

**Temple Israel Archives Interview  
of Herschel Feibelman**

**August 31, 2000**

Name: Herschel Lee Feibelman

Date of Interview: August 31, 2000

Address: 5299 Revere Rd., Memphis, TN

Date of Birth: May 10, 1919

Place of Birth: Memphis, TN

Sex: Male

Religious Affiliation: Jewish – Temple Israel

Educational Background: LLB

Occupational History: Lawyer – 57 years

Special Interest: Needlepoint

Father's Name & Occupation: Max – salesman (born October, 1867; died 1946)

Mother's Name & Occupation: Flora Polasky (born March 15, 1883 – arbitrary date picked by the family)

Name of Wife: Shirley

Names of Children: Jef, Harriet (Pahn), Maxine (Coven), Nathan

Interviewer: Margaret Halle

My name is May Lynn Mansbach. Margaret Halle and I are at the home of Herschel Feibelman to interview Mr. Feibelman for the Oral History Project of the Jewish Historical Society of Memphis and the Mid-South. Margaret Halle will interview Mr. Feibelman. Thank you very much Mr. Feibelman for participating in the project.

Were you named after someone?

Some distant cousins of my Mother's family.

Could you please tell me about your ancestors, from where they immigrated?

My parents were immigrants – I never had grandparents. They died many years before I was born. My father was born in Rulzheim, Germany, and the Feibelmans had lived there

for several centuries—maybe 300 or 400 years. He came to America right after his Bar Mitzvah. He came to live in Jackson, Mississippi with some people named Mannheimer. They were perhaps distant relatives, but would more likely be called “landsleit.” They lived in Mannheim which is close to Rulzheim. My mother was an orphan from her earliest days - she never knew her mother or father's care. Her mother died shortly after she was born - her father, I suppose the family agrees, grieved himself to death. She was brought to this country when she was hardly more than an infant. She lived in what was supposedly Russia, but would be Lithuania as we know it now.

Could you please tell me your mother's full name?

Flora Polasky

Who brought her to this country?

I think some cousins whose names I do not know. Her brother came before and he was living then in Indianapolis .

Why did they come to the South?

My father was one of three children, whose mother died when the third child was born and his father married again and the second wife had very little favor toward his earlier 3 children. He came to this country as soon as he could - that also happened to his 2 sisters. The other family (his wife's children) thought that they were more fortunate, but the Nazi years proved otherwise - they were all decimated.

Do you mind telling the names of your Father's brothers and sisters at this point?

My father had a sister named "Josie". I'm not quite sure what her real name was, but that is what everyone called her. He had another sister whose name I don't recall. I have a family tree which was made during the years that the people called the holocaust. It tells all about the Feibelmans.

Maybe we can get a copy of it.

Allright.

Did your father come here from Jackson for a special reason?

My father never did come to Memphis from Jackson. He lived in Mississippi from 1880 to 1922. Then he had a business failure. We were living then in Hushpuckena, Mississippi. That is quite a stigma for me that I have tried to overcome. I am probably the only person in Memphis that came from Hushpuckena.

I would like to know how your parents met?

My mother's brother and my father's sister were married and my father had lived in what they called the "country" for 25 years and in the well-known Jewish practice of matchmaking, his sister decided it would be a pretty good idea if he married.

Was this Josie?

Yes, my Aunt Josie had my father come up to Cincinnati where my Uncle Mike and she were then living, and Daddy met my Mama and they were married later.

Where did they live?

After they were married, they lived in Sharkey County, Mississippi. They lived in various towns in Mississippi. From the time they were married in 1906 until 1922 - Meridien, Hattiesburg, for a short time in Vicksburg, and then Hushpuckena.

What did he do for a living?

In the years that he lived in Mississippi before he married, my father was a plantation bookkeeper. After he married he had various experiences as a merchant. None successful. Shortly after WWII he had a business in Hushpuckena, where he was also the postmaster. Then there was a depression and he lost that business and just about everything they had. He moved to Memphis and for the rest of his working life he worked in the clothing department at Bry's Department Store.

What were your parents like?

Very different, one from the other. My father was a man of somewhat phlegmatic disposition. He had some characteristics which were certainly outstanding. There was a governor Altgeld of Illinois who said once that it is not so important for a person to be born in America as it is for America to be born in him. My father was the most patriotic person I ever knew. He had so many characteristics that were typical of Americans - he

would go to the park for a band concert on Sunday and so forth. He had very little schooling beyond what he had in Germany. He spoke German, but when he spoke English, it was hardly no accent at all. He was an Orthodox Jew - didn't speak any Yiddish.

My mother's story is quite an interesting one. She was an orphan, who lived with her brother, who was a man of many good qualities, but he was, by any fair use of the term, a miser. He just simply had so little security that he didn't provide too much. My mother began working just as soon as she physically could. But somewhere along the line she had some kind of inspiration for reading. My mother was truly a remarkable reader. She read classics, she had a fabulous memory and could, as I learned in later life—in my adult years, sing from memory all the lyrics for musical plays that she had heard. She spoke German because in Cincinnati where she went to school, it was one day English and one day German in some of the schools. In fact, she learned arithmetic in German. Also, and I never could figure this out, she had command of several dialects of Yiddish, not all Yiddish is the same - people know that. Once, much later in life, I had

an occasion to need an interpreter between two people who met in a concentration camp, married and were later divorced. One of them had a Hungarian type of Yiddish and the other Czechoslovakian. Mother came down to court and interpreted for me what each one said. The judge was quite taken with this. I think I owe so much to her for any determination I have to read and to owe my knowledge to my mother.

How much schooling did she have?

I don't know. I doubt that she went past the equivalent of the 8th grade. She had a remarkable capacity to express herself. As I said, she read copiously - reading 3 or 4 books at the same time.

Tell your father's name and if you know his birth year.  
My father was born in October 1867 in Rulzheim. His name was Max Feibelman.

What was your mother's name?

Flora Polasky. I don't think we got her birth date.  
We never knew. When my mother died, my sister and I arbitrarily picked a date.

What was that?

March 15,  
1883

Were your parents involved in synagogues or a Temple?

When we moved to Memphis in 1922, I don't believe they affiliated with any institution. My father would attend services for a few years at Beth-El Emeth congregation, which was on 3<sup>rd</sup> and Poplar. At one time it had been the site of Temple Israel. In 1928 we moved to a house on Tucker St., which was right across the street from the B'nai B'rith Home. They had a chapel and they actually had a congregation. On the High Holy Days there would be as many as 40 or 50 people who would come and daven there. My father became a member of that group and continued until his death in 1946.

Did your parents belong to any Jewish clubs besides the B'nai B'rith?

No

I'd like you to tell me what Memphis was like when you were a child.

I can't speak of a broad experience as a child. I don't want to say this with the sense of shame or put it in any form of an explanation. My folks didn't have anything - we never had an automobile, we never owned our own home. My parents did not extend themselves into the community. My father was once invited to a meeting for the Arbeiter Ferband. It might be translated as a group of people who worked - a working party. There was a meeting place on Adams St. We went there one Sunday evening and we never took off our coats. It was too much like Socialists or something to suit my Dad and we just went right back home. I never knew what East Memphis was. I began Religious School when I was 5 and I think I can honestly say that Poplar and Montgomery was as far east as I ever went.

What school did you go to in that area?

I started Merrill School in 1925. I went there for some years and then I went to Snowden School. I was in the first graduating class at Fairview Jr. High School.

What was that year?

1932. Then I graduated from Central High School in 1935.

We might as well continue with your education while we're at it.

My education was less than I really wanted it to be. I had no opportunity whatsoever to attend college. I could not even have gone away and worked my way through school because I felt I had an obligation to support, or at least help support, my family. So through a rather interesting set of circumstances, I met a man named Sam Margolin, who had established a 3 year law school three years before. I was 16 years old at the time and I met him at Methodist Hospital, when my nephew Phillip Kaminsky was born. At that time he and his wife were having their first child. Talking to Margolin, he invited me to come to his office to see whether or not I would like to enroll in his evening law school, which I did in the fall of 1935.

When did you graduate?

I graduated in May of 1938.

Tell me the names of your siblings.

I have a sister - her real name is Sterlie Mae Feibelman, but everyone all her life has called her Bobbi and that's what she thinks of herself as. I made known to May Lynn before you came because we were discussing something interesting in the way of Jewish superstition. I had 4 brothers who were born before me, all of whom died in the first year of their life. I'm not sure - probably poor medical care - they used to give "calomel" to children.

What is your sister's full name?

Her full legal name would be Sterlie Mae Feibelman Kaminsky.

Who were your friends?

My friends from the time we moved here in 1930 until I went into the service in 1942 were the people who lived in my neighborhood. I was a member of a religious school class, but I didn't have any close relationship with any of those people. I started working when I was about 13. So I never had golf or tennis buddies etc. Even though I think of myself somewhat at least as gregarious, I began to have relationships with a few people—Lawrence Safferstone was one—his hair was red and I never knew him as anything, but "Red Safferstone." My closest friend over all the years was Milton Sternberger.

When you were in school did you have any trouble because of your religion?

No.

Could you tell me if you have had any difficulties in the community because of your religion.

None.

What kind of Jewish education did you receive? You went to Sunday School. Was that at Beth-El Emeth or was that at Temple?

Temple. \

Were you Bar Mitzvahed?

At the time that I reached the age of 12 or so, my Mother spoke to Dr. Ettelson about a bar mitzvah. It really is a ritual; as a matter of fact, it is a noun, "Son of the Covenant," and Dr. Ettelson discouraged her. He did not favor a Bar Mitzvah - his son did not celebrate a Bar Mitzvah. We had Confirmation - which took place a year earlier than it does now. It was much more important. But that didn't satisfy my mother, so she had me (and I was certainly willing to do it) study with my uncle for some time. He had been educated to be a rabbi and he was a man who understood what he knew. I mean that literally - what Uncle Mike knew (Jewish tradition etc.) he also understood. He taught me how to deal with rudimentary Hebrew prayers. I never had it as a language - I wish I had, but I didn't. I can deal with it phonetically. Of all things, I celebrated my Bar Mitzvah at the old folks home in May 1932. I believe that was the only such case. I don't believe there was another boy who was Bar Mitzvahed there.

What did you do in the summers when you were younger?

The heat that we have now recalls the summer of 1931. We had moved on Evelyn St and I had had a bad winter with what a doctor described as "pharyngitis". He told my mother that the best thing for me was sunshine. For the full summer, from the time school was dismissed in May or June and until Labor Day, I went to the fairgrounds every day. She bought me a rather cheap tennis racket and I had a small amount for lunch money. That was the only real year that I played. My sister was married in 1933 and I went to work for my brother-in-law who had a grocery and I've worked ever since.

Do you want to describe your first job?

Yes, my first job was with a girl named Bessie Owen. Two or three nights a week - She had had some difficulty in Latin. Her family lived down the street from us. Her father gave me \$1.50 for 2 or 3 nights a week to come down and coach her in Latin.

What was your next job?

My next job was with my brother-in-law working in a grocery.

How long did you do that?

1933 through some part of 1936. His business failed and then I got a job with a man named Jake Weinstein in the coin machine business and shortly after that I went in business for myself.

In the law?

No, I was 17 years old I guess. I had saved a little money and I bought some vending machines and that's how I worked my way through law school. I also worked with a man named Clarence Camp, who dealt with pin ball machines, vending machines and the like in Memphis and the Delta. I graduated from law school in May, 1938, passed the bar examination and on August 18, 1938 (I remember the date specifically). I became acquainted with Leon Feuerstein and I practiced law with him and his son for 57 years.

We had a wonderful association. I practiced from August, 1938, until October, 1942, when I went into the service. When I came home from the service in May, 1946, I went back into the law practice. Anyone who knows about the law practice knows that it was tough enough one time: I did it twice.

In which branch of the service were you?

I enlisted as a specialist in the Air Force. I was determined not to be a lawyer behind some desk or anything like that. I found that that was not a very rewarding experience. So I made application to Officer's Candidate School. On July 1, 1943 I was commissioned an officer in the Field Artillery and I continued serving in that branch of the service until my discharge.

Did you rise from Lieutenant?

Yes, I did my last several months as a Captain.

Can you describe any memorable events that happened while you were in the service?

I have never discussed the military service with my family or my children. A reading recently about people's experience (of course there is so much now that is memory) made me much more aware of the years of experience that I had. I landed on Okinawa on D Day and had 81 days of active combat. I can almost truthfully say that I grew up while I was in the army - I was 23 years old when I enlisted. My Mother had been (because of her early misfortunes) very protective. I never left Memphis before for any period of time and I found out that there was a way of dealing with life in the army that was very new to me. I want this to be understood as just what I say. I was 2 years ahead of my class at school and I was always a smart child. For that reason, I never had an opportunity to pitch or catch - I was always in right field. I'm not sure that that called for an inferiority complex, but I did spend a lot of time feeling inferior when I was in school. For instance when we had a party there was no girl my size to dance with. I spent most of those years with my head nestled in some girl's bosom. It wasn't all that bad, but it hardly made me feel all that manly. I found out in the service that I could do it. Someone told me (just about the time that I went in) that I should think of it this way: "It's not the dog in the fight, it's the fight in the dog". I had the opportunity while I was in the service to learn that I could overcome my fear. I had some frightful experiences and I managed that, and I even earned a bronze star for military service. When I came home, many things had happened to me in the 4 years of service and I was ready to deal with life. When I went in the army I didn't realize that there is a whole big world out there. There were people from Brooklyn that I met in my early days at Brookley Field that I met while I was still in the Air Force. They had expressions and ways of evaluating things that were completely foreign to me. I had never had any experience with a black person as an equal. I had had black clients. I met a man named "Debeal" who was in the section I was in at OCS and the first time I sat across the table from him eating a meal, we were both aware that this was an initial experience for me. It was a wonderful thing because Debeal himself was a fine person and I think that was not an epitome, but it was a way for me to learn much about the world that I had been denied.

Did your Judaism annoy you while you were in the service or were you denied anything because you were Jewish?

There were 16 Jewish men in the 749<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery. We had a service every Friday evening. I was the ranking member of that Jewish group.

Did you start it?

Yes. The commanding officer who was himself (I'm not sure I like the word "anti-Semitic"—I think it's a little bit too precise in another sense) but Col. Post, our commanding officer, was a man who really deep down hated Jews. But he had to acknowledge that nothing interfered with our Sabbath observance.

I didn't care what they did in any other part of their military service, but they were Jews and they were going to come to that service and show the rest of the 550 men in the battalion that we had some respect for what we said we believed in and what appeared on our dog tags. We were at the morning formation, which we were shivering in the cold at 5:30 AM, and the non-commissioned officer who was in charge said "Are there any Jews around here in this group?" I held up my hand and he said "This is Roshina". That's how he pronounced "Rosh Hashona." He said "If you want to, you can go to services at the main post". I was at Brookley Field in Alabama. So I put on my class A uniform and I was walking down the street and he came out of the orderly tent. He said "Where are you going soldier?" I said "I'm going to religious services at the main post". He said "Go on in and sign out" and I said "Sign out for what?" "Sign out for going to the services". I said "Wait a minute, that's what this whole thing is about. I'm entitled to observe my religious holiday as well as anybody. What have you got that list for?" He said "That's my KP roster from Christmas." I said "I'll try that, I think that's fair enough."

There were any number of experiences - one much to elaborate to go into - our commanding officer died the day the Japanese surrendered and there was some doubt about how he met his fate. They took him to a hospital and even though he had expressed personally to me some admiration, the last words that he uttered were "Don't let those Jews kill me" He had learned that there was a Jewish surgeon. This affected me deeply—although I knew that hate was something more than superficial, here was an example of it being at the root of a man's personality.

What was your social life like when you were growing up?

Typical. My family never had an automobile, but shortly after I was 16 years old, I bought one. I would go out with girls.

Jewish girls?

Almost always. I didn't realize until recently that I never had a date on Friday night. I wasn't that religious, but it just seemed that I spent that time happily with my family.

Did you date any non-Jewish girls? I don't think so.

How did you meet Shirley?



On December 21, 1941, my close friend, Milton Sternberger, called me. I was working and he said "I need a little help". I said "What do you need?" I had been out all night the night before and I was absolutely hacked. All I wanted to do was finish what I was doing and go home. He said "My mother has invited 2 girls from Kansas City to come down here and I need you to squire one of them around. There is an open house at Eugene Greener's, which was on Lemaster St., and I want you to come over there and help me out a little bit." I went home and cleaned myself up a bit and went to this house - oddly enough, my son later bought that house and I would tell everyone that I met my wife in my son's living room. That's where I met Shirley and that's where my whole life changed.

Tell me what was Shirley's maiden name.

Shirley's maiden name was Samisch.

Where did she come from?

She lived in Leavenworth, Kansas.

How old were you when you met?

I was 22 and she was going to be 21 the following January.

When did you marry?

We married in July of 1943.

While we're at it (and I hope you will excuse me), I would like you to tell me about Shirley and what she does and what she has done.

Well, I think of my wife as somewhat special. By that I mean all the years before I met Shirley and the years since. All of that early period is somewhat opaque because the most important thing in my life has been her. From the moment I met her (I remember I came home that night and told my mother and my sister, who was living with us at that time) that I met the girl I was going to marry. That really is the most important thing in my life.

Now tell me about Shirley's activities.

Shirley went to the University of Texas and then when her father became ill, she went to a Catholic school in Leavenworth. From the time we married, she never lacked any determination to be a part of my family and to live in Memphis. We never gave a serious moment or thought to any place but living here. That started from the time I came home. I found so many things after we married. For instance, there was a Girl Scout equivalent of Eagle Scout for boys—we don't have it any more. It was a Golden Eaglet. I never met anybody who has been a Golden Eaglet except Shirley. Her folks were interested in scouting and I'm sure they inspired that. I have a son and 2 grandsons who are Eagle Scouts: I found out that most people who would meet us would quickly discover that we were different people in how we projected ourselves. Shirley has never really been one who did the talking, but she's done the walking.

Tell us about some of her activities.

When she first came home, she organized a Girl Scout troop at the Neighborhood House and that extended to other Neighborhood House activities. She would help get bicycles for children who otherwise wouldn't get them. She also began learning things that have made her life so meaningful. I don't think before she married that Shirley could sew at all. Now she doesn't do as much as she did, but she made clothes for our daughters, our granddaughters.

Tell about some of the civic things.

Shirley got into Sisterhood - she was president of the Memphis Sisterhood, president of the Region, a member of the National Board. She taught religious school even past the age of 70. She has always been active in anything that people called her for. She's been president of the Needlework Guild in Memphis and I think that the most significant thing that she has done is to establish an archives at Temple Israel. Anyone who has been in our Temple archives (unfortunately only a few) would find a remarkable collection of memorabilia and things that we should keep.

How many children did she have?

We have 4 children. I'm supposed to say more than that because we treat our in-laws just like our own.

Tell me the names of your children.

My son was born, not embarrassingly, but almost 9 months after we married. His name is Joseph Edward Feibelman. We call him 'Jef' by his initials. He was born in 1944. We came home from the service and quickly had 2 daughters, now Harriet Pahn and Maxine Coven - her husband died most tragically. He was a fine person. Our youngest son is now 49 years old - Nathan Feibelman.

How many grandchildren do you have?

We have 9 grandchildren, two of whom are married and we have one great-grandchild and come February, we anticipate another one.

Very nice. You belong to Temple Israel. Do you belong to any of the other synagogues? I belong to Beth Sholom Synagogue. I don't attend services there, but I attend regularly on Sunday morning to Talmud study class and I have had good relations with the Rabbis there beginning with Rabbi Becker, one of the finest persons I ever knew.

Do you observe the Sabbath? Do you have kashruth?

No. We do not observe the kashruth- not at all. My family did to some extent and Shirley's family probably not a great deal. As far as the Sabbath is concerned, Shirley and I have had what we would call our Shabbos all the years we married. The way I would describe that is irrespective of what happened during the week, my children knew that we were going to have a little better meal on Shabbos. Since we tried to teach them by example as well as by precept, I think we've gone to services every Friday night that we have been physically able.

Who was the greatest influence in your life outside of your parents?

My wife.

How about Mr. Feuerstein?

Leon Feuerstein was a man of rare quality and someone whose personality meant so very much to me. I'm not the least bit ashamed to say that I am capable of emotion - not to the degree that it would be radical or overwhelming, but I feel things and when I feel things, I manifest that. Leon Feuerstein was so much like my wife. His personality and his reaction to what happened to him was somewhat like a terrain map of Western Kansas. He was never at any time disturbed by what you might say are the small aggravations in life and I learned so much from him about self-control - how to evaluate what happened to me - the importance of living by the day and to deal with triumph with somewhat the same reserve that you would with tragedy.

What is there about the Jewish community in which you were raised first?

Memphis in my years of growing up was really a kind of Jewish equivalent of a Kerner Report. There were orthodox Jews, not in the sense you would talk about - they were Eastern European Jews and then there were what was called "The German Jews". Interestingly enough I have had on more than one occasion had the Temple described to me as "Christian Jews". The kids in Sunday School with me hardly knew orthodox Jewish children. In my particular case it was a little bit different because I really found that there were some very fine people - just because they didn't belong to the Temple and just because they had other associations - they still deserved respect and interest. I can say that even though my closest friends were people who we would be described as "Reform Jews", (I never use that adjective to describe myself) I also knew a number of people in the community besides that.

How large was the Jewish community when you were growing up?

We have some census figures. Right now the Jewish community isn't static in the sense that there's nothing going on. There are probably a little over 10,000 right now. I would say that when I was growing up there were probably a few thousand less because the University and some business opportunities have brought other people here. Probably 5-6,000 - something like that.

What sort of relationship did you and your family have with Jews from the other branches of Judaism - the Orthodox or Conservative?

My mother never used any kind of terms (I never heard my father use any terms) which brought about a distinction. We were Jews and anything that happened to us because we were Jews or any feelings we had were just simply parochial. I never thought of myself as being different from any other Jews.

What about the relationship that you have with Gentiles?

Very good.

What about with their families?

My Father's closest friend was Mr. Sullivan, who lived down the street. I wrote my wife everyday (I mean that everyday) while I was in the service and I wrote to my parents 2 or 3 times a week. No sooner had my father gotten a letter when he and Mr. Sullivan would take it down to Dirmeyer's Drug Store and show it to everybody.

What relationship do you have with Gentiles now?

Very good. I rode in a carpool for 33 years with John Wilkinson and Fred Ivy. We frequently meet. We celebrated their 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary last month and John's 80th birthday and when you ride back and forth every day with people, you've got to have some kind of relationship.

What about with blacks?

I had no difficulty dealing with blacks. For so long I used to think of blacks in the same inferior role that other people did. At Poplar & Hollywood, where people transfer street cars, almost every morning you could see a congregation of black women waiting to work in white people's homes. At that time there may have been one or two black lawyers. Now I work at the Church Health Center and at least half of the people that work there are black. They call me "Herschel" and I call them by their first names. I'm just as comfortable with them, quite frankly, as I am with you.

What's your attitude toward Zionism and what was your parents' attitude?

My parent's attitude toward Zionism was just about that of Dr. Ettelson. It was a non-participating attitude. Even though all of the dramatic things were happening during those years and my parents were conscious of what was going on in the world, I had absolutely no contact with it. The only contact I had with it was in the kitchen - there was a little blue box called a "pushky" and when something good would happen, or on Shabbos, we'd put a few coins in there and some rather strange looking man would come by periodically and pick it up. But I want to say this: Once I reached an awareness of what was going on and particularly the tragedy of the Nazi experience, I became greatly interested in Zionism. I've been chairman of the Israel Bond Committee here on occasion. I've even been honored at a dinner which I hope in some small measure I deserved.

Was that the Christian and Jews dinner?

No, it was an Israel bond dinner in November of 1985. I have read a good deal of modern Jewish history.

What in your opinion is the most significant change of Southern Jewish life in Memphis?

We could bring 2 words to this which would really be. There are so many people who live in Memphis now, like the three of you, who were not born in Memphis. Shirley came to Memphis from Kansas, you came from Ohio, you came from Virginia. Memphis is so fortunate to have people who have come here - now the indigenous Jewish population - so many have assimilated like the Loeb family etc. that some no longer

consider themselves Jews - it's hard to say "Southern Jewish population". I think the most significant thing that has happened in Memphis among Jews is this: Someone said once that the Jews are like everyone else only more so and that plays itself out in this way: It used to be a characteristic merchant small Jewish population. Thompson's Restaurant on Saturday night was a Mecca for these people. You could go there and would find a person who had a dry goods store, find a person who had a grocery store or a sundry store. A big number of these people (some of whom lived in the locale of the business) sent their children to college and that generation became doctors, lawyers, brokers etc. So what's happened in Memphis is this: Jews have grown as Memphis has grown - not necessarily always for the better - but surely by making known their presence. It would be a great surprise to non-Jews in Memphis to learn that there are only 10,000.

Have you belonged to any non-Jewish clubs or organizations?

I have belonged to clubs. I belonged to the Bar Association. I was a member of Memphis Senior Citizens for a good number of years. When I came home from the service, rather than go into the Reserves, I went into the National Guard. I was in the National Guard as a battery commander for 3 or 4 years. I have been active in the community where being Jewish was not necessarily a factor.

What are some of those activities that you participated in?

Principally beginning in the mid or late sixties, the War on Poverty. The War on Poverty committee was established in Memphis consisting of representatives of 33 organizations. I represented the Memphis Jewish Community Center. After a short period when Rev. Cunningham was the chairman, (about 4-5 months), I became chairman of the committee for 3½ years. That was quite a significant part of my life. I thought that I knew the depth of division in the community - the difference between affluence and anguish - but I didn't. I learned a great deal in those years. At the same time we were losing the war in Vietnam, we were also in Memphis losing the war on poverty. There were some very good experiences. I also met some people with whom I still have good relationships. I also met some people who acted out of bitterness. I've been very fortunate - some people do good work and don't get recognition for it and I have. I was an honoree for the National Council of Christians & Jews in 1994 and I've had some recognition in the profession. All of that has been for me a very rewarding experience. I've also had some wonderful, wonderful experiences in our congregation.

You were President.

I was president of the Brotherhood; I was president of the Temple when the new congregation was being built. For 8 years I was an officer in the National organization of Temple Brotherhoods. I met some very fine people and expanded my ideas about the country and how Jews live. My years with the Jewish Service Agency were very fruitful, I thought. Jack Lieberman was the director at that time. We discovered (I think we always knew) the difficulty of Jewish people in the area of adoptions. That was when the Jewish Service Agency became a licensed child placing agency. We had an opportunity to render real service.

Herschel Feibelman is now going to talk about his work teaching.

I find very little that is more rewarding than teaching. I have had the good fortune to have had a number of experiences which make me believe that if I had my life to live over again (most everyone speculates on that) I would have been most happy as a teacher. I began teaching at the Religious School at Temple Israel in 1938. One of the things I am really most proud of was when I had completed 50 years in 1988 there was a recognition at a children's service. When Barbara Mansberg gave me the award the children applauded. I can think of so few times when children at a religious school applaud anything. I taught at the law school where I had studied for 2½ years. That was a fine experience. While I was in the service in the National Guard I taught a Field Artillery procedure. I have been a resource person at Memphis State for graduate studies. I know of nothing that is more important in our whole society than love of teaching.

What is the most significant historical event in your life?

My marriage, the beginning of my family.

What about the war?

The war experience was a process of development. One must also realize that other things were going on. For instance, I married while I was in the service.

Before you went in or while you were in?

While I was in.

Did Shirley get to follow you?

Yes, we lived in various places in Texas for 1½ years after we married.

Did you experience the depression?

Indeed

How did it affect you? I know you said that your parents were poor.

I think the depression left its mark on almost everyone. I do not think of myself as a secure person because there was so much insecurity in my family and around it during the depression. It's very hard to fully erase the impressions that I got. When I read now \_

of some of the salaries that are paid to corporate executives - when I read that a beginning lawyer in New York is paid over \$100,000, I think that in December of 1938 my total receipts were \$13.25. Of course, I remember the depression. I also find there is an irrelevance. It serves no purpose whatever to discuss this with our younger generation. I have never, nor has Shirley, ever talked about the depression with our children.

What's the most significant change in the South that you noticed?

Civilization. I think we now realize that the parochial attitudes that southern people have The myth of southern superiority has been shattered. The south is geographically a part of this country. There is no reason whatever that I can see to try to distinguish a southerner from any other American.

Did you spend any significant time outside of the South except in your Army days?

No. I had an opportunity to explore interests that I have now that I'm unemployed (I don't like to refer to the term "retired") I find there are lots of things that are available for people to do. Shortly after I recovered from serious heart surgery, I organized a group of people who meet the first Thursday of every month at the Jewish Community Center . We have produced 60 or more programs. As I look out at the people who attend these meetings and I see the meaningfulness of getting together and expanding one's interests I feel a genuine sense of reward. Early in my life, when I was in the early years of my law practice, my folks, Milton Sternberger and I would produce plays at Temple Israel. It would be a play night for the Jr. Congregation. We had wonderful times at that. After I came home, I was interested in Brotherhood. We had programs at the Temple of original content—parodies and the like. I find even though it takes something which some people call "conceit", I'm not reluctant to deal with my ability. For instance, I reach children in school. It is rewarding - to some people it might be uncomfortable. It's pleasant for me. I have (and don't think that I am using this number idly) on almost 200 occasions gone to Christian groups and explained my belief as a Jew. I'm quite comfortable in that. I tell them when I start that if they deal with a lawyer, they better know what his fee is. My fee is "don't leave any question unanswered". In other words, if you have a question about Jews, ask me and I'll try to give you an honest answer. I find that on occasion, for instance, I have relieved Dr. Wax and Rabbi Danziger at Rhodes College and once or twice at the Memphis Theological Seminary explaining how I feel as a Jew and as a person. This is almost a natural function for me.

Is that the most important thing you've done outside of your work?

The most important thing I have done outside of my work is my family and my participation in it. I would dread (I use that term advisedly) any circumstance in our family which would create friction between my children, the persons to- whom they're married and my grandchildren. Shirley and I feel ourselves copiously blessed in the fact that they all get along together and that is not the product of chance.

Is this what you are most proud of?

I am most proud of the relationships I have with my family.

What advice would you give to the young generation?

One word: Try. From my wife, I learned that everyone should have a project. That project can be something social or something physical etc. I was blessed that some 20 years ago my wife started my interest in needlepoint. I have had so many wonderful hours of watching something that she has designed for me become something of an object. Even though I'm a person who really likes things, I feel that I have something in my life that I can do. I am almost never bored.

I'd like to ask you something about Milton Sternberger, who died not so long ago and who was your good friend just so that we have him in our Jewish records.

Milton Sternberger's life was principally in his early years influenced by the early death of his father. He was the oldest of 3 children and his mother married again shortly after that.

What was his stepfather's name?

Milton Silberberg.

Milton was an honest person. Here's the way I use that term (there really are no degrees of honesty, but there are degrees of the manner in which a person applies it to his character and his personality). Milton never deceived himself or anyone else. He was successful because not only was he ambitious, but he had almost a surprising capability—both intellectual and administrative. He started a business of his own called “Milton Sternberger Co.” which has flourished. He married a woman, Peggy Goltman Sternberger, who had a very social bent and Milton became a part of her social activity, particularly in organizations like the Memphis, the Cotton Carnival, Ridgeway Country Club and golf tournaments and the like. He participated in these out of love for her and interest of his own. He was charitable. Milton never made a big business out of having his name on the left hand side of stationery. But when he got into an organization, he put all of himself into it—as was the case of The Friends of the Library and the early years of the golf tournament, which was of so much value to St Jude and the Lung Assn. of Memphis. That grew out of his interest after his mother-in-law died from a lung problem.

He lived a long full life. Milton was essentially a man who coped. I really never knew his feelings about his children and their conversion to Christianity. Why do I say that? I watched him walk down the aisle of Christ Methodist Church with his daughter who was married to a fine young man, but who was not going to be a Jew. What was the reason he was not going to be a Jew?

The reason he was not going to be a Jew was because there was no impetus. His wife, Milton's daughter, had no insistence upon it and their children were reared in the Methodist church. Her husband unfortunately died - a fine young man. She is very much interested now in the Methodist church. His son, the oldest child, is now a Presbyterian. I don't know whether you would call this characteristic of Jews in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century or not. Many Jews have found an attraction in being part of the larger Christian world. That applies particularly to his family. Now, with respect to Milton's personality—he was a man, however hard or easy he was to know, to the people who really were his friends, he was an absolute delight. After his wife died, Milton would come over every Tuesday and every Friday and have supper with us. We had the most wonderful 1 ½ hours afterward. He and I would jokingly say that we would recall things that happened in our lives earlier and then we would begin lying to each other and then believe the lies. We would laugh about that. His army experiences were not unlike my own. He served his country well and served his community very well. Most of all my recollection of Milton is just of a wonderful person to be around. He had a sense of belonging, which may very well be lost for future generations. If you were a friend of Milton, you belonged to him and he belonged to you.



Milton's wife had many endowments - intelligence, physical beauty - but most of all a sense of presence. When she was young, and all thru her life, she had a way of appealing to people and exploited it by way of being on the radio - announcing and reporting on golf matches, in which she was interested. She was both a duchess and a queen of the Memphi group. We recall with keen delight how proud Milton was of her in sports. I think I remember her best though for her courage. Peggy had 4 major surgical experiences for a brain tumor and she went through each one of them with poise and courage and dignity and I never heard her complain about her suffering. Unfortunately she died a few weeks before their 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Milton grieved for her in a way that was consistent with his personality throughout his life - with dignity, with remembering and in the hope that he could, by having had his experiences with her, that he could broaden the world for himself and his children.

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