

ALUMNI INTERVIEW

July 27, 1984

Goldie Berger Knobler, born probably in 1903, entered JCH on 2/21/16; left 7/8/22.

Mrs. Knobler was full of praise for the JCH and of the happiness she experienced living there. She explained that she was born in Russia, her father having preceded the family to the United States and leaving behind a pregnant wife and three children. Mrs. Knobler was about 2 years old when he left. In 1914 her mother died and the children went to their grandparents. The following year or so her father, who had now remarried came to get the children and bring them back with him. The oldest sister remained with the grandparents of her own choice. Shortly after coming to Houston with her father, the father died and she and her little sister Minnie, known as Mickey, were left with a step-mother they hardly knew and still not knowing any English. Her brother was too old to be accepted into the Home, so he was placed in a foster home. Ultimately he joined the Merchant Marine. Mrs. Knobler has seen him only once in all the years since she entered the Home.

The B'nai B'rith "stepped in" and had the girls sent to the JCH. Mrs. Knobler recalled that shortly thereafter there was the 1918 flu epidemic and Texas children came into the Home "in droves."

Mrs. Knobler learned English while a child in the Home. She recalled an English teacher she had at Manual (Newman School) named Mrs. Freidrichs, who, she said, had taught her how beautiful the English language is.

Mrs. Knobler commented that as a child in the Home she learned "refinement and culture" and good manners. She recalled with some amusement now that a Mrs. Godchaux had been her Big Sister, and she remembered that she would send her car and chauffeur for the girl and a butler would open the door when she arrived. She learned table manners having dinner at the Godchaux home.

Mrs. Knobler took violin lessons from a Mr. Wehrman, who also played the organ in the Home Chapel on Friday night and Saturday morning services. She was invited to join an orchestra of his pupils and she remembered playing for the patients at the Home for the Incurables and once playing background music softly when someone had a reception for Gertrude Ederle, the first woman to swim the English Channel.

She greatly enjoyed camp on the Gulf Coast and still has a basket made of pine needles they used to collect while there.

She recalled that there were rules and when they were broken, you had to sit on your locker for a while. She remembered that her number, and thus that of her locker, was 130. She had to sit on her locker a few times, but she has no idea what her infraction was. She knew that Mr. Vollmer did spank some children, but has no specific recollections about it. She may have been punished for not hanging up her clothes, which was a rule enforced by locker-sitting.

They did have chores. Every Friday the mattresses had to be taken off the beds and draped over the railings on the balcony to air. Sometimes they were required to sweep the courtyard, and she remembered that this had to be done, one girl next to the other, with their brooms moving in unison, "like little soldiers." Most of the other rules she recalled had to do with grooming and personal cleanliness.

The girls were taught to sew, and Mrs. Knobler made her own graduation dress. They were also taught knitting, crocheting and tating. She remembers that they made their own underwear, and she recalled decorating her nightgowns with lace she herself had crocheted or tatted.

Religious holidays were always observed. Mrs. Knobler remembered standing before meals for the blessing to be said and standing afterward when God was thanked for the meal. Mr. Vollmer said kiddush every Friday night and the children went to services Friday night and Saturday mornings, and to Sunday School. When she was 14, Mrs. Knobler became a Sunday School teacher of a group of little ones. She still has the prayerbook that was the standard present for confirmation.

She got a "gold" medal for something; she thinks it may be for having been President of the Home's Big Sisters. These were girls who helped with the younger children. She recalled that each of them had eight "little people" for whom they were responsible, making sure that they got up, cleaned themselves, went to bed on time. Mrs. Knobler enjoyed this. She commented that although she is only 2 1/2 years older than Mickey, she tended to mother her, and she still does to this day.

The children were given an allowance each week of five pennies, and they were expected to save two of them, which they could use to buy things from the Home store, open for a couple of hours on Sunday.

Mrs. Knobler said that each child who left had a trade. She had been taught secretarial work. When she was ready to leave there was no family to whom she could go so Mr. Westheimer, who was then President of Grand Lodge No. 7 B'nai B'rith, took her into his home and employed her as the B'nai B'rith secretary for the tenure of his term of office. When his term was up, he helped her to find other stenographic work, where she worked till she married.

Mrs. Knobler does not know her birthday, and she is not really positive about what year she was born in. She estimates she is "going on 80." Mickey says that Mrs. Knobler gave her her birthday, which they now celebrate.

Mrs. Knobler has always felt a sense of responsibility for other children who once lived in the Home. She made a point of seeking out and offering aid and friendship to any child who returned to Houston from the JCH. Their re-unions used to be held in her home. She is very proud of how Joe Samuels turned out.

Mrs. Knobler has two children, seven grandchildren, including "three by choice" and seven great-grandchildren. She explained the grandchildren by choice as being the children by a previous marriage of the woman her son married, and Mrs. Knobler chose to include them among the grandchildren. Mickey also lives in Houston. Her first husband died in 1959 and she remarried in 1961. She has no children, but Mrs. Knobler says that she shares her children with Mickey.

Mrs. Knobler summed up by saying that she has had a "beautiful life." She had no parents, but "God has been my parent, with the JCH helping."

JUL 2 1984

Dear Viola-

please forgive my negligence for taking so long answering your kind letters.

The fact and truth of the matter, my heart is so full of gratitude and there are so many people involved, to whom I'm most grateful, I simply do not know how and where to begin.

actually, I feel there is no amount of space that I can recount all my blessings, experiences, etc, etc that the wonderful Home afforded me and my sister, Mickey. I shall forever be grateful to all those kind generous people, who took great interest (loving interest in the children) and the Home, my Home.

Viola, when you're next in Houston, please, call me 668-3432, I would love to see you and have a visit with you.

Gratefully
Eddie

P.S. A healthy & joyous
New Year greeting to our children

7/21/84