

## QUESTIONNAIRE FOR ORAL HISTORIES

1. I am Linda Leeser, and I am conducting an interview with Ethel C. Baer\* for the JFCS archives  
October 26, 2010.

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

Ethel's Mother came to this country when she was 20 years old, around 1920. First one of her brothers came, then another, then another, and then it was her turn. Another sister of her Mother moved to Argentina. Ethel's Mother came to Chicago, where one of her brothers lived. She worked in a knitted dress factory, sewing beads on the dresses. Mother attended the Huffman Preparatory School to learn English.

Her Father came sometime between 1918 and 1920. He was a tailor and heard of an opening for a tailor, and that is what brought him. Edith's parents knew each other in the old country, and when her Father heard that her Mother was in Chicago, he went to see her.

Both sides of the family lost relatives in the Holocaust.

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

Father-Solomon (Shalom) Cooper, born in 1900 in Bialystok.  
Mother-Edith Kagan, also born in 1900 in Bialystok.

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?

Her birth date is 7-24-24.

They spoke Yiddish and English at home. Both parents became citizens at the Old Neighborhood House.

They lived at 1121 East Broadway. There was Mother, Father, Bubby Adel Kagan, brother (who was 4 ½ years younger) and sister (who was 13 years younger).

5. What was your neighborhood like?

They lived in a family-oriented neighborhood, but there were no other Jews. Her Father's tailor shop was in the front of their house on East Broadway, and the family lived in the back. They were a couple houses away from the Lutheran Church, and the minister's children were some of the kids with whom she played. They were respectful of Ethel's family religion, and the minister asked Bubby what would be kosher so that she could eat with them. In her backyard there were peach trees and a grape arbor, and that was a great source of fun for the neighborhood kids. A girl named Lucille, who was from a German family, became a good friend, and they put on plays in the summer and served lemonade and charged admission.

\* mother of Lois Baer Barr, author of The Tailor's Daughter based on her mother's life

Ethel lived across the street from Normal School, which is now Breckinridge School, which she attended. Then the school became Eastern Junior High, and she went there, and then to Atherton.

Attended Sunday school at KI on the corner of Floyd and Jacob.

There was a grocery store called Coldiron's and a drug store on the corner of Barrett and Broadway, that was owned by Harry Meit. Also found in that area was Dages Paints, OK storage located on the corner of Barrett and Broadway. Her uncle Albert was a kosher butcher and worked for the Fuch's. There was also a kosher deli on Preston Street called Deitz. Mother could get goats' milk from Marcus Dairy at the recommendation of Ethel's pediatrician, because she was lactose intolerant. Cave Hill was one of her favorite haunts, as was Highland Library.

During the Depression, everything was scarce, but she remembers farmers coming by selling fruit in season and eggs.

The area of Grey, Chestnut, Walnut, and Preston was the place where much of Jewish life was centered.

Ethel's family moved to Indianapolis for one year because her Father became ill and couldn't work as a tailor. Ethel worked in a restaurant that year and went to Arther Jordon Music School on a scholarship.

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

Ethel was 13 years old at the time of the flood. The water level came very close to their home, even past the bottom of the hill that started at Barrett and Broadway. She remembers people coming in boats to give typhoid shots, and the Red Cross came with flour and yeast, and Bubby made bread. They had to boil their water and put a little iodine in it. Although the house was not inundated with floodwater, her Father's tailor shop show room was used to give typhoid shots and radio was established to send boats. Other family came to stay with them during this time, and there were 10 people in 3 ½ rooms. The family could watch the water rise. Ethel remembers some kids being able to ice skate to school from Butchertown prior to the flood.

Her Mother worried about Ethel and her brother losing schooling because of the flood, so they were sent to their uncle in Champaign, Illinois for a semester.

7. If you wished to travel, what kind of transportation did you use?

The family had a 1929 Chevy which Father called their "Jewish Packard". She remembers a trip the family took to the 1933 World's Fair in Chicago. There was a streetcar that went down Broadway with its rails in the middle of the street.

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

Ethel's Father was a cantor and sang with Keneseth Israel sometimes, and also Anshei Sfarad, if there were no customers. Making a living was primary. But Bubby went every Shabbat. Sometimes when Ethel was good, she would go to shul with Bubby and then go with her to her Bubby's girlfriends' homes. Mother would go to shul sometimes, as would Ethel. Then she would go to the picture show with her girlfriends before the price changed in the afternoons. They would also go to Taylor's Drug Store for tuna and cokes..

9. What holidays and rituals were observed?

Shabbas, Havdallah, Friday eve dinner, even when the pantry was lean. Usually they would have meat or chicken once/week. And Passover was also observed and celebrated. It was fun to change dishes and Bubby would make wine from the grape arbor. But Ethel had an allergy to the rosin in grapes and peaches, and was not allowed to have any of the things that Bubby made from them. She could drink mead, though, which Bubby also made. They could seat 20 around the dining room table. They had an icebox, not a refrigerator. In the morning, the women would congregate in the kitchen and cook all day to prepare-including her Father's sister and Mother's sister-in-law.

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

Ethel went to Sunday school and was confirmed, but she didn't learn Hebrew. That was just not something girls did in those days. She remembers roller-skating to the library, and the sidewalks from Barrett to Rubel Ave. were bricks!!

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

Ethel received a Bachelors Degree in Music Education at the University of Louisville, (which was not a state school then). During part of that time she joined the Cadet Nurse Corp. for 1 ½ years. She worked at the Autistic School as the music therapist for 14 years. A friend worked there and asked her to join them. It was located at 4<sup>th</sup> and St. Catherine, then at the Hurstbourne Christian Church, and finally it moved to the Coach House behind the Women's Club on 4<sup>th</sup> Street. The public school system did not accept children with autism at that time. Ethel still has tapes of her work with the children, and her memories are touching. She went on to get her degree at the Institute of Music Therapy at the age of 54.

12. Ethel was born in Louisville. See # 2 and #3 for family history.

13. How did you meet your husband? Where were you married? Did you have children?

She and her husband Ed worked at Waterman's Department Store-all Jewish kids worked there. They were married in Holyoke, MA, where her husband was stationed, on July 7, 1945, by a Rabbi who didn't speak English.

Ethel has three children: son Sol is a music professor; daughter Lois is a Spanish professor; son Andrew is a chiropractor.

14. Tell about your involvement in the Jewish Community?

As a girl, Ethel belonged to the Fillies Club, played piano at the YWHA for dance classes, and also worked for the USO where she brought classical music recordings for the soldiers.

She and her husband and children were members of Brith Shalom where all their kids were confirmed and their sons Bar Mitzvahed. Their daughter had a Bat Mitzvah when she was 50 years old, in Illinois.

They kept kosher while her Mother lived with them, but not after.

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

Her Father developed Parkinson's disease at age 37, thought to have been contracted as a result of encephalitis from the war. Her brother was too young for the army in WWII, but he joined the Reserves when he was old enough. During this time, her Mother ran a dry cleaning shop. Ethel's husband served in WWII at 19 years of age-until he was 21 or 22.

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

She loved Chanukah-latkes, dreidl, gelt, lighting the candles and singing. Her Father was a musician, too, and those are fond memories-music and the holidays. Ethel loved Pesach best!!! Mr. Rubenstein used to bring over the Pesach order to them.

Her Bubby instituted the tzedakah box, which was called the "Thank God box". Visiting rabbis could eat with them because they were kosher. The family was brought up to be charitable. When beggars came to the house, the family would share food with them, giving them sandwiches, but didn't let them in the house. During the Depression, everything was scarce, but there was fruit in season. Farmers would come by with strawberries and eggs.

17. What interests do you have?

Ethel likes to play bridge; she plays piano for the senior citizens club at JCC, and she likes to read-especially fiction and biographies. She enjoys going to plays with her friends and enjoys needlework.

18. What are your favorite family memories?

Celebrating the holidays with family and friends has always been special to her.

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?

She hopes that the people she has known will enjoy music and literature. She is a firm believer in education. Her philosophy is "Live and let live," which is not always so easy to do. Be a good parent, a good friend, and enjoy life.