

Mildred Foreman Clairfield
Interviewed by Ned Goldberg

June 15, 2004

(Transcribed by Theresa DuBois; edited by Marlene Trestman for brevity and clarity)



*Mildred Foreman Clairfield. Videotaped
6/15/2004 in Sugarland, Texas.*

NG: Today is June 15, 2004, I'm in Sugarland, Texas with Mildred Foreman Clairfield. When her parents split up, she and her brother went into the Jewish Children's Home for nine years. And today she is going to talk to us about her memories of being a child in New Orleans. You were talking about floods?

MFC: Yes, well I can remember the flood in New Orleans when the levy broke. We were in the home for one whole week, not going to school, which was a pleasure. And, of course, I never took much advantage of doing much because I was still young. But, the home gave us every opportunity to accomplish something and all I can remember is the good things, but I couldn't remember, you know, what they were.

NG: So you went into the home in 1919, it sounds like, with your brother.

MFC: I was six years old.

NG: Earlier you were telling me you thought you were in another home previously.

MFC: Yes, it was home in Memphis. A Catholic home that my father put us into. And, my mother, who wasn't Jewish, found out about the home in New Orleans, and she took us there. And, that's the most I can remember.

NG: Okay, do you remember what school was like in the Home, or the meals?

MFC: They sent us to the finest schools, Isidore Newman Manual Training School, and we always went to the synagogue, and I mean my childhood in the home was ... wonderful (crying).

NG: Do you remember eating your meals with Earl?

MFC: Sometimes, yes. The food was good, and the entertainment at night was good – you know they would have movies for us. And, I mean it wasn't like we were in an orphan's home, it was just like being in a home with other children – that was home.

NG: I was told down the middle of the yard, it was boys on one side and girls on the other.

MFC: Yes. Joe Samuels used to chase me (laughing). Yes.

NG: I've heard from other people that you used to shop for clothes at the department stores on Canal Street – do you remember?

MFC: Oh yes, and we had Big Brothers and Big Sisters from the outside, you know of very prominent people that would, you know, take us to the

theater, and take us out for dinner or something. That I remember.

And, I remember my Big Sister was Golda Goldsmith in New Orleans.

NG: Did you see your Big Sister after you left the home?

MFC: No, because I went to live in Shreveport. I went and I lived with my Aunt Leah Schuster and who was very wealthy, and I was married there, and in other words, she was just like another mother. And my Uncle Dave was a father to me. And so, they practically raised me until I got married. And then I got married [and had three daughters]. I lived with one daughter in New Jersey for about 5 years until I got sick, and they decided the best thing for me to do was to come back here and live in Houston.

NG: And this birthday party that you just had, you were how old?

MFC: Ninety-one.

NG: Okay, so you were twenty when you had your first child?

MFC: Yes. And I have nine grandchildren. And I have ten great.

NG: Mazel tov.

MFC: And ... what else could you want?

NG: Were there any special things about life that you learned about life in the Jewish Children's Home?

MFC: Well – maybe there was, but I just can't remember it right now.

NG: That's okay. Did Earl like to keep animals at the home?

MFC: Oh, he found a dog, and they didn't really allow dogs in the home, but he found a dog and he begged Uncle Harry [Ginsburg] to let him have

the dog. And, he did. The dog got loose and swam clear across from Lake Pontchartrain back to the home. And, then they allowed him to keep him. And I don't know whatever happened to the dog. I think the dog's name was Brother.

NG: When you met other kids from outside the home, did you feel any different?

MFC: No. no we used to go to Audubon Park by ourselves. We never did have chaperones. I remember there was a movie star that lived in Audubon Park. I don't know what her name was. And we used to go over there to visit with her.

NG: The Home's newsletter reported that famous movie actresses visited the home. Do you know who those movie actresses were?

MFC: I think one was Claire Windsor if I'm not mistaken. I don't know who the other one was.

NG: And, was she pretty famous at that time?

MFC: Oh, yes.

NG: Before we wrap up, do you have any special words of wisdom for anybody younger as to how you live to ninety-one, and stay active?

MFC: Well, I take just one day at a time. And, I try not to let anything bother me. And I think I'm in good health. And, I take care of myself. And, I'm lucky to have, you know, daughters (starts to cry) that can, you know, take care of me.

NG: I think that says it all right there. The home was good to you?

MFC: The home was good to us and like I say, you had every opportunity to become something, in fact, a lot of the children that left the home became very prominent and, I mean, I try to keep in touch with the kids that were there. And, I talk to Fannie [Mashinka Gerson] and Ralph [Beerman]. In fact, we visited with Ralph in New Orleans about eight years ago. But no, I've always been proud to have been from the home. And, I wasn't ashamed to tell people that I was, because they were very good to us. And, if my mother hadn't have put me into the home, I wouldn't ... have my children (gets teary).

NG: How did you meet your husband?

MFC: I met him in Shreveport. He was a jewelry auctioneer. And, I met him in the store. And he always said, "That girl – I'm going to marry." And he did. I was married fifty-nine years before he died. In fact, we were married on January 10th, and he died January 13th. So we did celebrate our anniversary. And he used to like to travel, and he was into everything. I mean, in business he manufactured furniture. He was a very good father and a good husband.

NG: What more could you ask for?

MFC: Couldn't ask for anything more (wipes tears).

[End]