

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR ORAL HISTORIES

1. I am Ann Friedman, I am conducting an interview with Henny Witzer for the JFVS archives.

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

Dad was from Germany. He arrived from Berlin in 1895 at age fifteen or sixteen. Mother was from Russia, she arrived in 1895.

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

Dad – Max Klein
Mom – Rebecca Jacobs

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?

My birth date is April 5, 1919. English was spoken at home, except when our parents didn't want us to know what they were saying, then they spoke German. When I was born we lived on 114th Street, which is now Harlem. We lived there until I was nine years old, then we moved to Brooklyn. Before we moved to Brooklyn just the immediate family lived in our house. Samuel, Morris, Elsie, Flo, Teddy, Matilda, Jack, Rachel, Miriam and Henny. Grandmother moved in with us in Brooklyn (Benson Hurst). When we moved to the big house in Brooklyn, most of the children had left home. My oldest brother, a sister and I were the only children that lived in this house.

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?

Brooklyn was beautiful. All private homes that looked identical. There were other Jews living in the neighborhood. There was an elevator in an apartment near us, it was the first elevator that I'd seen and we would ride up and down as teenagers. I walked to school, fourteen blocks. I went to Hebrew School, but never stayed there. I went to an Orthodox Schul. We had a grocery and drug store, it was a big city.

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

We walked or rode buses. We traveled to New York, Boston, the mountains and Monticello. We used the family car. I worked as a singer as an adult.

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

Dad didn't go much, he prayed at home. Mom went sometimes. My grandmother and I were very close – we spoke Yiddish and English to each other.

8. What holidays and rituals were observed?

We went for all the high holidays. Shabbat sometimes, it was a long walk, many, many blocks to schul.

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

I went to different religious schools. I was confirmed. When I was Bat Mitzvah coke and wine were served.

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

High School – Abraham Lincoln in Brooklyn, I took night classes. I had a career as a singer and tap dancer until I was sixteen, after that I did bookkeeping for B & L in New York.

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

I came to Louisville because my husband's dad and brother were in the window cleaning business. My husband's cousin had Lou Gehrig's disease. He wanted my husband to go into the business with him in Cincinnati. We moved to Cincinnati, but I didn't want to live there so we moved back to Louisville. Alec Berman told us about a window cleaning business in Louisville. My husband bought the cleaning business and we moved back 1946-1947.

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

I met my husband (Sidney) when I was sixteen. He was eighteen. There was a fire in my house and we moved to an apartment near him in the Coney Island area. I was singing and he was in college. I met his brother when I was sixteen and started dating his brother's friends. My husband and I started dating when I was twenty. One day I was walking from 14th Street from the subway to my parents candy store and I saw Sidney and he walked me home. My mom fed him well. His mother didn't want him to leave. We were married on June 15, 1943 in Coney Island at an Orthodox Schul. We had four children. Judith born 8-10-44, Janice born 6-17-47, Steven born 9-9-49 and Mark born 7-17-52.

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

I was always involved in Keneseth Israel. I did baking for the schul and taught Sunday School. I was involved with National Council of Jewish Women, Hadassah, Misrachi, KI Sisterhood. My children were Bar and Bat Mitzvahed.

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

My family was not affected.

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

On a cruise we stopped and saw an old synagogue. I was truly inspired. Religion was the base of my life.

16. What interests did you have?

People and to make people happy. I was the Senior Adults President at the Jewish Community Center, Shalom Towers President and Sisterhood President. I was also involved with charities and Anshei Sfard.

17. What are your favorite family memories?

My sister Matilda who took charge of the whole family, we were very close. When I was twelve, I lost a seven and a half year-old niece.

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?

I wanted a happy world. I would like to be remembered as sweet and honorable, a singer and a friend. The values that I would like to pass on are honesty and happiness.

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