

Interview

Bexah

A. H. KLAFERT (maiden name - LACHOFF) on June 13, 1983. Mrs. K. was five years old in 1940 when she entered the Home and 11 when she left in 1946 at the time the Home closed. Her first recollection was of the camp in Bay St. Louis. She recollected taking the trip on the train, she remembered the nuns who had a convent next door to the camp and who came and played ball with them. She remembered going crabbing early in the morning with Inga ^{Ellis} ~~Ellis~~. She remembered the crab boils. She remembered going to the movies and although they were not supposed to do so, she recalled hitch hiking a couple of times. She remembered that everybody seemed to have a great deal of fun and ^{then} she recollected that her friend Frances used to wake her up in the middle of the night to get her to walk to the bathroom with her because Frances was afraid to go down the long hall by herself. She remembered that the boys went on a five mile hike because her older brother came back from it "red as a lobster".

Her next recollection was of leaving the Home; she and three others were the last ones to leave. Mrs. K. said that she thought that was a bad idea. She became quite sad as she talked of having to leave. She knew that it had something to do with Uncle Harry's death, but she had no recollections of the death at all. It happened during the summer, but they must have come back because she remembered that they left from the Home itself. She and the other children had assumed that the Home was closed because of financial reasons, that is that they could no longer afford to keep it open. Mrs. K. said having the children return to their parents was very hard on the parents. It certainly had been for her. Her mother was working but she was not in good health, and was really not able to support herself and her two children, Mrs. K. and her brother, Gerson Lachoff. As a result she remembers that they had to get help from the Jewish Welfare Federation very often and they was something which she found very hard and rather demeaning. Mrs. K. then remembered the birthday parties. On the occasion of one's birthday the child and two friends from the Home would go to have dinner with Jean ^{Avign} and with Uncle Harry in his apartment; there were also presents. She said that somebody told her that they used to spend the night there, but she did not recollect that. She talked a good bit about a doll that

she remembered an uncle had given her for a birthday present one year. Mrs. K. had a little difficulty remembering exactly where Uncle Harry's apartment was, but finally that must have been to the right of the center hall behind his office. She recalled that Sunday was visiting day and she remembered the children all standing by the front door waiting for their parents to come visit. Usually she and her mother and brother would walk over to the Prytania and go to the movies.

Everyone had jobs to do, the jobs changing from time to time. She remembered that some of the jobs were to sweep the porch, to set the tables, to clear the tables, to dry dishes. The children took care of their own rooms and made their own beds every morning and changed linens on Friday. The room had to be straightened up and the bed made before one went to school. She shared a room with two other girls, although believes that near the end she had her own room. One of her recollections was of one of her roommates, Ethel Miron, who did not like to eat, and who was forced to remain at the table until she did eat. In retrospect and having had children of her own, she thinks that that was a poor way to handle it. She remembers that Ethel had to sit there for what seemed to her a very long time, but her recollection was that the child would never give in and eat.

Mrs. K. recalled that they had Seder at Passover, but did not remember any other religious ceremonies or observances in the Home. She herself was too young to fast at Yom Kippur so she does not remember anything about that, but she always remembers that there was plenty of food around. The children went to one of the three reform temples and she was one of the group who went to Gates of Prayer. She recalled walking there every Saturday morning to services, a whole group of them going down Prytania to the Temple. Mrs. K. commented that she "adored" Rabbi Sher^a, who always took a great interest in the children. She remembered going to Dr. Greene, the dentist and that when ever one did not feel well or had a sore throat they would go to the nurse. She still remembered how nasty the taste of the medicine was, which they swabbed one's

throat. Mrs. K. said that she believes that she learned values at the Home and that she got the beginnings of a very good education.

She remembered that the older girls went out on dates. She knew this because the older girls ~~served~~ as big sisters to the younger girls and she remembers that when the girls were getting dressed to go out on a date, they would then come into the smaller girls' room to show them how they looked before they left. She remembered that although they had a set time to go to bed, she loved to listen to "The Shadow" on radio and so she used to sneak into the bedroom of one of the older girls who had a radio and hide under her bed to listen to The Shadow.

Then she remembered that the older girls also were able to discipline the younger ones. Running down the halls was forbidden and if an older girls caught you, your punishment was to walk up and down the hall a set number of times. It seemed to her sometimes as often as twenty. Mrs. K. remembered that once she threatened to run away. She did not remember what had happened to cause her to want to run away, but she knows that she could not have been more than six at the time. She recalled that Inga had helped her pack her suitcase when she said that she wanted to run away, but had told her that she could leave but that she was ^{not} permitted to cross the street. She took her suitcase and got as far as the corner, but since she could not cross the street she came back.

She remembered selling magnolia^rs on the corner. Some of the boys would climb up in the big magnolia tree, take down the flowers and the children would sell them to passersby. She wondered what ever became of the money they made. Children who first came into the Home were put in the Infirmary for a week or two, she did not remember which. However, it was not as frightening ~~was~~ as it might have been because there were always other children there, and she remembered that Herbert Friedman and Ethel ^{MIRON} Moren were in the infirmary when she was there. Boys and girls dormitories were separate, the boys on one side and the girls on the other. She thinks, but she is not sure, that once a year they had "open house" when the boys could come over and visit the girls' side

and the girls could go visit the boys' side. She did see her brother quite often, eventhough they were sleeping on different sides of the building. Seats at the table for meals were assigned, two counselors and six children at each table, and brothers and sisters were always seated together. Besides, she and her brother could be together at play time and going to Sunday School.

Mrs. K. said that it was a very good experience for her. It seemed to her as if she had just lots of brothers and sisters and there was always someone to turn to. Mrs. K. then told me about her life after leaving the Home. She seemed to have few recollections of the years that she lived with mother before her marriage at eighteen, except for the fact that they were quite poor. At eighteen she married a man who was a sergeant in the Army and left New Orleans because she went with him to whatever post he was able to go to if she were able to accompany him. While her *mother* was alive she always returned to N.O. when he was someplace she could not go. There were two children of this marriage. Mrs. K. told me that her husband wrote her from Vietnam that he wanted a divorce, but since this letter came just at the time he had had his fortieth birthday she figured that it was part of a forty year old syndrome and paid no attention. From Vietnam he was tranferred to Turkey, where again she could not go. She fought the divorce for about four years and finally agreed in 1944 and the divorce became final in 1945. However, she met her second husband and said that the second marriage was absolutely wonderful and she was very grateful that her husband had wanted the divorce. However, her second husband died only a year and a half after the marriage. Mrs. K. said that she later learned that her husband had an affair while in Vietnam with a Vietnamese woman and that there was a child born of that marriage. She does not think that he will want to bring the child over since he has also remarried an American woman. There was some discussion of Mrs. K.'s current attempts to find work which she has found rather difficult to do. She had been a teller in a bank for many years, but this of course is very low paying occupation and even at that she has been having difficulty in finding work, but she did not seem to

be too discouraged about it. She would like to work at Willow-wood since she does volunteer work over there, going with a friend who is a beautician to help her wash the hair of some of the residents.

Mrs. K. has not kept in touch with many of the people she was in the Home with, but she still does have a few good friends from those days. She would be much interested in some kind of a reunion and would be glad to do whatever she could to help if such an event takes place.

NO. 10390

SMEAD