

INTERVIEW FOR JEWISH CHILDREN'S REGIONAL SERVICE WITH ALBERT FOX.

Question: How long did you live in the Home?

Ten years, from the age of three to thirteen.

Question: You were very young when you went in, do you recall anything of your life before going into the Home, or were you just too young for that?

I have very faint remembrances of things that happened on Rampart Street where I lived with my mother and father.

Question: What is your understanding of why you went into the Home?

I didn't know then, but I know now. I learned later that it was because my mother was very ill and that she had to be hospitalized and they thought it was best for me and my brothers and sister to be where I could be taken care of.

Question: Well than, you also had some brothers and sisters in the Home?

Two brothers and a sister.

Question: They all went into the Home? At the same time?

Yes.

Question: Do you remember who first brought you to the Home?

No. My first remembrance that I have of being there is being in this room with my two brothers and my little brother crying. Later on, I remembered the fact that we used to get peppermint candy and my brother used to suck on his all the time and it lasted a long time. We ate ours up right away and we fussed because he still had candy and we didn't.

Question: If you were three when you went to the Home, how old were your brothers and sister?

I think my brother was four and a half or five, that's Arnold the older brother, my younger brother was very young, he was in diapers and a baby crib all the time.

Question: Do you remember if you had to stay in the Infirmary when you first went in, sort of like isolation or something like that?

Very definitely, this is what I remember. Our first being in this room, or isolated area.

Question: For about how long do you think?

Oh, I don't remember. I just remember the instance with my younger brother crying and the instance with candy. That's all I can remember.

Question: Where you scared or homesick?

I don't think so, I don't recall being scared or homesick.

Question: When you left the Home, you were how old?

Thirteen.

Question: What year was that?

I was a sophomore in High School. It would be 1934 I guess, I was thirteen years old, I was born in 1921 so it must have been 1934.

Question: What was it like to live in the Home?

I think it was fine. I think the only, it was always a lot of other children you could play with and there was certain regimentation that you had to undergo, but you learned to live with it and you knew that if you conformed to the rules and regulations you got the priveleges, whatever they were and you were liked by the supervisors and you got along with the other children. There was a feeling of inferiority when you were away from the Home, at school you whenever you went away, I mean outside of the walls of the Jewish Children's Home.

Question: Why do you think that was?

Well, because you didn't have all the things that the other children had. You didn't have as many clothing as they had, you didn't have the toys like they had, at the time of Holidays, you couldn't brag that you got this for Chanaka because you didn't. You used to hear the other kids talk about the things they had, all the trips that they went on and the things that you didn't do or you just didn't have the benefits or the pleasures of the things that they had and the teachers at Newman knew you were a child from the Home and some of them treated you with a little bit of patronization or such as you better do right or else they were going to hear about it. All of them were not like that, but some few were. They thought that they were being benevolent to you if they did things for you, what do you expect, he's from the home, or things like that.

Question: You found alot of that?

Not alot, occasionally. I do remember one time shortly after I had left the Home, one of the boys came up to me and he said congratulations you're not in the Home anymore, why didn't you tell me that you left. I said why, what different does it make, and he says, well since you say it that way, that it doesn't make a difference, and I owe you an apology.

Question: Do you remember any of the rules that the Home had? Was there rules that you had to follow?

Oh, yes. You had to stay in bed until you were allowed to get out of bed. I could remember from time to time being punished at math time because I didn't got to sleep when it was time to go to sleep. I was always being punished for not laying still. Well, like I said, we were very regimented and naturally there had to be regimentation to accomplish the things that they had to do, you had to be on time for meals, you had to get out of bed and get dressed at the right time and you had to keep you area clean and you had to keep you drawer where you clothes were kept, you had to keep them very orderly, and such as that. You had to take care of your clothing.

I developed a saying about life, about people of dust ragers because if you wanted to impress the supervisors with how well you cleaned up and dusted your area, you dragged you dust rag on the floor, got it dirty so that you show how clean you were getting things. I say that some people are dust ragers because they got dirt to show what they are doing.

Question: You were definitely punished if you broke some of the rules?

Yes, as an instance that they tell about me being punished and it was, Uncle Harry used to give stories or give lectures or sermons every Friday night and he would base it on certain instances and this one night the sermon was based on attitude and he would go into the story about attitude. He told of an instance about how Albert Fox was punished and when he was told by the supervisor that she didn't like his attitude he told her ok I wouldn't have an attitude. Oh, yes you got denied going to the movies on Saturday night or you got denied staying up, you could be sent to bed early or you were punished by being made to go sit on you locker down in the basement, or you couldn't go out in the evening and play baseball or watch the big children play baseball, or you couldn't go swimming when it was time to go swimming. They had lots of different things for discipline.

Question: Did you have chores to do?

Yes. They called them groups, you could be in the laundry group or you could be in the front yard group, or the courtyard group, or the backyard group. If you were in the laundry group when you come home after school you would go down in the laundry and get the basket of clothing for you area and it was your job to distribute the the rest of the children their clothing. If you had front yard group, you had to keep the the leaves raked and the sidewalk sweep and things like that. The girls had kitchen group, where they had to wash dishes after meals and things like that.

Question: Do you remember who your special friends were in the Home?

Oh, yes. We still see them from time to time. Do you want to know who they were?

Interviewer: Yes, we're trying to get names and things.

Woodrow Pol^{ola} ~~over~~, who is now a doctor and lives in Mobile, Alabama; Ralph Gayner, who we hear from from time to time, at that time his name was Ralph Ginsberg, in fact a member of Gates of Prayer is his brother right now, Manny Gayner.

Question: What staff members do you recall?

Oh, I recall quite a few of them. There were those that we didn't respect and those that we did love and respect and those that had a very profound influence on us. One of the greatest people that I knew was Wanda E. Packet, she had such an influence on us that Ralph Gayner named his children after her and she was not a very well educated person but she was an inspiration because she was self educated, she did a lot of reading and she exposed us to good reading. Than there was H.B. Marks who became a very eminent pediatrician here in New Orleans. He was so terrific he had his entire library brought from Monroe, Louisiana and made available to us kids and he used to make us sit and listen to the classical music and the opera. If you wanted to be around H.B. Marks, you sat quiet while the music was playing and you got exposed to it. He also, H.B. was a medical student at the time, Harry L. Ginsberg has devised

a system of employing medical students at the Jewish Children's Home as supervisors and big brothers. And as such they could help us with our studies and also do duty to relieve the regular staff members and they also would go to some camp and help with the children in camp when they went to Bay St. Louis. H.B. was one of those people that was there and spent a lot of time with us and also exposed us to a lot of good literature and good music and also was a very highly principled person. I think Harry L. Ginsberg was a really fine person, he was the superintendent and there were a lot of times that I talked with him and he has a very good philosophy of life and he helped me to understand things. I think that he was responsible for trying to make the Jewish Children's Home as much unlike an institution as possible, and that he saw to it that the long, large dormitories was separated into individual rooms. He also had the brain child of bringing these students from the university to act as big brothers and guides and I think that he also had a philosophy of even though children would abuse things, they couldn't live in a steel house because they would not destroy it, but they should have dealt with things around them so that they could learn to appreciate them and that when they got to be older they would have experienced them and knew how to handle them, as such he did get delicate furniture for the children so that they could appreciate it. He had us kids learn how to re-finish it and things like that, he also taught us how to paint the building and as we did the other clean up things. It was often said that he was a little bit arbitrary and he didn't do the right thing by certain of the children, but I think he did the right thing by most of the children because he felt that we had to be prepared to face life and his feelings were that those that were educated enough and those sensible enough should go on to higher learning and that there were those who were not going to be capable of being college graduates, who he thought that they ought to have a trade so he devised a system of having certain children leave Newman School and go to trade schools or go to business schools and certain of the children didn't like it because he made enemies with them, but I think in the overall he sincerely thought he was doing the best. This was a big responsibility, but I know, I'm certain of the kids who are very successful because they didn't go to college and are very successful in their business because they did go to Delegado and learn a trade, of course there are certain people out there that are bitter at it because in spite of it they did go to college. So, give the devil his due, he did the best he knew how, and I think he was very progressive and ahead of his time at the time for what he did for us.

Question: Are there any others on the staff that you remember?

Oh, yes. We remember his sister, her name was Berger, one of the kids named her Bugs Bunny because she was not a bright as she should have been and she couldn't cope with them or with me, but I learned how to accept her and give her the right respect, other kids didn't feel like they had to and they were in trouble with her all the time. There was another supervisor. Incidentally, strange as it may seem, she was H.B. Marks cousin, but she only thought that we payed attention to her because of the things she could get for us, in other words if you wanted to go get a game out of the locker, which was kept under lock and key you had to go to Irma to get the key and she would make remarks, "yes the only time you see me and the only time you talk to me is when you want something", well, I thought she was stupid, but I mean this was the way it was and you had to learn to cope.

Question: But by and large do you think that most of the staff were good for the children? Did whatever they could for them?

I think that Harry L. Ginsberg had his staff meetings and he had you know, like any principal of any school all of his teachers are not going to be perfect, but he works with what he has. I think all in all they did a good job, all of them didn't have the same insight, all weren't Wanda Packers, but I think that eventhough Sonia Berger may not have been the most intelligent her heart was good, she spent a lot of time with us, she spent a lot of time seeing that we had what we needed.

Question: Do you remember what time you had to get up in the morning?

I think we got up at 6:45 A.M. or 7:15 A.M., I don't remember exactly. I do remember one time that I woke up early and I got dressed and I walked into the back yard and I bumped into Harry L. Ginsberg and he said does Aunt Sonia know you are back here and I said no, and he says well I think you better go tell her. Of course I got punished. That was one of those instances where you were supposed to stay in bed until the bell rang and then you had to get up and get dressed and go eat breakfast.

Question: Is that what happened, bells would ring when you were supposed to do things?

Oh, yes.

Question: Is that how they let everybody know that it was time to get up, to get dressed, to go to breakfast, whatever?

Right. Just like on a ship, the chief petty officer gets up and says now hear this, the bells tell you what to do.

Question: What time did you go to bed?

It depended on how old you were. As I was growing up in the Home they had a nursery department, they had a junior department and they had a boys department and they had a girls department. As nursery, they were boys and girls, co-educational; as junior department, they were boys and girls, but when the girls had something to show they left the junior department and they went to the girls side.

Question: About what time were meals?

Well, I think they were at 5:30 or 5:45 P.M. for supper and I think lunch was always at noon and it was sort of coordinated with school so that you could always walk home and eat lunch and then eat lunch and go back to school. Breakfast was coordinated so that you could get to school for the 8:30 class. I think we ate breakfast at 7:00 A.M., we got up at 6:45 A.M. we had to be ready for 7:00 or either 7:15 and then by 7:30 you had to be out and you had to be ready for inspection to go to school.

Question: They looked you over before you went to school? What, to make sure that you were dressed properly?

Yes, yes indeed. Sometimes when the the whether was inclement the nurse came down from the infirmary to see what you had on. She was always making the kids wear the raincoats if the whether was bad. You know, who wants to be dragging that rain coat to school.

Question: Do you remember what you did for fun?

Well, we had games and we had, a lot of the fun was cultural as I recall. There used to be a play time and the kids played a lot of cards and they used to meet downstairs on the weekend after supper and they would have card games, or in the afternoons in the backyard they would have baseball games, or something like that. Of course, on the weekends you would go downstairs if you weren't punished. On regular school nights you ate your supper and you went to your studies and then at the right time you went to bed. Occasionally, they had one radio and they would have music or radio shows down in the front and if you had been good that week, or they had movies that they would show down in the front, you got to see the movies there was that one instance that I had a bad attitude that I didn't go to the movie that night. There were children games and there were older children games, kids did a lot of skating around the sidewalk, in the courtyard there was dirt, around the perimeter of the courtyard was this wide pavement about 7 or 8 feet wide and you would just continually skate around the thing, or there was volleyball, or they take us to Audubon Park and you would swim and we would go on picnics in the summer time if ever there was any tickets donated to the Jewish Children's Home we would go to shows or things like that.

Question: Do you recall any of the special celebrations in the Home? Did they celebrate Passover, Chanuka, things like that?

Very much so. In fact we even went through the four question bit. The Passover we had a Sadder and I had learned the four questions, it was supposed to be the youngest child in the Jewish Children's Home, but it was easy to keep reusing the same kid. Uncle Harry Ginsberg made the remark when I stood up for the rehearsal and he says I expect that one of these days I'm going to say who's going to ask the four questions and this wheezing old man is going to say I am.

Yes, there was Passover and there was Chanuka and they did have toys for each of the children. They were meek, but they did have toys. They did light the candles. Fourth of July was a big event, in fact it was the, they have what they called the golden city, at that time they would call attention to the children who had earned the most good B points throughout the year and a big issue was made on how good you were that year and there were certain monetary awards, I think. This was always done on the fourth of July and there was a barn fire there, so of the older kids used to make up things about the supervisors they didn't like, or things like that.

Friday nights were very well observed, there was always special food and they always had the holley on Friday night. That was one time that you were never late for Friday night supper. You could really get the rap of God if you were late for Friday night supper.

Question: Did you have a chance to celebrate your birthday?

Yes they did. It was really cute, believe it or not McKenize's was in existence on Prytania Street and whenever somebody had a birthday one of the children were told to bring home a birthday cake and they would have a birthday cake and everybody would sing happy birthday. The thing that depressed me was that that cake came from McKenize's. The first McKenize's was the one on Prytania Street.

Question: How did they get a cake big enough to give everybody a piece?

Oh, it was at your table, you family at the table, all the children didn't share in it, but those at your table did.

Question: How often did you get to see your own family while you were living in the Home?

For a while, my young brother was in the nursery, I was in the junior department and my older brother was in the boys department, so we did not get to see each other much then because we were just in different groups. When I got in I think my freshman year or my sophomore year of high school Uncle Harry had got this program going where you had little individual rooms and I had a room with my brother, and I remember my younger brother accusing us of not liking him because he was in the junior department and my older brother and I was in the boys area and we had a room together and we had more in common.

I think I recall that I was in the third or fourth grade at the time that she left and went to live in Cincinnati. I didn't see a lot of my sister when I was at the Jewish Children's Home. First of all, she was seven years older and that could make a tremendous difference between us.

Question: How old was she when she left the Home?

She was fifteen or sixteen years old. Kids at that time could finish school, she went to Sophie Wright, the girls business school and then she went to live in Cincinnati with my grandmother. When children got old enough when they finished high school or finished trade school they were sent back to the city from whence they came. The Federation was the intermediary or the collecting of the disseminating agency in the Jewish Children's Home Program, so that when a child got to be a certain age they left and the Federation then had the responsibility of seeing to it that they got situated.

Question: Your father was here in New Orleans, did your mother pass away?

She was placed in Jackson, I don't remember if it was Jackson, MS. or Jackson, LA. She became mentally depressed and she had to be somewhere she could be taken care of. I have a very faint remembrance of mother coming to see us at the Jewish Children's Home shortly after we were placed in the Home, but that is all I remember. The last time I saw my mother was when she had died, she was brought to New Orleans and I was in the fifth grade at the time and my sister had to come back down from Cincinnati and then went back up to Cincinnati with daddy with mother to bury her. I only remember my mother three or four times in my life, one time when she sent her slippers down to daddy to put an intersole in the slipper, I can remember him taking a big pair of scissors and making an intersole for her slippers, and the time with the bread. The time that she brought a loaf of bread to us and the time that I saw her in the casket. That's all I remember.

Question: Did you see your father on a regular basis?

Well, he used to come on Sundays and I think that he used to come almost every Sunday. In the afternoon he used to take us down to see some of his friends or take us to a movie.

Interviewer: I can remember very vividly your father bringing you boys, the three of you, to our house quite often.

Yes, it was one of the Rosen ladies that had these big delicious purple grapes and I remember getting that purple juice on my pants, it stayed in my pants.

Question: I presume that you could get telephone calls and things like that?

I don't remember. Sylvia Fox got telephone calls because she worked in the Infirmary and they had a telephone.

Question: Did you ever go to camp in Bay St. Louis? What was it like going there?

Yes. It was fun, we used to look forward to it. It was a big event, in fact one of the biggest events of going to camp was saving up special things to have on the train that you were going to play with, a card game, or a book that you were going to read, or something like that. It was a big event. The older kids was always telling you how long it was going to take, or how many more miles we had to go before we were there. The trip took two hours from New Orleans to Bay St. Louis. We used to all go down to the L & M station and get on the train and then go to Bay St. Louis. It was a lot of fun. Eventually it got to be that the Jewish Children's Home was given a six week period every summer in Bay St. Louis and we worked at camp like we used to work on St. Charles Avenue helping to develop the camp and to make it nice. We were making walk ways through the woods, we made a big baseball field in the back and there is an old story about my brother that I remember. My older brother was very good at digging and we had the chore of going back in the back to dig a pit to put the garbage in and I remember one of the supervisors then when we were going to make a great big deal out of dedicating the garbage pit that my brother had dug and he got there and the assistant superintendent gave him a lecture and he said in the lecture, if all the children here at this camp eat food like the children at our table group there won't be any garbage.

Question: You mentioned that you did have a big brother? Was that the big brother big sister system there?

Yes.

Question: Do you remember who your big brother was?

Roger Perlis. He was one of the big brothers.

Question: What was he like?

He was tough. I remember the time that Roger punished me and I wouldn't be quiet, and he told me that I was the most persistent child that he ever saw.

Question: What are some of the things that you did together with your big brother?

Well, the big brother was usually in charge of your work project, or in charge of seeing that you got to the table on time, or that you did the things that you were

supposed to do. They actually assisted the supervisor who was in charge of the children.

Question: Did you have a big brother who was not a part of the Home, someone from the outside?

They had big sisters and big brothers now that you mention it, but I a Ms. Simon who was supposed to be our big sister, actually they had assigned big sisters and big brothers, who were people who could take the children out or who could give them attention or extra things. I think that there was a closer relationship, more a dialogue between my big sister. We were just her little brothers, but I don't remember. I guess I was just kind of confused with the question that you asked.

They did have what they called family groups in the structure of the organization of the children at Home. They did have a big brother who was one of the older children, to see that they conform and usually the big brother and the big sister were in charge of the table where you ate and the other children were part of that group. We did sit at the table with my sister.

Question: Did you go to Newman School all the way through?

Yes.

Question: You left the Home at the age of 13, how did you continue to go to Newman?

As bad as I was, I guess I was still one of the fair haired boys. Uncle Harry had a very high regard for me, I guess I was a nice kid he thought. He did say to me, I remember him calling Mr. Henson who was the principal and saying that he wanted me to continue going to Newman and Mr. Henson said yes, he's a fine boy, I think we ought to let him. So I did. I graduated from Newman.

Question: How did you like going to Newman School?

I liked it, I thought it was a very fine school. I liked a lot of the teachers there, some of them I didn't like. I thought Newman was a very fine school. I liked it.

Question: Did you have any school friends that were not Home kids?

Yes. One of the kids that made a remark to me that "Really congratulations, you're not a Home kid anymore."

Question: Did you visit with kids that were not Home kids, did they visit you?

Not so much when I was in the Home. I used to occasionally get invited to kids parties. I guess my friendships for these other students developed more after I left the Home. In fact I bumped into one of them in Washington, D.C. of all places during the War, Charlie Durel, another one that I was very friendly with was Harold Victor and Douglas Shear, who I don't see too much.

Question: You left the Home at the age of 13, where did you go then, what happened?

Well, our father had remarried and Uncle Harry, that's Harry Ginsberg the superintendent, thought it was a good idea since my father was remarried that his children and he should be reunited and we should live as a family rather than me staying on at the Home, which I didn't want to do. In all of his wisdom Uncle Harry saw it and he made me feel that it was the best thing that I could do and that I should not look back on it with remorse ever and not say that it would have been better if I had gone or if I had stayed he said because you would never know, just take it one day at a time.

Living wasn't as plush as it was in the Jewish Children's Home, believe it or not, but that's the way it was.

Question: As you think back on it now, do you consider your years in the Home to have been a good or a poor experience?

I think that they were good experiences. I thought that when I was having this interview with you that I might make a statement that I think that the Jewish Children's Home was a very good place, was very profound, had a lot of influence on me and I am sure that it made me what I am today. Taught me to be patient, taught me to accept life the way it is and that even though there were unhappy experiences there I think that what I learned there and the people that I met and the people that I learned to admire, that I am very happy about having been there. Like I said I left reluctantly, from a truly selfish standpoint I myself felt that it was best for me there, that I could be what I wanted to be in life better there than by leaving.

Question: Do you think you sister and brothers felt the same way that you did? Or do they have different feelings?

No, I really don't know how my older brother felt about it because he died during the War and he was 22 or 23 when he died. We never had an opportunity to discuss that or talked about it. I think that my younger brother was very unhappy, and strangely enough my wife knew him many years before she knew me, and the first time that she met me she found out that I had been in the Jewish Children's Home and she never knew that my younger brother had, having known him for several years. I don't think that he was as happy with it as I was and didn't accept it, or didn't get out as much as I did.

Question: Do you know the reason for that?

No. I think its just the way he was and I was the way I am. I really don't know. The people in the Home who were my personal friends, I guess I enjoyed them and them enjoyed me and the good supervisors that were born to respect and love, they made me happy, they made me contented. What they did to my brother, I never discussed it with him. I really don't know.

to put them in an institution. I think since then they found out that it was better to put them in a family setting, just like Harry Ginsberg was me to go back into the family because he thought that was better.

Interviewer: Tell me a little bit about what happened to you after you left the Home? What did you ultimately do?

I finished Newman and I had decided that I wanted to get a college degree and I decided that I was going to go get a degree. I went to LSU, during the time that I was out of the Home, but yet still associated with the Home, Uncle Harry mentioned to me one day, I think that you're going to go to college, but when you do get ready to go to college, we do have funds available to help our children go to college, so when you get ready come back and talk to us. I do think that they were a little to severe, to strict, or too stingy, and I hate to use the word stingy, because I don't think it was a question of stingy, but I think it was a question of trying to do the best of a philanthropist to not waste the efforts given forth by the philanthropist and in their eagerness to do as good a job as they could they may have been a little too severe with us going to school and didn't allow us or didn't suggest to us that we have a little more to be able to relax to be able to spend more time in studies and also spent some time in recreation. Out your expense account that you would have a certain amount of money for clothing or for pleasures, or for recreation, it was just what you needed for school, and I think that were it allowed us to have that high degree, that higher education, it made an inbitterness temporarily, got me to the point where I just said to hell with it, I don't want their money, I'm going to go get whatever I need, if I have to I'll get it and I did. But I am thankful for it, I think it was a little bit misadministered, it was too severe to ask a student, a child to live on such a meager allowance, instead of encouraging them to have a fuller life.

Question: Well, how did you supplement the money?

You just worked and you didn't take a full course of study.

Question: What degree did you get?

I got a degree in chemical engineering.

Question: What do you do now?

I build, because I met a girl who's father was in the building and I found out when I had finished and gotten my degree and I was getting ready to interview for employment, the point came home to me that if I pursue the profession of chemical engineering I would not have a good family life, that I would be uprooted and I would be away from my family a lot.

Question: Was there anything else you would like to tell us about? Have you ever gotten together with any of the ex-home kids?

Yes. Two of the people who had a big influence on me which I never talked about so far was Jean and Lawrence Avegno. Jean I think is responsible for these two kids being married, she was instrumental in getting us both to the Jewish Children's Home summer camp as counselors and that when we got to know each other, and that's when we fell in love and got married.

I continue to see Jean and Lawrence after I became a member of the congregation of Gates of Prayer.

Jean was responsible, she for many, many years was the secretary of the Alumni Association of the Jewish Children's Home, they used to use this as a vehicle to get athletic equipment for the children in the Home. The Alumni Association would make donations so that they would have these extra things for the children and Jean did schedule and coordinate reunions quite often.

There is some citizens here in New Orleans, Ralph Beerman and his wife, who anytime an ex-home kid would come to New Orleans they would open house for them. In fact Ralph's wife always have parties for us ex-home kids. Besides the meeting and the get togethers they used to have at the Jewish Children's Home when the building was still there, Ralph and his wife had get togethers. Roger Perils would have home kids over. I think we had a few over the years. As was said earlier, you either liked your time in the home or you hated it.