

Temple Israel Archives

Interview of Freda Brode

January 12, 2005

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FREDA BRODE (WEINSTEIN)

Harriet Stern: January 12th, 2005. (Interviewer does not identify herself)

I have the pleasure of interviewing Freda Brode. Please say your full name and your place and date of birth.

FB: Freda Jean - J-E-A-N Cohn, C-0-H-N Brode, B-R-O-D-E and now Weinstein, but I go by Brode. Date of birth, August 28th, 1943.

HS: And where were you born?

FB: My family was living in Forrest City, Arkansas, but I was born in Memphis at St. Joseph Hospital. Dr. Reinberger was my mother's doctor and I was born at St. Joseph's.

HS: But you went back to live in Forrest City?

FB: I was raised there and I lived there all my life until after I left high school.

HS: Was your name ever changed - other than by marriage?

FB: My father from Russia and came to The United States in 1912 and his family name was Comorovsky. My name was never changed but they changed from Comorovsky to Cohn.

HS: I see. And were you named after anyone?

FB: Since I was born during war time, my great grandmother's name was Freda and my parents didn't want a German name for me and they named me Freda (pronounced Fredda) and everybody teases me to this day that I was named after a man, Fred, and then my middle name, Jean, after an aunt -well, my great aunt - but my first name, people always say Freeda, but I tell them just to think of Fred.

HS: Well, I know from your form that you filled out that you do know a lot about your parents and grandparents so let's start with what you know about your father's family.

FB: I only know my father's mother's and father's names and then my father's siblings. When Daddy came in 1912, it was as a young boy. I think at the time he was about fourteen or fifteen, of course he didn't speak English and a lot about the family's history was not conveyed through the years. I think my grandfather's name was Itzach and that my grandmother was Golda, the reason being that my sister - her middle name is Goldie, and she was named after the grandmother. And Itzach was something that I had written down that my father had told me. He grew up and talked a great deal about how his life was

related to Sholom Aleichem stories in that there were pogroms during that time and he talked about how cold it was in Russia - how they had no refrigeration. Things were stored in the ice in the water. Where they lived outside of Kiev and just how poor they were. He came over from Russia with his sister, Annie. His sister was 25 and she was married and her husband was already here. And Daddy left a sister and three brothers in Russia. They lost contact through the years and then in 1959 Daddy and my mother and my sister went to Russia and they found the family and they were reunited at that time.

HS: Really? That's remarkable.

FB: And I understand some of the family came to the United States - some of the children and these would be cousins, but I have not been in touch. My brother has been in touch with them.

HS: So your father chose to come (missed words)

FB: Probably. Because that was the way of getting out. The last picture I have is of my grandfather sitting in bed with a beard and wearing a yarmulke and holding a bible. And all my father ever told me was that his father was sick. My father never discussed his mother or father. I was probably quite young and not interested in the story at that time and now I regret it. I asked my sister but she said Daddy never talked to her about it. I think that maybe he didn't remember or maybe it was just so sad for him that they didn't talk about it a lot. And the rest of the family that he met, they didn't know any more either.

HS: And so, he came to this country and he was with his brother and his sister and they came on a ship?

FB: He came on a ship and I have found out he was on the USS Bremen -a German ship and it came into port in July of 1912. It came into Ellis Island and they would not let him or his family off the ship because they had developed the measles. And they made him stay on the ship and they went around to the port of Galveston and arrived several weeks later at the port of Galveston and I have the manifest. His sister's grandchild found the manifest in Galveston and sent me a copy. And it has his signature and his sister's signature and he came with his sister and three of her children. And they lived in Memphis. I don't know how they got from Galveston to Memphis. Maybe by train - I don't know what the transportation would have been.

HS: Were any members of your family already here?

FB: My daddy and his sisters and no other family members came.

HS: So he was already here?

FB: Yes. He was already here. And Daddy was brought over by Abe Polsky, his sister's brother-in-law—his sister was Annie Comorovsky Polsky, married to Abe's brother Jake Polsky--that lived in Memphis. And they lived in Memphis up until I think the 1940s and then they moved to Little Rock, Arkansas.

HS: So your father came, and what work did he do?

FB: He worked -well, he worked - well, of course he was a young boy like twelve or fourteen - whatever he was - they had to make him older to get into the United States. So there is a discrepancy on his real age. Whether he was born in 1896 or in 1898. Daddy was a very aggressive young boy and he wanted to learn and he went to learn English and so he went to night school. And he became employed by the Krivcher family - I believe it was Mary and - it was Robert Krivcher's parents. And they took him under their wing and he worked for them for a number of years. I don't know if they had a grocery - or - I don't know. It's written down in the family history. But anyway he worked for them and then - I think it was in the 1920s and ???? where my mother was.

HS: Did he continue working for the Krivchers?

FB: No. As I said, he was a very aggressive young man and he wanted to be out on his own and so he went into a number of businesses. Whatever opportunity presented itself Daddy took it up and ran with it.

HS: And he lived here all that time?

FB: Yes. Daddy and Mother lived in Memphis until 1934 and then they moved to Forrest City, Arkansas.

HS: And what took them to Forrest City?

FB: I think a business venture. It was sort of a growing area, and somebody must have told him and he went to - I can't think of who told him about it. - It was a Garber. Joe Garber's brother -Myron. Mr. Garber was in the ice cream business at that time. And Mr. Garber said "What do you have to put up for collateral?" And he said "Myself" and Mr. Garber said, "That's good enough for me." And Mr. Garber loaned him the money, and he moved to Forrest City and opened a grocery store. And he opened the one in Forrest City and one in Marianna and in Cotton Plant and in all the little cities around there and he and my mother worked in a grocery store and all my brothers and sisters worked in grocery stores. And then in 1943 Mother found that she was pregnant with me. And she had already had a family. My sister was seventeen and a half. My brother was thirteen. And I was a big surprise. And Daddy decided that enough was enough and he wanted Mother just to enjoy herself so he sold all the grocery stores and went into the wholesale grocery business in Forrest City. And he had a partner - two partners. And then in 1952 he became the sole owner of The Forrest City Grocery Company. He always referred to me as his Little Good Luck Baby. Because I brought him a lot of success and a lot of luck. I was not wanted but it all turned out all right.

HS: How old are you?

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FB: I'm fifty-six. But at that time my father was close to fifty and Mother was in her late thirties and it was sort of unheard of in those days for her to start a family.

HS: Let's talk a little bit about your morn and her family. What about her family?

FB: Well, I know more about Mother's family. Mother was born in The United States. She was born in Clarksville, Tennessee. Her mother was Mary Rubenstein and Mary was from Latvia which then was part of Russia and then became Poland, and - I don't know - I have to get it straight, but back in the 1800s Latvia was part of the Russian area. My uncle brought my grandmother over. And I think she went to Clarksville through Uncle Sol Rubenstein - he was prominent in the community and he owned a dry goods store, and I believe he was a half-brother. I'm not so sure. Grandma married a man by the name of William Bachman, and, of course he was my grandfather, but I never knew him. He died in 1912. He was a tobacco farmer and the family was originally from South Africa. And that's all I know about his family, other than they did have diamond mines in South Africa and later the diamond mines were given to the government. And that is the extent of anything I knew about his family. My grandmother had four daughters - my mother, who was the oldest, and she had three sisters, Fannie, Bertha (Schwartz), and Willie. And when my grandfather died my grandmother was pregnant with Willie and they were really strapped for money in Clarksville and Uncle Shye Rubenstein took care of them but somehow I don't know how they got here, but when she came to Memphis she met Jake Katz and he was really the one who was my grandfather throughout the years.

HS: And do you remember visiting, or being in their home as a child?

FB: When they were in Memphis that was before I was born. They later moved to Marked Tree, Arkansas. Basically all my family were Arkansans. (missed words) and we went there (Marked Tree) frequently from Forrest City .

HS: What kind of Jewish life did everyone have in Forrest City and Marked Tree?

FB: Well, as far as Jewish life in those towns, there was no Jewish life. We had a Jewish home, and we had all the holidays, and my grandmother had a Kosher home. So they would go to Memphis to get Kosher meat. And then we would go there on Chanukah and on Pesach, and my grandmother strictly kept Kosher and kept Pesach. But growing up, my Jewish life began when I was six years old. My family and the other Jewish families - there were about fifteen Jewish families in Forrest City at the time - and the children - there were about six of us - would come to Memphis to Sunday school every week. One of the parents would drive us down to Baron Hirsch.

HS: And so you were part of a very close community.

FB: Right. And I was very involved. I got into Young Judea and in the Jewish sorority and there were lots of parties and Bar Mitzvah parties. I was Bat Mitzvah so that was more trips into Memphis for those studies. And I had an uncle that lived in Memphis, and so on the weekends that wasn't a problem. And I had a few Jewish friends that I would stay with,

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but it was really hard for us to get in with the group because we really weren't part of it because I didn't see them day in and day out, but there were three or four who took me under their wing and invited me into their homes and I would spend weekends with them and join their various activities.

HS: But you were in Forrest City and -

FB: There were three others who were in Forrest City who were Jewish. And we were all the same age. But I had a lot of non-Jewish friends, and I dated a lot of non-Jewish guys, but I knew all along that I was not going to get involved - that I always wanted at some point to marry someone who was of the Jewish faith. And that was very important to me. But while my family was very prominent we were never asked to be members of the Country Club. There was an exclusion in their by-laws. But now some of the families that remain in Forrest City are members of the Country Club. In fact my nephew is treasurer of The Country Club. But at that time we were excluded. I was invited to all the parties that the other kids had, and I never was excluded, but we just weren't allowed to be members.

HS: Did you ever overhear any sort of prejudice - ugly remarks??

FB: I never heard anything.

HS: Were your parents involved in the Jewish Community as well?

FB: Yes. Very much so. They always joined the organizations that they thought important and the B'nai B'rith played a big part in their life. They had their own B'nai B'rith Lodges. They met once a month in little cities like Wynne, Arkansas or Ora, Arkansas. They had this group that met and it was real important to all of them. And it was also social. The men would play cards and the women would play cards. There were social events. There would be picnics out on somebody's farm and we have a lot of videos the picnics and the parties and the B'nai B'rith meetings. And they would have these meetings and bring the children and all the kids would get together. And that was our socializing with the Jewish children.

HS: Was there a women's group and a men's group?

FB: Yes. But they met separately, but they met at the same place. Like it might have been the Wynne Lodge or some type of lodge. It usually wasn't at any one's home because there was such a big crowd and it would be a pot luck dinner or that type of thing. And, as I said, the picnics were just a huge thing. We had big crowds, and sometimes we had hay rides and the Ben Meyers family had a big farm and it could have been that farm or another farm. And it was fun. We had a lot of fun. And another thing was the BBYO group of which I later became president. And it was part of the Blytheville group, also. And in the late 1950s I became president of the BBYO and so I didn't join the BBYO group in Memphis because this gave me the same opportunities. And I went to meetings and conventions and all of that and I was very much a part of the whole system.

HS: Were you Zionists?

FB: Yes. Very much so. My grandfathers were always Zionists. They belonged to what they called The Arbeiter Ring when they were living in Memphis back in the 1920s and 1930s and I remember my mother always had a little blue box and on Friday nights we would always put a little money in it and she always told me that it was for people less fortunate (missed words about the box and about Israel becoming a state in 1948) and Mother would get these beautiful letters from Hadassah asking for contributions and I remember sitting down writing these checks.

HS: Was she in Hadassah at that time?

FB: Yes. Her affiliation was here in Memphis'

HS: How did your parents meet? Do you know?

FB: I'm not really sure, but I believe in about 1920 or 1921 they were introduced by Celia Wolf who was a friend of Mother's. My mother was only sixteen and a half when she married Daddy. They were married in 1921 and she was born in 1905 - that made her sixteen and a half. Daddy was supposedly seven to nine years older than Mother, so that made him twenty-two or twenty-three years old. My brother had a cute story of how they met and he said my grandfather went to my father and said "I'll put you in the grocery business if you'll marry my daughter." But my grandfather didn't have a grocery business. He was a peddler, so that story sort of went out the window. But we think a family member introduced them. ??? and this is Mr. Katz. And he had started out as a peddler in the 1920s in Memphis. They lived on Mason Street in Memphis, and I understand the house is still there, and I've been wanting to go by and take a picture. (Something about Mr. Katz) but he was a step-grandfather, so we really never got the complete history of that. (many missed words but something about somebody's brother who lives here.) My father was good to everybody and helped them get started in business. And once they got started they would look to my father for advice and guidance and things like that and after I graduated from high school in Forrest City then I left there and went to college. I went to Stephens College, a girls' school and I was very involved in Hillel there at the University of Missouri's campus. I would go to Hillel because I wanted Jewish contacts and and then I had a cousin at The University of Missouri and she was in a sorority and so I would stay there and met all the fraternity guys. We would also do our services at Stephens in a beautiful chapel that was designed by Frank Lloyd Wright and it was important to us. And that's when I decided that I wanted to go into social work. I did a tremendous amount of volunteer work when I was at Stephens. I started out by going to the state prison and then I worked at the school for the deaf and learned the sign language with the children. I loved that. I loved working with the children. And then some weekends we would go into Kansas City and live in the slums and it was at that point that my mother put her foot down. She said "Enough is enough. I didn't send you to Stephens to sleep in the slums." She wasn't too happy. And when I asked her if I could join the Peace Corps she said "NO," an emphatic "NO," and she said, "You're coming home. We'll get you an apartment We'll give you a car. Anything you want, but come home and get your college education in Memphis." So I did.

I graduated from Stephens with an Associate of Arts and then I came to Memphis in 1963 and I attended The University of Memphis. It was Memphis State at that time. And I worked at the JCC that summer as a counselor and then in 1964 - it was 1964 when I met Marvin Brode, my husband-to-be.

HS: And how did you meet Marvin?

FB: How did I meet Marvin? Well I had been living in Memphis - around the area of Belvedere and Union. And I was having car trouble. And I drove into the Exxon right there on Union across from the Methodist Hospital and I was waiting to see the mechanic when this dashing guy comes rushing up saying, "I've got to see the mechanic Get out of my way." And I put my hand on my hip and I said, "Excuse me. I was here first." And he looked at me like "Who is she? Telling ME what to do." And we started a conversation and he saw the back of my car the license plates with the Arkansas and his dear friend, Jack Goldstein was from Forrest City and was a neighbor of mine and we started talking about Forrest City and about jobs and he took my name and number and said, "I might give you a call" And so we met at a service station. And he did call me and we started dating and he asked me not to go out with anybody until he got to know me better. And Marvin was very entertaining and a very important attorney and very involved in politics and I guess he just sort of swept me off my feet.

HS: How old were you when you married?

FB: Marvin was twelve years older than me, so when we met I was twenty and Marvin was thirty-two. And when we married the following year I was twenty-one and Marvin was thirty-three. And my mother couldn't say anything because she and my dad were so many years apart - of course she was very young when she got married, but as long as he would be good to me they would approve, and I graduated from Memphis State in May of '65 and then in June of '65 Marvin and I were married.

HS: And at that time your parents knew that you would not come back to Forrest City?

FB: Oh, yeah. My parents knew that I would never move back. I mean I loved too much cultural life and then meeting Marvin who was very much involved in cultural life and the arts and they knew I would never go back to Forrest City. And so they got me to Memphis. That was as close as they could get me.

HS: Tell me a little about Marvin and your life with him because I know he was in politics and in various things.

FB: Right - right - Marvin was just the biggest influence in my life. Other than my parents. Because I was just a young girl and he sort of molded me and pushed me and got me involved and into politics, and into the opera and so many things, and he always said "Behind every good man there's a good woman" but Marvin was the force behind me - pushing me into all these activities and into organizations and getting involved.

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HS: Any particular organizations?

FB: Yes. When Marvin and I met, he was in politics. He was in the Tennessee legislature at that time. He was elected in 1962 and he was there for three terms. And he, again, involved me in politics. I was involved in The Democratic Women of Memphis, and later became the president and in '67 we went to The Democratic National Convention and - you know the historic convention in Chicago, and it was such a big mess and we wound up coming home early. We had been stink bombed at our hotel The Palmer House and Marvin said "Enough's enough we don't need this." I was the one supposed to be going. I mean he was the state legislator but I was asked to be the Democratic delegate and so I got to meet all these wonderful people I mean all the wonderful people that were in politics at the time.

HS: Were you able to stay for the election?

FB: Oh yes. And then we left that night.

HS: And then did you go to another convention?

FB: No. We didn't go to another one after that.

HS: What did you do with the Democratic Women after that?

FB: I stayed involved and Marvin stayed involved, too. And he and Governor Clement were very close, and he remained in politics and then Marvin became the Assistant Attorney for the city under Mayor Ingram. And he did a tremendous amount of work even though he didn't get paid by the City of Memphis. He created the bill for the Arts Commission. If it had not been for the bill that Marvin introduced into the Legislature there really wouldn't have been an Arts Commission. Others didn't seem to feel that there was a need -

HS: At the state level?

FB: At the state level and Marvin pushed for it, and later became Commissioner. I remember going to Nashville and Marvin being honored. And another thing that Marvin pushed for was the bill that seat belts should be required in cars. You see at that time there were no seat belts. It was later that seat belts had to be worn, but his was that seat belts had to be in the cars. So that was a great accomplishment and he, along with one of the senators, passed that in the Legislature. So those are the two things, along with other legislation that he was influential in.

HS: And how many years was he in the Legislature?

FB: Six years.

HS: And did he remain as City Attorney?

FB: After a while - and then he saw other mayors come in, and he had been in private practice since the 1950s and he was in his father's law firm Howard Brode and his Uncle Arthur was in the same firm and our son has now taken over his firm.

HS: And you have two sons?

FB: I have two sons – William (Bill) and the other son is Robert. Robert Mark Brode. Billy was born in '67 and Robert in 1970 and they both went to The University of Tennessee and Bill went on to get his law degree at Alabama and practiced in Alabama until Marvin needed him to come back to Memphis and Robert graduated from Washington and Lee Law School with honors. He was on Law Review and was given a scholastic scholarship to Washington and Lee and he graduated the year that Marvin passed away in 1995. And then Bill was already helping with the law firm and Robert came in and Bill and Robert have been practicing together since 1995 and I'm very proud of that.

HS: That is something to be proud of.

Do you have any other stories that you find particularly significant during that particular time - I mean this is through the Civil Rights years -

FB: The Civil Rights years really hit me in the late Fifties. I mean when I was in Forrest City. That was when they came into Little Rock and integrated the school system. And that really had a terrific impact on us living in Forrest City. I mean we were just an hour away from Little Rock and a lot of the young boys and girls that went to that school came to Forrest City.

They had family that were living in Forrest City and they came to live to live with them and went to school there. That's when all the rioting started and the government came in. In fact, one of the young men was a member of the Barg Family and he came to Forrest City and Monte Goodman and I started dating that year. So that's how I remember that.

HS: So that was the year that the school was integrated?

FB: Right There were a lot of problems and so much turmoil that a lot of the families just took their children and moved away until it settled down. It wasn't because of the integration but because of the rioting and all the problems that were occurring.

HS: And these were white children?

FB: Oh yes.

HS: And I assume there were other places where they went.

FB: I don't know about other places. I just know that there were other young people that moved to Forrest City to live during that time.

HS: And they went back?

FB: Oh yeah. After things settled down they went back.

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HS: What about the schools in Forrest City?

FB: We weren't integrated at that time. There weren't any other integrations in Forrest City until many years later.

HS: Was there much interaction - I mean racial interaction as you grew up?

FB: None whatsoever. The blacks had their schools and we had our schools and there were no shared activities.

HS: Were there any activities during the Civil Rights movement in Forrest City? I mean any protests or anything?

FB: Of course I left there in '61 and never heard too much after that. I really don't know. I mean Marvin was involved with a lot of influential people and I don't know how he worked with them but I know he was part of keeping calm in Memphis. That would have been about 1968 when Martin Luther King was assassinated.

HS: Well, talking about history was there any other special event that you thought was important in your life?

FB: My involvement with Hadassah for many, many years and things that have happened there through the years has been very important in my life.

HS: Well, we have to talk about Hadassah

(side one of tape ends - side two begins)

FB: -and, as I said, I was in SDT Sorority when I was at the University and I was asked to be an adviser and I said "Okay" and we had a lot of Sigma Delta Tau meetings at our home at 2163 Tishomingo in Chickasaw Gardens. And it was a big home. I mean it wasn't huge, there were only two bedrooms, but the rooms were pretty large and, like my mother and father, I liked to entertain and have people over and our doors were always open to everything and everybody and so I hosted a lot of sorority things and when Marvin and I were married I was called by Hadassah - by the Hadassah president, who was at that time Esther Shendelman and invited to a board meeting And I said that I wasn't a member and knew nothing about Hadassah and she said, "That's okay. Just come to the board meeting, see if you like the women and if so you can join. So I did that and Marvin said that would be fine and so I joined and I took on a small job. I think it was mailing chairman and that was my first job, and then a group of us young women got together and we started a young women's group. I was in there for social reasons. We played mah jong and we were young and we were having children. I had my first one in '67 And before that I had worked for the State of Tennessee. In '65 I had decided I wanted to do my social work.

So I got a job with the State of Tennessee in the Food Stamp Department and I was out in the field interviewing people and it was a kind of dangerous situation because I was very young and I was seeing people I didn't really need to be encountering and I was going into homes and I was really putting myself into kind of dangerous situations and Marvin didn't really like it and so he asked that I stay with the Food Stamp people but in the office - doing office work and I did that for a while until I became pregnant and then I stopped my state career. And I was also asked by other organizations to get involved and I did. I joined the National Council of Jewish Women and then I got involved in the community. I love community work. I love going into schools and one of the programs they were involved in was taking plays to schools. And one of the plays was CINDERELLA, and I was asked to be Cinderella and we went to various schools throughout the Memphis community and performed the play and I had a pair of high heeled plastic slippers and I did that for about a year or so really enjoyed that. But a lot of these plays these children had never seen or a lot of stories they had never even heard about (missed words) and then I sort of got away from that. Suddenly I had a lot of family things in my life. My parents in 1971 had their fiftieth wedding anniversary and this was a very memorable and very touching part of my life. We went to my father and asked "What can we do for you? For you and my mother? What would you like? Would you like a trip? And my father said to us: "It's important that you keep your Jewish identity and your Jewish involvement, your Zionist involvement and your mother and I want each of you and my sister and my sister-in-law and mother to be life members of Hadassah. And at that point we all became life members and that was our gift to them. And he asked that I stay involved and that the girls stay involved as much as they could because they were living in Forrest City and it is important to me to carry on the heritage and their involvement. And I guess that was what really prompted me to go ahead with my involvement in Hadassah. Because Daddy had asked it. And to this day I tear up about it because that's what I did for them.

And about a year or so later I became vice president and in 1975 it was my first year to go to Israel and I went for the dedication - the re-dedication of Mount Scopus Hospital (missed words, but something about that area not being safe and so they were rebuilding the hospital - also something about seeing Golda Meir) and so that was the highlight of my visit, and in 1976 I was president of the Memphis chapter. I was still very young. I was one of the youngest presidents and I had just had a baby - Laura - Laura B. Sherman and everybody couldn't believe that I was leaving her home as a baby and going to Israel. But I did and I had a very wonderful housekeeper who has been with me now for thirty-five years and who has been part of my life so that I've been able to do these things. A lot of people can't do it because they don't have the household help. But Marvin stayed home. He did not want to go to Israel. I went with my sister-in-law. It was a beautiful trip.

HS: But your parents didn't live to see you do all that.

FB: No. Unfortunately my mother died in 1972 and my father died eleven months later in 1973, and I guess that's why their anniversary was so touching. At that time Daddy let it be known how he wanted us to live our lives and that's the way it was. I must observe that once we moved to Memphis we became very involved with Hadassah. My sister-in-law was very charitable and her family, too, had been very involved with Hadassah so we have a family history of involvement.

HS: What is your sister-in-law's name?

FB: My sister-in-law is Sylvia - Sylvia Walter and her first husband, A.J.Gruner, died and she married Walter so she is Sylvia Walter and she moved to Memphis in the 1990s and we were all part of the family business. And that's one thing I just thought of. I used to work in the family business from the age of six until I graduated. I would go down there every day and I would work. I used to stamp cigarettes. The state required that a state tax be put on each little pack of cigarettes and so my daddy taught me how to stamp the cigarettes. I became so fast that even a machine couldn't stamp as fast as I did and when I left for college my daddy said "Not only are you costing me a college education, but now I have to buy a cigarette machine. But all those years I was paid and so I saved my money but we all became part of the family business and when it became a corporation my father gave us shares.

My brother William Cohn ran the family business after that in the 1970s and my sister
stayed on in the business and we sold out our part in 1980 and my nephews, my brother's
sons, run the business. (missed words) and my sister-in-law, Sue Cohn is married to my
brother and they just celebrated their fiftieth anniversary. And their two sons David and
Allen live in Forrest City and my sister's children live here in Memphis. But let's get back to
my Hadassah. For two years I was president of the Memphis chapter and when I was
president everything was so Zionist, so Israel oriented and I felt like we weren't reaching
into the community that was here. We weren't reaching a lot of young people who didn't
know what a Zionist was, and so it was my hope that we get involved in the

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community and show that we do something locally. And so it was then that I initiated a lot of local projects. We went into the schools tutoring and teaching children hygiene. I guess some of this maybe came from Council and I initiated these programs for the chapter and even went on later to National and told them that we've got to start doing things locally and doing things on a local basis. And as I got more involved with National in later years I really pushed for that and we really are doing a lot more of that locally with Hadassah. I mean nationally and locally. During that time Each One Teach One was the literacy program and we began going into the schools and, you know, teaching the children how to read and write. And we could see the need for paid professionals in that area. Of course the local project has always been Young Judea through the years, it's always been Zionist oriented, Israel oriented, but as well as the

ones in Israel we have projects here in the United States for them. But what we're doing now is we're very involved in politics on the national level and we do a lot of lobbying in Washington. We set up a Washington task force. I'm on the - we call it ??? and if one of our senators or congressmen or politicians is going to Israel we call them and ask them if they want to go to Hadassah and if Hadassah needs some funding we call them and help them get that bill passed. (missed words but something about insurance companies and genetic testing and changes made in the last fifteen years) and it's a different Hadassah but yet very different. We're doing a lot of fund raising projects for Israel, bit still we're doing a lot more locally. We're working with breast cancer and teaching young women about breast cancer self-examination and we're contributing to breast cancer research .

HS: Do you still have an office mainly for Hadassah?

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FB: No. In 1986 I became Southern region president and the Southern region included five states and I was automatically assigned to the National Board as the region president on the National Board. During that time a lot of things happened in my life and I was the regional president for just two years. And after that you automatically go on the National Service Committee of Hadassah. And so my years on the National Board continued. I was elected to the National Board for three years, and so I continued to serve and I was on the National Board for fifteen years and after fifteen years you become an honorary member of the National Board I am now an honorary member and my last major position ended in 2001. I felt that Hadassah needed in some way to reach out to satellite offices. There they were in New York and here we were here, and there

wasn't the close contact that we needed. And they finally set up a satellite office in Atlanta, and they finally opened, I think, six in the United States. And I was appointed the first chair of the Southeast Region Development Center. And so from 1998 to 2001 I created the office and created the Development Center and in the second year that I was in we hired a Development Director. We have a man as Director of Development now. So that was my last big position in Hadassah and my life has changed in the last several years, but Hadassah is still there and I love it very much, but some other things need my attention.

HS: Marvin died some years ago?

FB: Yes. Marvin died in 1995. Let me go back to 1983. In 1983 I went to real estate school. There was a person who asked me to go into real estate, and I said, "Okay." I had

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no intention of going into real estate and then in 1984 it was half the course - I continued and she dropped out. And here it is twenty years later. In 1986, well it was George Humphreys, whom my company is named after, said that he was closing his business, and all the agents came in and said, "Freda, you're the logical one to run it. You have the business background. We know you can do it." I didn't even have my brokerage at that time. You know you have to have a brokerage license and they said they'd stay on if I would buy the company. And ten days later I bought the company. Marvin assured me that he would, you know, back me if I needed backing and actually in 1986 I had accepted to become the Region President. And I was buying the company and I had the Region presidency and Marvin had become ill. He had his first illness. He had been diagnosed as having a heart problem. And then we had to leave and went to Houston

where Dr. Denton Cooley did the heart valve surgery and so all of this was happening in my life and it was overwhelming really. I didn't know which way I was going. But it worked out very well. Marvin recovered beautifully and the company was running and I handled the Region presidency and then in 1988 I bought the building I'm in now. I was running two offices that had 18 agents, trying to be a mother and a wife, and there was just a lot on me, so I closed one office and consolidated into one and ran the real estate company, owning it. And in '94 -'95 - '94 was my last trip to Israel - because that year Marvin had become ill again, and he died -passed away in '95. And so I was left with the law firm to pull together and my business and all the financial things and a daughter that was getting ready to go to college and so I really had very traumatic year in '95. But I'm strong. And I think that's the one thing that we as women--we depend so much on our husbands - and

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yet we're strong. We can be strong. And we can do it if we just put our minds on it. If we're determined to make a go of it. I said I could get through it and I did.

And then in 1986 - I didn't date. I mean I went out with friends and they were wonderful. Being widowed is a whole new life. You have to take care of yourself and everybody else. And the other thing I didn't mention is that I was a caregiver. I had taken care of an aunt, one of my mother's sisters and my mother-in-law who was a wonderful lady who lived past her son - she was 95 when she passed away in 1998. But Mom had gone to the Art College and in fact we gave an endowment to the college in her name- the Erniece Brode room - I don't know, it was the auditorium or something like that - Mom was sort of a fixture at the art college and so there I was left to take care of Mom Brode who was then in her nineties. So I

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took care of all of her needs. But we were very close. She was like a mother to me because I lost my mother very early on and we were very close and she was a wonderful mother-in-law. Mom was an artist. She had been widowed for many years and that was her way of staying involved. She went to the college three days a week, climbed up three flights of stairs, worked with these huge canvases, went to art shows all the time and I have a lot of her paintings in my office and throughout my home that Mom gave me. And so I was a caregiver along with everything else and I was also involved in a lot of real estate things. I was on the Board of Realtors. I was on the Professional Standing Committee. I was on the grievance committee. I was on the Brokerage Committee and co-chairman of that and on the Budget Committee and while my children were growing up I was room mother every year and the first woman

to be on the Board of Trustees at Country Day School. And that was a very nice honor. But I have a very good business sense. My father taught me that and I had good organizational skills and leadership skills and I could get people to accept things so they couldn't say no.

HS: That is really remarkable. You've just come up on top.

FB: Then in 1996 - that's another thing to be thankful to Hadassah for - not only the many things they taught me over the years - but in 1996 I went to a Regional meeting when one of the members came up to me and asked if I was ready to start going out and I said no I didn't want to date. I didn't want to meet anyone. But she wouldn't take no for an answer and she gave my name and number to her brother-in-law, David Weinstein in Knoxville, and two months later David called

me and said, he was coming to Memphis to the Casino so I finally agreed to meet him and he flew to Memphis and we began seeing each other, and it was in 1998 that we married and he retired and moved to Memphis. And he has been a tremendous help to me - in the business and we just had this wonderful relationship. Since that time my daughter got married, my son got married and my son's wife, Amy Wiener Brode got her real estate degree so she's with me and that's just wonderful - to have her here helping me out and last year my daughter Laura, who had a great job with Sysco, and she had her master's degree as a dietician, but last year she gave that up and got her real estate license so now she is in with me and I hope that some time in the near future I can now sit back and relax and - I've enjoyed life. David and I travel a great deal. Marvin and I had traveled. And I've got to say I've

had a wonderful life. I've really had a wonderful life. There have been some bumps in the road. Nothing is ever perfect, but I've had a very good life - a wonderful life. I was enriched by my parents in very many ways and by my heritage and I've even been involved with Temple Israel. When Marvin and I married in 1955 I became a member of Temple Israel. And I've been involved with Temple Israel since then. Then later on in life I learned to garden and I spent a lot of time gardening and in past years I used to sell Temple Israel's bulbs. For the Sisterhood. So I've done a little bit of everything.

HS: Another thing I wanted to ask you about. What was the dancing part?

FB: When I was a little bitty girl I danced. Marvin and I danced and I did ballet. But now David and I love to dance and once a week we go to dance. We go to McWherter Center -

the Senior Service place. We love to dance to a band. And then once in a while on a weekend we go to the Crescent Club or some place that might have a band. We used to go down to the casino when the bands would come you know, like the Glenn Miller band, and we would go to it and dance. We love to do ball room dancing.

HS: How many grandchildren do you have?

FB: When I married David his daughter had one son and now two grandsons - and they live in Phoenix and that is the first of my grandchildren. But for my grandchildren - the first was born in 2002 - Madison Brode - a little girl named after Marvin and she's beautiful, and I certainly don't mind taking care of her. Most of the days she goes to school, but when they're closed I take care of her because her mother's a nurse, and her grandma makes herself available. And my

grandson was born in 2003 –Robert’s and Amy’s son, and that is Gordon, and since Mommy is a real estate agent, Gordon comes to grandma’s office frequently and helps me at the office. And I love both of them and try to be with them as much as possible. On my sixtieth birthday last year I planned a really special trip - the most important thing to me is family and so I asked my children if they would go on a trip with me and they said yes and so we rented a home in Destin and all of us were together and it was fabulous. And so we went to Destin and spent an entire week together and we all got along together and that's really - that's what I like- to be with my family.

HS: Is there anything that we have missed that we should have talked about I turned the tape off but I'll turn it back on so you can comment.

FB: Well, I was just going to say that what may be interesting generally is Southern Jewish life because there were so many small towns throughout Arkansas and Mississippi and Alabama with Jewish families, large amounts of Jewish families and over the years they, like many others are leaving the small towns and going to Memphis and Atlanta and other big cities and -

HS: Do you think they are missing something by not growing up in a small town?

FB: I think growing up in a small community made my Jewishness deeper. I can't say to try to compare something to something that you don't know but I felt that being Jewish was very important and I think it helped me realize what I wanted to do with my life. And to this day we have Passover and I do what my mother did - I change over

my dishes for Passover and observe Passover as an Orthodox even though I am Reform and we have Chanukah celebrations and I have Friday night Shabbat dinner every Friday night and if the kids don't have social plans and they want to be there, no matter how tired I am I love having them. Nothing is as important as a family getting together, having time to talk, to talk about the week, things you might want to do and do together. It's just a good time for family to be together. I'm fortunate to have family here so that I can do it with family here. I'm glad that my daughter-in-law is devoted to Judaism and wants it for part of her family life and her daughter's and that makes me very proud it's just a very good feeling. And we are very involved with Jewish activities. I have worked out at the Center as a teacher and I'm proud of my children and proud of what they have accomplished along with Marvin in that we raised three beautiful and wonderful intelligent

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children.

HS: Did you do anything in particular that you would advise young people -?

FB: I guess what I did in the past - what I told my boys when they were in law school that there are so many detours that you could take, but you should establish goals and try to get to those goals. And don't let detours carry you in the wrong direction and try to stay on track to what you feel is important in your life and you just do the best you can do.

HS: Well, that's good advice. I don't think there's any way to ask you what you're most proud of because you've done so many things. But is there anything that you're most proud of having done? Can you think of anything that you're most proud of having done?

FB: No, it's just that I think my children and

my accomplishments in my organizational life I think Marvin pushed me a lot in that direction. I don't know that I would have done it on my own. There were many other organizations that asked me to be president. I did have to put a stop to it. You know to take on an organization, to take on a presidency, I had to have a commitment to that organization and so Hadassah became that organization in my life - and, as I say, my children and what I have been able to accomplish as a woman. There aren't too many women who own a real estate company. There are realtors, but for many years I've run this company, and I think that's an accomplishment in itself.

HS: It really is. It really is. One thing that we forgot is to talk about that you did in terms of Hadassah.

FB: Right. For many, many years I worked on

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the history of Memphis Hadassah. I have accumulated many, many documents of Memphis Hadassah since the 1940s, and I have them here. I could do something with it for The Memphis Historical Society, I have records from the 1940s and the 1950s - a lot of it has historical information - a lot about the state of Israel and things that were going on at that time - pictures - and people were coming to me at that time asking for dates and anniversaries and it was soon after my presidency that I started working on this history. And I have a lot of interviews with a lot of the past presidents of Hadassah on tape and papers that some of them have written themselves about their tenures and if my life hadn't been in such a turmoil I wouldn't have stopped then. Leonard Saharovich has been after me to put it in writing and then I came up against the wall of finances and there was no way to publish it at the time and I had the pictures all set up - so that if

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possibly somebody were to take that over getting the financing - and really it's ready to go if somebody would just put it in the correct form. All the information has been compiled up until probably the 1990s. They were mostly interviews with the chapter presidents. And my hope is for it to be a book and each like decade of the past presidents and what they talked about and what happened during their presidencies. I think it would be great. The Memphis chapter was formed in about 1916 or 1917 and we have a 90th anniversary coming up in a couple of years and it would be nice if there could be a **????** of the ladies who helped with it.

(Tape abruptly stops)

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