

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR ORAL HISTORIES

I am Gay Adelstein, I am conducting an interview with: Caroline Balleisen for the JFCS archives in September 2011.

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

My parents, Belle Stern and Isadore Maurice Kimmelfield, were born in Kupel, a village near Odessa, Ukraine. One of Belle's sisters ran away and Belle went after her, traveling all over Europe for two years. The sister ended up in New York, and Belle found her there in 1917. She stayed with her sister for awhile and then went to New Bedford, Conn. to teach Hebrew. She spoke four languages. Isadore was a Talmudic scholar, a Zionist, and a Socialist. (Jews were slowly being assimilated into Russian society but few Jews were allowed in schools.) Isadore left Kupel in 1914 to escape the draft, went to Cleveland and then to New York. He met Belle at a landsman society. She was being courted by Velvel Chomsky who became president of Dropsie College and was the father of Noam Chomsky, but she chose Isadore instead. Isadore was a foreman with Western Union but he went on strike with his workers and was boycotted for two years. Then he worked for All America Cable and stayed there for the rest of his life. Belle went to adult education classes and took English to get a job, but her husband wouldn't let her work. Everyone spoke English in their home, no Yiddish, because Belle wanted her kids to be Americanized.

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?

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

I was born in 1930 in Brooklyn, N.Y. I had one older brother, Arthur. I lived in Brooklyn until I went to college. No other Jewish families lived near us.

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 met Paul Tenen at Brooklyn College and after several years of dating, we married in 1952 after I graduated from Columbia Law School. Three years later Paul was killed in an auto accident. Five years later I met Donald Balleisen, and we married in 1959. Donald graduated from Princeton and Harvard Law School. He worked for Penick Ford which was sold to Reynolds Tobacco Co., and we did not want to move to Winston Salem. I knew about Louisville—its orchestra, the Courier Journal and Harry Carmichael who desegregated schools before there was a law—so we decided to move to Louisville. I had mainly preferred mixed gender groups, but I was invited to a meeting of NCJW, and I was so impressed by them that I joined the group.

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?

I lived in Louisville on Runnymede since 1969. The houses were just being built then, and many Jews lived there. Donald and I were associated with The Temple (which was downtown) and we shopped at Holiday Manor. We were not here for the flood but were here for the tornado which went up I-71 but missed our subdivision. We put the kids in the basement, but Donald was upstairs talking on the phone to N.Y. and I kept calling him to come down to the basement.

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?

THIS GOES BACK TO THE TIME IN BROOKLYN. My family used the subway and buses. Even when we went to the country, Northbranch in the Catskills, we took a bus for five hours. We and another family rented rooms in a farmhouse there. We played Monopoly, hiked, picked berries, etc. It was there that I had my first incident of anti-Semitism when a child called me a dirty Jew. At home I lived close to Coney Island.

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

BROOKLYN: My family was not much involved with religion. We went to synagogue on the high holidays and celebrated Thanksgiving but not Christmas. Once when I was 6 or 7 my father tried to let me sit with him in the Synagogue, but I was sent to sit upstairs with my mother.

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?

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?

BROOKLYN: I went to Sunday School at the Jewish Community House of Bensonhurst, which was like the JCC. I was not confirmed, but learned Bible stories, sang, took ballet and drama. I am not now in touch with anyone there; but one friend, Iris Kline Owens, persuaded me to apply to Barnard. I would have liked to be in touch with her, but she died. Iris wrote novels. Other well-known people who attended the Community House were Rhoda Karparkin who was a CEO of Consumer Union and Maurice Sendak.

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 Brooklyn College, Barnard, and Columbia. My first job, in high school, was selling linens at Loessers Dept. store in Brooklyn. When I graduated from law school there were few if any jobs for Jewish women, so the Dean of the law school hired me to work on a project to develop an income tax code. The people on that committee were famous and interesting. They met at the Bar Association and usually had lunch at the Harvard Club, but since it did not let in women when they were with me they went across the street to the Algonquin. The office looked at the Colgate clock, same as in Louisville. The firm had two Jewish partners, one of whom hired me. I was always interested in

public policy which led me to become an attorney. I had thought I would go into politics, but didn't have the confidence. Instead, I decided to open my own practice, and worked for the same professor who had hired me, doing research at the Columbia library. There I met Myra Schumann who was doing the same kind of work. I told Myra I wanted to meet a man who wanted to marry, not just have sex. Myra talked to her husband who was a friend of Donald Balleisen and set up a date for him with me. Donald was tall, wore a hat, and took me to dinner at the Plaza, then to the movie (The Last Angry Man), on to a jazz club, and then to a walk by the river. This was January 17, 1959. On Valentine's Day he gave me a lovely heart pin, and we married on April 8, 1959, a small wedding at the Sheraton Netherlands. We had three children: Ellen, born January 9, 1960; Wendy, born October 13, 1963; and Edward, born July 3, 1965. I have three grandchildren; Cassandra Marie Finger who graduated from Smith three years ago; Zach who is 15 and Aaron, 13, who live with Edward in Durham, SC where he is a professor at Duke. Daughter Ellen lives in New York and teaches ESL at CUNY and does pension consulting for the teachers' union.

While I was raising my children in Louisville, I was on many boards. When my husband left Greenbaum, I became his associate lawyer, and then we became partners with Tilford, Dobbins, Alexanders, Buckaway, and Black. I specialized in estate tax, tax planning, and was a court-appointed lawyer for children's abuse cases.

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?

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

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?

In my neighborhood in Brooklyn was an Italian Catholic girl who became my close friend. We would walk to the Bay wearing shorts and the soldiers in trucks would whistle at us. However, once a man exposed himself and that was the end of the walks. I experienced no anti-Semitism in Louisville.

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 had one aunt who immigrated to Israel in the 1950s. My Mother's oldest brother, who had four kids, was in the Red Army and they ended up in a displaced persons' camp. Bella, who was a poll watcher, finally got them into the U.S. Her brother became a professor at Dropsie College, but was angry with his sister for not getting him a position in New York. My brother enlisted in the army at 17 (1943) and wanted to go into the Specialized Training program. Later he was sent to Penn State on the GI Bill and became an attorney.

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

I have no spiritual memories. I just liked being Jewish.

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?

When I was young I liked Frank Sinatra, drawing, my cat, folk dancing (as a teenager), politics and playing the piano. I took lessons for eight years at the 3rd Street Music Settlement where lessons

plus music theory were \$1.25. Now I am involved in writing my memoirs, politics, the Citizens Housing Counsel, the Citizens Union, and the American Jewish Committee.

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

My best memories are of having my whole family here for my birthday. I wish I had been more involved with them, but they are all far apart geographically.

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?

I would like to be remembered as a person who really cared about Tikkun Olam. I want my children and grandchildren to do their own thing and be happy. I am very proud of all of them.