

## Earl Foreman

Interviewed July 21, 2004

By Ned Goldberg, Executive Director JCRS

(Originally transcribed by Theresa DuBois;  
Edited by Marlene Trestman for brevity and clarity)



*Earl Foreman, Interviewed 7/21/2004*

Ned Goldberg (NG): Today is July 21, 2004. We're at the home of Earl Foreman in Dallas, Texas. Earl came into Jewish Children's Home with his sister. So tell us, what happened to your family that led you and your sister to have to come to live in the Jewish Children's Home?

EF: My aunt from Shreveport took [us] to New Orleans, and put [us] in the home. [My sister] had no hair on her head, and I had long blonde hair. And they put me on the girls' side, and put her on the boys' side. And, a few days later they found out that she was a girl, and I was a boy. And, they separated us and put us back on the [correct] side. Several years passed by, and I had a dog named Brother, and I had some guinea pigs and chickens. [The Superintendent] was going to punish

me for not going to school or something like that, and he took my dog away, and put him over to Algiers, which is about 125 miles from New Orleans. And, he swam back, came back about a month later – he swam across the river by himself. He came in the home wringing wet and muddy, and jumped in bed with me. [Laughs.] Well, and then they said I could keep the dog. And then I believe it was about when I was 13 years old, I left with my sister to Shreveport [to live with my aunt and uncle]. And a couple of years after that, I landed mechanic work.

NG: Tell me where did you go to school when you were at the home?

EF: Isidore Newman Manual. Well, I went up to the sixth grade I believe or something like that. And, then I was confirmed in New Orleans at Temple Sinai. And, then after that I did quite a bit of things.

NG: Who were your friends at the children's home?

EF: Oh Lord, all of them were my friends. In fact, I was the ring leader (laughs). And we used to climb up on the building, up in the attic there, which was about 175 feet high, and they were scared I was going to fall and hurt myself, and they made us quit doing that.

NG: Did you go to summer camp?

EF: Oh yes, we went to Bay St. Louis every year in the summertime. And, we really had a good time. And, we went fishing, and crabbing, and they had a nice home out there. Every year we'd go on summer vacation. And, like I say, we always had what they call a wrestling match between me and the rest of the boys, and see who was the best

man. And, I'd take them on every time they come on. And, they had two brothers -- a Cecil and I forget the other one -- oh they were twins. And, I got in a fight with one of them and beat him. And then the other one wanted to fight me and I beat him. Then I took on the other two boys, and I knocked my knuckles out of place. And I had to put a cast on my hand. But, every day we went to school, we had what they call an Irish Channel Gang, which was a riverfront bunch of kids who used to come up to the school there, and always wanted to challenge somebody up there.

EF: And, my father came [to visit us in the Home] several times before he passed away. But my Aunt Leah, she's the one that took care of us.

NG: You mentioned before we started videotaping, that the first home you went into wasn't the Jewish Children's Home?

EF: It was in a Catholic Home, and they had these sisters there. They'd ask you questions and if you said something, she'd slap you on your hand with a ruler or something. So when my aunt found out I was in a Catholic Home, she took me out of there right quick and carried me to the Jewish Children's Home, and put me in the home there.

NG: Did you have meals with your sister?

EF: No. The girls would sit on one side, and the boys sat on one side. And, we'd have breakfast, and dinner, and supper the same way. And, the food was really good. But, we'd have macaroni and cheese practically every day for lunch, and I got tired of that. But, like I said I had guinea

pigs, and rabbits, and then I'd sell them to the school kids and I'd tell them, "Now if your mother don't let you have the rat – or the mice." – they were white rats you see, and I would charge them \$1 and I'd say, "Now if you bring it back I don't give you the dollar back, but I'll take the animal back. That's the way it goes." And, so that's what we did for years. And, I'd give the kids some candy, and money to buy stuff like that. Then, we had a cave out in the backyard there, and tried to live in that thing, but it wouldn't work. And, they made us cover it back up again. But, like I say, we raised quite a few chickens, guinea pigs, and white rats. And, I'd sell for I don't know how many years there. And, I had a bicycle I bought, and I rode it all around the home there. I let the other boys ride, and some of the girls rode it. And, everybody liked my dog – his name was Brother.

NG: Now, tell me about how you came to leave. Whose decision was it to take you out of the home?

EF: My Aunt Leah – she's the one who took us out.

NG: Did your mother come visit you when you were in the home?

EF: No. No. She was in Texas. She had remarried. My aunt and uncle raised us.

NG: Tell us what you did after you left the home.

EF: Well, after I left the home I went into the garage business and learned the mechanic business. And, that was for about 10 years. And, then we decided that we wanted to get three diesel trucks out of Chicago.

And, we went up there to Chicago, and got those trucks and brought them back, and we built a – the body for a four wheel truck on the back of this big truck was a six-wheel truck, and it was a Diamond T Hercules truck, a diesel. The first diesel that ever come down to Louisiana and on the state highway. And, I drove that thing for 10 years. And, then I went into the bread business.

NG: Now were you living in New Orleans or Shreveport?

EF: Shreveport. And then at that time, I had what they call a café route. And, I'd built my bread route so big that they told me I'd have to get another truck, but they had to have one of the old-timers take my route. And, I told them, "If you change my route again, I was going to quit." Because after all I'm working for myself see. And, so when I did come back and built the route back up again, they did the same thing again – told me they had another man they'd put on that route because I built the route up too big. So, I told them well I said, "I quit." And I said I'm going to buy a café on Marshall (ph) Street, and go into the café business. And, I stayed there for seven years. It was right next to the city hall, and all of the people in the city hall ate with me. I stayed there for seven years I believe it was, and then I sold it. Then I came to [Dallas] and I bought a drive-in café on Forest Avenue next to the fairground, which I had for seven years. We were in the Jewish neighborhood out there in south Dallas. And, they went colored overnight, and I sold my café then. I wasn't allowed to serve colored

people, but I served them in the back of the place there. Well, then when all the white people moved out to north Dallas, I bought a home here on Aberdeen Street. And, then I went in the lounge business for four or five years. And, then I went back into the service station business. After another ten years, and I finally quit when I was seventy-some years old.

NG: You've been working hard your whole life it sounds to me.

EF: Oh yes.

NG: Where did you meet your wife?

EF: I met her in Shreveport. And she was working in the theater, selling tickets you know – candy, and that. I was 22 years old, and we got married. And, then like I say, I bought a home on Burgundy Street, here in Dallas, it was only three houses on that lot and a drug store because, it was nothing but farmland. And, Dallas had built up right quick, and I had to sell that house. And, I bought another house here in Dallas.

NG: Where did you get married?

EF: I got married in Shreveport.

NG: And your children, your two daughters, were born and raised –?

EF: In Shreveport. I forgot how many years we were down there.

NG: Was there anything special that you learned from being in the Jewish Children's Home. What are some of the things they taught you?

EF: Well they taught me everything – right from wrong, and that. And, like I say, we'd go to the summer camp every year. And, I think most of it was my own fault like I say. I was hardheaded. I thought I knew more than other people did. But, I learned a lot later on that I didn't know nothing. But like I said, the home really took care of me.

NG: Now you told me that you learned how to fight, and you certainly learned how to raise animals living there. Where did you keep the animals that you raised?

EF: In the yard. We had a big yard and we had a lot -- I had all kinds of animals there. Chickens, roosters, hens, and raised guinea pigs, rats, they let me raise anything I wanted to.

NG: You learned how to sell animals living in the home it sounds like.

EF: I learned how to make a little living for myself too. And like I bought a bike and I rode a bike all around the place there. And, like I say, when I come out of there, I was ready to go to work.