

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR ORAL HISTORIES

1. I am Ann Friedman, I am conducting an interview
with Jack Benjamin for the JFVS archives
on July 24, 2001.

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

My father had an uncle who came to Louisville in 1880. He lived in Shawnee Terrace and his name was Benjamin. My father's sister, Hattie Benjamin, married Hyman Knopf and she came to Louisville in early 1990's. Some family members came to New York before WWI. Other uncles, nieces, and aunts lived in East New York. One brother came when WWI went to Germany, he fought in the German Army and then came here. In the 1920's he fought in the United States Army. He had moved here. The rest of my father's family immigrated except one sister who died in the Holocaust. All of my mother's family except for one niece perished in the Holocaust.

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

My father, Max Benjamin, was born in East Prussia on January 21, 1888. My mother, Julia Zernik Benjamin, was born in upper Silisia on November 2, 1888.

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 – Grandparents? Uncles/aunts? Brothers? Sisters?**

I was born on May 6, 1927. German and English were spoken in my home. Up until I was ten we lived in a small Beuthen in Upper Silisia. M.F.B.S.M. My mother's father and mother. I was 5 and 8 when my grandparents died. I came to the United States with my brother through Hias. I lived on Madison Street with my father's brother, his wife, and daughter. I didn't have a difficult adjustment. My brother lived with his daughter and her husband, and son with the original Émigré in the West end.

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?**

In Germany we lived in a large residence, which was over two businesses. One of the businesses was a saloon, which belonged to father and my mother's brother. I lived on Town Square and directly across the square were orthodox and conservative schools and one may have been German reform. There was a kosher butcher and an apothecary. I went to a Jewish elementary school and the synagogue on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

On Madison Street Jews, Syrians, and Lebanese lived. Our house was one block from General Hospital. I walked to George W. Morris School, which was two blocks away. I went to A.J. Hebrew School and Sunday school. We were two blocks away from the Hay Market and we shopped there. I had my tonsils removed in the doctor's office.

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

Not asked during this questionnaire.

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

When I lived in Germany I took a train to the United States. We had a chauffer and a town car. In Louisville I would walk or take the streetcar. I went to camp Tall Trees for several summers. The first year that we were in this country my mother and dad worked at Tall Trees. My sister would light the Friday night candles in Mrs. Nevils home.

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

I belonged to Adath Jeshurun and attended services. I attended the syna gogue on Sabbath and High Holidays.

9. What holidays and rituals were observed?

All of them.

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

My bar mitzvah was held at Adath Jerhurun, the temple where I went to Sunday school and Hebrew school.

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

I attended the University of Louisville. I was a sociology major. I started working as a teen with Mrs. Arthur Kling as an arts and crafts assistant at Camp Ricory. I worked at the Y.M.H.A. I was a counselor at Tall Trees until 1945, when Uncle Sam called me for duty. I was active in the Air Force for two years and came back to Louisville and enrolled at the University of Louisville. I was head counselor at Tall Trees and got married. I married Ann Poland and then joined my wife's mother in Lads & Dads business. I ran the day camp at the Jewish Community Center (J.C.C.). I was also the Adult Program Director. I got divorced and changed careers. After a few years I became facilities and membership director at the J.C.C., and I stayed at the center for fifteen years. Then I went into the grocery business for two years in New Albany, Indiana. When The Temple was new they were looking for an administrator and I got the job. I was administrator for twenty-one years. A teacher once told me that since he was I was Jewish my name must be Jacob, instead of Jack.

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

Answered above

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

I met my second wife, Mary Pfeiffer, at The Temple and in 1990 we were married. I have one son whose name is Max Benjamin

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

I was always involved with the Jewish Community. I was a board member and Sunday school principal at Brith Shalom. I was on the board at the J.C.C. and chairman of the camp committee. I received the JWB associate award. In 1980 I worked at The Temple in all areas of administration. My family was not involved. I was the youngest board member at the J.C.C.

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

My father was in the German Army in WWI. My mother lost a brother during WWII. My brother was named after this uncle. I served two years duty in the Caribbean. I served on a 85 foot rescue boat. At the end of the war a counselor asked me what I would like to do when the war was over. I said that I would like to get into the Foreign Service. The counselor said, "Jews wouldn't be in that field." I tried to sign up to fight in the wars in Israel. Hagana came to the United States looking for recently discharged service men. I was talked out of going to Hagana.

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

Standing on top of a mountain in the Rocey's of on the sea shore. Religion has made me an ethical person.

17. What interests do you have?

My interests are history, the Louisville Jewish community, photography, gardening, reading, opera, and the heritage theater (when Tarbis played husband and wife in the play, the last scene was so emotional. I was doing the lights and tears would roll down my face.)

18. What are your favorite family memories?

The birth of my son.

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?

I've contributed to the Jewish community so that in 200 years it will still be around. I would like to be remembered as someone who was involved in many events and that I was part of the community

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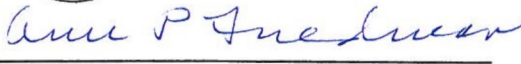
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40205. My story will be kept in the JFVS library unless I choose to keep it myself.


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Witness

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QUESTIONNAIRE FOR ORAL HISTORIES

I am Ann Roberts, I am conducting an interview with: Jack Benjamin for the JFCS archives on January 19, 2011.

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

Jack and his family fled the Nazis from Silesia, the southeastern part of Germany. In 1938, he and his brother arrived in Louisville. He went to live with his uncle (father's brother), and his brother lived with a cousin, whose family had immigrated to Louisville in the 1880's. The following year, Jack's parents and sister joined him in Louisville.

2. Tell me about your parents - their names and where were they born?

His father, Max was originally from East Prussia.

His mother, Julia was from Beuthen, Selesia near Poland.

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

Jack was born May 6, 1927.

The Benjamin's spoke German at home.

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

The family lived in Old Louisville, on Brook St., across from the old Male H.S. During this time period, many Jews lived in the neighborhood, due to the close proximity to synagogues. While attending high school, Jack was the front desk room clerk at the nearby YMHA (on 2nd St.) during World War II.

5. What brought you or your family to Louisville, Kentucky and when did you come?

It should be noted that the family immigrated to Louisville because other family members came in the 1880's, and again in the 1920's when Max's sister, Haddie arrived. She owned a restaurant and worked at Camp Tall Trees.

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

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?

The primary transportation for the family was the trolley system and of course, walking.

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

In terms of involvement in the synagogue, the family was very busy making a living, but they did attend Shabbat services and observed holidays.

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?

Some of Jack's most significant memories surrounding Jewish celebrations are, his Bar Mitzvah, as well as enjoying his mother's "wonderful" cooking on a regular basis.

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

Jack is no longer in touch with the other students from Sunday School.

12. What is your educational background? What was your career? Who or what influenced you to choose your career?

He attended U of L where, he was interested in social work. Between 1945-47, he was in the Air Force--in the air-sea rescue unit. Over the years he worked at Camp Tall Trees (his parents did also), and did so again after the Air Force.

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

In 1949, he married and divorced some years later.

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

From 1962- 1978, Jack was the Adult Program Director at the J.C.C., and prior to that, he was on the Board at the Center. Over the years, he contributed his talents to working with the Center's Heritage Theater. Not only did he build scenery, and help with lighting, and had a part in "All My Sons." In 1979, the Temple merger took place and Jack was hired as the Temple's first administrator.

In 2000, Jack became Executive Director Emeritus and is a lifetime member of the Board of Trustees at the Temple.

15. What was your involvement in the non- Jewish community? Did you witness any anti-Semitism living in Louisville?

Between 1978-1980, Jack was in a partnership with his brother-in-law in a grocery store in New Albany, IN.

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

Jack's brother, Fred was killed in Italy in World War II on March 7, 1945.

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

18. What interests or hobbies did you have when you were young and what are they now?

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

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

Jack has a long history of commitment to the Jewish community. He would like to be remembered for helping people and being a "nice guy."