

ALUMNI PROJECT INTERVIEW WITH

Sam Freedman, Miami

September 21, 1983. Telephone interview with Sam Freedman.

Sam Freedman, who entered the Jewish Children's Home in 2/17/28 at the age of 11 years, remembered a good deal of his life prior to entering. His family life had been chaotic. His parents separated when he was two and a half, his mother going off and leaving him and his three older brothers with the father. When Mr. Freedman was four years of age he and his brothers were hospitalized for what he thinks was removal of tonsils and adenoids, and while they were in the hospital, the father disappeared. The four boys were then placed in the Faith Home in Houston, a non-sectarian orphanage. Two years later the father, then re-married, returned and took the boys out to live with him and his new wife. This marriage lasted only about another year, and when the step-mother left the father tried to rear the boys alone. Apparently there was little supervision of their activities, as Mr. Freedman referred to their "running wild." When Mr. Freedman was 11, his father became ill with tuberculosis, and was supposed to go into a sanatorium. He tried very hard to get the boys into the Jewish Children's Home, but only he was eligible, since the Jewish Children's Home would not accept children over 12 years of age.

Mr. Freedman never saw his father again. He recalls that in 1932 when he was 15, Jean Avegno called him into her office one day and asked if he knew a Morris Freedman about whom there was an article in the Houston paper. That was his father, who according to the article had taken his own life. Mr. Freedman recalls going back to his room and crying for hours.

Upon first coming to the home he was in Isolation for two weeks, during which time he was examined by the Home doctor. He had fond recollections of Anna Kamin, the nurse. Other staff he remembered with affection was Uncle Harry's widowed sister, Mrs. Berger, with whom Mr. Freedman says he was "in love." He also recalled how very pretty the dietician. And Bill Parker was someone who was special to Mr. Freedman, since he taught him how to use tools and how to build things. He liked Bill very much.

Mr. Freedman said that the first two years at the Home were his "bad times," since he was not used to rules and felt that he was being "caged." He knows now that it was better for him than the life he lead with his father, but he felt resentment at the rules to which he was unaccustomed. He said that punctuality was very important, as he learned the first week he was there, actually learning the word for the first time.

Some of his recollections were of raiding neighbors' fig trees with other boys and stealing blackberries from neighboring yards. He also recalled sitting on the fence watching the black lads in the college across the street practicing football.

Mr. Freedman described himself as "being obsessed" with sports, at which he was very good. However, this meant that he did not apply himself to his studies, and he made poor grades, though many of his teachers told him that he could do the work if he would put some attention and time to them. Accordingly he went to Newman only through 7th grade. The Home wanted to place him at Delgado, but he did not want to go there, so he went to S.J. Peters Commercial High. He did not like it there, either, and the following year he went to Delgado. He did poorly there, so they took him out of school and his last year at the Jewish Children's Home he worked with Bill Parker, more or less as part of the maintenance staff. He recalled that during the summer he was 17, while he was at camp, he was informed that he would be leaving to go live with his mother and her second husband. He has not had any prior warning of this possibility. Mr. Freedman explained that Uncle Harry wanted to "get rid of the older kids." *Deph 6/13/34*

Camp, itself, was a very good memory. He always enjoyed his time there. He also recalled his Big Sister, though he could not recall her name. She took him and a couple of other boys out to dinner and to the movies. He remembered that it was at dinner at her house that he first learned to eat shrimp.

Mr. Freedman liked Uncle Harry, and recalled how much they enjoyed having Uncle Harry read to them. He remembered his reading the "Count of Monte Cristo" to the children. He did recall only one episode of corporal punishment. When boys were in trouble, Uncle Harry would call them in and give them a talking to. On one occasion Mr. Freedman apparently talked back and Uncle Harry called him a "jackass." When Mr. Freedman made a flip remark, Uncle Harry got angry and hit him on the head with his cane (he had a bad foot at the time.) However, he did not seem to hold any grudge for that episode. Each child had a booklet in which various aspects of Home living were kept and demerits marked. If a child had a certain number of demerits, punishment ensued.

Mr. Freedman also recalled that when the Depression hit New Orleans, the Home went on an "austerity program." He recalled that the meals were different, wholesome but with less variety and less meat and chicken. He recalled lots of red bean dinners and what seemed to him like sardines for lunch daily.

Mr. Freedman described his life after he left the Home, and it was a bad time for him for quite a while. His mother had married a non-Jew who was a farmer in rural Texas and had six children by that marriage. He really did not fit into the family and was unhappy, so after a while he left and went to live with his married sister in Houston. That did not work out, either, and before he was nineteen he was living in a furnished room and supporting himself by working in a factory. In 1939 he went to New York to try to ship out as a seaman but had difficulty getting hired because he always looked younger than his years. He was drafted in 1943 and served in the armed forces till 1946.

ALUMNI PROJECT INTERVIEW WITH
Sam Freedman, Miami
Page 3

In retrospect, Mr. Freedman feels very grateful for his years at the Jewish Children's Home. He states that if he had not been accepted he feels sure that by now he would be dead or in prison. One of his older brothers did get involved in illegal activities and served an 8 year prison sentence. He said that he recalled that in 1929 a group of social workers did a study of children's homes over the whole world, and that their conclusion was that the Jewish Children's Home was "one of the best places in the world."