

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR ORAL HISTORIES

I am Marcy Beyer, I am conducting an interview with: Marcy Beyer for the JFCS archives on March 2011.

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

My parents arrived in Brooklyn, New York, from a shetle in White Russia in 1914. My mother, Luba Chazankin, and her brother, Dave Chazankin, walked, rode carts, and swam from their home near Kiev, Russia to a port in Germany where they booked passage to America. They left their native land because of anti-Semitism, because their eldest sister and brother-in-law were in North Dakota and urged them to leave Russia and travel to America.

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 and father are first cousins of two sisters, Bessie and Mary Chazankin. They were both born in Russia to poor peasants. Bessie married Moses Chazankin and Mary married ? Gressman. (Can't remember his first name.) I never knew my grandparents. My mother's parents both came to live with her in Minneapolis, Minnesota where Mama lived after leaving Brooklyn. My father's father died of tuberculosis as did his other siblings. His mother remarried a Bertachevsky and she had four more sons. She died in Moscow at age 92. None of my father's immediate family, to my knowledge, came to America when he was still alive. My father's last name was changed to "Grossman" when he arrived at Ellis Island.

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

I was born May 25, 1926 in Minneapolis, Minnesota, the third of four children. My parents spoke Yiddish and Russian and some English in our home.

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

As a child, I lived at 725 Girard Avenue, Minneapolis, Minnesota (now a park) and 825 Penn Avenue North, Minneapolis, Minnesota. I was named for my maternal grandfather, Moses, and called Masha, Mashale, Marcella. I am told my grandmother Bessie lived with us, also my brother Harry, who died at age 12. I don't remember him at all. At times, my Aunt Hannah, the youngest of the 12 Chazankin children, lived with us from time to time, depending which sister she was arguing with. At times, my Uncle Dave, the youngest son, stayed with us. There were also various roomers and boarders. I had one sister, Esther, and one brother, Irving. Both lived in the same house.

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 for a position at the Jewish Community Center as Senior Adult Director in 1979. I was paid \$1,000.00 a month.

My parents were both dead, also my sister at age 56. I drove my Gremlin from Wisconsin to Kentucky, loaded with some belongings. My furniture arrived by van.

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?

In Minneapolis, we had many Jewish people in our surroundings. We had a Kosher butcher shop across the street, and a synagogue several blocks away. I attended Grant School which meant a long walk up a steep hill (used for sledding in the winter). I walked to school with a Gentile friend who lived one block away. I felt very sorry for her because her father drank and fought with her mother; and her parents did not like Jews. She didn't know why.

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

Did not live in Louisville in 1937. Actually, I probably never heard of Louisville.

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?

Since I had an automobile, I traveled by car. Did take the bus several times, traveling anywhere to get a feel of the city and its' environs.

We stayed with my Aunt Riva. We also stayed with Uncle Louis and his wife. Also visited Chicago during a fair time. I remember I wet the bed and was terribly embarrassed. My mother and aunt were very soothing. I must have been 5 years old.

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

In Minneapolis, my parents attended Keneseth Israel on the High Holidays, my father downstairs and my mother up with the other aunts and close friends. I did not like attending Yom Kippur because I had to kiss my aunts and was offended by their bad breath. However, when I was old enough, I prepared the Yom Kippur evening table setting and placement of food. I never took a bite even though I was hungry. I am not like that anymore.

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 were observed in our home with gusto. Although we were the poorest of all the relatives, my mother's home always was filled with them at religious holidays. My mother, Aunt Hannah, Uncle Dave and Uncle Sam had glorious voices. There was much singing and joy. Many times, Mama included non-Jewish neighbors in our festivities.

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 Yiddish school for about a year until some other mother found out the teacher had wandering hands and the after-school tutoring was shut down. Too bad. I was learning to write

Yiddish which would have helped me help my mother correspond with her dear friend in Brookly, New York. I never attended Sunday school.

2. 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?

My educational background consists of undergraduate degree in double major of Speech and English from the University of Minnesota Main campus, Minneapolis, Minnesota. With that degree I got a job as a Recreational Director in Ashiya, Japan with the Naval Air Force at the enlisted men's service club. I eventually became the Director. I loved that job. I loved the people of Japan, my many travels through the country, the enlisted men and their many problems, the food, the beauty of the country. I had wonderful experiences. I returned in 1964 with my husband (Technical Rep.), and my son and daughter. What a thrill to show them Japan!! Both tours, I lived in Japan 3 years for a total of 6 years in that exotic country, yet so simple and uncluttered.

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 the father of my children on my first tour in Japan. He worked in the Post Office. He was not Jewish, but that did not matter to either of us. We did agree if we had children to raise them in my religion, since being in the service he would be away for long periods of time. We were married in Japan by the Christian Chaplain in a non-denominational service (after first being married by the American Consulate officer in Fukuoka, Japan.) We had a daughter, Rebecca Allison White, born in Japan 56 years ago; and a son, Robert Steven White, born in Hampton, Virginia 54 years ago. I do have two grandchildren by way of my son. My daughter had no children.

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

Jewish involvement? I was a leader of a group of young girls similar to scouts, but not. We met once a week for some kind of activity. This is very sketchy in my memory. I belonged to Hillel on campus at U. of M. Most of my close friends were of mixed religious backgrounds. My dearest friend, Ruth Goldberg, still lives in Minneapolis. We speak weekly and when I visit, I stay with her and Abe at their home in St. Louis Park, Minn. even though I have relatives in the area. My roommate was Chinese. She had been brought over by some Christian group. I did not know what sect. Perhaps Catholic. We remained friends until her death last year. She visited me in Louisville and I visited her in California and Colorado. Now, her life experiences would make a wonderful story.

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?

My grade school was a mixture of Jews and non-Jews. I remember a heated discussion about Christmas celebrations in school. This was handled by a reform rabbi having a conversation with the community at the school. It was decided to also have a Hannukah celebration to balance the problem.

Did I witness anti-Semitism? Oh, yes! Too much. I remember walking home from the bus stop and passing by a little boy who called me a dirty sheenie. I knew it was something derogatory because he

shouted it vehemently. I asked my mother what "sheenie" meant. She didn't know and told me to ignore him. The next time this happened, I told the boy if he ever called me a sheenie again, I would smack him. He never did.

I worked at the Dayton Company, a large department store, in the sheet music department. There was the manager, her assistant and we part-time girls. A customer could request a song demonstrated and one of the full-time staff would play the piano. The assistant knew I was Jewish, yet she made derogatory remarks about the greasy hair of the new Jewish hire. Turned out the girl was Catholic. I never said anything. I was always polite. The manager was very nice and I never heard anything demeaning from her.

The Dayton Company was anti-Semitic. The Jewish Community decided to band together and give them something to ponder. Jewish women with very Jewish sounding names called and closed their charge accounts. The message got through, and Dayton's started hiring people with more Jewish sounding names!

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 remember WWII as a time of rationing. I had two cousins in the war; one in Guadalcanal, the other in the Philippines. I wrote very often. I think I was in my teens at the time! I remember when President Roosevelt died. I cried often because he had been the father I wanted as my own, and he had guided us through terrible times.

Pearl Harbor is a blur. I remember drills when we hid under our desks; and purchasing stamps to eventually lead to a war bond. I remember the songs sung by Kate Smith, the Andrews sisters, Irving Berlin, Bing Crosby. I remember the scrap drives and my father dragging down a bed spring to contribute to the war effort. I remember my uncle taking the trolley from South Minneapolis to North Minneapolis where I worked in a super market just for a can of salmon I had secreted for him! I remember my mother telling the person handing out ration books that she already had a certain amount of sugar and he should remove the stamps for that month!! I did not go hungry. I did not feel deprived.

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

I am a secular Jew. I like the festivals, some of the history. I also like some other religious customs. We usually had Christmas dinner because my Aunt Hannah had the day off. I don't think I ever was very religious. I followed the dietary rules in Mama's home but not outside. Heaven and Hell were right here on earth and we had better make the best life possible....my mother's teaching.

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?

Hobbies: Embroidery, reading, reading. Now: crafts, reading, traveling. I collected US stamps for a number of years but gave them to my grandson to sell if he needed money for college tuition. I have cabinets filled with items I collected on my travels around the world, but no pattern.

I acted and recited in Junior High and High School. I acted in Little Theater and at the Univ. of Minnesota. I acted in Mississippi, Georgia, Ohio and Louisville. I feel very comfortable speaking before people. I like to write poetry and stories, mainly for myself. Something that has to be released from my emotions. And I love to read and also listen/read from tapes and CDs.

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

One of my sweetest memories is of sitting with my mother while she assembled clothing on the sewing machine and I had sewed the hems in skirts. She told me stories while we sat and I had her all to myself.

I used to go to an aunt some afternoons to be taken care of because my mother had to sew and didn't want to worry about me playing outside by myself. My aunt would give me lunch and sometimes I saw my favorite cousin. He worked in a nightclub and came in late so he slept late. My aunt would always have a meal ready for him. She rarely went out because she wanted to be home to look after him. Thank goodness, he was a wonderful son in return. My aunt would take a nap after he left and I would crawl in bed with her. She slept. Sometimes I did also.

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?

Legacy. I think I'm still raising my children! I want them to be grateful for living in America, and to respect others as they would like to be respected. I want them to love their religion, Judaism, but to accept the religious beliefs of others. I want them to help others by teaching, not just showing. I would like to be remembered as a fair person, listening to both sides before giving my decision or opinion. I want to be remembered as a person you could tell a "secret" to and know it stopped with me. I want to be remembered as being approachable, fun, innovative, good imagination, artistic, accepting (most of the time) and non-judgmental (most of the time).