Sandra: Today is January 31, 2006, and we’re here with Erwin Zaban, who’s agreed to do an interview for the Esther and Herbert Taylor Oral History Project of the William Breman Jewish Heritage Museum. Thank you for agreeing to be with us today.

Erwin: It’s my pleasure.

Sandra: I’d like to begin by just having you talk for a short time about your earliest roots, where you were born, and where your parents came from, and their names. If you can, if you get to a name that sounds a little bit different if you could spell out that name, that would be very helpful.

Erwin: Shall I start with my grandparents?

Sandra: Yes, please.

Erwin: My grandparents on the Zaban side came to Atlanta in 1895 because my grandmother had a brother here by the name of ‘Springer,’ so my grandfather came here first with his older children. My grandmother came later with the balance of the children; there were eight children. My dad was a year old when he came here in 1895.

Sandra: What were your grandparents’ names?

Erwin: My grandfather’s name was David Zaban. My grandmother’s name was Ann Zaban. My mother’s parents migrated from Russia in about 1908 and settled in New York and finally, I don’t know for what reason, settled in Savannah [Georgia]. His name was Max Feidelson.
Sandra: How do you spell that?
Erwin: F-E-I-D-E-L-S-O-N. My grandmother’s name was Rachel, my daughter Laura’s middle name. They lived in Savannah [Georgia] with six children. My mother was Sarah, next to the youngest. I only have one cousin left in Savannah now. In Atlanta [Georgia], I have two cousins still here, Harriett Eisner [sp] and Davee Kuniansky.

Sandra: I know Davee.
Erwin: They’re my first cousins.

Sandra: What did the family do in Savannah?
Erwin: They had a grocery store in Savannah, like many people of that time, with a house connected to the grocery store.

Sandra: Did they belong to Mickve Israel1 or did they belong to the old temple there... did they belong to a Russian congregation?
Erwin: They belonged to a Conservative2 congregation, but my mother went to Sunday school at the very old reform temple there...

Sandra: ...Mickve Israel...
Erwin: ...Mickve Israel. Interesting enough, her rabbi was a rabbi by the name of [George] Solomon,3 and in later years, he opened a summer camp for boys in North Carolina called ‘Camp Osceola.’ I went to Camp Osceola when I was seven or eight years old with a whole group of Atlanta fellows. Cecil Alexander [Jr.] was one that went with me. But that’s where my family came from. My grandfather came here and went into the furniture business.

Sandra: What kind of furniture?
Erwin: I really don’t know because he passed away a few months after I was born. I never knew that grandfather. But he had a fairly successful, I guess, furniture store for that time.

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1 Mickve Israel in Savannah, Georgia is one the oldest congregations in the United States. It was originally organized by mostly Sephardic immigrants from London who arrived in the new colony in 1733. The original synagogue was granted a charter in 1799 by General James Edward Oglethorpe, who established the colony of Georgia for England in 1732. In the late nineteenth century it began to shift to Reform Judaism. The current building was consecrated in 1858. The actual synagogue building was built on a plot of land given to the congregation by the city of Savannah. The cemetery, however, was established in 1733 on a plot of land given to the congregation by James Oglethorpe in the name of King George III.

2 A form of Judaism that seeks to preserve Jewish tradition and ritual but has a more flexible approach to the interpretation of the law than Orthodox Judaism. It attempts to combine a positive attitude toward modern culture, while preserving a commitment to Jewish observance. They also observe gender equality (mixed seating, women rabbis and bat mitzvahs).

3 Rabbi George Solomon was rabbi of Mickve Israel in Savannah, Georgia from 1903 to 1945. From 1926 to 1945 the Solomons owned and operated a Jewish camp called Camp Osceola on Lake Osceola near Hendersonville, North Carolina.
Sandra: How old was he when he passed away?
Erwin: In his sixties.
Sandra: And your grandmother was . . .
Erwin: My grandmother lived until she was about 70.
Sandra: Did she then move in with you?
Erwin: No, she had a house on Capitol Avenue, almost where [Turner] Stadium [previously Atlanta-Fulton County Stadium]⁴ is now, and she lived there.
Sandra: That’s interesting, because a lot of times families . . .
Erwin: Yes.
Sandra: . . . connected. She must have been a very independent woman.
Erwin: She was. She had a big house and there were other people who rented rooms there because those were tough times. That was before and during the [Leo M.] Frank case.⁵ It was a tough time for Jews.
Sandra: Do you have any recollections about the Frank case from hearsay?
Erwin: Just hearsay. I don’t have any recollection. It was before I was born.
Sandra: Right, you were much too young, but I thought maybe the family had spoken of it.
Erwin: I only remember my dad telling me that he was a teenager and they were very much afraid of everything back in those days. [They] stayed in the house for a week or two during all those riots. That’s all that I knew about it.
Sandra: Did your dad then go into the furniture business?
Erwin: My dad went into the furniture business in Miami [Florida].

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⁴ Atlanta–Fulton County Stadium, often referred to as ‘Fulton County Stadium’ and originally named ‘Atlanta Stadium,’ was built to attract a major league baseball team. In 1966 it succeeded when the Milwaukee Braves relocated to Atlanta. The stadium was built on the site of the cleared Washington-Rawson neighborhood, which had been a wealthy area and home to much of Atlanta’s Jewish community. The Braves continued to play at Fulton County Stadium until the end of the 1996 season, when they moved into Turner Field, the converted Centennial Olympic Stadium originally built for the 1996 Summer Olympics. The stadium was demolished in 1997. A parking lot for Turner Field now stands on the site.

⁵ Leo Frank (1884-1915) was a Jewish factory superintendent in Atlanta, Georgia. In 1913, he was accused of raping and murdering one of his employees, a 13-year-old girl named Mary Phagan, whose body was found on the premises of the National Pencil Company. Frank was arrested, tried, convicted and sentenced to death for her murder. The trial was the catalyst for a great outburst of antisemitism led by the populist Tom Watson and the center of powerful class and political interests. Frank was sent to Milledgeville State Penitentiary to await his execution. Governor John M. Slaton, believing there had been a miscarriage of justice, commuted Frank’s sentence to life in prison. This enraged a group of men who styled themselves the “Knights of Mary Phagan.” They drove to the prison, kidnapped Frank from his cell and drove him to Marietta, Georgia where they lynched him. Many years later, the murderer was revealed to be Jim Conley, who had lied in the trial, pinning it on Frank instead. Frank was pardoned on March 11, 1986, although they stopped short of exonerating him.
Sandra: How’d he get to Miami?
Erwin: It was during the boom years . . . 1925, 1926. He went to Miami. There were a whole group of Atlanta people that went there. One that I remember was Sam Eplan . . . [he] went there as an attorney. That’s Leon’s father. He had a furniture store, and things were booming. A hurricane came along\(^6\) and everything was out in the bay, and of course in those days, they did not have adequate insurance, so my dad actually went bankrupt.

Sandra: What year was that?
Erwin: Nineteen twenty-six. He then went to work as a sales representative for Puritan Chemical Company,\(^7\) which was [owned by] his life-long friend, Abe [Abrom Lewis] Feldman . . . A.L. Feldman.

Sandra: They were life-long friends from when they were boys?
Erwin: Yes, when they were boys. A.L. Feldman,\(^8\) I think was an orphan who was born in North Georgia somewhere . . .

Sandra: Yes, he was not from here originally.
Erwin: . . . and came to Atlanta. They were friends.

Sandra: How did A.L. Feldman get into the chemical business?
Erwin: A.L. Feldman worked for [Simon] Selig. To give you a little background on the chemical business . . . Simon Selig came to it . . . I guess he may have been born here, but at any rate . . . he worked for a company called West Disinfecting Company out of New York. In 1896, he went into the chemical business for himself\(^9\) and from that came Puritan Chemical Company.

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\(^6\) The so-called ‘Great Miami Hurricane’ was a Category 4, with sustained winds of 145 miles per hour, which devastated Miami in September 1926.

\(^7\) Puritan Chemical Company was founded by Abrom Lewis (A.L.) Feldman in 1920. A.L. Feldman began as a sales representative for the Selig Chemical Company until he established his own firm, Puritan Chemical Company. It manufactured sanitation maintenance chemicals and was a competitor of Zep. It is now Puritan/Churchill Chemical Company. (2016)

\(^8\) Abrom Lewis (A.L.) Feldman was born in Hartwell, Georgia in 1896. His family moved to Atlanta shortly before his sixth birthday, where he attended Ivy Street School, and the Georgia Tech Evening School of Commerce (later Georgia State University). In 1916 he began working as a city salesman for the Selig Chemical Company, and in 1920, he established his own business, the Puritan Chemical Company. He sold it in 1973 for $7,000,000.

\(^9\) Simon Selig (Sr.) founded Selig Chemical Company in 1896, after working as a sales representative for West Chemical Corporation in New York. Originally Selig Chemicals manufactured and sold home cleaning products (soaps, dispensers, disinfectant, etc.), insecticides and other consumer goods. In 1968 Zep purchased Selig Industries and today it manufactures cleaning products and programs to the industrial and institutional markets.
My dad worked for Puritan and he came . . . out of Puritan Chemical Company, several companies came out . . . Zep. It was an interesting thing . . . industry has changed today.

Sandra: What kind of chemicals were they?

Erwin: Cleaning [and] sanitation chemicals. My dad went into business in 1937. I was not quite 17 years old. I quit school, much against my parents’ wishes, and helped him out. My mother was the office girl. I used to do some packing and sweeping the floors. My dad went out and sold chemicals. Then we grew from that. When my dad was 50 years old . . . which was like 1948 or something like that . . . in that time . . . he decided he didn't want to be in business any more. He and my mother moved to Miami. They lived there the rest of their lives. He was still president of the company. I was a youngster when I . . . actually I was still in my twenties . . . we had a very small company with maybe eight or ten salespeople and it grew. We were very fortunate and lucky. Then in about 1952 we decided, along with our confidante, Max Cuba, to sell our salespeople and our other employees a stake in the company. That really was the reason we really grew after that. We opened branches all over the country [and in] Canada, Europe. We merged that company . . . actually sold it to National Linen Service in 1962. Today that company has about 1,400 salespeople throughout the world and is probably one of the three or four largest in the business in the country.

Sandra: It’s an amazing success story . . . goes back to the time in 1936 or 1937 when your father decided to leave Puritan Chemical. What was the reason for that?

Erwin: I don’t think my father [Mandle] would have ever left, because my father really didn’t care about becoming wealthy. He enjoyed life, he enjoyed fishing, but he worked. My mother was very unhappy with what he was making in the way of pay. I think maybe she saw me growing up . . . I was a teenager . . . she wanted me to go into business. She worked with him for 10 or 15 years, but I was very fortunate. I happened to be . . . I tell people I’m a member of the lucky sperm club. I really was very lucky.

Sandra: That’s great. What was A.L. Feldman like to work with? Was he a friend at the office as well as socially to your father?

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10 Zep was founded in 1937 by Mandle Zaban with two others: William Eplan and Samuel Powell (thus ‘ZEP’). The company manufactured and sold sanitation and cleaning chemicals. Erwin Zaban quit school joined the business when he was 17, eventually in 1948 assuming the leadership. In 1962 Zep was sold to National Linen Service. Zep still exists today (2016).

11 National Service Industries was founded in 1962 with the merger of two established Atlanta companies, National Linen Service and Zep Manufacturing Company.
Erwin: They were friends socially and in business. I think A.L. Feldman did some good community work back in those days. I think he was one of the first presidents of the Jewish Community Center. But I think he lacked good manners when it came to running a business . . . although he was a fairly wealthy man . . . because he was one of the early pioneers in the business . . .

Sandra: What happened to Selig Chemical?

Erwin: . . . Selig Chemical was run by Simon Selig’s son—Simon “Slick” Selig—that’s Cathy and Steve’s father. He ran it until about 1970 or 1971 when Ben Massell, his father-in-law, passed away. He went into the real estate business and I bought Selig. Even to this day . . . I don’t know how long it will be . . . but Selig and Zep are competitors.

Sandra: Are they really?

Erwin: Yes, they have separate sales forces and they’re competitors, and this company owns both of them.

Sandra: But how does that work?

Erwin: It worked very well. It worked very well. I had . . . Steve Selig’s cousin, Lyons Joel, was president of Selig, and Harry Maziar became president of Zep. I overlooked [supervised] both of them. They were good friends and they were both very successful. We merged that company into National Linen and then became National Service Industries in 1962. I ran it for about four years. My friend, Milton Weinstein, whose father started National Linen, purchased Zep. He asked me after four years to come over to the home office and have Harry Maziar run Zep. I became president of the parent company. Then when Milton retired . . . he retired very early . . . I was made chairman and CEO. We bought lots of other companies. Today the company’s split up, but before the split, it was about a $2.5 billion company. They still . . . one company still owns Zep and Selig and Lithonia Lighting, which is a very large lighting manufacturer. The other company owns National Linen [Services] and Atlanta Envelope, which was also a Jewish company owned by David Goldwasser, who I bought in about 1966.

Sandra: That must have been really hard for you, to see the company split up . . .

Erwin: It was, but I was ready. I retired when I was about 69 years old. The Board wasn’t satisfied with the person who followed me and they brought me back in as CEO for about a year or two until they found someone else that they liked, who then split the company up, which I
think was a mistake. But I am going to be 85 years old this August and I don’t worry about that anymore.

_Sandra:_ That’s good. Going back a little bit again to Zep. It’s an acronym. What does it stand for?

_Erwin:_ My dad had two partners: it was [Mandle] Zaban, [William] Eplan and [Samuel] Powell.

_Sandra:_ What happened to Eplan and Powell?

_Erwin:_ [William] Eplan died the first year we were in business. He was 29 years old.

_Sandra:_ Which Eplan was that?

_Erwin:_ He died from peritonitis, which came from appendix.

_Sandra:_ Was it, Sam? Part of the Leon Eplan . . . ?

_Erwin:_ It is Leon’s cousin, [William]. He was a wonderful person.

_Sandra:_ What was his first name?

_Erwin:_ Billy. Billy Eplan. Powell decided to leave and go into business with his brother-in-law in the chemical business in Augusta [Georgia].

_Sandra:_ Were they successful?

_Erwin:_ No, he had some mental problems and two or three years later ended up in some kind of rest home. I don’t think the company exists anymore.

_Sandra:_ It’s amazing that you’ve kept the name all those years.

_Erwin:_ Yes. It was a catchy name and became well-known.

_Sandra:_ You can go all over the country and see Zep products. I love going into bathrooms in airports or wherever and you see that little Zep logo.

_Erwin:_ The largest customer they have today is Home Depot.\footnote{The Home Depot was founded in Atlanta in 1978 by Bernie Marcus and Arthur Blank and has grown to be the largest home improvement retailer in the United States. The first two Home Depot stores opened on June 22, 1979, in Atlanta, Georgia. The Home Depot operates stores in 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands and Guam), all ten provinces of Canada, as well as Mexico. (2014)}

_Sandra:_ Really?

_Erwin:_ Yes. It’s all over Home Depot.

_Sandra:_ That’s wonderful.

_Erwin:_ My friend, Bernie [Bernard] Marcus, was responsible for that. One thing I think I should mention. . . I can show you some articles. We had probably the outstanding board of
directors in Atlanta at National Service. We had Don Keough, who was president of Coca-Cola. We had . . . gosh, I can’t think now . . . [Dr.] Betty Siegel, who was president of Kennesaw [State University—Kennesaw, Georgia]; [John] Clendenen, who was president of BellSouth; the president of Delta Airlines; we had John Medlin, the president of Wachovia Bank.\(^\text{13}\) There were several articles written saying that it was Georgia’s outstanding board of directors. I learned a lot from that because I had come out of a privately-owned company. I recruited most of these people. When I came to National, they had no outside directors. It was fun and these people remained lifelong friends. Bernie [Bernard] Marcus\(^\text{14}\) was on that board.

Sandra: That’s amazing. It’s amazing how this small little company just grew and grew and grew to become such a . . .

Erwin: Milton Weinstein was really . . .

Sandra: Tell me about him.

Erwin: Milton was my lifelong friend. He was not when we were kids because he was six years older than I was. He was a wonderful friend and a tremendous business partner. He wanted someone in that business to help him grow it. There are many articles written saying that the reason they bought Zep was to get me, but I don’t think that was the reason. Milton retired when he was 60 years old. I didn’t want him to retire. I wanted him to remain as chairman. He said, “I’m not doing anything. You’re running the company.” He did retire. We stayed friends; we live in the same building. We stayed friends until he died about five or six years ago.

Sandra: What about David Goldwasser? Were you also friends with him?

Erwin: David Goldwasser . . . when I bought Atlanta Envelope, remained as president of Atlanta Envelope. Two or three years later [he] came over to our home office and headed a group of companies that we had. He retired eight or ten years later and became president of [Jewish] Federation [of Greater Atlanta]. [He] did a lot of work at the Temple.

Sandra: I think the [Atlanta] Symphony [Orchestra]\(^\text{15}\) as well.

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\(^{13}\) Wachovia Bank is now defunct (2016). In the financial crisis of 2008 it was bought by Wells Fargo Bank.

\(^{14}\) Bernard (Bernie) Marcus (born 1929) is an American philanthropist and retail entrepreneur. He co-founded the Home Depot and was the company’s first CEO. He served as Chairman of the Board until retiring in 2002. Marcus heavily contributed to the launch of the Georgia Aquarium in downtown Atlanta in 2005. Based mostly on the $250 million donation for the Aquarium, Marcus and his wife, Billi, were listed among the top charitable donors in the country by the Chronicle of Philanthropy in 2005. Marcus also funded and founded the Marcus Institute, a center for the provision of comprehensive services for children and adolescents with developmental disabilities.

\(^{15}\) The Atlanta Symphony Orchestra was established in 1945. Robert Spano has been its music director since 2001. Their main venue is the Woodruff Arts Center. (2016)
Erwin: The Symphony as well. You have to remember that all these people that we bought . . . the Lithonia [Lighting] people were Bob Freeman and his family. Do you know Bob?

Sandra: Yes.

Erwin: I guess two-thirds of the companies were Jewish family companies. They took our stock, so they all became very well-positioned. They were nice to work with.

Sandra: What do you think made you different? You were a 16-year-old boy, started working in a company and in your twenties you had this responsibility. What do you think was inside of you to make you have, one, the drive and two, the ability to create such a giant corporation?

Erwin: I don’t know. I was an only child. Therefore, I was very close to my parents and so were they to me. I was a terrible young kid. I think if my dad hadn’t gone in business I might have ended up in Sing Sing [Correctional Facility, New York State]. I was a terrible child. When he went in business I wanted to be of help to him. It kind of thrilled me to see him going into business for himself. I don’t know of any other reasons, really. It was nothing so unusual I guess. Many of my friends went in their fathers’ businesses. When you go into your father’s business, it’s really like starting on second base. It’s not like starting on home plate—you’re already halfway around. There were a few of my friends who never made it to third base, but most of them did very well.

Sandra: It’s truly a great story. If we can just look at the company over the decades, were there any eras that were particularly hard. Talk about the war years for the chemical business . . . World War II, that is.

Erwin: During the war years I went [in]to the service, but only for about four or five months. Came out . . . I had volunteered . . . came out and was subject to being drafted. I went into an officer training program and because of something with my feet I couldn’t make it. I had to either take a discharge or stay in. I took a discharge and [was] subject to being drafted, [but] I was never drafted.

Sandra: That’s amazing.

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16 Sing Sing Correctional Facility is a maximum security prison in New York State. In 1970 the name was changed ‘Ossining Correctional Facility’ but it was changed back to ‘Sing Sing’ in 1985. It is notorious for its violence and executions.
Erwin: I stayed in uniform for about a year. During that time there was a severe shortage of merchandise. I think you saw in that booklet of mine, letters I had written when I was 23 [or] 24-years-old to the salespeople saying we had no more of this and we were out of that. It was a tough time. But we had suppliers who were good to us. They kept us in business. Of course all of our younger salespeople were also drafted or volunteered into the service. Tough times.

Sandra: I’ve often heard that Atlanta in 1946 was a boom time because so many people were returning home. Did you notice that?

Erwin: Yes. In 1946, things were really started.

Sandra: Did you see Atlanta changing then from the small little community it was to a different kind of city?

Erwin: It is a much different kind of city. I think Atlanta when I was growing up was about 300,000 people . . . if that big. It was more a village-type city than it is today, not as metropolitan as it is today. I grew up just four blocks from where we are here on 13th Street. Went to a school on 10th Street, which is not there anymore. But it was a different city.

Sandra: What was the social life like back then?

Erwin: For Jewish people it was a very different social life. My father could not join the Standard Club, because it was for German Jews at that time. Many years later, they invited him and he joined . . . 30 years later. But I had friends who were . . . their parents were members. I used to go there once in a while. Then we had two other clubs, the [Jewish] Progressive Club, which my father was one of the early founders of . . . that came out of another club . . . the Don’t Worry Club. Then they had the Progressive Club. Then the

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17 During World War II, ration coupon books and tokens were issued dictating how much of product could be bought. Rationing often includes food and other necessities for which there is a shortage, including materials needed for the war effort such as rubber tires, leather shoes, clothing, and gasoline.

18 The Standard Club is a private, country club, with a Jewish heritage dating back to 1867. The club originated as Concordia Association in Downtown Atlanta. In 1905 it was reorganized as the Standard Club and moved into the former mansion of William C. Sanders near where Turner Field is now located. In the late 1920’s the club moved to Ponce de Leon Avenue in Midtown Atlanta. The club later moved to the Brookhaven area and opened in what is now the Lenox Park business park. It was located there until 1983 when the club moved to its present location in Johns Creek in Atlanta’s northern suburbs.

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

20 The Don’t Worry Club was founded in 1913. It was created, along with other organizations, by Eastern European Jews who were excluded from German-Jewish and gentile social clubs.
members of the Progressive Club, as they got older, wanted to socialize with some people of their age instead of youngsters and they started the Mayfair Club,\textsuperscript{21} which was on Spring Street, right near where Federation is today. The Mayfair Club had a horrible fire later and never reopened. But it was a different social life. The Ashkenazi\textsuperscript{22} Jews were looked down upon by the Reform\textsuperscript{23} German Jews, and they looked down on the Sephardic.\textsuperscript{24} It was not like today. Today we really have a much different community, thank goodness. We really do. I think one reason for that change came about . . . just one reason . . . is we had some very good leaders in all of those groups. I’ve been a member of the Sephardic congregation for 20 odd years . . . Or VeShalom\textsuperscript{25} . . . because I have friends there. I never go there, but I’m a member. Member of Shearith Israel,\textsuperscript{26} but I never go there. I’m a member of AA [Ahavath Achim]\textsuperscript{27} synagogue, where I don’t go, because of my grandfather and my father. I go to Temple,\textsuperscript{28} when I do go, but

Simon Selig (Sr.) founded Selig Chemical Company in 1896, after working as a sales representative for West Chemical Corporation in New York. Originally Selig Chemicals manufactured and sold home cleaning products (soaps, dispensers, disinfectant, etc.), insecticides and other consumer goods. In 1968 Zep purchased Selig Industries and today it manufactures cleaning products and programs to the industrial and institutional markets.

\textsuperscript{22} Ashkenazi is an ethnic division of Jews which formed in the Holy Roman Empire in the early 1000’s. They established communities in Central and Eastern Europe.

\textsuperscript{23} A division within Judaism especially in North America and the United Kingdom. Historically it began in the nineteenth century. In general, the Reform movement maintains that Judaism and Jewish traditions should be modernized and compatible with participation in Western culture. While the Torah remains the law, in Reform Judaism women are included (mixed seating, bat mitzvah and women rabbis), music is allowed in the services and most of the service is in English.

\textsuperscript{24} Sephardic Jews are the Jews of Spain, Portugal, North Africa and the Middle East and their descendants. The adjective ‘Sephardic’ and corresponding nouns Sephardi (singular) and Sephardim (plural) are derived from the Hebrew word ‘Sepharad,’ which refers to Spain. Historically, the vernacular language of Sephardic Jews was Ladino, a Romance language derived from Old Spanish, incorporating elements from the old Romance languages of the Iberian Peninsula, Hebrew, Aramaic, and in the lands receiving those who were exiled, Ottoman Turkish, Arabic, Greek, Bulgarian and Serbo-Croatian vocabulary.

\textsuperscript{25} Congregation Or VeShalom was established by refugees of the Ottoman Empire, namely from Turkey and the Isle of Rhodes. The congregation began in 1920 and was based at Central and Woodward Avenues until 1948 when it moved to a larger building on North Highland Road. The current building for OrVeshalom is on North Druid Hills Road.

\textsuperscript{26} Founded in 1904, Shearith Israel began as a congregation that met in the homes of congregants until 1906 when they began using a Methodist church on Hunter Street. After World War II, Rabbi Tobias Geffen moved the congregation to University Drive, where it became the first synagogue in DeKalb County. In the 1960’s, they removed the barrier between the men’s and women’s sections in the sanctuary, and officially became affiliated with the Conservative movement in 2002.

\textsuperscript{27} Ahavath Achim was founded in 1887 in a small room on Gilmer Street. In 1920 they moved to a permanent building at the corner of Piedmont and Gilmer Street. The final service in that building was held in 1958 to make way for construction of the Downtown Connector (the concurrent section of Interstate 75 and Interstate 85 through Atlanta). The synagogue moved to its current location on Peachtree Battle Avenue in 1958.

\textsuperscript{28} The Temple, or ‘Hebrew Benevolent Congregation,’ is Atlanta’s oldest Jewish congregation. The cornerstone was laid on the Temple on Garnett Street in 1875. The dedication was held in 1877 and the Temple was located there until 1902. The Temple’s next location on Pryor Street was dedicated in 1902. The Temple’s current location in Midtown on Peachtree Street was dedicated in 1931. The main sanctuary is on the National Register of Historic Places. The Reform congregation now totals approximately1,500 families (2015).
I’m not a very religious person. I’m a very traditionalist . . . I really think there’s nothing like being Jewish, particularly with people. You go all over the world and you see another Jew and it looks like you have something in common with each other. It’s a wonderful experience. Then my father got involved in community work, particularly the [Jewish] Federation [of Greater Atlanta].

He had a telephone in his office, a special line. His job was collecting past due pledges. Of course, he made a lot of people mad, pushing them for money. Then when I grew up, I first worked in the youth organization of Federation . . . I don’t know what they call it today . . . when I was about 18. Worked there right up to the present time. I was chairman of the campaign with Milton Weinstein and Dan Garson in 1955. I was 34 years old. We thought we were something. We raised $600,000 or $700,000.

Sandra: That is something from that time in Atlanta . . . small community.

Erwin: We were encouraged by our peers: Ben Massell, Abe Goldstein and a number of others who were leaders . . . Barney Medintz . . . leaders in the community. Then Barney asked me to get involved in the [Marcus] Jewish Community Center, which I did. Others asked me to

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

30 Benjamin (Ben) J. Massell (1886–1962) was a civic and community leader in both the Jewish and general communities of Atlanta. In the early 1900’s, he and his two brothers, Sam and Levi, founded the Massell Realty Company, which had a hand in the development and sale of several landmark properties in Atlanta. Civic leader Ivan Allen, Sr., was known to say, “Sherman burned Atlanta and Ben Massell built it back.” Ben Massell was the uncle of former Atlanta mayor Sam Massell.

31 Abe Goldstein was a business and Jewish community leader. He was active in Ahavath Achim and well as Israel Bonds, the Anti-Defamation League, the Atlanta Jewish Welfare Federation and many other community causes. He founded Prior Tire Company in 1920 and remained active in the business throughout his life. He died in 1982 at the age of 90.

32 Barney Medintz (1910–1960) was a Jewish leader both nationally and locally in Atlanta. He was one of the national leaders of the United Jewish Appeal and the Israel Bond Organization. He was also vice-president of the National Community Relations Advisory Council, vice-president of the Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds and a former member of the executive committee of the American Jewish Committee. Locally he was president of the Atlanta Jewish Community Center and past president of the Atlanta Jewish Community Council and the Atlanta Bureau of Jewish Education. He was also president of the Southeast Regional Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds. Medintz graduated from Northwestern University at Evanston, Illinois where he was a star basketball player. He came to Atlanta after he graduated to become a recreation director at the Jewish Educational Alliance. Camp Barney Medintz, a Jewish camp in Cleveland, Georgia, is named in his honor.

33 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. Their programs include preschool, camping, fitness and sports, Jewish life and learning, arts and culture and social and educational programs. 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. It was preceded by the Atlanta Jewish Community Center (AJCC) on Peachtree Road in Midtown.
get involved in the [William Breman] Jewish Home,\textsuperscript{34} and one thing led to another. It’s very hard for me—it may not be for some—to turn down your friends who are interested in something that you really don’t have any interest in. Maybe you develop an interest later, maybe you don’t. But one thing led to the next. It’s been a wonderful experience.

\textbf{Sandra: } What was your greatest love of all of those communal involvements? What did you feel a close connection with?

\textbf{Erwin: } I think the [Marcus] Jewish Community Center.

\textbf{Sandra: } What led you . . .

\textbf{Erwin: } Interestingly enough, I was never president of anything. I was never president of Federation, though I was asked, never president of the Jewish Community Center, of the Home, never the Temple. I don’t know whether they didn’t like me or whether I turned it down. I can’t remember.

\textbf{Sandra: } Zaban Park\textsuperscript{35} was such a testimonial to you and your family. How did that all come about?

\textbf{Erwin: } That’s an interesting story. My parents died in 1973. Just before their death, or just after, I don’t recall, Max Kuniansky said to me at a board meeting at the Community Center, “Erwin, we need to have a camp site. There’s 50 acres of land out here in the country.” That was country then. “It’s $50,000 . . . $1,000 an acre.” I gave them a donation in honor of my parents. I think they were still living. I’m not sure. Years later we bought five more acres at $100,000 an acre. There’s no telling what that land is worth today. We built a small community center . . . you might remember it, with a swimming pool, some camp sites, picnic sites and a lake. It was very nice. Then, I don’t remember when, I guess it’s been eight or nine years ago, Federation decided there were a lot of organizations that needed capital funds and we had a capital fund drive. I think Steve Selig and I might have raised 75 percent of the big money that was raised. We had a goal of, I think, $48,000,000 and we raised $52,000,000. That’s when the Community

\textsuperscript{34} A nursing home in Atlanta providing short and long-term dementia, Alzheimer’s, and nursing care. Formerly the ‘Jewish Home,’ it first opened in 1951 at 260 14th Street NW, on land that had been donated by real estate developer Ben J. Massell. The Home’s growth called for a larger, updated facility, leading to the construction of a new building at 3150 Howell Mill Road NW. The second Jewish Home opened on February 16, 1971. In 1991, it was renamed the William Breman Jewish Home to honor and recognize its third president, Bill Breman, as the prime motivator of the modern day facility.

\textsuperscript{35} 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.
Center got its money to expand and build the building they’re now in. So did the Jewish Home built the third building there. But the Community Center is my favorite, I guess, because it serves all segments of the Jewish community, and all ages of people, from four months old in the nursery to people who are near dead, so it really serves a great purpose.

Sandra: I know that your daughter Laura [Zaban Dinerman], that’s one of her great . . .

Erwin: My daughter Laura was the first lady president of the [Jewish] Community Center.

Sandra: Really great. You also mentioned the night shelter. Tell me how that came about.

Erwin: Rabbi [Alvin] Sugarman\(^{36}\) was responsible for starting the night shelter, along with Carol [Breman] Nemo. They had the night shelter\(^{37}\) in the Sunday school rooms during the week and they’d clean it up and have Sunday school on Sunday. He just talked to me one day about having a night shelter away from the Temple. He and I went to see Simon Selig, Steve’s father, who owned the building next door. We asked him to donate that building to the Temple so that we could have an enlargement of Temple facilities and also a night shelter there. I suggested to him that we would name the building to him and that Rabbi Sugarman would announce it on the High Holy Days\(^{38}\) and he would enjoy it. His answer to me was, “Erwin, I’m not interested in having my name on the building and I don’t want it announced on the High Holy Days. I’ll give it some thought, but I don’t think I’ll do it.” A couple of days later he called me and says, “I’m going to give you that building. Maybe it would be okay to put my name on it and it might be fine for the rabbi to mention that during the High Holy Days.” So he gave us that building. I forget what the number was . . . several hundred thousand dollars I gave them to redo one floor for the night shelter. Then the year before last we raised a couple of hundred thousand and renovated it all. It serves a good purpose.

Sandra: It’s a wonderful concept. Whose concept was that to be a couples’ shelter?

Erwin: I think most of the churches . . . or many of the churches . . . had night shelters. I think St. Luke’s was first. Some of them catered to men, some to women, [and] some to families. You had to choose what you wanted, and I think Rabbi Sugarman thought that doing couples.

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\(^{36}\) Rabbi Alvin M. Sugarman, now (2015) retired, is the Rabbi Emeritus of the Temple in Atlanta and currently serves with life tenure. He began his rabbinate at the Temple in 1971 and in 1974 was named senior rabbi. A native of Atlanta, Rabbi Sugarman received his BBA from Emory University and was ordained by Hebrew Union College. In 1988 he received his PhD in Theological Studies from Emory University.

\(^{37}\) Now known as the ‘Zaban Couples Center.’ It provides housing and two meals daily for homeless couples. In lieu of paying a fee to reside at the Center, couples are assigned chores and are assisted in breaking the cycle of homelessness.

\(^{38}\) The two High Holy Days are Rosh Ha-Shanah (Jewish New Year) and Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement).
would be nice. In later years, when we built the . . . third building at the [Breman] Home . . . I donated . . . a pretty large sum of money today for redoing the old nursing home, and calling it the ‘Zaban Tower.’ So now we have independent living in the Jewish Tower,\textsuperscript{39} assisted living the Zaban Tower,\textsuperscript{40} and a nursing home in the Breman building.

\textbf{Sandra}: It’s such a legacy. I mean to you and your family. It’s a wonderful commitment to Atlanta. It’s great.

\textbf{Erwin}: I haven’t really done as much as I should have done. Really. I always think there’s a lot more I could have done.

\textbf{Sandra}: That’s amazing that you would think that, when I look at you and think, “My gosh, look at all that you have done.”

\textbf{Erwin}: I don’t think any of us do all we could do. We think we do sometimes, but we could stretch a little more and do a little more personally or money-wise as well.

\textbf{Sandra}: If we can go back just a little bit to the earlier eras. I was wondering if you could reflect upon a few things . . . growing up in Atlanta, living in Atlanta . . . one is the Civil Rights Era\textsuperscript{41} . . . what your recollection of that whole time period was business wise, socially, communally.

\textbf{Erwin}: I touched on some of that with you with the clubs. It was a good experience. We had a high school here, Boys’ High School,\textsuperscript{42} which became [Henry] Grady [High School] later. There must have been . . . 25 percent of the students were Jewish . . . it was a terrible school. We met in wooden portables [trailers] with potbellied stoves there at that time. But we had a real nice Jewish community.

\textsuperscript{39} The Jewish Tower is a 200-apartment independent living facility located on the same campus as the William Breman Jewish Home and the Zaban Tower, although it is run separately from the Jewish Home and the Zaban Tower. The Jewish Tower was established in 1978. (2016)

\textsuperscript{40} Located on the same campus as the William Breman Jewish Home, the Zaban Tower is a 60-unit independent living community offering low income seniors age 62 and above the comforts and conveniences of a luxury community with rent based on income.

\textsuperscript{41} The American Civil Rights Movement encompasses social movements in the United States whose goal was to end racial segregation and discrimination against black Americans and enforce constitutional voting rights to them. The movement was characterized by major campaigns of civil resistance. Between 1955 and 1968, acts of nonviolent protest and civil disobedience produced crisis situations between activists and government authorities. Noted legislative achievements during this phase of the Civil Rights Movement were passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, the Immigration and Nationality Services Act of 1965, and the Fair Housing Act of 1968.

\textsuperscript{42} Boys’ High School was founded in 1924 and is now known as Henry W. Grady High School. It is part of the Atlanta Public School System. It has had many notable alumni, including S. Truett Cathy, the founder of Chick-fil-A. It is located in Midtown Atlanta.
Sandra: Were there any restaurants that you frequented... in the Fifties and Sixties... the hangouts?

Erwin: There were very few good restaurants. There was one called Heron’s downtown near the Rialto Theater.\textsuperscript{43} There was one on Peachtree [Street], Hart’s... in later years [the] Coach and Six. People did a lot of their dining in the clubs. Jewish people... we had three clubs that were in town, so that we ate more in the clubs than we did in other restaurants back in those days.

Sandra: What about the Paradise Room?\textsuperscript{44} I see a lot of people at the Paradise Room at the Henry Grady Hotel.\textsuperscript{45}

Erwin: Yes, it was a popular place. There was also one in the Ansley Hotel\textsuperscript{46} [Rainbow Room].\textsuperscript{47} They had shows and dancing, things of that type. I got married when I was... on my twentieth birthday. Shortly after [that I] went into the service... a year or so later. But we grew up with friends that stayed our friends all their lives. Unfortunately, my first wife [Doris Reisman], from whom I was divorced, died a few years after we were divorced. She was a very fine lady. That was Laura\textsuperscript{48} and Carol\textsuperscript{49} and Sara’s\textsuperscript{50} mother. We developed some friends... most notable of my friends was Sidney Feldman.\textsuperscript{51} We were friends for over 60 years. I don’t

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{43} The Rialto Theater was built in 1916 and was the Southeast’s largest movie house with 925 seats. It was on Peachtree Street and stayed open during the Great Depression. At one point in its history it boasted the largest electric sign above a marquee south of New York City. More than one Hollywood movie was premiered at the Rialto. In 1962, the original Rialto was torn down and a larger Rialto was erected on the same site and remained open until 1989. Georgia State University renovated it into the Rialto Performing Arts Center in 1996.

\textsuperscript{44} The Paradise Room was a popular dining and dancing club in the Henry Grady Hotel in Atlanta, Georgia.

\textsuperscript{45} The Henry Grady Hotel was a 13-story hotel located at the corner of Peachtree Street and Cain Street (now Andrew Young International Boulevard) in Atlanta from 1924-1972. It was named after Henry Grade, Georgia’s most celebrated orator. After the Grady was demolished, the Westin Peachtree Plaza was built on the site.

\textsuperscript{46} Known formally as ‘Hotel Ansley,’ it was located on Williams Street in downtown Atlanta. It was built in 1913 and named for Edwin P. Ansley, developer of the Ansley Park neighborhood. In 1930 radio station WGST moved its studios to the hotel. In 1939, the hotel had 400 rooms with en suite bathrooms and radio. In 1952 it was sold and renamed the Dinkley Plaza Hotel. The building was razed in 1972 and the Hyatt Regency Hotel is now on the site.

\textsuperscript{47} The Rainbow Room was a popular dining and dancing club in the Ansley Hotel in Atlanta, Georgia.

\textsuperscript{48} Laura Zaban married Marshall Dinerman.

\textsuperscript{49} Carol Zaban married Larry Cooper.

\textsuperscript{50} Sara Zaban married Robert Franco.

\textsuperscript{51} 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 25\textsuperscript{th} 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.
\end{footnotesize}
think a day ever passed that weren’t communicating by phone or in person, with lunches and dinners. He was like the brother I never had.

**Sandra:** I’ve heard wonderful things about him.

**Erwin:** He was outstanding. He was a great worker in the community. He was the only person, I think, who was president of the [Breman] Jewish Home, the Jewish Community Center and Federation.

**Sandra:** That’s amazing. I know it must have been very rough for you this year when he passed away.

**Erwin:** He didn’t come to this country until he was about 11 years old.

**Sandra:** I’ve met a lot of his family. His father was . . . who was Max London? That was his . . .?

**Erwin:** Who?

**Sandra:** Max London.

**Erwin:** Max London was his uncle. His mother’s brother. That’s Bobby. You know Bobby London?

**Sandra:** Yes.

**Erwin:** He was my best friend. I had a number of other friends. I had about eight or nine fellows that I used to go to lunch with and all of them but one are gone.

**Sandra:** Who were the fellows you went to lunch with?

**Erwin:** I went to lunch with Meyer Balser,\(^52\) Bill [M. William] Breman,\(^53\) Sidney Feldman and Jerome Kahana [sp], Perry [Pete] Morris. I can’t think of all of them. But Nate Lipson is the only one that’s still around. Maybe Irving Adair. Both are kind of incapacitated. I’ve been very

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\(^{52}\) Atlanta native Meyer Balser (1908-2004) was a business and civic leader. He served as chairman of the Red Cross and Community Chest (predecessor to United Way) campaigns. He was twice named ‘Man of the Year’ of Massachusetts Mutual Life Insurance Company where he was a leading insurance agent for many years. He received numerous accolades and awards for his leadership in Atlanta’s Jewish community including the Atlanta Jewish Community Center and the Atlanta Jewish Federation. The Meyer Balser Naturally Occurring Retirement Community at the William Breman Jewish Home which offers programs and services to help seniors live independently in their own homes is named in his honor. A book about his life by Vida Goldgar, *A Goal Worth Shooting For: The Biography of Meyer Balser*, was published in 1998.

\(^{53}\) M. William (Bill) Breman (1908-2000), owner of the Breman Steel Company, was a longtime resident and community leader of Atlanta, Georgia. Bill received numerous humanitarian and human relations awards for the extensive community service work that he did, including the Distinguished Service Award of the Gate City Lodge of B’nai B’rith (1965); the American Jewish Committee Human Relations Award (1981) and the Abe Goldstein Humanitarian Award of the Anti-Defamation League (1984). He served as president of the Temple and the Jewish Home, now called the William Breman Jewish Home. Bill also founded the William Breman Jewish Heritage Museum.
lucky. I’ve had four cancer operations and a coronary bypass. I’ve had everything wrong and here I am.

**Sandra:** You look great.

**Erwin:** Well . . .

**Sandra:** You really do.

**Erwin:** G-d’s been good to me.

**Sandra:** Do you remember Leb’s Restaurant?\(^5^4\)

**Erwin:** I remember Leb’s very well . . . Charlie Leb and how he got in trouble.

**Sandra:** Can you talk a little bit about that and that time period?

**Erwin:** Yes, Charlie Leb came here, I think from Miami [Florida]. Another fellow came here from Miami and opened . . . I forget now . . . right next to the Biltmore Hotel.\(^5^5\) Anyway, Charlie Leb came here and opened a restaurant on Forsyth Street, on the corner. It was the first real deli sort of restaurant that we had that was good. We had some when I was younger, Gold’s, Kaufman’s . . . but he did very well. It was the place to go late at night or whenever. He got in trouble with the black community and rejected them, and they just killed him. He ended up opening a restaurant in the Cabana Hotel later . . . Cabana Motel on Peachtree . . . called ‘King’s Inn.’ But he was a character.

**Sandra:** So he described what he did . . . he told them that he would not integrate the restaurant?

**Erwin:** Right. He would not integrate it. Several of them went in there and urinated on the tables. It was a real fight going on. He couldn’t survive it.

**Sandra:** What was that whole era like? I found some of the photographs in your, home that you had a lot of African-American workers at Zep.

**Erwin:** Yes. I had a lot of good African-American friends. Still do.

\(^5^4\) Leb’s Restaurant was owned by Charlie Lebedin and was at the corner of Forsyth and Luckie Streets. Lebedin was a well-known segregationist, and Leb’s, like most downtown restaurants in hotels, did not allow black customers. In the early 1960’s, protestors including students from Atlanta College, began to hold repeated pickets and sit-ins, and Leb’s was a frequent target. After a series of civil rights protests that were met with increasing violence, Leb’s and the other downtown restaurants were finally integrated on July 23, 1964.

\(^5^5\) The Atlanta Biltmore Hotel on West Peachtree Street in Atlanta opened in 1924. The 11 story hotel and the 10-story apartment buildings were located in Midtown. There were towering radio masks on each end of the building, with vertical illuminated letters on them that spell out ‘BILTMORE.’ In 1967 it was sold to Sheraton Hotels and became the Sheraton-Biltmore Hotel. The building has now been renovated and turned into office space and condominiums and is still called the ‘Biltmore.’
Sandra: Was it difficult socializing or interacting? Did you social . . . during the . . . Fifties, early Sixties?

Erwin: Not if you were Jewish. I think we had a bigger heart for blacks that the rest of the community. Our ancestors didn’t come and operate plantations. They were tortured some themselves, especially those that came from Russia. But I have two good friends in the black community today that I’ve had for years: Herman Russell and Jesse Hill. ‘Daddy’ King [Martin Luther King Sr.] was one of my friends. I understand [Coretta Scott King] passed away this morning.

Sandra: Yes.

Erwin: But we never had that problem. I had blacks on my Board of Directors since I came here.

Sandra: Were you a member of the Temple when the Temple was bombed?

Erwin: I was a member and my good friend was president, Billy [William B.] Schwartz. It happened just before we were taking the kids to Sunday school. Billy’s still a good friend of mine. He spends a lot of his time in Miami [Florida] now. But he has three sons here. One’s working for Federation now.

Sandra: He’s also on the board of the museum.

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56 Herman J. Russell (1930- ) is an Atlanta businessman and philanthropist. He owns H.J. Russell & company, a construction, construction management, real estate development and property management company. He is active in civil affairs and worked very closely with Martin Luther King Jr. in the 1960’s.

57 Jesse Hill (1927-2012) was one of Atlanta’s most prominent civil rights leader as well as president and chief executive officer of the Atlanta Life Insurance Company from 1973 to 1992. He used his position in the black business community to promote civil rights in Georgia and Alabama, worked to desegregate University of Georgia in Athens, helped make it possible for blacks to get mortgages to buy homes and organized successful voter registration drives in which 50,000 blacks were registered to vote. He even employed Rosa Parks in his Montgomery office as a secretary during the Montgomery bus boycott. He supported Martin Luther King, Hill was active in the civic and business communities of Atlanta for more than five decades.

58 Martin Luther King Sr. (1899-1984) was the father of Martin Luther King Jr. He was a Baptist pastor, missionary and an early figure in the Civil Rights Movement.

59 Coretta Scott King (1927-2006) was an American author, civil rights leader. The widow of Martin Luther King, Jr., Coretta Scott King helped lead the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960’s. King often participated in many of her husband’s exploits and goals during the battle for equality. Mrs. King played a prominent role in the years after her husband's 1968 assassination when she took on the leadership of the struggle for racial equality herself and became active in the Women's Movement. King founded the King Center in Atlanta and sought to make her husband’s birthday a national holiday.

60 The Temple on Peachtree Street in Atlanta, Georgia was bombed in the early morning hours of October 12, 1958. About 50 sticks of dynamite were planted near the building and tore a huge hole in the wall. No one was injured in the bombing as it was during the night. Rabbi Jacob Rothschild was an outspoken advocate of civil rights and integration and friend of Martin Luther King Jr. Five men associated with the National States’ Rights Party, a white separatist group, were tried and acquitted in the bombing.
Erwin: But he was president and he did a good job of getting it renovated, rebuilt. The Christian community came along very strongly with help.

Sandra: Do you think Rabbi [Jacob] Rothschild\(^61\) was right to take a stand . . . to push the congregation into civil rights?

Erwin: I think he was right, but he was before his time. I mean I have to admit I did not feel as strongly toward the blacks as he did at that time, but we never had any trouble with black employees. I had black salespeople. Black people worked in my warehouse.

Sandra: You mentioned another project really close to your heart . . . something that you did in East Lake with the black community?

Erwin: That’s not a big project. After my parents died I went to the mayor [of Atlanta], who was Maynard Jackson\(^62\) at the time . . . told him I wanted to do something in memory of my parents and I wanted to do it in the black community, in a run-down community. East Lake was terrible at that time. He said, “Erwin, if you’ll give me . . .”—I forget the number, it was $35,000, I think—“the city will put up $35,000. We’ll put up a recreation center there and call it the ‘Zaban Recreation Center’ in memory of your parents.” So we did. Today, of course, that park is in the middle of a whole new area caused by Tom Cousins and East Lake Country Club . . . new condos all over the place. It was just a few months ago . . . the East Lake Community Foundation runs that . . . it’s owned by the City of Atlanta . . . they invited me to come out there for a whole day thing . . . rejuvenation. I went there with Laura and I went back again with my wife. We had like 1,200 volunteers from Home Depot and UPS [United Parcel Service] and other places. They were repainting and putting new kitchen cabinets in and replanting. I don’t know if I showed it to you, but I think when you were at my house, I just got a thing about two black kids’ baseball teams that were playing out there. I’ve given them money over the years, but it’s very nice. But it’s not blighted like it was anymore, and it’s not all black like it was anymore. But it was at the time.

Sandra: What about some of the other individuals that have, that you’ve had the good fortune to get to know over the years? What did you think of Rabbi [Jacob] Rothschild?

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\(^61\) Rabbi Jacob Rothschild was rabbi of the city’s oldest Reform congregation, the Temple, in Atlanta, Georgia from 1946 until his death in 1973 from a heart attack. He forged close relationships with the city’s Christian clergy and distinguished himself as a charismatic spokesperson for civil rights.

Erwin: My beginnings was with my father’s generation. They had many outstanding leaders: Ben Massell for one, Abe Goldstein I mentioned, Barney Medintz. A whole group of people. It seems like in Atlanta the next generation has come along and done a little bit better job. This generation that’s followed me has done an outstanding job, much better than we ever did. They’ve grown, with more people and more volunteers and more interest. People like Steve\textsuperscript{63} and Linda Selig\textsuperscript{64} . . . outstanding.

Sandra: What about Sam Massell?\textsuperscript{65} Can you reflect a little bit about him and the fact that we had a Jewish mayor in the Seventies? What was that like?

Erwin: That was very interesting, but short lived. Very short lived. One of the most interesting things that happened to me over the years was when Steve Selig’s father died. I guess it was a month later I called Steve and said, “I want to have lunch with you.” He came and we had lunch. I said, “Steve, your father was always a good contributor, but he was never really interested in the Jewish community except the Temple. You got to do . . . get interested. You’ve got the means and you’ve got a whole circle of friends that aren’t involved.” He tells this story over and over again. Twenty years later I said to him, “I told you [that] you should pick what you wanted. I didn’t know you were going to pick everything.” But that’s been a wonderful relationship with Steve and Linda and Cathy in particular.

Sandra: How about your family? How have they followed in your footsteps?

Erwin: My children have been outstanding. They really have. Far better than I ever was. My daughter, Carol . . . my oldest daughter . . . was president of Jewish Family and Children’s

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\textsuperscript{63} Simon (Steve) Stephen Selig III (b. 1943) is the son of Simon Selig Jr. and Caroline Massell Selig. After college he worked in the Selig real estate development business, campaigned for Jimmy Carter in his presidential campaign, after which he moved to Washington D.C. where he served as Deputy Assistant to the President. After his government work he returned to Selig Enterprises and then founded Southern Promotions, which arranged conventions and concerts in the Atlanta area. He was instrumental in bringing the Music Midtown Festival to Atlanta. Today Selig Enterprises is one of the major real estate companies in the Southeast with shopping centers, official buildings and industrial complexes. He was also active in the Jewish community with roles in the Jewish Federation of Greater Atlanta and the United Jewish Communities, where he served as chairman of the annual campaign and president of the Federation from 1996 to 1998. He donated the building the Selig Center and William Breman Jewish Heritage Museum now occupies in Midtown.

\textsuperscript{64} Linda Selig is Steve’s wife.

\textsuperscript{65} Sam Massell (b. 1927) is a businessman who served from 1970 to 1974 as the 53\textsuperscript{rd} mayor of Atlanta. He is the first Jewish mayor in his city’s history. A lifelong Atlanta resident, Massell has had successful careers in real estate brokerage, elected office, tourism, and association management.
Service.\textsuperscript{66} She was the founder of an organization called ‘PALS,’\textsuperscript{67} where they had [Jewish] children matched up with people [who would act as mentors]. Then she was chairman of Federation’s campaign two years ago. Still working in many, many directions. Laura, of course, was, as I told you, was first president of the Jewish Community Center. Then she became president of the [William Breman] [Jewish Heritage] Museum,\textsuperscript{68} or chairman, or whatever you call it. They’re interested in many things. My youngest daughter, Sara, and her husband [Robert Franco] are a little more religious than the rest of us. I think it’s because of her husband, Robert, who’s a very nice young man. Last year, Robert was honored by Kollel.\textsuperscript{69}

\textbf{Sandra:} Wonderful.

\textbf{Erwin:} They’re very interested in the Epstein School,\textsuperscript{70} and their children went to the Epstein School.

\textbf{Sandra:} How many grandchildren do you have?

\textbf{Erwin:} I have ten grandchildren. Seven are married, eight will have been married this summer. That makes 18, and I have eight great-great grandchildren. I have another one coming in April. Altogether, my family will be 32 . . . my immediate family, not counting my wife’s family, from a single person.

\textbf{Sandra:} That is truly amazing.

\textbf{Erwin:} I have been blessed, been blessed.

\textsuperscript{66} JF&CS is a result of the merging of two separate organizations, both of which started as committees of the Jewish Federation of Greater Atlanta. The first, Jewish Family Services was founded around 1890. The agency became an autonomous organization in 1982. In 1979, Jewish Vocational Services was started. It became independent in 1985. The two agencies merged in 1997 to become JF&CS. Jewish Family and Career Services (JF&CS Atlanta) is a group of professionals and volunteers offering programs, and resources for individuals and families of all faiths, cultures and ages. Services include counseling, tools for employment, and support for people with developmental disabilities. JF&CS is a member organization of the Association of Jewish Family & Children's Agencies (AJFCA).

\textsuperscript{67} Now a part of Jewish Family & Career Services, the PALS program is similar to a Big Brother/Big Sister program for Jewish children. It offers one-on-one mentor relationships and provided activities that are fun, diverse and low-cost or free.

\textsuperscript{68} In 1992, M. William Breman gave the lead gift, ensuring the creation of the William Breman Jewish Heritage Museum. In 1996, the museum opened at the Selig Center on Spring Street in Midtown Atlanta. The Museum features a permanent exhibit called Absence of Humanity: The Holocaust Years, 1933-1945 as well as exhibitions about Southern Jewish history and Jewish culture. The Breman Museum also includes the Cuba Family Archives for Southern Jewish History, the Weinberg Center for Holocaust Education, and a library of research materials.

\textsuperscript{69} ‘Kollel’ in Hebrew means ‘gathering’ or ‘collection’ [of scholars]. It is an institute for full-time, advanced study of the Talmud and rabbinic literature. It is like a yeshiva but the student body are virtually all married men, who receive a regular monthly stipend to their members.

\textsuperscript{70} The Epstein School (also known as the Solomon Shechter School of Atlanta) is a private Jewish day school in the Atlanta area located in of Sandy Springs. In 1973, Rabbi Harry H. Epstein and the leaders of Ahavath Achim synagogue wanted to create a Conservative Jewish day school. The first campus was housed at the synagogue. In 1987 the school moved to Sandy Springs.
Sandra: Amazing. Do the grandchildren live mostly here in Atlanta or are they spread out?

Erwin: All my children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren live in Atlanta except one granddaughter and her husband and two kids. They live in Colorado. Everyone else lives here.

Sandra: Have they gotten involved in the community?

Erwin: Yes, yes.

Sandra: So it’s quite a legacy that you’ve instilled in all of these.

Erwin: I see now some of my grandchildren getting involved a little bit. Carol’s son, Kevin Cooper, was leader of Young Leadership [Council],\(^{71}\) or whatever they call it, at Federation. I’ve encouraged him to do that, but I’ve also thought that sometimes my daughters do too much. That’s only because I’m older and I don’t want to do that much anymore.

Sandra: You do think they do too much sometimes?

Erwin: I think Carol, my oldest daughter, has been sick for a while. She had a double mastectomy a few years ago. She’s really not that well, but she continues to be involved.

Sandra: That is so wonderful. I have the good fortune to know . . . I don’t know Sara [Franco] really . . . but I’ve known Carol [Cooper] and Laura [Dinerman] played such an important role in the [Breman] Museum and still do.

Erwin: Carol’s either first or second vice president of Federation.

Sandra: I didn’t even know that. That is just truly amazing. I’m looking at my list here and I want to see if there are some areas that we missed. We talked a lot about some of your friends in the community. We talked a lot about your friendships with some of your contemporaries, but I also wanted to know what you thought of some of the professionals that you’ve dealt with over the years: Ed Kahn, Mike [Max] Gettenger, David Sarnat.

Erwin: Ed Kahn headed Federation when I was growing up. After I grew up David Sarnat headed it. Today, of course, I think . . .

Sandra: . . . Steve Rakitt . . .

Erwin: . . . Steve Rakitt\(^ {72}\) is probably the best that we’ve had. At the Community Center we’ve had a number of directors. There’s no question Harry Stern has been the most

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\(^{71}\) The Young Leadership Council (YLC) is dedicated to building a connected community of young Jews to promote Jewish identity, and to support Jewish community through fun and meaningful volunteer, networking, social, educational and philanthropic activities. YLC welcomes adults up to age 40, who are single or married, with or without kids.

\(^{72}\) Steve Rakitt was President and CEO of the Jewish Federation of Greater Atlanta from 2000 to 2010, when he moved to head the Jewish Federation of Greater Washington.
outstanding. He really had built that place, built the membership . . . has to have an affair every other week in order to maintain the big budget of over $20,000,000 a year. He only gets about $1,400,000 from Federation. The rest of it is membership fees . . . but the professionals have been very good. They’ve done a good job by in large. It’s impossible for a professional in the Jewish community to satisfy everybody because you just don’t do that with Jews. Everybody’s got to have a voice. If you go to a Federation meeting, people like to hear themselves speak and they stand up and talk about things that are irrelevant. You have to have a lot of patience to be a social worker in Atlanta.

Sandra: I can imagine. I’m sure. It’s interesting. Talking about the Center, you probably do remember as a boy . . . the old Jewish Educational Alliance.73

Erwin: Only a little bit.

Sandra: Did you go there?

Erwin: I went there a little bit, but we never lived on the south side of town as I was growing up, so it was more inconvenient, particularly until you could drive an automobile. But after I could drive, [I] would go there to some affairs. That’s where I met my first wife. It was a barn . . . it was just a terrible place, but it was enjoyed by a lot of people. It was right in the heart of the Jewish community, as was the Progressive Club and the Standard Club . . . all there together.

Sandra: Was it upsetting for your father to not have been a member of the Standard Club? Did it bother him?

Erwin: No, no. In fact, when he was invited he didn’t even . . . my dad was not a golfer. It was just to be with some friends. But the Standard Club’s changed too.

Sandra: Are you still a member?

Erwin: I’m still a member, I go there once a year maybe . . . twice a year. But my wife plays golf four or five times a year there. We spend some of our time away from Atlanta now, in Florida in the winter, and we have a little place in the mountains in the summer. But it’s been a wonderful experience. I’ve had a great journey.

Sandra: In closing, first of all, is there anything you feel that I have missed that you’d like . . .

73 The Jewish Educational Alliance operated from 1910 to 1948 on the site where the Atlanta- Fulton County Stadium was located. The JEA was once the hub of Jewish life in Atlanta. Families congregated there for social, educational, sports and cultural programs. The JEA ran camps and held classes to help some new residents learn to read and write English. For newcomers, it became a refuge, with programs to help them acclimate to a new home. The JEA stayed at that site until the late 1940’s, when it evolved into the Atlanta Jewish Community Center and moved to Peachtree Street. It stayed there until 1998, when the building was sold and the center moved to Dunwoody. In 2000, it was renamed the ‘Marcus Jewish Community Center of Atlanta.’
Erwin: Hardly anything you’ve missed . . . you’ve covered the waterfront. I want you to know, though, that I don’t think that I’m unusual or that any other people in Atlanta are that unusual. We do what we feel we’re supposed to do. Most times as I’ve told you we don’t do all that we should be doing. So don’t get overly impressed with people because a lot of that is ego on the part of people.

Sandra: In closing, I’d just like to know, Atlanta’s been your home your entire life. What do you feel about the city? What do you feel about the direction it’s going and where you’d like to see it continue to go?

Erwin: I think the city’s a mess, if you want to know what I think. We have a terrible, terrible situation. One reason for it is that Atlanta should be and Fulton County should be one and the same. We have two governments, two police departments, two sanitation [departments], and two fire departments. There’s always divisiveness between them. I think Atlanta is like most big cities today, many of our politicians are corrupt. We have very few honest ones, I think, because that’s not the way you play the game. You cannot get elected to an office if you don’t take donations from people. When you take donations from people, you’re sometimes obligated to help them in some way when they ask for help. That’s the way the system works. I guess not only locally in Atlanta, but all over. With all of that, there’s no place in the world like this country. We’re so fortunate we live here.

Sandra: I agree.

Erwin: Atlanta’s been good to me. I can’t complain about it. I wonder sometimes about what’s going to happen in my children’s and grandchildren’s and great-grandchildren’s lives. I’m concerned, greatly concerned, with this Islamic movement . . . that we could have more strife here as their population grows. I’m not concerned about the black community. I think the black community will mesh in, because they’re mainly Christian . . . but this Islamic movement, where you do all these things, commit suicide, bombing, whatever, in the name of religion, it’s just frightening.

Sandra: I’m glad you mentioned that, because it leads me to one question that I didn’t touch upon, and that is your relationship with the State of Israel and the support that you’ve given it over the years. Would you like to talk about that a little bit?

Erwin: I have not been to Israel but once. I’ve been thinking about going back to visit my money. But my wife just came back from a big mission that they had. My children go.
was a big supporter. He raised money for Haganah,\textsuperscript{74} which we refuse to believe today was a terrorist organization when we fight terrorist organizations. I’ve always supported Israel in many, many ways. But I really don’t have any desire to go there.

\textbf{Sandra:} Yes.

\textbf{Erwin:} I went there with Sidney Feldman and his wife.

\textbf{Sandra:} Is that when you went?

\textbf{Erwin:} Yes. We bought a workshop there. At the time, Shearith Israel needed a Torah.\textsuperscript{75} We went around to Torah writers, and never could find what we wanted. Finally, Rabbi [Sydney] Mossman,\textsuperscript{76} at the time, found one.

\textbf{Sandra:} What year was that?

\textbf{Erwin:} I think it was the twenty-fifth . . . about 1948, 1949, 1950, maybe early Fifties.

\textbf{Sandra:} Finally, you did mention your wife that went on the mission. I know she’s involved too in community activities. Would you like to talk about that about your wife’s activities?

\textbf{Erwin:} About her trip to the . . .

\textbf{Sandra:} . . . just her communal involvement.

\textbf{Erwin:} Judy’s done a lot of work. Judy [Oliver] was not Jewish. Before we got married she said, “I think I ought to convert.” I said, “You don’t have to.” She says, “No, you’ll be more comfortable if I convert.” So, [Rabbi] Alvin Sugarman converted her. We walked outside the Temple, and I said, “How does it feel. How do you feel?” She says, “I feel like a Jewish girl.” I said, “What’s that?” She says, “I got a headache.” But she’s been very good working on Jewish things. Never in a leadership role . . . though she has taken a leadership role in several non-

\textsuperscript{74} (Hebrew: Defense). This was a Jewish paramilitary organization that operated in the British Mandate of Palestine from 1920 to 1948. Later, most of its members became the core of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF). After the 1920 and 1921 Arab riots, the Jewish leadership in Palestine believed that the British had no desire to confront the Arabs who were attacking Jews. Haganah was originally created to protect Jewish farms and kibbutzim and to actively confront the Arabs. In the wake of the 1929 Arab riots the group grew and got more organized, acquiring military equipment and skills that turned them into a capable underground army. After the war, the Haganah carried out anti-British operations in Palestine such as the liberation of interned immigrants from the Atlit detainee camp, and attacking British installations. They also organized underground immigration into Palestine. Two weeks after Israel became a state, the Israel Defense Forces were created to succeed Haganah. All other paramilitary organizations were outlawed. This led to conflicts between David Ben-Gurion, the prime minister, and the Haganah leadership. Famous members of the group included Yitzhak Rabin, Ariel Sharon, and Moshe Dayan.

\textsuperscript{75} Hebrew for ‘teaching. ‘Torah’ is a general term that covers all Jewish law including the vast mass of teachings recorded in the Talmud and other rabbinical works. ‘Sefer Torah’ refers to the sacred scroll on which the first five books of the Bible (the Pentateuch) are written.

\textsuperscript{76} Rabbi Sydney K. Mossman was born in Windsor, Canada in 1913. He served in Germany during and after World War II. He served for many years at Shearith Israel in Atlanta, Georgia.
Jewish organizations. She was head of Meals on Wheels\textsuperscript{77} and the [Atlanta] History Center.\textsuperscript{78} She’s done a lot of work. She works in the Jewish community but she’s never been a leader in it. I don’t know whether she’s uncomfortable doing that or not. She went to Israel and really enjoyed that. She’s very proud of being \emph{bat mitzvahed}\textsuperscript{79} there.

\textbf{Sandra:} I was on that mission also.

\textbf{Ruth:} Mr. Zaban, could you talk just a minute about your upbringing, or values, that you have brought to your business and to your philanthropy and whether that came from your parents or your community or Jewish sensibilities or ethnic . . .

\textbf{Erwin:} If I talk about that it sounds like I’m bragging and I really don’t want to do that. Our values were simple values. They weren’t . . . I think I knew and enjoyed the fact that what success I had I had to give back, and wanted to give back. Then I was influenced by a lot of people, as I’ve said. One of my dear friends, Bernie Marcus, who I met when he first came to Atlanta, says that I was his mentor, which I wasn’t, of course. But Bernie’s been a good friend. When I was sick a few years ago he donated $1,000,000 in my honor to build a gymnasium at the Shirley Blumenthal Park.\textsuperscript{80} He’s been a good friend over the years. But I guess I don’t want to get fancy. I don’t want to get taken up with myself or with wealth. At 85, if you’ve never realized it before in your whole life, you realize that money is just not everything. After you have all the necessities of life and what luxuries you want and can afford, the rest of it doesn’t mean anything. You have to get older to realize that, though, because when you’re younger you’re always out there fighting for more business or more organizations or whatever it is you’re doing, but fortunately I have a great family. They’ve carried it on very well.

\textsuperscript{77} A program that delivers meals to individuals at home who are unable to purchase or prepare their own meals.

\textsuperscript{78} The Atlanta History Center was founded in 1926 by 14 Atlantans who wanted to preserve the city’s history. They called it the ‘Atlanta Historical Center.’ Today it is the Atlanta History Center and is on a campus that houses the Atlanta History Museum, Centennial Olympic Games Museum, Swan House, Smith Family Farm, six historic gardens, and the Kenan Research Center. It also includes the Margaret Mitchell House, which is located off site.

\textsuperscript{79} Hebrew for ‘daughter of commandment.’ A rite of passage for Jewish girls aged 12 years and one day according to her Hebrew birthday. Many girls have their \emph{bat mitzvah} around age 13, the same as boys who have their \emph{bar mitzvah} at that age. She is now duty bound to keep the commandments. Synagogue ceremonies are held for \emph{bat mitzvah} girls in Reform and Conservative communities, but it has not won the universal approval of Orthodox rabbis.

\textsuperscript{80} Shirley Blumenthal Park was a Jewish community center in in East Cobb County, and was part of the Marcus Jewish Community Center of Atlanta. However, it has been closed and is being sold to Mt. Bethel United Method Church.
Sandra: I think in listening to . . . thinking about this interview, the most amazing thing to me is that you were an only child and today there’s 32 family members. That’s quite a legacy and quite a wonderful thing to . . .

Erwin: I’m very proud of that.

Sandra: I would be too. It’s wonderful.

Erwin: If we weren’t on video I’d tell you a story about that.

Sandra: You can’t tell it on the video? You can tell us after. Thank you very much. I really enjoyed it.

Erwin: Thank you, darling. I appreciate you both being here.

Sandra: Thank you.

<End Disk 1>

INTERVIEW ENDS

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