

## QUESTIONNAIRE FOR ORAL HISTORY OF MARGOT BARR

1. I am Helene Banks, I am conducting an interview with Margot Barr for the JFCS archives on June 29, 2010.
2. Can you tell me how and why your family originally came to this country and when?

My family came to the United States in August 1939 from Donauschingen in Germany. My father and other townsmen were put in jail on Kristalnacht. We lived in a small community and my father was released from jail when the family obtained the records necessary to travel. We went to and stayed there for a couple of days because Dad's mother and other relatives lived there. Then we went to Paris for a couple of days. Dad wanted to stay, but mother said "no." We were on the last ship to leave in August of 1939. When we arrived in New York, my Dad had 10 cents. Mother's sister lived in New York. My uncle, aunt and their two children were with us on the ship. My aunt was the one who talked my mother into getting papers to be able to leave when the time came.

3. What were your parents' names and where were they born?

My father's name was Fred Bensinger and mother's name was Judith. They were Both were born in Germany.

4. What is your birth date? What language(s) were spoken in your home? Where did you live then? Who lived in the same house with you – Grandparents? Uncles/Aunts? Brothers? Sisters?

I was born September 25, 1929 (I was 9 years old when I came here.). German and Yiddish were spoken in my home and we had to learn English when we arrived in the United States. We were separated from our parents for a short time (our family didn't have any money) and our mother disapproved of the separation. Finally, we were all reunited. When we came to Louisville, Dad was given a job operating an elevator. We lived downtown on Brook Street. My brother, sister, Mother, Dad and I lived together in the same house. We lived right next to the school.

5. What was your neighborhood like? Were there other Jews living in the neighborhood? Did you walk to school? Sunday School? Temple? Was there a neighborhood grocery? Drug store?

Jews lived everywhere in the neighborhood; on 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, and 3<sup>rd</sup> Streets. The Jews lived all around us. Yes, I walked to school. Both my brother and sister went to

Jeshurun and I then went with my brother and sister.

**6. How did the 1937 flood affect you and your family?**

We weren't here until 1939.

**7. If you wished to travel, what kind of transportation did you use. Did you travel when you were young. If so, where?**

We didn't travel. I did travel with three other girls by train to Florida when I was 18 or 19.

**8. Was your family involved in a synagogue/temple?**

My whole family was involved at Adath Jeshurun..

**9. What holidays and rituals were observed?**

All holidays and rituals were observed in our home.

**10. Did you attend religious school? Were you confirmed? Bar Mitzvah?**

I did not attend religious school. I was not Confirmed or Bat Mitzvahed.

**11. What is your educational background? What was your career?**

I finished high school and went to night school to take college courses at the University of Louisville. I worked in an office as a secretary.

**12. What brought you to Louisville and when did you come?**

I came with my family in 1939 or 1940.

**13. How did you meet your husband/wife? Where and when were you married? Do you have children?**

I met my husband in Louisville in 19 ?? . He owned a store on 4<sup>th</sup> Street. We were married in Louisville on August 10, 1952. I have three children; Sandy Hammond, Jennifer Burke and Jeff Barr.

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**14. Discuss your involvement in the Jewish Community? Was your whole family involved?**

My whole family was involved in the Jewish Community. My mother always helped at the JCC, especially with senior activities. My children have also been involved.

**15. How was your family affected by the World Wars? Wars in Israel?**

Our family was deeply affected by World War II. We had to escape Europe. The wars in Israel affected me as they did other Jews. I was very distressed and supported them as we could. We bought Israeli bonds

**16. What are your favorite spiritual memories? How did religion affect your life?**

My spiritual memories are being together with my family for Jewish holidays and family celebrations. My mother always cooked and we would go to services together.

**17. What interests do you have?**

I play bridge, go out with friends to the theater and go to lunch and dinner Occasionally.

**18. What are you favorite family memories?**

My best memories are being together with my family and parents.

**19. What is your legacy? How would you like to be remembered? What values Would you like to pass on to those you leave behind?**

It is important to keep the family as a group and do everything you can to help the needy. Make sure the family is able to get an education and that everyone has a good life.

## Margot Barr

Margot Barr, nee Bensinger, was born in September, 1929, in a small town in Germany, called Donaueschingen. She was the oldest of three siblings, Ann, and Carl. As conditions in Germany began to deteriorate her parents realized the urgency of emigration. She remembers that her father, Fred, was jailed for a time by the Nazis. He had a small retail shop, which was taken from them. These were perilous times for Jews in Germany, and eventually all of Europe.

Her mother's sister and her family also were able to leave Germany and they were the only other family members who escaped, those remaining all eventually perished. A cousin in Chicago was a sponsor and helped the family get the required papers for emigration from Germany. At one point they even tried to get to South America but that didn't work out and then the visa to America finally became available.

When the family was finally allowed to leave, they left with little in the way of possessions or wealth. They used the last of their funds to pay for the journey and arrived with little more than the clothes they were wearing. Their boxes of belongings were to be shipped to them but nothing ever arrived. They first went to France, where a cousin of her father's encouraged them to settle there. However, Margot's mother, Judith, insisted that they follow their original plans and leave Europe right away, which proved to be the action that saved the family.

They arrived in New York in August, 1939, just prior to the outbreak of war in Europe in September. Margot was 10. The family lived in New York a short time before they were helped by HIAS, which found a place for them in Kansas City. The family was given bus tickets for their trip. However, when the bus stopped in Louisville, Fred decided that since they had some relatives here, they would remain in Louisville.

They lived for a while at 944 South Brook Street near Male High. Her mother worked at a shop across the street from the school and had other part time jobs, which allowed her to be there when the children came home from school. Her parents attended classes to learn English and the children picked up English rather easily, as children often do. They later moved to 954 South Brook to a larger house, which enabled them to take in boarders. Her sister, Ann Schaffer, now lives in New York. Margot and her brother, Carl, still reside in Louisville. Margot's father, Fred, died August, 1979 and Margot's mother, Judith, lived independently and enjoyed good health until very late in life and died in her own home September, 2007 at the age of 103.

Margot recalls that the people of Louisville were helpful, friendly and welcoming and assisted the family to get settled. She went to Girl's High but did not attend college. She met her husband, Larry, who was born in Dayton, OH and had moved to Louisville from Huntington, West Virginia to take a job in sales. He was the manager of the Collins stores on Fourth. They were married in 1951. Margot and Larry moved to Dorothy Ave and lived there for about five years before moving to a home on Wendell, in the Bowman Field area. Larry died in February, 2003.

The Barr's had three children, Jan, Sandy and Jeff. They were members of Adath Jeshurun, which Margot said was a welcoming and warm congregation. Her children attended religious school at AJ and Jeff celebrated his bar mitzvah there. The family enjoyed occasional travel by auto, seeing many sites in this country while the children were young.

Margot recalls being busy with her children and home. She was a secretary/receptionist for Temple Brith Sholom for many years and continued with the congregation when it merged with Temple Adath Israel, now called The Temple. She recalls the many seders and other religious observances at home as well as the functions held at Congregation Adath Jeshurun.

Her daughter, Jan, married Robert Burke and lives in the North Palm Beach area. They have three children. Daughter Sandy, married Dr. Mark Hammond, a local dentist, and they have two children. Her son Jeff also lives in Louisville.

#### Additional family information

Fred Bensinger was the son of Carl and Bertha Bensinger.

Judith Bensinger was the daughter of Isaac and Sophie Schlessinger

Lawrence (Larry) Barr was the son of Samuel and Sophie Barr

Prepared by Irvin Goldstein with additional details by Carl Bensinger.  
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**Barr** Margot, 85, died peacefully on March 22, 2015. She was born in Germany and came to this country with her family as a child. She was the secretary of The Temple before her retirement. She was a star bridge player who acquired life master status and an avid Mah Jong player. She was a member of Congregation Adath Jeshurun, The Temple and the Jewish Community Center.

She is preceded in death by her loving husband of 51 years, Larry Barr; and her parents, Fred and Judith Bensinger.

She is survived by her children, Jeff Barr, Jan Burke (Rob) and Sandy Hammond (Mark); her grandchildren, Jamie Burke, Jeremy Burke, Joshua Burke, Lauren Hammond (Ryan Rosenthal) and Kenny Hammond (Liz); her great-grandchild, Sophie Hammond; her brother, Carl Bensinger; her sister, Ann Schaffer (Sam); her cousin, Hans Bensinger; and several nieces, nephews and cousins.

Funeral services will be 3:00 p.m. Monday, March 23, 2015 at Herman Meyer & Son, 1338 Ellison Avenue with burial to follow in Adath Jeshurun Cemetery. Visitation will begin after 2:00 p.m. Contributions, in her memory, may be made to the Judith Bensinger Fund at the Jewish Community Center, The Temple or Congregation Adath Jeshurun.