

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR ORAL HISTORIES

1. I am Linda Lesser, I am conducting an interview with **Steven L. Block** for the JFCS archives on December 21, 2009.

2. **Can you tell me how and why your family originally came to this country and when?**

Steven's Father's family, the Selligmans, came from Prague in the 1840's through New Orleans and settled in Alabama and Kentucky. Steven's Mother's Father was Russian (Steven's maternal grandfather) and his Mother's Mother was German.

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

Steven's Father's name is Louis Block. Steven's Father was born in Louisville in 1905. Steven's Mother's name is Karolyn Arnson, and she was born in Niagara Falls, New York in 1907. His Mother was active in the League of Women Voters and was an early feminist and very liberal in her political orientation. (His maternal grandmother was a suffragette and took part in the New York March in 1919.) His parents divorced in 1945 when his Father was in a dental surgical unit of medical corps serving in WWII. Steven was 11 at the time of their divorce. Both of his parents remarried. Today, Steven serves on the Board of the League of Women Voters, carrying on his Grandmother's tradition.

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?**

Steven was born September 30, 1934 and is 75 years old and was born in Louisville. In his home, only English was spoken. He and his family lived in three locations in Louisville: Indian Hills, where there was only one other Jewish family. He has fond memories of being able to drink water from Beargrass Creek. He lived on 5 acres with his parents and younger brother Richard. Eastern Parkway was the second neighborhood where the his mother moved in 1944. There he met other Jewish kids and learned more about Jewish life. He was able to walk to Longfellow School. This home was near Model Drug Store, which housed a public library, and the Uptown Theater, which had a Jewish owner. He remembers going to the drug store with his brother for sandwiches and then to a movie, in the days before TV. His third neighborhood was on Cherokee Road where he was able to walk to Barrett Junior High 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?**

See number 4.

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

He was a tiny tot during the flood of 1937. He remembers his parents talking about it, and there may have been some leaks in his home.

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

Both of his parents had cars, and while living on Eastern Parkway he also was allowed to take the Broadway bus downtown. Steven remembers going to a summer camp, run by a progressive teacher his Mother knew from New York. The camp was a working ranch in Montana, and he was there four summers, from age 11-15 (1946-1949). There he did things like building a three-seated outhouse, a corral, and a slop pit (where "slop" was put for the animals). His brother went to a more "normal" camp.

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

When Steven's family lived in Indian Hills, he and his brother were picked up by Judge Granman who was teaching at Adath Israel downtown and taken to Sunday school. The family drove in for Rosh Hashannah and Yom Kippur. When his Father remarried, he and his new wife became Unitarians and were founders of Thomas Jefferson Unitarian Church

9. What holidays and rituals were observed?

Although Steven's family identified as Jewish, he was not brought up with a religious tradition.

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

Steven was confirmed, but not Bar Mitzvahed.

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

Steven attended the University of Louisville where he studied the social sciences-economics, political science, and history. He received his B.S. there, as well as a teachers' certificate. He left Louisville in 1958 for Harvard, where he studied City Planning. He discovered he was not very good at drafting and had the privilege of being one of the first social planners. He was invited to Sicily to help with some social planning, and then returned to Louisville and became involved in the Civil Rights Movement. He was hired by the Planning Division of the State of Kentucky and developed closeness to his birth state from programs with which he worked. He moved to Washington D.C. where he worked with anti-poverty programs and helped start a new program: VISTA. He did work under Mr. Shriver, when VISTA was organizing farm workers and Native peoples. He is now retired from the Federal Government.

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

Steven was born in Louisville; he returned when 2 exhibits from his Frankfort collection were held at The Speed Museum.

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

He married a Senior English Teacher in 1963. They divorced in 2004

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

Since returning to Louisville 6 years ago, Steven's association with Judaism has grown. He joined a Havurah 3 years ago and has been reviving his ties with his religion.

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

Steven's Father told him about WWI. And he has a vivid memory of some slides that his Father showed him of returning soldiers he treated, providing them with facial surgery from wounds they received in the war. His Father photographed them before and after their surgical procedures during his time in the military during WWII. These slides had a great impact on Steven. He remembers the Six Day War and the feeling of elation in his family about Israel's victory. He has never been to Israel.

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

Steven has been moved by the experiences he had with Indian people in Washington state when he worked for VISTA. Singing religious music, whatever the tradition also moves him. He has a special memory of spending time with his brother and an older neighbor woman when his family lived in Indian Hills. The neighbor said she was descended from Anne Bloyn. They saw shooting stars in the night skies, when his neighborhood was still considered country.

17. What interests do you have?

Steven notices he seems to be drawn to causes that champion the under dog and that help them win. Social action is important to him. He is on the Board of the League of Women Voters. He is one of the few men to have been invited to this position, and he is proud to follow his Mother's footsteps. He likes to hear people tell their stories, is drawn to the arts, and enjoys watching basketball. He began collecting prints in 1978 (instead of the stock market, he notes), and he has been instrumental in establishing a permanent collection of prints he donated to the Speed Museum and the University of Louisville for future generations. He loves his birth city and state.

18. What are your favorite family memories?

Integrated in above

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?

Steven would like to be remembered as a generous fellow with good spirit and humor. He would like to be seen as someone friendly and enthusiastic, who delights in sharing and is moved by kindness. His value of becoming involved in worthy causes is something he would like to leave to others. He would like his name to be associated with generosity.



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To Whom It May Concern:

I do hereby give my permission to record my life history through the Jewish Family & Vocational Service Oral History Project, 3587 Dutchmans Lane, Louisville, Kentucky 40205. My completed story will be sent to me and a second copy will be kept in the JFVS library unless otherwise stipulated in writing by me.

Steven L. Block

Participant

Carla Leiser

Interviewer

12-21-2009

Date

