard when it purchased and renovated a two-story apartment building. In 1956, it converted the Tabernacle Baptist Church on Boulevard to a synagogue. It built its current synagogue building on a five-acre lot on LaVista Road in 1961.
99 Grant Park is a historic neighborhood of Atlanta that was formed around Grant Park, the fourth largest park in the city. It had two major attractions: Zoo Atlanta and the Atlanta Cyclorama, a cyclorama featuring the 1864 Battle of Atlanta during the Civil War.
Helen: Politics? I don’t think that the Jewish people were at that time all that involved in politics. Also, it was a strictly white politics. It was the “good ole boy” politics. It was [Herman] Talmadge and his crowd.\textsuperscript{100} The Jews didn’t really mingle in it. I think the first Jewish politicians \textit{per se} in Atlanta was [Sam] Massell\textsuperscript{101} and Sydney Marcus.\textsuperscript{102} I think those were really the first two to get active. The Jews weren’t that involved. They were involved with campaign money behind the scenes, so to speak. I remember that my son-in-law’s grandfather, Abe Goldstein was very . . . He did a lot of business with the city. He knew the city politicians. They helped their campaigns with money. Herman Talmadge had a very instrumental position in Washington by being in the agricultural committee as far as Israel was concerned so the Jewish \textit{machers} [Yiddish: important or influential person] supported Talmadge very greatly because they knew that way they could influence his vote as far as help for Israel, which was very badly needed. That’s about the extent of the great politics. Outstanding politicians you didn’t have at that time.

Sandra: Was Herman Talmadge very responsive at this time?

Helen: Yes, he was very . . . I mean, he was treated nicely, to put it nicely, so he reciprocated. He was always there for the Jewish community to see and to listen to. Of course, he was a very erratic character and you never knew what was coming, but as a whole I think he voted very pro-Israel always.

With the power structure at that time—Hartsfield and Ivan Allen—the Jewish merchants had a very good relationship. It was not . . . they weren’t very cordial. Socially they ran together. They were involved in the planning of city business. Look at Mr. Rich . . . The Rich’s Foundation was one of the most charitable and citywide foundations that did a lot of good and was very much respected.\textsuperscript{103} Then I think the Commerce Club, where all the big industrials

\textsuperscript{100} Herman Eugene Talmadge (1913-2002) was Governor of Georgia twice; once in 1947 and then from 1951 to 1955. He spent most of his public service in the United States Senate, serving from 1957 to 1981. He was a Democrat.

\textsuperscript{101} Samuel A. Massell, Jr. is a native Atlantan and former commercial real estate broker who served from 1970 to 1974 as the 53rd mayor of Atlanta, Georgia. He is the first Jewish mayor in the city’s history.

\textsuperscript{102} Sidney J. Marcus (1928—1983) was a native Atlantan and a prominent politician. Marcus was a Georgia legislator from Atlanta’s 26th district, now the 106th district, who served in the Georgia House of Representatives from 1968 until his death in 1983.

\textsuperscript{103} Morris Rich (1847-1928), was the Anglicized name of Mauritius Reich, a native of Hungary. He was the original founder of Rich’s, a department store retail chain headquartered in Atlanta that operated in the southern United States from 1867 until 2005. In 1943, the Rich Foundation was created to distribute a share of the profits of the department store. Through the years, the Foundation has been a major supporter of Atlanta’s charitable and educational life. The Foundation’s purpose is to benefit non-profit organizations in the field of arts, civic, education, health, environment and social welfare in the metropolitan Atlanta area.
belonged to . . .

They right away did take Jews in, in contrast to the people in the Piedmont Driving Club.

Sandra: Speaking of that, socially how was the mixing, or did . . .
Helen: No, there was very little mixing at that time between the Jewish and the non-Jewish. They went to their church and we went to our synagogue. They met at formal occasions and said, “How do you do?” But . . .
Sandra: Was that kind of a mutual unspoken agreement?
Helen: I don’t know whether it was mutual. I think the Jews didn’t want to push and the others didn’t open the door too far, so it was sort of a moot point.
Sandra: What was the social life like in the Jewish community?
Helen: The social life played a lot more around the clubs than it does now. People didn’t have the big houses and swimming pools that they have now. Neither did you have the restaurants like you have now. Really when you had company or you wanted fancy entertainment, you went to your private club and so did the non-Jews because there just wasn’t that much to go to here. I remember 40 years ago when my mother would come to visit in the summertime, she only drank hot tea. If you went to a restaurant and asked for hot tea and they looked at you like you were insane. She went around travelling with her tea bag and asked for hot water. Otherwise, if she asked for tea, she would get iced. Couture was not known too much in Atlanta at that time. It was not an international city by far. It was an overgrown Southern city. Even entertainment wise, you had the movies, you had a symphony that was composed out of laymen, you had no ballet group or anything else. You had wonderful performances of visiting artists. You bought a series ticket at what was then the old [Atlanta] Municipal Auditorium, which now belongs to Georgia State. That’s where you went for your concerts. It was a [unintelligible; Tape 2, Side 1, clip 2, 9:25; sounds like “bomb” or “barn”]. Or else, you had the Fox [Theatre], where you had the Metropolitan [Opera]. That was the big event of the season.

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104 The Commerce Club is a private business and social club on Peachtree Street in Downtown Atlanta, founded in 1960. In 2010, the Commerce Club merged with the One Ninety One Club and the new Commerce Club opened on the 49th floor of the 191 Tower. Since the merger, the Commerce Club is also known as the ‘191 Club.’

105 Atlanta Municipal Auditorium, originally known as the Auditorium and Armory, was an auditorium in Atlanta, Georgia, USA. It was constructed in 1909 with funds raised by a committee of Atlanta citizens and then sold to the city of Atlanta. The building was sold in 1979 to Georgia State University, which now uses the structure as their Alumni Hall.

106 The Fox Theatre is located on Peachtree Street in Midtown Atlanta. The theater was originally planned as part of
Sandra: How about the Jewish cultural life?
Helen: The Jewish cultural life . . .
Sandra: Was there a separate . . .
Helen: No, there wasn’t that much Jewish cultural life. Each synagogue had their own study groups or brought in their own speakers. The city really pulled together more when the Federation took over and handled some of the big political and cultural things. The Community Center also became more active for a while and then it sort of slumbered in again. Now I think it’s coming back.
Sandra: Was the Jewish Community Center, the JCC, already in existence when you moved here?
Helen: When I moved here, they still had the Alliance that was on Capital Avenue. That was also in that area where now the stadium is. Then they had a little center on 10th Street that belonged first to AA and then they turned it partly over to the Jewish community until they built their synagogue but it wasn’t much. Then they bought this property on Peachtree Street, which became for the whole city. That really invigorated the community.
Sandra: Were you active in that? Did a lot of people go to the [Atlanta Jewish Community] Center? Was that a big place . . .
Helen: Yes. We all belonged to it because we wanted our kids to participate in sports. In order to participate in these baseball leagues and whatever, you had to be a member of the Center. Plus, you yourself would need [membership] for exercise class, swimming, or if you went to some program that they had. Everybody I knew belonged to the Center at that time.
Sandra: This was about what period?
Helen: That was about 30 years ago, when our children were young.
Sandra: What other organizations were the children active in and what kind of activities did they do?

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107 Beginning in the early 1900’s, The Metropolitan Opera, an opera company based in New York City, made weeklong tours to Atlanta. Originally, the performances were held at the Atlanta Municipal Auditorium and then the Fox Theatre. The annual tour was a major social event that eventually outgrew the Fox and, when the Boisfeuillet Jones Atlanta Civic Center was built, moved there until the Met disbanded its touring program in 1986.
Helen: All the children belonged to ACA or BBYO. Some of the Hadassah members got their kids to join Young Judaea. That was about it. I don’t even think that the Orthodox had a youth group. Everything played in the Center. The Community Center was the center of all this.

Sandra: Since you mentioned meeting Mrs. Frank, was there any overt or non-overt discrimination?

Helen: I must be honest: I can’t say I ever encountered it in the city of Atlanta per se. Maybe it was because I tried to avoid problems. It could be that without knowing it . . . Since I didn’t push my way into the Piedmont Driving Club and neither have I made an application at the Cherokee Country Club, I couldn’t say whether I would have been turned down. I probably would have been turned down, but I stayed more or less within my circle of acceptance. I did encounter occasionally people who were very fervent Christians and tried to show me the futility of my ways [and said] that I’ll never wind up in Heaven, and I would burn forever in Hell-fire. I told them it didn’t worry me too much since I’m more concerned with what happens here than what happens afterward. They gave up. I wasn’t exactly a good project for conversion.

Otherwise, I really can’t say that I’ve ever encountered problems.

I know the kids occasionally said that they had one or two kids that rumbled about Jews having too many holidays, the Jews had too many privileges . . . but they always straightened out there stuff so it was never critical. My husband—half the people he worked with didn’t know he was Jewish. If they did, they thought he was a nice guy. One or two said, “You’re a real nice Jew.” He said, “Well, I’m a real nice person. That I am a Jew is incidental. Jews are just as nice

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108 B’nai B’rith Youth Organization (BBYO), 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.

109 Young Judaea is a peer-led Zionist youth movement founded in 1909 for Jewish youth in grades 2–12. Its programs include youth clubs, conventions, summer camps and Israel programs that provide experiential programming through which Jewish youth and young adults build meaningful relationships with their peers, emphasize social action, and develop a lifelong commitment to Jewish life, the Jewish people, and Israel.

110 The Piedmont Driving Club is a private social club near Piedmont Park in Atlanta, Georgia. It has enjoyed a reputation as one of the most prestigious private clubs in the South. The club unofficially did not allow minorities to have memberships.

111 Chartered in 1956, Cherokee Town and Country Club is one of Atlanta’s private clubs. The club has two locations: the Town Club, which occupies the famed Grant Estate on West Paces Ferry Road in Buckhead and the Country Club, which is located near the Chattahoochee River in Sandy Springs. Traditionally, the club did not have any minority members.
as Christians,” or some such thing and, “If you give us a chance, you’ll see,” or some little joke or lesson. Otherwise really, I have not had too many problems that way.

I find an enormous amount of [non-Jews are lacking] knowledge of the Holocaust. When people find out I have a German accent, [they ask] why did I come. It’s like with each one, you practically have to do an educational job. Then there’s this question of why should the Chosen people have this problem. I say, “Well, it’s because we’re chosen sometimes for the wrong purposes.” I presume it has a lot to do with the circles you are exposed to, to encounter antisemitism. Or people are too polite to express it. What goes on behind their bedroom door or their living room door, we never know, but as a whole, no.

Sandra: Was there any relationship or any communication with the black community?

Helen: None. None whatsoever for a long time. It just wasn’t socially done that you intermingled. I remember a lot of head shaking when Rabbi Rothschild’s came up with the idea of entertaining, having a dinner for Martin Luther King, Jr. after the Nobel Prize. [There were a lot of people who said,] “Why does a Jew do that? Why does a Jew have to stick his neck out?” There is a certain ghetto mentality in all of us, I think. Whether we were born in Europe or here, “don’t make any waves” is sort of ingrained in all of us.

I must admit I greatly debated with this. I hate to make noises. That comes from my childhood when I rode the streetcar to Fuerth, I was told, “Don’t talk loud. Don’t talk at all if you don’t have to. Make yourself invisible.” I think it carries over in your adult life. I get very uncomfortable at times when I read certain things in the newspaper what Jews have done bad, or what Jews have said, or Jews with a very risqué undertaking. I say, “Why does it have to be a Jew doing that?” Even so, I always felt that the black and the white situation was a horror. I don’t think I ever would have had the courage that Rabbi Rothschild did and say, “This is wrong and we must do such and such.” I have great respect for him for doing that. Of course, the bombing of the Temple followed for this respect. I know something had to be done.

I remember when I first came in the South, I was horrified about the [segregated] water fountains. The water fountain I though was an absolute horror—separate black and white. I know

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112 Rabbi Jacob Rothschild was rabbi of the city’s oldest Reform congregation, the Temple, in Atlanta, Georgia from 1946 until his death in 1973 from a heart attack. He forged close relationships with the city’s Christian clergy and distinguished himself as a charismatic spokesperson for civil rights. Rabbi Jacob Rothschild was an outspoken advocate of civil rights and integration and friend of Martin Luther King Jr.

113 Martin Luther King, Jr. (1929-1968) is best known for his role as a leader in the Civil Rights Movement and the advancement of civil rights using nonviolent civil disobedience based on his Christian beliefs. On October 14, 1964, King received the Nobel Peace Prize for combating racial inequality through nonviolence.
it took me a long time bot to look on the streets in Atlanta when I saw a black and a white couple walking with their arm around each other. I had been so ingrained [with the idea that] this isn’t done that it . . . only since about two or three years that I don’t take a second look, that it shocks me. This was just the way it was done.

**Sandra:** How do you think that the Jewish Community reacted toward integration?

**Helen:** I think they were very courageous here. After Rothschild gave the original push, I think they slowly but surely fell in line with the right thing to do. They weren’t quite as courageous a some of the northern rabbis who came here to march and all this, but I think they after a short time, they did speak up for the right thing. They weren’t in the foreground, but they did follow. Like somebody said . . . a friend of mine one time said, “If they didn’t have the blacks, they would have the Jews as scapegoats.” There was a German word for it: *prügelnjuden* [German: beating Jews]. That meant [having] somebody—a Jew—to beat up. They figured it was safe to have somebody between the others so they didn’t push that quickly to get them in line with everybody else. Everybody looks out for his own. It’s human nature.

**Sandra:** But it seems that you have reached out to a lot of people.

**Helen:** I tried, but self-protection is a great instinct.

<End Tape 2, Side 1>

<Begin Tape 2, Side 2>

**Sandra:** You have a few more additional little memories?

**Helen:** Yes, just little memories [from when we were] talking about when we had meetings. You always had to be very careful. You couldn’t say anything about anybody. There was always a cousin or a distant relative of this particular person in the room because in Atlanta forty years ago, everybody knew everybody and everybody was more or less interrelated. Now, you can talk almost about everybody and they wouldn’t even know them. To show you: we used to know everybody. The women who were presidents or active in the organizations really knew more or less everybody in the other organizations because we would meet at combined meetings or else we had this meeting we used to call the “hyena meeting.” That was when we made the community calendar. Everybody was fighting for dates and wouldn’t relinquish dates and it was a horror for a long time. But you got to know the other sides. You had a working relationship and it worked out in the long run. It also depended sometimes on the skill of the chairperson who ran it. But you knew most everybody who was anybody in the organizations, running it.
Sandra: Can you remember the names of any of them?

Helen: Yes. There was Marilyn Shubin,\textsuperscript{114} and Frances Bunzl,\textsuperscript{115} and there were the Strausses that were in the council, Mrs. [Leah] Janis,\textsuperscript{116} then Rene Briswood. Ida Levitas was very active then, too. You just knew them. About three years ago, I went to a big meeting at the Federation Women’s Committee. I was sitting next to Frances Bunzl, who had been a [National Council of Jewish women] president two years before I was a Hadassah president. We knew more or less the same people. We looked around in the room. Between the two of us, we knew everybody who was over 55, but we didn’t hardly know anybody who was under 55. We decided we really were very passé, but it was fun to see all these new young ones who are going to be active in the Jewish community. It leaves you a good feeling that the hard work everybody has done to lay the groundwork will continue hopefully in community efforts, whether it will be under the Federation or whether it will be still that all these women’s organizations or men’s organizations will continue to be functioning that remains to be seen in the future. It was interesting the changes.

Sandra: I’m curious did some of the women’s organizations particularly. Even though they had their own agendas, did they ever come together?

Helen: Yes. We tried to already after about 20 years ago that we decided that even though we had our own agendas, we all were working for the Jewish people and we ought to get together once in a while without competition, to talk to each other. Also to compare notes. That’s why this community Women’s Federation Council was formed: to be an outlet for the presidents of the different organizations to get together. It was a very good idea.

Sandra: Was there anything jointly they sponsored?

Helen: Yes, they had several . . . then the last few years they had several programs: outstanding women speakers or forums, which was open then to the public as well. Then they started this Women of Achievement program where they honored the different women of the different organizations, regardless of what the organization was, as long as it was a recognized

\textsuperscript{114} Marilyn Shubin is originally from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. She lived in Cleveland, Ohio for 10 years prior to settling in Atlanta. She was active in the National Council of Jewish Women in both Cleveland and later Atlanta. She was also active in the Atlanta Jewish Federation and chaired the 1978 welfare campaign.

\textsuperscript{115} Frances Bertha Hamburger Bunzl (1920--) was originally from Wiesbaden, Germany, but immigrated with her family to the United States at the beginning of World War II and eventually settled in Georgia. Frances was active in Atlanta’s Jewish community, serving on the National Council of Jewish Women and the Temple Sisterhood. Her testimony is available from the Breman archive.

\textsuperscript{116} Leah Janis was active in Atlanta’s Jewish community and was the first president of the Atlanta chapter of Brandeis University National Women's Committee, founded in 1949.
Jewish community organization, which is very nice. That way, if you came to honor the Hadassah person, they were there to honor the ORT person, or the other one. It makes it a community affair. I think it’s a very good idea.

Sandra: What do you see for the future for the Jewish community or organization work?

Helen: I am in some ways not too optimistic because I feel that life for the Jewish young woman is much harder than it was for us because 80 percent of them area working, they have children, the children have enormous amounts of activities that keep the mothers busy after they come [home] from work, people live very far from each other, and the women are tired. They may not be able to shoulder the responsibilities of running organizations unless they are going to have paid employees running these organizations and they just come to partake in the programs, which wouldn’t be so bad either and support it financially. Otherwise, you’re going to find out that maybe you have one overall project, federation or organization that divides the money that comes into your organization and does all the arranging of all programs, and all dinners, and everything else that you really can only be a partaker of entertainment so to speak and not a participant of work.

Sandra: I’d like to go back to the four years you spent in Galveston. Can you remember any of the people you came in contact with? Where you a member of Dr. Cohen’s congregation at B’Nai Israel?¹¹⁷

Helen: Yes, I was a member of that congregation. I worked as a secretary, I taught in the Sunday school. I worked for Mr. Isakson. I kept the books for the congregant and sent out the bills. I had girlfriends from the other [synagogue]. They had an Orthodox synagogue, Beth Jacob.¹¹⁸ [Rabbi Louis] Feigon was the rabbi there.¹¹⁹ My best girlfriend was named Elaine Farb. She belonged to that synagogue. Sometimes, since I didn’t have any parents [in town] and the people I lived with were not Jewish, I would go sometimes, on certain holidays with her to her synagogue, the Orthodox synagogue.

Talking about discrimination: I remember during the war, Rabbi Cohen was the first man who dared to sleep a black Jewish soldier in his house. The congregation was worried to death

¹¹⁷ Congregation B’nai Israel is a Jewish synagogue located in Galveston in the American state of Texas. Founded by German Jewish immigrants in 1868, it is the oldest Jewish Reform congregation in the state. Beginning in 1888, Rabbi Henry Cohen led the congregation for more than five decades, through periods of rapid immigration of Jews from Eastern Europe and two world wars.

¹¹⁸ Congregation Beth Jacob was chartered in 1931. Congregation Beth Jacob is a Conservative Jewish synagogue located in Galveston, Texas.

¹¹⁹ Rabbi Louis Feigon, (1904-1987) was the rabbi at Beth Jacob from 1930 until 1960.
that somebody was going to bomb his house or hurt him. He had such enormous respect in the city that he was the only man who really got away, so to speak, with murder. I mean, it was a criminal activity to have a black man sleeping in your house as a guest, but he did it. It was accepted at that time.

Galveston was a very lively town. It had a very nice Jewish community with lots of young people at that time. It was a center of lots of Armed Services because it was on the Gulf [of Mexico, which opens to the Atlantic Ocean]. They invited Jewish soldiers for holiday meals and to synagogue. They were very busy. It had so many military installations then. They had a USO.120 The girls would go to the USO dances and look for the Jewish boys. Usually the Jewish boys found the Jewish girls. It was same kind of a magnet. I had a very nice time.

Sandra: That was also a port of entry for immigrants.

Helen: But not during the war. That was before that. That port had closed completely

This Rabbi Cohen had been very instrumental in bringing the Jewish people in after the pogroms in Russia in 1918.121 He brought several boatloads of refugees and settled them all over Texas. He went to Washington. He was a little bitsy man. He wasn’t more than five feet ten [inches], if he was that. He was very bent over, and stooped, and really had this very typical Jewish nose. He was a very unassuming, very ugly man. He looked always terribly disreputable [with] crumpled clothes. He wrote notes on his cuffs. The cuffs were always full of scribbled notes, which he would look at. But he was a brilliant man and a very good man. [He was] very much loved. His wife, Miss Mollie, would always go after him, straightening out.122 He would go like a whirlwind through the synagogue, everything flew all away. He was quite a man.

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120 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 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.

121 The Galveston Movement, also known as the Galveston Plan, was a U.S. immigration assistance program operated by several Jewish organizations between 1907 and 1914. An American banker named Jacob H. Schiff and Rabbi Henry Cohen were major leaders in the movement. The program worked to divert Jewish immigrants, fleeing Russia and Eastern Europe, away from East Coast cities, particularly New York, where the large influx of immigrants was met with little opportunity and growing anti-Semitic sentiments. The goal was to distribute immigrants over other parts of the United States, where they would have more opportunities. Galveston was chosen as the most available port of entrance and a Jewish Immigrants’ Information Bureau was established there.

122 Mollie Levy (1862—1951) was from Galveston, Texas. She married Henry Cohen in 1889 and they had two children.
They had several Jewish males in Galveston. Last year when I was in Galveston, they had another Jewish woman mayor again.\textsuperscript{123} She was reelected I think for the third time. He had really . . . when he started out with trying to do away with discrimination and forced equality, he really had laid the groundwork in the city.

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\textsuperscript{123} Jan Coggeshall was the first female mayor of Galveston, Texas, serving from 1984 until 1989, when Barbara Crews became mayor. Lyda Ann Thomas was the city’s third female mayor, serving from 2004 to 2010.