

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR ORAL HISTORIES

I am Ann Friedman, I am conducting an interview with: Norman Banks
On July 26, 2001 for the JFCS archives.

1. Tell me how and why your family originally came to this country and when? How did they travel?

My grandparents lived in the Ukraine. My grandfather was a miller (flour) by trade. When the Cossacks came to their village the men were taken away to serve in the military. My grandfather, Nathan, and my grandmother, Clara Michelbanc, fled with their children, Maurice, Fannie and another sister who was called "Red," to a seaport city in Germany where they stayed only until they were able to get passage to the United States in 1898. My father, Maurice, had another brother named Martin who was born after the family arrived in the United States. The family first arrived in New York and then went to Baltimore.

My mother, Esther Sophie Bordensky, "Sophie," came in the United States with her parents from Poland or Russia in the 1890s. Sophie had nine siblings (ten children). One of her brothers will be 100 years old this year; he lives in Rockville, MD. The family settled in the same area as my father's family, Wilkins Avenue in Baltimore. My parents met because they lived close to each other. They married in 1916.

2. Tell me about your parents - their names and where were they born? Have there been other family names used in the past? Where, when, and why was it changed?

My mother was Esther Sophie Bordensky Banks.

My father was Maurice Banks.

3. What is your birth date? What language(s) were spoken in your home?

I was born on April 25, 1918. My grandparents spoke Yiddish and some English. My sister, Rhona Banks Singlust, and I spoke English.

4. Where did you live as a child? Who lived in the same house with you – Grandparents? Uncles/Aunts? Brothers? Sisters?

5. What brought you or your family to Louisville, Kentucky and when did you come? How did they travel? Did they share any unusual experiences with you?

I came to Louisville in 1933. After the Depression, Fort Eustis was closed and the troops were moved to fort Knox, Kentucky. An Army general asked my father if he would like to come to Fort Knox. He came in 1931, and the rest of the family joined him in 1933.

6. What was your neighborhood like? Were there other Jews living in the neighborhood? Did you walk to school? Sunday school? Synagogue/Temple? What kind of shops were in your neighborhood?

The Jews of Baltimore lived in the Carroll Park area, somewhat like a ghetto, with Italians living in their own area and Poles in their own. Jews traveled together. That's the way it was – rough.

The family moved to Hopewell, Virginia, a very small town near Ft. Eustis, when I was two or three years old. My father and brother-in-law opened a grocery and they took turns working in the grocery while also working in a munitions plant. About 18 months later World War I ended, the munitions plant closed, people lost their jobs, the grocery closed, and the town virtually became a “ghost town.” A business opportunity presented itself in Clarksburg, West Virginia and my family lived there for about two years, after which the family relocated to Newport News, Virginia. It was there that I went to Sunday school, Hebrew School and went to schul. My mother's father was a cantor so religion was a great priority. This was where I really grew up, attended services and had my Bar Mitzvah!

7. If you or your family lived in Louisville at the time - how did the 1937 flood affect you and your loved ones?

8. If you wished to travel within the city limits what kind of transportation did you use? Did you travel out of town when you were young? What kind of transportation did you use when you traveled out of town? And if so, where did you go? What special memories do you have of those trips?

We traveled by train or automobile. I would go to Baltimore with my mother who had a chronic medical condition and was treated by her brother, Nathan Bordensky, who was a doctor. We also

traveled to see family on the old Kiptopeke Ferry, which in those days took you from Virginia to Maryland (you actually took your car on the ferry and drove the rest of the way.)

9. Was your family involved in a synagogue/temple? Were your parents or other family members religious?

My family and I attended the Orthodox synagogue.

10. What holidays and rituals were observed in your family? Do you have any significant memories surrounding Jewish celebrations and what was special about those occasions?

All Jewish holidays and rituals were observed and I was raised in a kosher home. On Shabbat and holidays my grandmother would not cook because they could not burn a flame. She took her food to the bakery because the baker's ovens remained warm.

11. Did you attend Sunday School or other religious schools? Were you confirmed? Did you have a Bar/Bat Mitzvah? What are your memories from that time? Are you still in touch with some of the people that attended Sunday School with you?

I attended religious school and became a Bar Mitzvah. I was to be confirmed but got into an argument with the rabbi. The Confirmation class had to write speeches using the letters from the word "dogma." My assigned letter was "d." I wrote the speech but the rabbi refused to accept it and said I had to write another speech. I refused and my father was called to come to the synagogue. I never wrote a new speech, but the rabbi was fired when it was learned he had never been ordained.

12. What is your educational background? What was your occupation? Who or what influenced you to choose your career? What kind of preparation or training was required for your career?

I attended two years of high school in Newport News, Virginia and completed the last two years at Male High School here in Louisville. The family moved to Louisville in 1922. My career was working for my father in the laundry, dry cleaning and tailoring business. The Depression had hit and everything was tough. The Bank of Kentucky failed, the insurance policy with the bank failed and "there went my education down the tubes."

13. How did you meet your mate? At what point did you realize that this was the one you wanted to marry? Where and when were you married? Do you have children? Grandchildren?

I met my first wife, Birdie Mae Kaplan, when she slammed the door in my face at a party. We dated for about three years until her mother urged me to make a marital decision. We married on July 7, 1940 at the Kentucky Hotel at Fifth and Walnut Rabbi Gittleman married us. It was a huge wedding. We had three children – Jeffrey Banks, Neil Banks and Anne Banks. Birdie Mae passed away in November, 1981. I met Helene Jaffe through my sister and we started dating right away – July, 1982. We dated for two years but I also dated a few other women. I “sowed a lot of wild oats.” We married on May 27, 1984. Helene has three children.

14. Discuss your involvement in the Jewish Community outside of your temple or synagogue when you were growing up.

I was active at Adath Jeshurun as Treasurer of the Board and worked for UJC for a number of years. The whole family is active in the Jewish community in many organizations in different areas.

15. What was your involvement in the non- Jewish community? Did you witness any anti-Semitism living in Louisville? If so, how was this incident handled?

16. How was your family affected by the World Wars? Wars in Israel? Pearl Harbor? What are your earliest recollections when thinking about major events in history?

I was in the Tank Corps in Germany and spent eighteen months in the service.

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

Attending services with my family is a favorite spiritual memory. “My religion is the core of my being.”

18. What interests or hobbies did you have when you were young and what are they now? What schools did you attend and are there any memories that stand out from that time in your life?

My interests were and are golf, cards (bridge), reading, music and dancing.

19. What are your favorite family memories – whether it was with your family of origin, or your extended family and friends?

My fondest memories are of family and marriage. We were a large family and went on trips together and celebrated occasions together. .Family is most important to me.

20. What is your legacy? How would you like to be remembered? What message do you want to leave for your children and future generations?

"He was a good man, Gunga Din!" He loved all his family, his children and Helene's children. I want to be remembered as a "good guy," honest, honorable and with a good sense of humor.

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR ORAL HISTORIES

1. I am Ann Friedman, I am conducting an interview
with Norman Banks ✓ for the JFVS archives
on July 26, 2001.

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

My grandparents lived in the Ukraine. My grandfather was a miller (flour) by trade. When the Cossacks came to their village the men were taken away to serve in the military. My grandfather, Nathan and my grandmother, Clara Michelbanc fled with their children, Maurice, Fannie and another sister who was called "Red", to a seaport city in Germany where they stayed only until they were able to get passage to the United States in 1898. My father, Maurice, had another brother named Martin who was born after the family arrived in the United States. The family first arrived in New York and then went to Baltimore.

My mother, Esther Sophie Bordensky "Sophie", came in the United States with her parents from Poland or Russia in the 1890's. Sophie had nine siblings (ten children). One of her brothers will be 100 years old this year, he lives in Rockville, MD. The family settled in the same area as my father's family, Wilkins Avenue in Baltimore. My parents met because they lived close to each other. They married in 1916.

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

My mother was Esther Sophie Bordensky Banks.
My father was Maurice Banks.

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 on April 25, 1918. My grandparents spoke Yiddish and some English. My sister, Rhona Banks Singlust and I spoke English.

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?

The Jews of Baltimore lived in the Carroll Park area, somewhat like a ghetto with Italians living in their own area and the Poles in their own. Jew traveled together. That's the way it was – rough.

The family moved to Hopewell, Virginia, a very small town near Ft. Eustis, when I was two or three years old. My father and brother-in-law opened a grocery and they took turns working in the grocery while also working in a munitions plant. About 18 months later World War I ended, the munitions plant closed, people lost their jobs, the grocery closed,

and the town virtually became a “ghost town.” A business opportunity presented itself in Clarksburg, West Virginia and my family there for about two years after which the family relocated to Newport News, Virginia. It was there that I went to Sunday school, Hebrew school and went to Schul. My mother’s father was a cantor so religion was a great priority. This was where I really grew up, attended services and had my Bar Mitzvah.

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

We traveled by train or automobile. I would go to Baltimore with my mother who had a chronic medical condition and was treated by her brother, Nathan Bordensky, who was a doctor. We also traveled to see family on the old Kiptopeke Ferry, which in those days took you from Virginia to Maryland (you actually took your car on the ferry and drove the rest of the way).

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

My family and I attended the Orthodox synagogue.

8. What holidays and rituals were observed?

All Jewish holidays and rituals were observed and I was raised in a kosher home. On Shabbat and holidays my grandmother would not cook because they could not burn a flame. She took her food to the bakery because the baker’s ovens remained warm.

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

I attended religious school and became a Bar Mitzvah. I was to be confirmed but got into an argument with the Rabbi. The Confirmation Class had to write speeches using the letters from the word “dogma.” My assigned letter was “d.” I wrote the speech but the Rabbi refused to accept it and said I had to write another speech. I refused and my father was called to come to the synagogue. I never wrote a new speech, but the Rabbi was fired when it was learned he had never been ordained.

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

I attend two years of high school in Newport News, Virginia and completed the last two years at Male High School here in Louisville. The family moved to Louisville in 1933. My career was working for my father in the laundry, dry cleaning and tailoring business. The Depression had hit and everything was tough. The Bank of Kentucky failed, the insurance policy with the bank failed and “there went my education down the tubes.”

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

I came to Louisville in 1933. After the Depression, Fort Eustis was closed and the troops were moved to Fort Knox, Kentucky. An Army General asked my father if he would like to come to Fort Knox. He came in 1931 and the rest of the family joined him in 1933.

12. How did you meet your husband/wife? Where and when were you married? Did you have children?

I met my first wife, Birdie Mae Kaplan, when she slammed the door in my face at a party. We dated for about three years until her mother urged me to make a marital decision. We married on July 7, 1940 at the Kentucky Hotel at 5th and Walnut Streets in Louisville. Rabbi Gittleman married us. It was a huge wedding. We had three children – Jeffrey Banks, Neil Banks and Anne Banks. Birdie Mae passed away in November 1981. I met Helene Jaffe through my sister and we started dating right away – July 1982. We dated for two years but I also dated a few other women. I “sewed a lot of wild oats.” We married May 27, 1984. Helene has three children.

13. Tell about your involvement in the Jewish Community. Was your whole family involved?

I was active at Adath Jeshurun as Treasurer of the Board and worked for UJC for a number of years. The whole family is active in the Jewish community in many organizations in different areas.

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

I was in the Tank Corps in Germany and spent eighteen months in the service.

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

Attending services with my family in a favorite spiritual memory. “My religion is the core of my being.”

16. What interests did you have?

My interests were and are golf, cards (bridge), reading, music and dancing.

17. What are your favorite family memories?

My fondest memories are of family and marriage. We were a large family and went on trips together and celebrated occasions together. Family is most important to me.

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

“He was a good man, Gunga Din!” He loved all his family, his children and Helene’s children. I want to be remembered as a “good guy”, honest, honorable and with a good sense of humor.

★ Friday, March 21, 2008 ~ 14 Adar II 5768

■ **Norman Banks**, 89, died Wednesday, March 19, 2008 at the Episcopal Church Home after a lengthy illness.

Mr. Banks was a 1935 graduate of Louisville Male High School and had served with the U.S. Army Tank Corps in World War II. He was in the laundry and dry cleaning business in the Fort Knox and Radcliff areas and was president of the Muldraugh Realty Company. He was the 54th member of the Standard Country Club and member of B'nai Brith and Congregation Adath Jeshurun.

He was preceded in death by his parents, Maurice and Sophie Banks; his first wife, Birdie Mae Banks; and his sister, Rhona Singlust.

He is survived by his wife, Helene D. Banks; his sons, Jeffrey (Carol) and Neil; daughter, Anne Banks; stepchildren, Deni Townsend (Bill), Sharon Jaffe (James Glasser) and Leonard Jaffe (Charleen); grandchildren, Sara Dentinger (Jeff), Michael Banks, Jonathan Bronner (Sara), Meredith and Elizabeth Bronner, Adam, Brandon and Emilee Banks, Jaclyn Lackey (Jason), and Sarah and Annie Glasser; great-grandchildren, Noah and Olivia Dentinger; brothers-in-law, Dr. Martin Kaplan and Dr. Ben Kaplan (Miriam); and Martha Brown, who helped care for him.

The family wishes to thank the loving and caring staff of the Episcopal Church Home.

His funeral will be 2:00pm Friday, March 21, 2008 at the funeral home, with burial in Adath Jeshurun Cemetery 2926 Preston Highway.

Visitation will begin at 1:00pm Friday.

In lieu of flowers, donations can be made to the Parkinson's Support Center of Kentuckiana, Congregation Adath Jeshurun or Hosparus of Louisville.