INTERVIEW BEGINS

Sandra: Today is April 6, 2007. I am with George Stern, who has agreed to be interviewed for the Esther and Herbert Taylor Oral History Project of the William Breman Jewish Heritage Museum. Thank you. I am so glad that you agreed to do this. We are very excited about getting some of your memories here on tape. I would like to begin by just asking you where you were born and what your parents’ names were, and get a little bit of background.

George: First of all, I’m glad to be here. I’m glad to help in any way I can. I was born in Brussels, Belgium [on] February 19, 1937. My mother’s name was Blanche Stern. Her maiden name was Levison, L-E-V-I-S-O-N. My father’s name was Albert Stern. He had no middle name.

Sandra: Where were they from originally?

George: My mother was born in Frankfurt am Main, Germany. My father was from a little resort town a little outside of Frankfurt called Bad Schwalbach [Germany]. I believe it’s spelled S-C-H-W-A-L-B-A-C-H. It was a resort town that people came to because they had a lot of health spas, salt, that kind of stuff, minerals. It was an interesting town. I actually went there many years after the war and the town was not destroyed during the war so it’s still authentic town [like it was] way back when. I saw where my daddy lived and the place that his mother—really he was raised by his uncle and aunt, the store they had there . . . It was kind of interesting.

Sandra: How did they end up in Brussels?

---

1 Brussels is the capital of Belgium. It is located approximately 200 kilometers (124 miles) south of Amsterdam, Netherlands.
2 Frankfurt [German: Frankfurt am Main] is a central German city on the Main River. It is the largest financial center in continental Europe. Prior to World War II, Frankfurt was notable as having the largest timber-framed old town in Europe, but much of the city was destroyed during the war and rebuilt afterward.
3 Bad Schwalbach (called Langenschwalbach until 1927) is a spa town in western Germany, approximately 50 kilometers (31 miles) west of Frankfurt.
George: Interesting story about my mother: In 1933, most of my family . . . I had a large family called Oppenheimer O-P-P-E-N-H-E-I-M-E-R. They were called Kartoffel Oppenheimer, Kartoffel meaning ‘potato.’ That family wanted to all go to Israel. They all actually immigrated [to what was then Palestine] in 1933. There was a family of about six children and the mom and dad. The parents actually went to Israel already in 1913—I have a picture of them on a camel in Israel in 1913—but refused to move until the youngest child had graduated school in Germany, so they moved in 1933.

Sandra: Was it because of the takeover of power?

George: Yes. They were ardent Zionists.\(^4\) They really were. They would have left in 1917 had Israel been a little more sophisticated and all that. My mother—whose closest friends were these cousins, the children of this uncle—wanted to go with them to Israel. The [Nazi party] were starting . . . It was 1933.\(^5\) My mother wanted to go to Israel and go with them. She was about twenty then. My grandfather begged her not to go and said, “It’s too far.” It’d be sort of like someone in America saying, “I want to move to Seattle . . . from Atlanta [Georgia].” They compromised. She moved to Brussels [in] 1933. My father was a traveling salesman and he went to all these countries, much like you go through the states here. When all the problems started [in Germany], he went to Brussels in 1933.

Sandra: They both left relatively early. They had the wherewithal to see that this was not going to get better?

George: They left early, yes.

Sandra: Did they ever speak about that—how they knew when so many others did not in 1933? [Did they] already think that . . . So many Jews said, “We thought things were going to get better.” Apparently your parents did not. Did they ever speak about that?

---

\(^4\) Zionism is a movement that supports a Jewish national state in the territory defined as the Land of Israel. Although Zionism existed before the nineteenth century, in the 1890’s Theodor Herzl popularized it and gave it a new urgency, as he believed that Jewish life in Europe was threatened and a State of Israel was needed. The State of Israel was established in 1948 and Zionism today is expressed as support for the continued existence of Israel.

\(^5\) Amid an economic depression and increasing political instability in Germany, Adolf Hitler and his party, the National Socialist German Workers’ Party (German: Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei; also known as the NSDAP or Nazi Party) rapidly rose to power. In 1932, the Nazi party was elected to fill more seats in the Reichstag (parliament) than any other party. In 1933, democratically elected President Paul von Hindenburg appointed Hitler Chancellor of Germany, a position responsible for leading the Reichstag. As Chancellor, he began transforming his position into a dictatorial one. When the President died in 1934, Hitler declared himself head of state and effectively became absolute dictator of Germany under the title of Führer (German: Führer).
George: That has to take me to a second story. I think this all ties in together. Around 1900, my grandfather’s sister, who married into a family called the May family—[spelled] M-A-Y; in Germany it was spelled M-A-I actually but they changed it to May . . . They came to America in 1900. Mortimer May, who was an offspring of that family, eventually became the international president of the American Zionist Organization. They were ardent Zionists. They used to come to Europe all the time from 1900 on and tell them, “Why are you all staying here? There’s nothing but trouble here,” and all that. I think that got my mother’s ear, so already in 1933 when the Nazis started their uprising, she wanted out. My daddy was the same way. He didn’t know the May family obviously at that time because he hadn’t met my mother, but they just said, “Why do we need to stay here? We’re young,” and all that kind of stuff. Independently of each other, they decided Brussels was the place to go.

Sandra: How did they meet?

George: The usual way that nice Jewish people meet. My mother was told by someone—she might have told me that; I don’t remember who—that, “Wouldn’t you like to meet a nice Jewish boy from your hometown?” That’s how they met and the rest is history.

Sandra: What was their life like in Brussels until [the German] occupation?

George: Interestingly enough, the Nazis actually came to [Brussels] in May of 1940. On the day the bombers came, is the day that my parents left. I used to ask my mother, “Mom, from 1933 to 1940, why were you . . .” My mother was twenty-three years old [when she moved to

---

6 Mortimer May (1893-1974) was the son of Jacob May, a German Jew who settled in the United States in 1879. May and his brother, Dan, operated the May Hosiery Mill after the death of their father, Jacob. Mortimer is best known for his Zionism and his role in rescuing German Jews in the 1930s. During the years before World War II, Jacob and Mortimer May made five trips into Hitler’s Germany and managed to rescue more than 200 Jews before the flow of visas was cut off. Mortimer served as president of the Zionist Organization of America from 1954 to 1956 and was past chairman of the executive committee. He was also active in the Nashville Jewish Community, where he served as president of The Temple and the Nashville Jewish Community Council.

7 Founded in 1897, the Zionist Organization of America is the oldest pro-Israel organization in the United States. It is dedicated to educating the public, elected officials, media, and college/high school students about Israel and to promoting strong United States-Israel relations.

8 Germans forces invaded Belgium on May 10, 1940. King Leopold III stayed in Belgium, but the prime minister and many cabinet members fled the country for London, where they set up a government-in-exile. A German military administration coexisted with the Belgian civil service, but due to competition for power between the German military administration and the SS, anti-Jewish measures were enacted more slowly in Belgium than in other occupied countries, so that some large Jewish businesses and real estate properties stayed under the control of their Jewish owners during the war. Nevertheless, of the 66,000 Jews in Belgium, 34,801 were imprisoned or deported during the Holocaust, and of those, 28,902 perished. The capital city of Brussels did not suffer systematic bombing raids during the war, but the civilian population was oppressed by German policies. Much of Belgium was liberated in September 1944, although fighting continued as German troops offered resistance throughout the country and launched the Ardennes Offensive in December. By February 1945, the country was reported to be free of German troops.
Belgium]. I was born in 1937. She was about twenty-seven when I was born. I used to ask my mother, “Why when you knew what was going on in Germany and you knew the Nazis were coming to Brussels, why were you not running from there? Why did you not leave there?” She used to always tell she had this set of friends—fortunately most of whom made it to America. She said, “We were having too good a time. We were in our twenties and life was good in Brussels.” Until the Nazis came, they were having a great life. She said, “We were just having a good time.” That’s the only explanation she could ever give me.

**Sandra:** Did you ask your father as well?

**George:** I asked my father the same thing. My father was a very quiet gentleman. I think when my mother would speak he would . . . if that’s what she said was the reason, I think he would just agree with her. He didn’t say much different.

**Sandra:** Did they talk about or did they speak of what happened after occupation when the Nazis came in? What happened to them individually?

**George:** What happened was . . . It’s funny. Even though I was only three, three and half years old then, I have some small memories. I don’t know whether the memories are from what my parents have told me over and over again or whether I really remember anything. We lived in a second floor—today you’d call it a condo—apartment. The day the bombs came, everybody ran downstairs in the basement. These people were all friends and they all decided, “Look, we gotta get out of here.” The next day, they got in an automobile and they just started driving. Technically in Brussels at that time, other than the bombs were coming and then the bombs went away, they didn’t have any problems in Brussels. They got in a car. There were six of them. They got in a car and they just started driving. Actually, there were two cars.

**Sandra:** Where did they go?

**George:** They went to France. When they got inside [France], they had one serious problem: they weren’t selling gasoline on the highways. When they got to France, they literally ran out of gas. There they were. They were then stopped by the local authorities, [who asked], “What are you doing here? Who are you?” Even though they were Belgian, they were really Germans and so that was a time they were all arrested. That’s the story. It was my mother and grandfather [from] the Levison side. My daddy’s parents had died long ago. He was actually an orphan most of his life. It was my mother, father, my grandfather, grandmother, my mother, father and I. The men were taken off and just put into a jail.
Sandra: What city was that?

George: This was in Toulouse, France. The women then were told they had to go to this camp, Gurs. I still can’t figure out how to spell it.

Sandra: G-U-R-S.

George: Gurs. I just saw it in this book too. My mother actually didn’t have to go to Gurs because she had a little child. If she chose to go to Gurs, they would take the child away because it was sort of like a kibbutz, where the kids live separate from the parents. She wouldn’t do that either so she opted . . . with the help of all these German women—somehow or another she knew a lot of the women because they were all running to France at the same time . . . agreed to hide me in Gurs during the whole time that I was there. We were only there I would say from May [1940] until probably four or five months. My mother went because my grandmother went and she wouldn’t leave my grandmother alone. She could have left. Now, again, I don’t know what . . . I never got . . . My mother never dealt with that issue with me. Because she wasn’t leaving [there was no point in wondering] what would you have done if you had left. There wasn’t any place to go.

When my father got carted off, they made a deal that if they ever got out of wherever they were, they had a cousin in Toulouse and they would meet in Toulouse and give that cousin some information. I said Toulouse; the cousin was really in Lyon [France]. L-Y-O-N I think you spell it. That was sort of going to be their contact person. Then my daddy got arrested. He went off with my grandfather and we lived in Gurs. That’s where I learned how to speak German because at that time, I only spoke French because that’s what they spoke in Brussels. My mother

---

9 Toulouse is a city in Southwestern France, not far from the border with Spain.
10 The Gurs camp was one of the earliest and biggest transit camps for Jews established in prewar France. It was located at the foot of the Pyrenees in southwestern France, just to the south of the village of Gurs and about 50 miles from the Spanish border. The French government established the camp in April 1939, before war with Germany as a detention camp for political refugees. In early 1940, about 4,000 German Jewish refugees were interned there as “enemy aliens,” along with French leftist political leaders who opposed the war with German. After the French armistice with Germany in June 1940, Gurs fell under the Vichy regime’s authority. In October 1940, German authorities deported about 7,500 Jews from the southwestern Germany into the unoccupied zone of France. The Vichy government inters most of them in Gurs. Of this group, 1,710 were eventually released, 755 escaped, 1,940 were able to emigrate, and 2,820 men were conscripted into French labor battalions. By the time the Vichy government closed the camp in November 1943, more than 1,100 internees had died in the camp. Over 18,000 of the almost 22,000 prisoners who had passed through Gurs were Jewish.
11 A kibbutz [Hebrew: ‘gathering’ or ‘clustering’] is a collective community in Israel traditionally based on agriculture. They began as utopian communities that combined socialism and Zionism. In a kibbutz, children typically were housed away from their parents, in a separate building, with one or more caregivers, while their parents slept collectively in another building.
12 Lyon is the third-largest city in France. It is located in eastern France.
just always told me that these women, whenever the guards at Gurs would come in to do whatever, they would hide me. My picture of Gurs is much like if you went to Auschwitz-Birkenau and you saw the beds in the camp. That’s my recollection of it, but I don’t know whether that’s true or not. I know the way she would describe it, they would all be sitting on the beds—as you’ve seen those pictures of unfortunately the Holocaust folks in the camps—and they would hide me. They would feed me from their rations because there wouldn’t be any food for me, but it was mainly . . . My mother used to say we had mainly bread and soup. That was probably most of what we ate.

Sandra: How did they get out of the camp?

George: Eventually when the Vichy government [was established], the people of Gurs let them out—whoever those were because they said the Jews were going to get killed. They just let them go. My mother and my grandmother went back to Toulouse.

That’s another interesting story my mother used to tell me. The woman refused to allow—they went in some boarding house—anyone with a small child unless the child was [toilet] trained. One day my mother told me we were sleeping on the mattress and unfortunately I wet the bed. My grandmother stayed in bed all day long to tell the lady she was sick so she wouldn’t notice that the mattress was wet. My grandmother then left and went to Lyon where she made contact with my father who told them that we were in Toulouse.

My father, interestingly enough, and grandfather were let go and they were in Dunkirk when everybody evacuated Dunkirk. They were there when the boats and the soldiers

---

13 Auschwitz-Birkenau was a network of camps built and operated by Germany just outside the Polish town of Oswiecem (renamed ‘Auschwitz’ by the Germans) in Polish areas annexed by Germany during World War II. It is estimated that the SS and police deported at a minimum 1.3 million people (approximately 1.1 million of which were Jews) to the Auschwitz-Birkenau complex between 1940 and 1945. Camp authorities murdered 1.1 million of these prisoners. Prisoners slept on wooden bunk beds in primitive wooden barracks. There were 36 bunks per barrack; 5 to 6 prisoners were packed on a shelf to fit over 500 prisoners per barracks.

14 Like many concentration camps, the conditions in the Gurs camp were very primitive. It was overcrowded and there was a constant shortage of water, food, and clothing.

15 Vichy France, known officially as the French State (État français), was the government headed by Marshal Philippe Petain (French: Pétain) from July 1940, after the Germans invaded France, until September 1944, when the Allies liberated France. An armistice signed in June 1940 divided France into two zones: one under German military occupation and one left under French sovereignty (the Vichy government). Although it was officially neutral, Vichy France collaborated closely with Germany. The Vichy government was complicit with German racial policies, aiding and cooperating with the detainment and deportation of Jews from both occupied and unoccupied France.
were all going over. They actually had an opportunity where they could have gone with them . . . to get out. They decided not to. They actually started going back toward Lyon and Toulouse and wherever they were going because they were German. When the German infantry . . . because the infantry was totally different than the Nazis. They really could have cared less about Jews. They were soldiers.

My daddy told me the story how he rented . . . they got a truck, they put a bunch of people in it, and when the Nazis would come and say, “What are you doing,” they’d say “Oh, we’re going back to . . . We’re working. We work here.” They let them go. Eventually my daddy got back to Lyon, met my grandmother there and my grandfather, and he came back to Toulouse.

Sandra: How did they emigrate? Did they have their papers all in order?

George: No, they . . . That’s another story. I have to tell you two stories here. For some reason, my grandparents went back to Brussels. I never understood that part of it. They just didn’t want to leave. They didn’t know where they were going. They didn’t want to leave. I’ll tell you about that later on. They were hidden underground—I’ll tell you that story—like Anne Frank.

My mother and father—as so many people had done then—had somehow or another taken jewelry, and little gold things, and all that. That’s what they were using for money. Eventually they got to the Pyrenees (although Toulouse is in that area, or Gus). They got to the little town of Pau, P-A-U, France, which is right on the Spanish-French border. They were stuck there. They couldn’t get papers to get into Spain. My mother told me the story. This I didn’t know until my mother died in 2004, so I didn’t know this until more recently. [She] told me the story of how I actually went into a nursery school in a Catholic monastery—I have no recollection of that—because we had to live in Pau about a month. Eventually we got papers to

---

10 Dunkirk was a pivotal point in World War II history. In May 1940, the British and French forces were driven back to Dunkirk on the coast of France and just across the Channel from Great Britain. Surrounded by Germans, several hundred thousand soldiers were about to be wiped out or taken prisoner by the Germans. Winston Churchill ordered any ship or available boat, large or small, to pick up the stranded soldiers. Some 861 ships, including any boat that could even remotely float, responded to his call. In nine days from May 27 to June 4, 1940, 338,226 men (including French, English, Polish, Belgian and Dutch troops) were spirited off the beach under murderous German artillery and aircraft fire at great risk. Some 40,000 soldiers were not rescued and were captured and left to make their own way home. All of their equipment and ammunition had to be left behind. It was a bittersweet victory as Dunkirk was in actuality a terrible defeat. Winston Churchill called it a “miracle of deliverance,” while at the same time warning that “wars are not won by evacuation.” After Dunkirk, Germany controlled of large parts of continental Europe, which came to be known as “Fortress Europe.”
get into Spain. My mother used to say it was just blackmail and paying people off and you finally got a visa to get into Spain.

Sandra: That was you, your mother, and your grand . . .

George: Just my father, and my mother, and I.

Sandra: Your grandparents went back to Brussels?

George: The other thing that was happening was from 1933 to 1940 [was that] my grandfather and my dad used to send money to the family in America, just to put away. When we were in Spain and my mother was running out of money, they were able in Spain to write to America and that’s how they got some money to eventually get over to Portugal, which was their next stop. We lived in Spain six months.

Sandra: Now what year are we talking about?

George: We’re talking about from May of 1940 we were in Gurs until about September of 1940 and then—my mother said we lived in Pau a month—around October 1940 we got to Madrid, Spain.

Sandra: You are so fortunate because it was late already.

George: It was very late. Of course, the one thing that always helped us was that we had this family in America [as] opposed to the families we were traveling with, [who] ended up having to go to Panama and South America because they couldn’t get into America because [the United States] had all these strict immigration restrictions.  

Sandra: Then you were in Portugal....

George: We lived in Madrid for six months. Every time we tried to get to Portugal, my mother tells the story about we got on a train, and went all the way to the border, and then the papers we got were false. They paid off somebody, and they were forged, and so we had to go back to Madrid. Eventually she said we met some person and he was able to get us papers, and eventually we got to Lisbon, Portugal.

---

17 Throughout the 1930’s, isolationism and xenophobic sentiments allowed a restrictive immigration policy to prevail in the United States. Although aware of and sympathetic to the plight European Jews faced, President Roosevelt was also preoccupied by a severe economic depression. Fierce political opposition in Congress resulted in the failure to increase immigration quotas. The Immigration Act of 1924 (The Johnson-Reed Act) had limited the number of immigrants allowed entry into the United States through a national origins quota. The quota provided immigration visas to two percent of the total number of people of each nationality in the United States as of the 1890 national census. It completely excluded immigrants from Asia and severely limited the immigration of Eastern Europeans. It remained in place throughout World War II.
Then my mother said we were very fortunate, that then you just tried to get on a boat, no matter where the boat was going you wanted to get out of there. She said we met another gentleman who took a liking to my mother—[you] didn’t know my mother, but anybody that knows her, she was just an incredible woman—and got her three tickets to go on a boat to Havana, Cuba. We’re one of the rare immigrants that did not come by way of Ellis Island.

Sometime [in] January [or] February 1941, we ended up in Havana, Cuba. I was born in February, so by that time I was four years old. My mother . . . You have to go back in history. You can imagine Havana, Cuba would be like going to Las Vegas today. Everybody was happy, and gay, and playing. My mother tells the story . . . It’s kind of [difficult to] imagine this happening today. My wife and I would have killed . . . We wouldn’t have done it [and] my kids wouldn’t do it, but in 1941, my mother said, “He’s okay sleeping in a hotel. Let’s go out tonight.” They left me alone in a hotel, they went out, and they come back two or three hours later, and they see this big crowd in the lobby of the hotel. They go to see what’s going on and it’s me with all these people because I had left the room and couldn’t find my mother and daddy. That happened. They had a good attitude about it.

Then, just to tie that up, because we had this family in Nashville that had to give us affidavits, and money, and guarantee my mother and dad . . .

Sandra: You already had a number?

George: Yes. I don’t know if we had a number when we got to Havana but that’s what we were waiting on. Then eventually through . . . HIAS [Hebrew Immigration Aid Society] and all that, we got to Miami, Florida. That I remember—flying on this little clipper plane. It was a seaplane. We landed in Miami. Then they picked us up . . . It was the Joint [American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee]. They picked us up and they took us some place to stay. I sort of have some memories of this. Then the next day, we got on a train, and we went to Nashville,

---

18 An Affidavit of Support and Sponsorship was among the criteria applicants seeking an entry visa into the United States during the 1930s and 1940s had to meet. This required two sponsors who were United States citizens or had permanent resident status. Sponsors had to provide proof of their financial status (Federal tax returns and an affidavit from their bank and employer) to ensure that the immigrants would not become dependent upon social welfare programs.

19 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.

20 The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (commonly called “the Joint”) is a worldwide Jewish relief organization headquartered in New York. It was established in 1914.
Tennessee, where our family was or where a lot of our family was. That’s how we got to America.

**Sandra:** That is a great story.

**George:** It is incredible.

**Sandra:** I want to go back just a little bit and talk about your grandparents because they ended up going back to Brussels. I’d just like to get that story down about how they survived.

**George:** This is great. This is an incredible story. From 1940 when my mother left and when my grandmother went to Lyon to find this cousin, to find out where everybody was, until 1944, my mother did not know that my grandparents were alive. [They had] no contact at all. Her brother, whose name was Leo Levison. He has a son that lives here in Atlanta, Gary Levison. I don’t know if you know Gary and Louise Levison, but they live here in Atlanta. Her brother was another risk-taker. He came direct in 1937. He left [Germany] and said, “I’m going to America.” He was eighteen. As fate would have it, he was here a year or so and he got drafted into the service. Back then they used to . . . you had a number. The lower the number, the earlier you went in. He got drafted early on. He lived in Nashville. I’d say 1936 or 1937 . . . He was this eighteen year old immigrant. Everybody liked him. He had this great personality and charm about him. They all loved him and they called him ‘the little immigrant from Belgium.’

He went in the army and, because he spoke French, German and English, he became an intelligence officer. He was stationed in France somewhere and he always went ahead to see what was going on because he spoke all the languages. He got to Brussels, Belgium in 1944—this was before the Battle of the Bulge. He was running around the old neighborhoods where he had lived with his parents and somebody came up to him—it was an old neighbor—and said to him, “You know, I don’t know if you know it or not, but your parents are still alive. They’ve been . . .” [hidden with the help of the] family “X,” whoever they were. It’s funny. I never asked nor did my mother ever tell me [their name]. I don’t know if she knew. But the family “X” hid

---

21 Also known as the Ardennes Offensive (December 16, 1944 through January 25, 1945), the Battle of the Bulge was a major German offensive launched toward the end of World War II through the densely forested Ardennes mountain region in Belgium. Hitler threw everything he had into trying to drive the Allies back and stopping their advance out of Normandy, France. The Germans achieved nearly complete surprise during a period of heavy overcast weather, which grounded the Allies’ air forces. The Germans nearly broke through (“the Bulge”) the Allied lines. Nearly 19,000 Allied troops were killed and 62,000 wounded and 26,000 missing or captured. The Germans suffered nearly 85,000 casualties before they were pushed back. It was the largest and bloodiest battle fought in World War II.
them out the same [way that] Anne Frank [was hidden].\textsuperscript{22} Everybody knows that story. They were hidden out for four years, the same way.

My uncle went and he found them underground, hidden and all that. I still have . . . I need to locate . . . I know where it is—it’s in one of my boxes . . . I still have the Victory Letter—they used to call it V-Mail, I think . . . [the letters] the soldiers sent [or] something like that—where my uncle wrote my mother telling her, “Your mother and daddy are alive.”\textsuperscript{23} I still have that . . . original letter [telling her] of that. Of course, you can imagine the joy. By that time, [it was] 1944. I was already seven [or] eight. I remember that.

Then my uncle said to his parents, “Look, the war’s not over yet, so if we get split, let’s make a deal. This is where we’re going to meet when the war ends,” because they all had an idea in 1944 that the war was going to end. If you watch all the documentaries, they knew [the war would end soon]. They just didn’t know when. Sure enough, the Battle of the Bulge came and they got split again. Then they met when the war ended wherever the rendezvous in Brussels was. They were able to manage.

\textbf{Sandra:} Did they come to Nashville then?

\textbf{George:} Yes. I remember they came to America in 1946. I remember my mother, my daddy, my uncle and I—my uncle wasn’t married at that time—driving to New York and meeting them in New York and getting them an apartment. For some reason which I never understood either, for about six months they had to live in New York. I don’t know whether that was by choice or whatever. They lived in New York and we’d go visit them. Then eventually they moved to Nashville.

Unfortunately, my grandfather died already in 1947, so he really only had about a year or two in this country. My grandmother lived until 1959. I was already in law school when she died so I knew her very well. I knew my grandmother. I was about ten or eleven when my

\textsuperscript{22} Anne Frank (1929-1945) was a German-Jewish girl whose family fled to Amsterdam and, after the Germans occupied the Netherlands in World War II, went into hiding with her family and 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.

\textsuperscript{23} V-mail, short for Victory Mail, was a mail process used by the United States during the Second World War as the primary and secure method to correspond with soldiers stationed abroad. The process involved microfilming specially designed letter sheets. Instead of using valuable cargo space to ship whole letters overseas, microfilmed copies were sent in their stead and then "blown up" at an overseas destination before being delivered to military personnel. The system of microfilming letters was based on the use of special V-mail letter-sheets, which were a combination of letter and envelope. The letter-sheets were constructed and gummed so as to fold into a uniform and distinctively marked envelope.
grandfather died, but to this day . . . My grandmother moved in the house . . . We all lived in an area which today is Music City, Opryland and all that stuff. My grandmother’s house is still standing. It’s one of the only . . . It’s a business now. It’s a little house like they convert so many. That’s how they made it through the war. It’s wild.

Sandra: Here you were a young, little Belgian-German Jewish boy and you end up in Nashville, Tennessee. How was that growing up in Nashville?

George: I love Nashville. I learned English right away. I know that . . . I remember where I went to nursery school. [It was] not far from where we lived. The Nashville community—much like we do today—couldn’t have been nicer to us. I have to tell this story. There’s a family here named Beryl Weiner.

Sandra: Beryl’s a good friend of mine.

George: Beryl’s wife Elinor was Elinor Brown. [Her family] had a furniture store. I never knew this story either. My mother moved to Atlanta after my daddy died in 1993. I used to make it a habit of every weekend just taking her somewhere. We would end up at Starbucks in Buckhead next to Publix. One day we’re sitting in there and Elinor and Beryl come in. I’ve been close with them for a long time too. [To] my mother I said, “Mother, you remember this is Elinor Brown? She used to live near us later on.” My mother looked at her and said, “You know I want to tell you a story.” Elinor’s father died young. [She said,] “I want to tell you something. The first bed that we ever had when we moved here in 1941, your daddy contributed to us or gave to us, that we slept in.” That was a story I didn’t even know. Then of course, [Elinor] was totally . . . She never knew these stories. First, her daddy died young and I’m sure he didn’t talk about that stuff.

We lived in this apartment. It was really a duplex and we were assigned a family. Like one of my longest, probably the two or three of my longest friends, we were assigned these families. They had four-year-old boys. I was four. One of my buddies now lives in Israel. One lives—I see him—in Washington. Unfortunately, my closest friend of those three died recently.

---

25 Buckhead is an area located northwest of Downtown Atlanta with gracious homes, elegant hotels, shopping centers, restaurants, and high-rise condominium and office buildings. Buckhead is a major commercial and financial center of the Southeast, and it is the third-largest business district in Atlanta, behind Downtown and Midtown.
26 Publix is a supermarket chain operating in the southeastern United States.
It was fun growing up in Nashville. It was a small Jewish community. Everything revolved around the Jewish Community Center.

**Sandra:** Was it startling to come into the American South though and see . . . Did you notice the separation of the races in the American South? We have asked this question so often and some people say, “No, it was just kind of there. It didn’t really . . .”

**George:** I’m going to give you the simplest answer. When you come as an immigrant, you are put wherever whoever puts you there, HIAS or whoever. We lived on Sixteenth Street, which was the border of the black-white community. I don’t mean this in a negative way. If you went west of the street, it was all white. If you went east of Sixteenth, it was all black. I didn’t know any better. I’m four, five, [or] six years old and I . . . right next door to me . . . were all these black kids playing ball. I’d go over and play with them. Invariably, some little white kid would come and just beat the crap out of me [and] say, “You Jew lover! You nigger lover,” and all that kind of stuff. I grew up with that from the time I was five or six years old. Eventually . . . Now, again, the grammar school I went to, which I could walk to in those days—we weren’t afraid of anything. We’d walk everywhere. We didn’t even have a car—was all white. Then I would come home and I’d either play with some of the white kids and if nobody was around to play, I’d play with some of the black kids. Invariably I’d get used to somebody coming over there, and hitting me in the head. That was a routine thing.

Until I was in the eighth grade—that’d put me about thirteen [or] fourteen—I went to school and one of these kids that used to beat me up all the time went to this same school. By this time, I had switched schools. This kid came up to me one day and said, “You’re nothing but a Jew, and I hate Jews, and I’m going to kick your butt,” and all that. I went and told these other kids and they went and beat him up. That was the first time I’d ever had a defense of being a Jewish kid. But obviously I grew up . . . In 1954, when the famous *Brown vs. Board of Education [of Topeka]* case came, I was at a baseball game with my high school. I remember the newspaper kids that used to come, [calling], “Extra, extra! Supreme Court [says] schools are going to be [de]segregated.” Everybody in the stands . . . I thought they were going to die.

**Sandra:** You mean integrate.

---

27 *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* was a landmark decision of the United States Supreme Court that declared state laws establishing separate public schools for black and white students unconstitutional. The ruling paved the way for integration and the civil rights movement.
George: Yes, they were going to integrate. I thought when people heard this . . . Back then, there was no black school and whites, it was all whites versus whites. They thought the world was going to the end. Now, again, I had a great mom and we would talk . . . Everybody’s equal, but the bottom line of it is, you took your risks for a long time if you dealt with the black community. You took your risk, as a kid.

Sandra: Probably as adults too.

George: I would hope that . . . We know the extreme cases of the adults. Yes, I was very knowledgeable. I grew up all around it.

Sandra: What did your parents do in Nashville?

George: My daddy, when he first started became . . . one of the nice Jewish folks there had what I called a scrap iron yard. He gave him a job. I remember my mother used to tell me he used to make fifteen cents an hour. My mother went to work for her family; They owned a hosiery mill in Nashville—this May family.28 She went to work there as a typist and all that. I actually lived with—meaning during the day when I wasn’t in school—a great aunt, who was my grandfather’s sister.

It was interesting that we lived at 800 Sixteenth Avenue, my grandfather’s sister lived at 900 Sixteenth Avenue, and my grandmother lived at 1000 Sixteenth Avenue. We all three lived within a block and everything was walking. I remember going back to this day, my cousin Irene—who was just in town for this hundredth birthday I was telling you about—she and I . . . later on we’d go to high school reunions. We would walk this whole area, which we thought used to be miles. Turned out it was three or four blocks here, three or four blocks there, because we did everything by foot. There was no such thing as driving.

Sandra: Let’s get on to more of your personal story. You grew up in Nashville. What about college? When did you decide to go? Did you always know you were going to college or was it something your parents wanted?

George: I was very lucky. When I was in the eighth grade, I went to a school that had little or no Jews in it, very few. They always thought I was the smartest kid. I really wasn’t that smart but I was a lot smarter than the rest of them. They entered me into this oratory contest. I went to the

---

28 The May Hosiery Mill was established in Nashville, Tennessee in 1909 by Jacob Mill, a Jewish immigrant from Germany. May served as president and then as chairman of the board until his death; his sons Mortimer and Dan operated the sock mill after that. The family sold the plant to Wayne-Gassard Company of Chattanooga in 1965. Renfro Corporation bought the plant in the summer of 1983 from Wayne-Gassard but closed it in 1985.
oratory contest—my mother and I . . . laughed about it all the time—and I thought by far I was the best one. I came in third. Interestingly enough, it was during Chanukah.\textsuperscript{29} I remember that because I was so disappointed, my mother said “Let’s go home and play dreidel.”\textsuperscript{30} While I was there—and this really changed my life—one of the public speaking teachers of the high school that I would go to was there. She came to me afterwards—her name was Alder, A-L-D-E-R—and she said to me, “You know, I am the best whatever, one of my students was Dinah Shore,” and she gave me all this. She said, “I want you to come to West High School.” We lived in the city, but in Nashville you could go to the first county school or you could go to the city school. She said, “I want you to come to West High. I’m going to put you immediately on the debate team.” I think at that moment in time, something lit up in me and said, “You know, I think I’m going to be a lawyer.” She was true to her word, and I went on the debate team, and did that all through high school.

Now all my family went to Vanderbilt [University].\textsuperscript{31} The May family that came in 1900, they went to Vanderbilt and they were very active. They were a very influential family in Nashville. Dan May, the brother, was head of the Board of Education.\textsuperscript{32} He was on the Vanderbilt Board of Trustees. Mortimer May was the head of the Zionist Organization. My parents always said “Son, you don’t need to apply to any schools. You’ll go to Vanderbilt.” That’s what I did.

At that time, I had no clue that Vanderbilt was as good a school as . . . Today, you say to anybody you’re going to Vanderbilt [and they will say], “Hey, that’s fabulous!” Until I moved to Atlanta in 1961 . . . I went to Vanderbilt undergraduate and I went to Vanderbilt Law School. [I] took it for granted all those years . . . [I] never lived on campus or anything; I lived at home . . . I took it for granted because it seemed the place to go. Even though Vanderbilt was a

\textsuperscript{29} Hanukkah [Hebrew: dedication] is an eight-day festival of lights usually falling around Christmas on the Christian calendar. Hanukkah celebrates the victory of the Maccabees in 165 BCE over the Seleucid rules of Palestine, who had desecrated the Temple. The Maccabees wanted to re-dedicate the Temple altar to Jewish worship by rekindling the menorah but could only find one small jar of ritually pure olive oil. This oil continued to burn miraculously for eight days, enabling them to prepare new oil.

\textsuperscript{30} The dreidel is a four-sided spinning top that children play with on Hanukkah. Each side is imprinted with a Hebrew letter. These letters are an acronym for the Hebrew words “A great miracle happened there,” referring to the miracle of the oil that lasted eight days.

\textsuperscript{31} Vanderbilt University is a private research university in Nashville, Tennessee with many distinguished alumni and affiliates.

\textsuperscript{32} Dan May (1898–1982) was a Nashville, Tennessee business, educational and civic leader. May was an active member and trustee of many civic and educational organizations in the Nashville area. He was as an alumnus and long-time member of the board of trustees of Vanderbilt University.
great school, if you lived in Nashville, it was a little easier to get into. I’m not trying to say I wasn’t that bright, but it was a little easier to get into because you didn’t take a dormitory space. All of us that lived in Nashville, all these friends of mine, we all went to Vanderbilt. Nobody ever went . . . very seldom anybody went out of town because everybody said, “You’re going to a great school here.” When I moved to Atlanta in 1961 and I started looking around, everybody would go, “You went to Vanderbilt!” I didn’t know what that meant. So what? Big deal. That’s when I found out Vanderbilt was a good school.

Sandra: What drew you to Atlanta?

George: That’s an interesting story, too. When everybody else was going to work doing law clerkships and even when I was in undergraduate school, I was always a camp person. I went to Camp Blue Star,33 Camp Judaea,34 and others, Camp Bel Air, probably camps you don’t even know about.

Sandra: I know Bel Air.

George: Do you?

Sandra: Doris Goldstein.35

George: Yes, Doris Goldstein, exactly. She and I [worked there]. She ran the waterfront when I was the canoeing director. I just saw Doris yesterday, Saturday. Doris Harris as she…. 

Sandra: Doris Harris. They had the Confederate Flag on the banner going into Bel Air.

George: Exactly. She and I worked there in 1954 and 1955. [in] 1954, I was only seventeen. I was already canoeing director. She was the waterfront director. I always loved camping and I really wanted to be a camp director. I didn’t necessarily want to be a lawyer. In 1961, I and a lady by the name of Lila Riesman36 . . .

Sandra: I know Lila. She’s no longer . . .

George: She’s deceased.

---

33 Blue Star Camps is a private Jewish summer camp for children ages six to sixteen. It is located in Western North Carolina.

34 Camp Judaea is a Jewish, Israel-centered summer camp for boys and girls ages seven through fifteen. It was established in 1961 near the town of Henderson, in the mountains of western North Carolina.

35 Doris Goldstein was born Doris Harris in New Orleans, Louisiana. She is an active member in the Jewish community of Atlanta, Georgia. During the Cold War, she and her husband, Martin, were strong supporters of Soviet Jewry. Doris served as Chairman of the Atlanta Jewish Federation’s Soviet Jewry Committee for three years, as well as on the Executive Committee and Board of Governors of the National Conference on Soviet Jewry.

36 Lila Beverly Young Reisman (1928-2003) was an active member of the Atlanta, Georgia Jewish community. She served as President of the Southeast region of Hadassah and was a member of the National Board of Hadassah. In 1959, she led the Young Judaea summer program in Israel and then spent several years working at Camp Judaea at Blue Star. She was as one of the founders of Camp Judaea in Hendersonville, North Carolina.
Sandra: She passed away a couple of years ago.

George: She was one of my best friends. In fact, I gave a eulogy at her funeral. That’s how close we were.

Sandra: She helped us with the camping exhibition.

George: Exactly. She helped with the camping exhibition [at the William Breman Jewish Heritage Museum]. Lila and I actually founded physically Camp Judaea. I was running Camp Judaea at Blue Star before Blue Star started. When I got out of law school, they offered me this job. They said, “Wouldn’t you like to be the camp director and run Young Judaea?” I looked at my wife and thought it was a good idea. There were a few other reasons . . . don’t need to go into detail on. Anyway, that’s what made me come to Atlanta. The first three years of my life [in Atlanta], I ran Camp Judaea and Young Judaea—1961, 1962, [and] 1963.

Sandra: That is a wonderful story. I did not know that.

George: I was the camp director, and I’m still on the camp board, and I still go to camp meetings, and I still go to Camp Blue Star, and see what’s going. I go now to my grandchildren’s camp for a week, called Camp Kawaga.37 It’s up in Wisconsin. My son-in-law is the camp doctor. They once said something to him about, “Don’t you want to . . .” [He said], “My father[in-law] used to be a camp director . . .” Now I go up there and I’m just a grandpa up there, so I have a great time. That’s what happened. In 1964, finally my wife . . . we had a baby, our first child, Michele.

Sandra: Why don’t you state your wife’s name for the purpose of the tape?

George: Eva Prager, then Stern. Eva came to me and said, “You know, I think it’s time you need to think about earning some money. Why don’t you go practice law?” That’s what I did. Somebody fortunately gave me a job and I became a lawyer. I’ve always told this to all my law colleagues that I see every few years that I guarantee them that the three years that I spent as Young Judaea director was more meaningful in the practice of my law career than if I had been in a law firm for three years doing whatever young guys do—title searches, and wills, and all

---

37 Camp Kawaga is a sports centered summer camp in Minocqua, Wisconsin for boys 7-16 years old.
that stuff—because I met all the people. I’d meet people like Erwin Zaban\(^{38}\) and Sidney Feldman.\(^{39}\) Erwin Zaban’s kids were all campers of mine at Blue Star. Half this town remembers me as their camp director or camp whatever . . . that are younger than me, five or ten years younger. Then of course, people like Doris Goldstein—I still call her Doris Harris . . . Most of the people that I knew coming in, I knew from camp. I never went into the camp business. I became a lawyer and I don’t regret that.

**Sandra:** You worked for somebody, but now you have your own firm?

**George:** Yes, I started working for somebody and then about ten years later, he and I became partners. Then about ten years later, he retired and I started my own firm.

**Sandra:** It is family law?

**George:** Family. We do only family law—divorce, adoptions, alimony, that kind of stuff. I do it because of my camping background, because you’re dealing so much with children. That’s really my main love is children. That’s why I don’t mind when you say talking to all these . . . I do that all the time.

**Sandra:** They are going to love it. They are going to love your story.

**George:** I love it. I love dealing with children.

**Sandra:** They are going to absolutely love it. Do you love the practice of law?

**George:** [Yes].

**Sandra:** You don’t mind having given up the camping?

---

\(^{38}\) Native Atlantan, philanthropist and community leader Erwin Zaban (1921-2010) was known by many as the ‘Godfather of the Jewish Community.’ After quitting school to help in his father’s Depression-era business at age 15, Zaban built successful businesses worth billions of dollars and donated millions to worthy causes. He worked alongside his parents to build Zep Manufacturing Company. Zep later merged with National Linen and became National Service Industries, a Fortune 500 Company. He donated and raised money for undeveloped land in Dunwoody that became Zaban Park, home of the Marcus Jewish Community Center of Atlanta. He donated money to the Jewish Home, for which the Zaban Tower is named. He helped create the homeless couples’ shelter at The Temple which bears his name.

\(^{39}\) Sidney Feldman (1921-2005) was a leader of many organizations, both nationally and in Atlanta. Among his many honors were the B’nai B’rith Man of the Year, the Anti-Defamation League Abe Goldstein Human Relation's Award, Prime Minister's Medallion on the 25th anniversary of Israel, the National Council of Christians and Jews ‘Good Neighbor Award,’ and the American Jewish Committee Award for Advancing Understanding Among All People. He was National Vice-President of United Jewish Appeal, President Emeritus of the Jewish Federation of Greater Atlanta and past president of several organizations including the William Breman Jewish Home, and the Marcus Jewish Community Center.
George: No, because I’m still so much involved in that kind of stuff because I went . . . I was the chairman of Camp Barney Medintz. Years ago . . . we had this fight about, “Is the [Jewish Community Center] going to be open on Shabbat?”

Sandra: I have all the records from Rabbi [Emanuel] Feldman.

George: I was the chairperson of that, of the Shabbat. Joel Gross and I would plan all these programs and we’d have ten people there. It was all for kids, mainly for kids. Whatever I’ve done has been mainly with children.

Sandra: Some of the activities you have been involved with are the Marcus Jewish Community Center and what others?

George: I started the Center mainly because that was my background from Nashville because I had been very active in Nashville. I eventually worked up to be president. Then I was active in Temple Sinai. I’m one of the founding members of Temple Sinai in 1968. My wife and I didn’t have a temple to belong to so we decided to belong to Temple Sinai because it was new and we liked Rabbi [Richard] Lehrman. I’ve been on the [American Jewish Committee] Board.

---

40 Camp Barney Medintz is an overnight Jewish summer camp near Cleveland, Georgia in the North Georgia mountains. It was founded in 1963 and named in honor of Barney Medintz, a prominent Jewish leader in Atlanta, who died in 1960.

41 Emanuel Feldman (b. 1927) is an Orthodox rabbi and Rabbi Emeritus of Congregation Beth Jacob of Atlanta, Georgia. He was born to a family of Orthodox rabbis dating back more than seven generations. During his nearly 40 years at Beth Jacob beginning in 1952, he nurtured the growth of Atlanta’s Orthodox community from a city with two small Orthodox synagogues to a community large enough to support Jewish day schools, yeshivas, girls’ schools and a kollel. He is a past vice-president of the Rabbinical Council of America and former editor of Tradition: The Journal of Orthodox Jewish thought published by the RCA. In 1991, his son, Rabbi Ilan Feldman, succeeded him.

42 The Marcus Jewish Community Center of Atlanta is the primary Jewish community center in Atlanta. It is located in Dunwoody, north of the city, and offers family-centric programs and events with programs, events, and classes that enrich the quality of family life. The Atlanta Jewish Community Center (AJCC) on Peachtree Road in Midtown preceded it. It was named in honor of Bernard Marcus, one of the co-founders of Home Depot, who gave a major gift to the capital campaign. The Atlanta Jewish Community Center (AJCC) on Peachtree Road in Midtown preceded it. Atlanta Jewish Community Center was officially founded in 1910, as the Jewish Educational Alliance. In the late 1940s it evolved into the Atlanta Jewish Community Center and moved to Peachtree Street. It stayed there until 1998, when the building was sold and the center moved to Dunwoody. In 2000, it was renamed the ‘Marcus Jewish Community Center of Atlanta.’

43 George Stern was President of the Marcus Jewish Community Center from 1981-83.

44 Temple Sinai was founded as a Reform congregation in 1968 and met in a variety of locations before establishing a synagogue on Dupree Drive in Sandy Springs, north of Atlanta. Rabbi Richard Lehrman was chosen as the congregation's founding rabbi. The current rabbi is Rabbi Ron Segal (2019).

45 Rabbi Richard J. Lehrman (1938-1979) was born in Pennsylvania and came to Atlanta, Georgia in 1965. In 1968, he was chosen as the newly formed Temple Sinai congregation's founding rabbi. Rabbi Lehrman continued to serve the congregation as its rabbi until his death in November 1979.

46 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.
of my grandchildren is involved in that. My daughter really helped start that program, my daughter Michelle Simon. I’m very active in that.

Sandra: My daughter is one of the Amit teachers.

George: Really? Great!

Sandra: At Davis Academy. The Amit Program was a non-profit organization that provided centralized Jewish special education to special needs children in the Atlanta area who were visually-impaired, hearing-impaired, or learning disabled. The program that operated in Atlanta, Georgia from 2001 until 2013. It operated the The Amit Gar'inim School, a Jewish day school on the Davis Academy campus, that served children with moderate to severe learning disabilities and/or developmental disabilities in kindergarten through eighth grade.

George: She must teach my grandson.

Sandra: She teaches special needs kindergarten and first grade.

George: He’s already now . . . He started there and he’s now in the fourth grade. They’ve done a great job.

Sandra: I would like to go back a minute because that’s a very interesting story . . . I had no idea you were involved with the Shabbat opening of the Jewish Community Center because in lots of major cities around the country, Jewish Community Centers are open on Shabbat so children have a place to go. Why do you think it became such a controversy here in Atlanta?

George: Obviously, the Orthodox community would always be opposed just naturally to that and I think that that was a backlash from that. I think the other thing that really was wrong—it wasn’t wrong, we didn’t know—the people didn’t support it. I think if we’d had the people support it. Joel Gross, who is now the assistant director at the Center . . . spent a lot of time . . . interesting. I always tell this story to Joel—his father was my Atlanta Young Judaea director. Joel Gross . . . was doing a lot of work with kids at that time and that was my forte. I spent a lot of time planning some great stuff from like noon after temple was over, synagogue. Nobody ever came. We were lucky if we’d get twenty kids. Even adults didn’t come. Now again, we ran it downtown because we didn’t have a building at Zaban, at Marcus Center, whatever it was

47 The Amit Program was a non-profit organization that provided centralized Jewish special education to special needs children in the Atlanta area who were visually-impaired, hearing-impaired, or learning disabled. The program that operated in Atlanta, Georgia from 2001 until 2013. It operated the The Amit Gar'inim School, a Jewish day school on the Davis Academy campus, that served children with moderate to severe learning disabilities and/or developmental disabilities in kindergarten through eighth grade.

48 The Davis Academy is a private Jewish day school in Atlanta, Georgia for students from kindergarten preparatory through eighth grade.

49 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.
called. We didn’t get the support. I think that totally destroyed it. I think if we’d have had two, three, four hundred kids . . . The kids still were going to the malls and movies and whatever they were doing. We got no support. The thing that we were trying to do—this was my schtick [Yiddish: a special interest or talent] and Joel was supporting me—is . . . everything we did I wanted to do with something Jewish involved. I didn’t want to the rabbis to say to me, “Well, this is just a playground.” Whether we were doing intramurals [or] something that was not organized, we would do study groups. At the end of the day we were going to have this big habdallah and the parents would come and pick up their kids and we’ve have somebody give some Navare Torah and all that. We didn’t get any support. Finally, I was the first to say after—I don’t know whether we did it a year, or two, or how long we did it—I said, “This is a waste of time. We need to close it. It’s not worth the community being all upset about it.”

Sandra: We have all of the records from Rabbi Feldman’s papers. He would take out these really vocal newspaper ads about…

George: Absolutely.

Sandra: They were very upset about it.

George: If I could have proven to Rabbi Feldman . . . When I was involved in Young Judaea, the first convention that Rabbi Feldman ever came to . . . I have his picture. I always kid him. He was just here in town for some anniversary or something that we attended at Beth Jacob. I would have sat down with Rabbi Feldman. I knew him very well. I still do. I would have sat down with him and said, “Look Rabbi Feldman, let me show you what we’re doing. We’ve got three hundred kids and let me show you what we did last week. We taught them about Kashrut or we taught them about that.” But we didn’t have any support. [We] couldn’t do it.

---

50 Zaban Park in Dunwoody is home to the Marcus Jewish Community Center of Atlanta. The area is named for philanthropist and community leader Erwin Zaban who gave and raised money for what was formerly undeveloped pastureland.

51 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. Rabbi Joseph Safra was the congregation’s first permanent rabbi in 1951, followed by Rabbi Emanuel Feldman from 1952 to 1991. Rabbi Ilan Feldman has been the congregation’s rabbi since his father Emanuel’s retirement in 1991.

52 Kosher/Kashrut is the set of Jewish dietary laws that dictate how food is prepared or served and which kinds of foods or animals can be eaten.
Cuba Family Archives

[Rabbi Feldman] was really . . . and I can appreciate that. I belong to Temple Sinai, but I grew [up] in an Orthodox . . . Rabbi [Yossi] New is one of my closest friends. I’ve had a study group in my office for twenty-four years with Rabbi New [with] twenty, twenty-five people every Thursday. [It] still goes on . . . I know Rabbi Feldman well. Freddie Glusman’s father was my cantor. I understand all that—I really do—but the bottom line is it didn’t work. This community didn’t support it.

Sandra: That is so interesting. I am so glad we talked about that because I did not know that other side of it. I only saw the one side.

George: I don’t mean to be repetitious. I understand where he was coming from, but I didn’t have anything to show him the good we were doing. For example, I went to Ahavath Achim Synagogue Saturday and the rabbi talked about Kashrut. Rather than damning everybody that said, “Well, you don’t keep Kashrut one hundred percent,” he got up and said, “Everybody

53 Orthodox Judaism is a traditional branch of Judaism that strictly follows the Written Torah and the Oral Law concerning prayer, dress, food, sex, family relations, social behavior, the Sabbath day, holidays and more.

54 Rabbi Yossi New is originally from Melbourne, Australia but came to Atlanta, Georgia from New York in 1984. He is the rabbi at Congregation Beth Tefillah and serves as the Director of Chabad of Georgia.

55 Fred Glusman (1932-) was born in Germany and came to America with his parents, Bernard and Anna, in 1937. He received his B.A. degree from Vanderbilt University. He then served in the Army as a Chaplain. Following his service, Fred moved to Huntsville, Alabama, where he worked as a manager at the Huntsville Electric Supply Company. While in Huntsville, he served as President of the Alabama State Association of B’nai B’rith, helped found the conservative congregation of Etz Chaim, and was active in the Boy Scouts. Fred later moved to Atlanta, Georgia, where he became involved in the Jewish community. He served as executive director of Beth Jacob for 26 years and assistant kosher supervisor for the assisted living community in Sandra.

56 The cantor [Hebrew: chazzan] is the official in charge of music or chants and leads liturgical prayer and chanting in the synagogue. Cantor Bernard Glusman was born in Zurich, Switzerland, in 1907, while his parents Leopold and Sima Glusman were en route to Germany from Russia. At the age of 15 he sang in the choir of the largest synagogue in Frankfurt, Germany. At 22, he conducted his first service. He attended the Yeshiva Seminary and Conservatory in Frankfurt. In 1931 he married his wife, Anna, and became a cantor in Giessen, Germany. In 1937, Cantor Glusman and his family immigrated to the United States. Upon his arrival, Glusman worked as a cantor, and teacher and a shochet at the Sons of Israel Synagogue in Newburgh, N.Y. In 1946, Glusman became the cantor at the West End Synagogue in Nashville, Tennessee, where he served with distinction until his retirement in 1979.

57 Ahavath Achim Congregation (often referred to as “AA”) was organized in 1886 as Congregation Ahawas Achim (Brotherly Love) and is Atlanta’s second oldest Jewish congregation. Organized by Jews of Eastern European descent, the congregation’s founding members felt uncomfortable in the established Hebrew Benevolent Congregation (The Temple) comprised primarily of Jews from Germany, who by the late 1800s had begun to liberalize their Orthodox doctrine. Originally located in a rented room at 106 Gilmer Street, the congregation would make a succession of moves, to 120 Gilmer Street, to a hall on Decatur Street in 1895, to its first building in 1901 on the corner of Gilmer Street and Piedmont Avenue, to its second building on Washington Street in 1921, and finally, to its present location on Peachtree Battle Avenue in 1958. Four different Rabbis, Rabbi Mayerovitz (1901 – 1905); Rabbi Joseph Meyer Levine (1905 – 1915); Rabbi Yood (1915 – 1919); and Rabbi A.P. Hirmes (1919 – 1928) provided spiritual leadership for Ahavath Achim until 1928, when Rabbi Harry H. Epstein was hired as Rabbi. He retained that position for the next 50 years. Rabbi Epstein became Rabbi Emeritus in 1986 and was succeeded by Rabbi Arnold Goodman. During the early years of Rabbi Epstein’s tenure, he slowly made innovations and modifications in congregational activities. By 1952, Ahavath Achim joined the Conservative Movement, with the most noticeable shift from Orthodoxy being the gradual change to mixed seating. Today, Ahavath Achim Congregation is the largest Conservative congregation in Atlanta.
should make an effort to do one thing you didn’t do yesterday. So if you just give up eating . . . whatever . . . pork, or if you keep kosher at home, maybe you don’t eat meat out.” It was an interesting . . . I know it’s a Conservative approach; I’m smart enough to know that. But I didn’t have anything to offer him like that. I had nothing. I had eight, or ten, or twelve kids and most of them could have cared less. I had no parental support. That was . . . We’d get four parents maybe on a weekend, on a Saturday while their kids were playing. They’d go out and play tennis. Well, I don’t need to open the center on a Saturday. They can go tennis at Bitsy Grant. They don’t need me. It was an interesting era, but we took a lot of flack for it at the Center. We did.

**Sandra:** How did you meet your wife?

**George:** If we weren’t on tape, I’d say to you, “Now think about how would I have met my wife.” I was at camp. My wife was from a little town in Virginia—Marion, Virginia—and her mommy and daddy said to her, “You really need to go to a Jewish camp.” She went to Camp Blue Star. I was this canoeing director and eventually I did the teenage kids there. My cousin—the same one I was just talking about who was here for the hundredth birthday . . . She was in the teenage village at Blue Star; I was a canoeing director—she said to me, “Hey, I really met this nice gal and she speaks fluent German.” I don’t want to get into this discussion but in my day of growing up, Germans stuck together. We were not from that . . . We were from the Orthodox Germans. My daddy was Orthodox. We were not from the Reform Germans. People don’t realize there were just as many Orthodox in Germany as there were Reforms. They always think about the Reforms. I met my wife. My mother claims to this day that the first Sunday I called to tell her I met this nice girl, that I also said, “And that’s the girl I’m going to marry.” We dated, and we made it through camp, and she finished her last year—she was a medical technician, so she could finish in Nashville. She moved to Nashville, where I was finishing my second year in law school, and then we got married the next year. [We] had a great relationship. She was a great woman.

**Sandra:** That is wonderful.

**George:** She was a great woman. She unfortunately got sick. Everybody loved her. She was very active in the community.

---

58 Built in 1952, the Bitsy Grant Tennis Center (BGTC) was once the headquarters of the Atlanta Lawn Tennis Association (ALTA), the country’s largest grass roots tennis organization. It is located in the Springlake/South Buckhead area of Atlanta, Georgia. Considered the showplace for tennis in the Southeast, the BGTC hosted ALTA’s Atlanta Invitational tournament, drawing the great national players of the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s to Bitsy Grant. Today, BGTC is the largest public tennis facility in Atlanta with the only public clay courts available.
Sandra: She went through Shanghai [China]?

George: Right.

Sandra: Do you want to take a few minutes and talk about that a little bit?

George: Sure.

Sandra: Quick question before we go into that—you said her maiden name was Prager?

George: [Yes].

Sandra: Was she related to a George Prager?

George: No. I’m not really sure. I’ll tell you this whole story. She was raised by her stepfather, a man named Blumenberg, who is the man that’s more featured in this book that I gave you today. Her father died . . . after they were in China. I’ll give you the story on Eva because I was just as intrigued by it as she was. After Kristallnacht59 . . . They actually made it through Kristallnacht . . .

Sandra: What city were they in?

George: They were in Munich, Germany. Her mother and father—her natural father—somehow—and it’s in the book—the paper . . . got permission [from the German government] to go to Shanghai.60 I don’t understand . . . with the German mark on it and everything—the Nazi swastika symbol. They got on a freighter. The reason why I have a lot of this information is that Eva had an aunt who eventually married someone also that she met in China, interestingly enough I should say. He had a son that when he was in China, he was sixteen, seventeen, eighteen . . . We became friends after they all came to America. I used to pick his brain. He’d

59 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.

60 Shanghai is a city located in east China at the mouth of the Yangtze River. In the 1930s and the early 1940s, Shanghai, China was an open city. It did not require visas or certificates of good conduct from Jewish immigrants. This leniency in immigration allowed between 15,000 to 18,000 European Jews fleeing Nazi racial policies and violence to find refuge there. As World War II intensified, the Nazis pressured their Japanese allies to participate in the Final Solution and hand over the Jewish refugees in Shanghai. The Japanese refused and instead established a ghetto in Shanghai, where between 20,000 and 25,000 Jews were confined for the duration of the war. The Shanghai Ghetto was an area in one of the poorest and most overcrowded sections of Shanghai, China. Unlike European ghettos constructed by the Nazis, the ghetto was not fenced in and Chinese residents were not required to leave. Jewish educational, religious, and cultural institutions were also allowed to continue and some Jews were able to get passes allowing them leave the ghetto. Conditions in the ghetto were difficult due to overcrowding. Residents were chronically short of necessities like food, clothing, and medicine. The majority of Jewish refugees in the Shanghai Ghetto did survive World War II, but overcrowding and limited supplies made severe hunger and illness widespread.
come visit me in Atlanta. They lived in San Francisco. I’d go to San Francisco and he’d tell me about a lot of these things. Anyway, they were on a boat—it was Eva and her dad. Her stepdad was a doctor, a very famous . . . He was actually a psychiatrist, studied under [Sigmund] Freud. His name was Blumenberg, B-L-U-M-E-N-B-E-R-G. Wonderful man.

Sandra: First name?

George: Ernst, E-R-N-S-T. Eva’s mother was pregnant on the boat with the second child. He used to take care of her when they’d be on the boat on the rough seas and they’d get sick and do all that stuff. Then when they all got to China, they were all put . . . eventually they got there, they were all put into what they now call the ‘Jewish Section.’ I don’t like to call it a ghetto because they did have freedom of movement there. It was not like you couldn’t get out of . . . the ten blocks or twenty blocks that were there. I’ve been there twice. As I told you earlier, I was there in September. They lived in very terrible—‘they’ being all the Jews . . . They had like thirty thousand Jews that eventually got in, because the Chinese and later the Japanese really didn’t have anything against the Jews; they just didn’t want anybody to be traitors and all that kind of stuff. But they didn’t do anything for them. Early on, the Chinese tried to help them with supplies and all that.

They all became independent in this neighborhood. My mother-in-law and [her] mother ran a restaurant. My father-in-law was the doctor there because even though he was a psychiatrist, he had an M.D. so he [could administer medicine]. He used to tell me that the worst problems they had there were people dying because they had no supplies. They would live twelve and fifteen in a two-bedroom apartment. People would die from malnutrition and typhoid. There were no health . . . and all that. Her father—her real father—his name was Wilheim, W-I-L-H-E-I-M. They called him “Willie.” He had a heart condition and her stepfather to be was the doctor, so he used to love these two little girls. You [have] got to remember the mama gave birth to the second child [under the care of Ernst Blumenberg]. Her name is Susan. She lives in Kingsport, Tennessee. He used to always be around there because he was taking care of the

---

61 Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) was an Austrian doctor who was the founding father of psychoanalysis. Psychoanalysis was a clinical method for treating psychopathology through dialogue between the patient and psychoanalyst. Freud postulated a complex theory of sexuality, dream analysis, and mental processes such as repression, death drive, aggression and neurotic guilt.

62 Ernst Blumenberg was born in 1888 and lived in Bad Nenndorf, Germany. He was imprisoned by the Nazi authorities in 1937, but later managed to flee to Shanghai, China, where he spent the duration of World War II. He later immigrated to the United States.
father. They went to a German Jewish school. They all spoke German. They learned no Chinese or anything like that. They got by.

Then the war ended and then unfortunately Eva’s father died. He somehow made it through the war and then he died like in 1946—the exact date is in this book my daughter put together. Then the Chinese came to them and said, “You know we’ve just had this revolution . . .” I don’t know what they said exactly. [They said], “We just had this revolution or we’re going to have this revolution and you’ve got two choices—you either got to get out now or you’re stuck.”

Again . . . the Joint—this is really interesting . . . There’s a note in there where the Joint lends my mother-in-law six hundred dollars and she agrees to pay them back at the best she can. The note says [it is] so that she can buy the ticket to get on the boat.

Sandra: That is amazing.

George: It’s all in this book. It’s mind-boggling. In 1948—they were there from 1939 to 1948. They lived in China—they all got on the boat and they all went to San Francisco [California]. There’s a big German community in San Francisco. From what I’ve read, most of the people that lived in Shanghai were German. They’d somehow gotten on the boats from Germany and gotten over there, as opposed to being from all the other areas where the Nazis were killing everyone in Poland, Russia, and everywhere else.

Then they grew up—my wife, and her sister, and mother . . . in San Francisco. Now, my father-in-law was a doctor, a psychiatrist. He had to get a job, but he was already sixty. He had to retake the boards. He took the job as the head of the women’s psychiatric hospital in Virginia. It would be the equivalent of Milledgeville but it was only for women. Therefore, he had to move to Marion, Virginia. The story sort of goes that he got lonely, and he loved these two little girls, and he went all the way back to San Francisco, proposed, and they all moved to Marion, Virginia in 1951 or 1952, something like that. Then, my wife actually went to school up there, to Radford College, which is now Radford University. Then in 1958 or 1957, I think, she went to Blue Star and that’s where we met. That’s how she got there.

Sandra: The rest is history.

63 In 1949, Shanghai came under Communist control.
64 The Southwestern Virginia Mental Health Institute (SWVMHI) opened as the Southwestern Lunatic Asylum in Marion, Virginia in 1887.
65 Central State Hospital (CSH) in Milledgeville, Georgia opened in 1842 as Georgia’s first public psychiatric hospital. CSH services include psychiatric evaluation; treatment and recovery services for persons referred from various components of the state’s criminal justice and corrections systems.
66 Radford University is a public university in Radford, Virginia.
George: The rest is history. [We have] three children, six grandchildren.

Sandra: That is wonderful. Do you pass these stories along to your children?

George: Absolutely.

Sandra: I see your daughter . . .

George: My daughter was big time on this. The only thing I supplied her with was the information as I’m giving you and she put the whole thing together and helped find all these artifacts.

Sandra: Have you told your children the stories about your family as well?

George: That and they all . . . I asked them the other day, “Where is the tape?” They said, “We got it here somewhere.” They’ve all looked at my mother’s tape. They were very close to . . . all three of children were very close to my mother.

Sandra: Did most of the family end up emigrating then or did distant relatives end up not being able to get out?

George: I [have] got to say this to you—on my wife’s side, she—my mother-in-law—had three or four brothers. They all made it because I met most of them. One sister went to San Francisco. They all went to China. My father-in-law—I think most of his people got out.

On my side, we had little or no family. My Oppenheimer family—which is my mother’s . . . My grandmother was an Oppenheimer—they all went to Israel. I have five hundred relatives in Israel. I have a huge . . . They’ve been there from 1933. I have this huge . . . and I’m very close to my cousins that are my age—sixty-five, seventy. We go to Israel as often as we can. I know that on the Stern side, my daddy was raised by his uncle and aunt. I think a few of them actually died in the Holocaust. I don’t really have that data. My daddy was . . . his mother and daddy died when he was like four or five. [His aunt and uncle] raised him. When he was eighteen, he was glad to get out of there. He was solo all his life until he met my mother. I don’t really have a lot of background. I don’t know of any . . .

It’s interesting and I don’t mean this . . . Whenever people talk about Holocaust survivors, I never put myself in that role. I feel, as you said, so fortunate that my mother and daddy were smart enough to leave—they didn’t go far enough—and do what they did. Then we had all these steps that eventually got us to America. That’s why when that day that happened, I don’t say to my children and family . . . A lot of people know I’m from Brussels. I don’t talk about Gurs and all that kind of . . . except to my family so they can preserve it all.
Sandra: Now we will get you really involved.67

George: Yes, I loved it. I’m going to add one or two things if you don’t mind.

Sandra: No.

<tape is interrupted; then interview resumes>

George: I was going to tell you side stories. My wife, Eva’s real father, Wilheim, had previously been married and he had a daughter from that marriage. Interestingly enough, she married a guy eventually named Stern. In the late 1930s—this is a story that I got from her, just to tell what happens to people—he got arrested and he was sent to [probably the Dachau or Buchenwald concentration camp after Kristallnacht]. She would go all the time to try to get him out of prison, out of the camp. Eventually on the promise that she would leave the country, she got him out late 1930s—1938 [or] 1939.68 Youth Aliyah—one of the Hadassah programs—got them to Denmark.69

They were in Denmark and then Hitler got to Denmark.70 She told me the story about how they were on one of these boats as they were taking the people from Denmark to Sweden and that they were hiding under a cloth, a tarp—eight, ten, or twelve of them—when a German soldier came, and lifted the tarp, and saw them there, and just put the tarp back down.71 They got over to Sweden.

Sandra: That is an amazing story.

---

67 George served on the Board of the Breman Jewish Heritage and Holocaust Museum until the time of his death in 2014. He was also a speaker at the museum, teaching children from all over the American Southeast about the Holocaust.

68 Thousands of German Jews and close to 6,000 Austrian Jews were arrested after Kristallnacht and deported to the Dachau or Buchenwald concentration camps in Germany. Most were released within a few weeks, but only if they promised to immigrate immediately, leaving their property behind.

69 Youth Aliyah is a Zionist organization that rescued over 5,000 Jewish children by the time World War II broke out in 1939. Hadassah, the Women’s Zionist Organization of America, supported Youth Aliyah from its inception in the 1930s, when it helped young Jewish refugees resettle in Palestine.

70 Germany invaded Denmark in April 1940.

71 When German authorities planned the deportation of Danish Jews in the fall of 1943, Danish authorities, Jewish community leaders, and countless private citizens facilitated a massive operation to get Jews into hiding or into temporary sanctuaries. Popular protests quickly came from various quarters such as churches, the Danish royal family, and various social and economic organizations. The Danish resistance, assisted by many ordinary Danish citizens as well as the Danish police and Danish government, organized a rescue operation that managed to take some 7,200 Jews and 700 of their non-Jewish relatives to safety in neutral Sweden. Despite the rescue efforts, the Germans seized about 470 Jews—mostly refugees from Germany or Eastern Europe—and deported them to the Theresienstadt ghetto in occupied Czechoslovakia. The Danish authorities and the Danish Red Cross vocally and insistently demanded information on their whereabouts and living conditions, prompting the International Red Cross to visit Theresienstadt in June 1944. In late April 1945, German authorities handed the Danish prisoners over to the custody of the Swedish Red Cross. In total, some 120 Danish Jews died during the Holocaust. This relatively small number represents one of the highest Jewish survival rates for any German-occupied European country.
George: That’s an amazing story. Then in 1983 . . . forty years later when I did this famous trip with Cantor Goodfriend, the last part of the trip, eighteen of us went to Poland. Then we met up with a [Jewish Federations of North America] trip to Israel. At the week that we were there was the week of the fortieth anniversary of the Danes rescuing the Jews and I met the lady that got my step-sister-in-law out of Denmark.

Sandra: Unbelievable.

George: She was there for this fortieth anniversary. It was the coolest thing because I spent a lot of time with that family—with the “Stern” family. They had two daughters. The two daughters now live in [Los Angeles, California] because their mother and father got divorced and they wanted to live with their dad and all that . . . That’s another story.

Sandra: That is amazing. To change course here a little bit, you had mentioned a little bit earlier that you had joined Temple Sinai because you knew Rabbi Lehrman, who was the founding rabbi there. [If you could share] some recollections about those early years at Temple Sinai and Rabbi Lehrman, that would be great.

George: The way it all really happened was in 1968 a bunch of people got together and they said, “We want to form a new temple.” You’ve heard that. Then my wife . . .

Sandra: Were you all temple members?

George: No, we belonged to no synagogue interestingly enough. My kids were young. I don’t want to put on the record why we didn’t belong to any synagogue. I’ll tell you that afterward because it’s kind of funny. But my daughter was five years old and she was going to . . . They had just opened the . . . Let’s see, she was born in ’63 so I guess they had opened four or five years. We lived on Buford Highway so we lived right near where the old Hebrew Academy used to be. It was on North Druid Hills. She went to nursery school there. My wife and I said “Look, we gotta belong to a Temple. It’s time for her to go to Sunday School.” That’s when I read about that these eight or ten or twelve people were talking about forming a synagogue and I went and

72 Cantor Isaac Goodfriend (1924-2009) served at Ahavath Achim in Atlanta from 1966 until his retirement in 1995 as Cantor Emeritus. Cantor Goodfriend was born into a Hassidic family in Poland. At the age of 16, he was interned in a German labor camp in Piotrkow, Poland. Escaping in 1944, he was hidden by a Polish farmer and was the only member of his family to survive the war. After the war, he attended the Berlin Conservatory of Music, McGill Conservatory of Music in Montreal, Conservatoire Provincial de Quebec, and later in Ohio at the Music School Settlement and Baldwin Wallace College. Before coming to Atlanta he served as cantor at Shaare Zion in Montreal, Canada in 1952, and later at Cleveland, Ohio’s Community Temple.

73 The Jewish Federations of North America represents 153 Jewish Federations and over 300 network communities, which raise and distribute more than $3 billion annually for social welfare, social services and educational needs with the objective of protecting and enhancing the well-being of Jews worldwide.
met with Rabbi Lehrman. I said, “How are you? I know that my background’s always been Orthodox and Conservative, but I think I could really handle this. I think I’d like it a lot and we can still do whatever.” So we did. There’s about eighty of us that’s on the Board at the Temple that were really “the founding members.”

Then, we had to start the Sunday School. [Rabbi Lehrman] and I and ten or fifteen other people . . . we were really volunteer teachers back then. The most fun that I had with Rabbi Lehrman is we couldn’t figure out what to do with the teenagers. I said, “You know what we really ought to do? We ought to form a program that we do on Saturday.” We used to call it S.W.I.N.G. [That] wouldn’t be a good word to call it today. [It] stood for Southern . . . I don’t remember now what it stood for. It was an acronym for something. Then twice a year, we would take them to Camp Coleman, which was really my thing, and Rabbi Lehrman would go there. Rabbi Lehrman was this very serious guy. [He was] very intellectual, but just a great guy to be around. When we were all at S.W.I.N.G., which would be four or five of . . . I got two or three of my Young Judaea people that were also at Sinai and I had a great staff. We only had fifty kids maybe, so we didn’t need . . . We had six, or eight, or ten people. We would have the best times with these kids. We’d have campfires, and we’d do Israeli dancing, and we’d sing, and we’d play ball. He would get into it because he was always a serious guy and then we would see the side of him that nobody would see. We’d talk about our days in college and stuff that normally you have fun talking about. He was a wonderful guy. We did that . . . I did S.W.I.N.G. for about four or five or six years. Then the program continued. I wish I could remember what it stood for.

Sandra: We have the records. We can look it up.

George: Southeastern whatever . . .

Sandra: Was he a good sermonizer?

George: Yes, he was okay. The bottom line of it was he was very intellectual and he gave a good sermon. It was okay. I liked him. He was a nice guy and he was friendly. He tried to be involved in the community, in our Temple community. It was unfortunate the poor guy got sick and died.

Sandra: What was it?

---

74 Camp Coleman is a Reform Jewish summer camp in Cleveland, Georgia that was established in 1964.
George: I think he had cancer. He died in 1978 [or] something like that. Then we had one year where we had sort of an interim Rabbi and then Rabbi [Phillip] Krantz came. Krantz was a totally different experience because he’s just the most personable guy in the world.

Sandra: I belong there. He is great.

George: Lehrman was . . . I wouldn’t call him as personable . . . This wasn’t his personality. He was personable but not in the same way. Rabbi Krantz, he’s the most personable guy you can meet, but his sermons are just okay, right? <laughs to indicate he is joking> I love Ron Segal. I think he’s just terrific. I think this temple . . . I’m so proud. I’m going to tell you one story about the Temple. Can I do that? Do you care?

Sandra: Absolutely.

George: In 1968, there were maybe a hundred of us at a meeting. The first thing they wanted to discuss was limiting the membership to 425. First of all, I thought it was outrageous to limit the membership when we had one hundred schnooks [Yiddish: fools] there running this temple. Why even talk about 425? They had a vote and the vote was a hundred to two to limit the membership to 425. The two being me and I think my wife felt bad for me so she voted with me. I always say this story now. Fast-forward thirty-five years and now we have open membership. I always kid people, “It took me thirty-five years to get that point across.” I was really upset about . . . How could you limit any Jews that want to come worship in your temple? It didn’t bother me about the space and all these things they look at, but I didn’t care. So, that was fun.

My second cute story about the Temple was . . . This shows you how Reform Judaism has moved back to the right. I was on the board and I made this thing about, “We need to have yarmulkes at the Temple.” [They said], “Yarmulkes?! What? It’s a Reformed temple!” The compromise was finally made that we could have yarmulkes then—now, we’re talking about in the 1960s and 1970s . . . we could yarmulkes there providing there was a sign above it saying, “Optional.” The stuff we had to go through to have more Hebrew taught there . . . Anyway, the Rabbi was willing to . . . He was good about that. It was [not] the Rabbi himself necessarily. It was always the people that were running the show.

---

75 Rabbi Philip Kranz was the senior rabbi at Temple Sinai from 1980 until 2006. Prior to that, he served as rabbi of the Chicago Sinai congregation. He continues to serve the Atlanta Jewish community today and Temple Sinai as rabbi emeritus. (2014)

76 Rabbi Ronald Segal joined the Temple Sinai clergy in July 1996, serving as Assistant and then Associate Rabbi until he was named the congregation’s third Senior Rabbi in July 2006. Rabbi Segal is very active in the Atlanta Jewish community and is currently the President of the Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR), the international rabbinic organization of the Reform Movement (2019).
Sandra: Yes, it has definitely gone to the right.

George: Now, we have the best temple. Goodness gracious, we got all this crazy membership, and everybody shows up, and we have all these fun things. I’m very proud of that; with what little I did for the beginning . . . and then there were hundreds of people that did that. We’ve just done such a great job there. We were lucky because we were smart. If you look at all the . . . I know the histories of all these temples. If you look at all the junk they’ve gone through. Look at the AA and look at The Temple and some of the others. We were always smart enough to have the Rabbi there in place. Now that we have Segal . . . I don’t know whether all of that ought to be on tape.

Sandra: It is wonderful. Is there anything else that you would like to say? Ruth would like to [ask a question].

Ruth: I just wanted to ask you what that whole experience of having to move to so many countries because you were a Jew might have meant to you in your life and what you have taken with you from that whole experience of your family?

George: I think the most important thing I’ve learned all the years is to be active and to be philanthropic. I try to support everything I can, whether it be the Federation, or the Center, or the Temple, or Amit, or whatever. I also support Rabbi New and even Rabbi Feldman. I’m not as active there. I don’t support that as much, because I really think we need to keep supporting the Orthodox community because we can’t let people slip in the cracks. That’s what happens a lot of times. That’s what I learned. We just got to keep our religion alive and our faith alive and support all these things. That’s really what I learned. I’ve always been that way. That’s why I was active as a kid.

I hate to say this because this is going to sound like I’m talking about myself, but in 1954, I won an award in Nashville called the Ralph Shepherd Award for the whatever teenager.77 Now you fast-forward to 2007. Fifty-three years later, I get a letter from the Nashville Jewish Community Center. They said that, “In the past, we’ve always had the recipients decide who the next recipient is going to be, but we’ve always used Nashville people. We’ve decided this year we want to use people that we can find that live outside Nashville.” That was a big thrill for me to think about that fifty-three years later for whatever I contributed way back when they still

---

77 In 1954, George was the recipient of the Ralph Sheppard award for outstanding young leadership in the Nashville, Tennessee Jewish community.
knew what I was doing and where I was. They sent me this list of fifteen—without names—great kids in the Nashville community. I’m sure we have the same [here in Atlanta], maybe we have more here because we have a bigger community. That was so interesting. I wrote this lady who was running it a nice letter. I said, “I really appreciate that you would even think that I would be worthy of considering someone today.”

I felt like we did the same thing in Nashville until I left there when I was twenty-four. I got people today . . . I was at a bar mitzvah [and someone said], “I remember when you were my camp director.” I worked at the [Jewish Community Camp] up there. I always feel like that’s what you got to . . . That’s why I love doing this. I don’t mean just the tape. I’m going to really enjoy doing the speaking engagement. I love this stuff and I want to [have people] understand it all.

Sandra: I think you are going to really enjoy it. When you came here with your family, did you have to go through the naturalization process?

George: No, I didn’t. Back then . . . This is really a wild story. If you came to this country before 1948 [or] maybe 1947, if your parents were naturalized, you were automatically naturalized. You didn’t have to do anything. From the time I . . . My parents were naturalized. They came in 1941. I’m guessing they did it 1946 [or] 1947. No one ever asked me to prove I was a citizen. I went through grammar school, I went through junior high, I went through high school, I went through the Army—back then, you had to go through the Army, I didn’t have to go in the Army.

I moved to Georgia in 1961. I go to Dekalb County to register to vote. The lady says, “Where were you born?” [I said], “Brussels, Belgium.” [She said], “Well, let me see your certificate that you’re a citizen.” I said, “You’ve got to be kidding, ma’am. I’ve never had to do that.” [She said], “Well, here you have to do that.” I didn’t know what to do so I called . . . Fortunately I had a friend in Immigration. He said, “Well, call Miss So-and-So.” Her name was Ernst, E-R-N-S-T and . . . I said, “Miss Ernst, I got a problem. They won’t let me register to vote here because I’m . . . my parents . . .” She said “Yea, they got this new form now and all that kind of stuff here. Fill all this out.” First question: “Attach your birth certificate.” I’m born in

78 A bar mitzvah [Hebrew: son of commandment] is a rite of passage for Jewish boys aged 13 years and one day. At that time, a Jewish boy is considered a responsible adult for most religious purposes. He is now duty bound to keep the commandments, he puts on tefillin, and may be counted to the minyan quorum for public worship. He celebrates the bar mitzvah by being called up to the reading of the Torah in the synagogue, usually on the next available Sabbath after his Hebrew birthday.
Brussels, Belgium. Where is my birth certificate? Fortunately, Brussels—the Grand Plaza, where they kept the records there—was not destroyed. Then I called this man. His name was Henri De Geve. He was the Belgian Consulate. I still remember him because he did it for fifty years. I said, “You need to do me a favor. I need a copy of my birth certificate.” He gets it. Of course, it’s in French. Thank G-d for him, he translates it with an affidavit that he’s a translator. Now I got that, so now I fill out the form.

The next thing my mother and daddy call and say, “You know, this is really weird. We got a call from the [Federal Bureau of Investigation].” I said, “What do you mean?” He says, “Well, they want us to . . . They have to come see us because you’ve applied that you want this . . . whatever this paper is that you need.” Sure enough, they had to go through [explaining] who they are, and that they came here, and show their papers. Eventually I got this certificate and eventually I got to vote in Georgia. That was the only time anyone has ever asked me that question.

**Sandra:** That is amazing.

**Ruth:** My other question was about your own feelings about Israel . . . I know being involved in both Blue Star and Camp Judaea, those both have, I believe, a fairly strong Zionist teaching philosophy. I was wondering how your experience growing up and your family’s experience as one half being practical Zionists and having moved to Israel, how that all came together for you?

**George:** I would say, one, I’ve always been a Zionist. I joined . . . A lot of people don’t know this. I’ll give you a little background. Herman Popkin started Camp Blue Star.79 Harry Popkin was his brother. There was a third brother. He died. His name was Ben. Herman Popkin, when Blue Star was just starting out, you know what his job was? He was the Young Judaea Youth Director—the job I took on later on. Harry Popkin ran B’nai Brith in District Five or whatever this district is.80 When I was already ten or eleven years old, Herman Popkin came to Nashville and he said, “You really need to be a Zionist” and all that. Great, I became . . . I belonged to Young Judaea. I never belonged to AGA or B’nai B’rith. Don’t ask me about that. I was one of

---

79 Herman M. Popkin (1918-2002) was born in Augusta, Georgia. He served in the Signal Corps during World War II. After the war, he accepted a position as the regional director for the Zionist Youth Program before co-founding Blue Star Camps in Henderson County with his brothers Harry and Ben in 1948.

80 B’nai B’rith Youth Organization (BBYO) is a Jewish youth movement for students in grades from 8 through 12. The organization emphasizes its youth leadership model in which teen leaders are elected by their peers on a local, regional and international level and are given the opportunity to make their own programmatic decisions.
the only males that did that. At that time, people didn’t want to do Israeli dancing and all that kind of stuff. I did and I was one of the first people.

A lot of people don’t know this – but Camp Tel Yehudah, which is the Young Judaea senior camp, the only year it was ever in the South was 1952. It was in Hendersonville, North Carolina. A lot of people don’t know that. I went to camp there that year and learned how to do Israeli dancing and all that. In fact, the first job I had with Doris Harris – the reason I became Canoeing Director is because I was actually hired as the Israeli Dance Instructor but the Canoeing Director resigned and the Director said, “You’re going to camp and you’re going to learn how to be the Canoeing Director.” I did that at Blue Star too. I taught . . . Larry Cooper and I—Larry Cooper of Carol Cooper fame or visa versa—he and I used to teach Israeli dancing at Blue Star all the time. Friday nights we did that.

The only other part of that story is when I became the Young Judaea Youth Director [in] 1961, I used to have to travel the Southeast. I went to Miami, Florida, where my great-uncle . . . whatever he is, related to me—Mortimer May—lived. Now, here was this guy, the biggest Zionist, took me out for dinner because I couldn’t afford it. I was maybe making fifty dollars a week doing this job. He would take me out to dinner. He lived on Arden Road, which is a really nice road in Miami. I’d make sure . . . I had to go to Miami a lot because all the Jews lived in Miami. That’s where I was getting most of my people from. Every time, I made sure to go to his house because he would take me out to dinner, more than me getting a McDonald’s hamburger—it was about all I could afford. He looked at me and he said, “You are the only one in my family I’m proud of because you’re the only real Zionist,” because he thought being in Young Judaea, I had to be a Zionist. I’ve always been a Zionist. I love Israel. There’s just not enough you can do to support Israel. I don’t have to tell anybody here that. I’ve been a very ardent Zionist. I’ve always felt that way. No, I’ve never had the intent to live there, but I love going there, and I love that all my family is there, and they’re great people.

Sandra: That is wonderful. On that note, I think that is it unless you would like to say anything else that we have maybe left out.

---

81 Camp Tel Yehudah began in 1948 and is Young Judaea’s national teen leadership camp. It is located in Barryville, New York and provides immersive, summer experiences for Jewish teenagers from ages 13–17.

82 Larry Cooper is the husband of Carol Cooper, one of philanthropist Erwin Zaban’s three daughters. The Coopers are active members of Atlanta’s Jewish community.
George: I’ve got many other stories I’ll share with y’all at some point. I told you the story about the hundred-year-old lady I just had her birthday. She’s got a whole lot of stories that I want to deal with. I want you to see my mother’s tapes. They’re incredible.

Sandra: We can do a follow-up if there are things that . . .

George: I don’t mean necessarily have to be on tape. I’ll just share all that with you. They used to do a theater . . . My mother lived at the Renaissance. They used to say “Blanche in Hollywood” because she was . . . I really need to see them again because I want to see . . . A lot of the history I learned not just from talking to her but also off these tapes.

Sandra: Your mother sounds like she was a really remarkable person.

George: You’d go to anybody, any of my friends . . . she was incredible. Luckily for me until maybe two weeks before she died, she was in great spirits and pretty much in good health, and never lost [her mental facilities].

Sandra: That is wonderful.

George: Her reason for not losing it was she ate a garlic clove every day. She said that’s what keeps you going.

Sandra: Did she come to Atlanta right after you did?

George: No. My mother and daddy lived in Nashville and my daddy died in 1989. In 1993 . . . She waited four years. I kept telling her, “You need to come to Atlanta.” She’d come here for the holidays and all that kind of stuff. When you see her tapes, she really has a lot of stuff to tell. I’m trying to remember. There are probably a lot of other stories about my wife and, of course, I told you the story about her sister. I make it a habit when I run into to anybody that’s a Holocaust—like you’re doing it professionally—[I say], “Tell me about it. Where did you come from? What did you do? How long were you there?”

Sandra: Her last name was Prager? It is interesting because we do have files on all these Pragers that came through the Joint plus the German-Jewish Refugee Childrens’ Service. I’m just wondering if we look at it if there’s any connection.

---

83 The Renaissance on Peachtree is an independent and assisted living community for senior citizens located in Atlanta, Georgia.

84 Sandra may be referring to the German Jewish Children’s Aid (GJCA), an organization, based in America, which acted as the receiving organization for unaccompanied (and some orphaned) Jewish children emigrating primarily from Germany to the United States. The GJCA placed the children with foster families or with American relatives. Between 1933 and 1945, more than one thousand unaccompanied children fleeing Nazi persecution arrived in the United States thanks to the GJCA, who worked with the Children's Bureau of the US Labor Department, and with the help of the National Refugee Service.
George: I’ve never met . . . I used to pick my wife’s brain on that. I’ve never met anybody that she was related to named Prager, because Prager . . . I wouldn’t say it’s a common name, but it’s not uncommon. There are a lot of Pragers running around. But I never met anybody.

Sandra: Alright.

George: Amen. Thank you.

Sandra: Thank you.

<End Tape 1>

INTERVIEW ENDS