

Temple Israel Archives Interview of

Frieda Frank Cooper

July 16-17, 2000

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INTERVIEW - ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Name: Frieda Frank Cooper
Date of Interview: July 16-17, 2000
Address: 1028 Murray Hill Lane, Memphis TN 38120
Date of Birth: November 28, 1909
Place of Birth: St Louis, MO
Sex: Female
Ethnic/Racial Heritage: Jewish - German - Russian
Religious affiliation: Jewish - Temple Israel
Educational Background: High School Graduate
Occupational History: Steno - Ready-to-wear Store Manager
Special Interests: Charity work, sewing, cooking
Father's Name & Occupation: Harry Frank - cotton
Mother's Name & Occupation: Dora Traube Frank
Name of Husband: Sam Cooper (Deceased)
Names of Children: Joyce Graflund, Carol Levy, Anita Cooper (McDonald),
Beverly Howard (Deceased)
Interviewer: Joyce Cooper Graflund

J.G. My name is Joyce Graflund. I am here at the home of Frieda Frank Cooper to interview Mrs. Cooper on behalf of the World History Project of the Jewish Historical Society of the Mid-South. Today is Sunday, July 16, 2000. Mrs. Cooper has agreed to answer questions and tell us about her life for this project.

F.C. I am Frieda Frank Cooper. I was born in St. Louis, MO, on November 28, 1909. I was named after my grandfather's mother. Most of the family came from Germany. I think her name was "Frada."

J.G. How would you spell that?

F.C. I have no idea. This part of the family's name was "Traube". That's my Mother's family. They settled in Nashville, TN. I am not sure if they stopped on the way. They had other relatives in Nashville. My grandmother's name was Cecilia Weinbawn. My grandfather was Wolfe Traube. They stayed in Nashville some time and probably around 1892 they spent about a year in Memphis (approximate time as I have no record of it). From there they moved to St. Louis where they spent the rest of their lives. The family name was not changed. My grandfather was Bernard Frank and he married Florence Brown and they were married before they came to this country. Probably had one or two children. My grandparents on my mother's side had 3 children before they came here. My mother was born in Nashville, December 27, 1886, and my father was born in St. Louis on May 17, 1889.

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J.G. Did you personally know your grandparents?

F.C. Yes. I didn't live in the same city with them very much because we left St. Louis when I was about 3 years old. My mother's mother had died the year before; her father was living with her older sister and my father's parents stayed in St. Louis.

J.G. What did they do for a living?

F.C. My grandfather on the maternal side manufactured ladies' underwear. At that time they were using a lot of cotton embroidered underwear with full skirts and things of that sort. I'm not sure whether he had a place to work or did this in his home. He had women to manufacture it and he sold it. My father's family had a dry goods store and in the fall he would go down into Arkansas and sell merchandise. More than likely he would go with someone else and open up a store for 3 months.

J.G. Were they religious at all? Were there any religious activities?

F.C. I have no idea. Both my grandparents were Orthodox, I believe. That was before the Reform Movement came into effect. This was many, many years ago. I think both of them went to the synagogue on Saturday morning, but I never accompanied them so I don't really know. My own parents I would say were Jewish in their beliefs, but not regular synagogue members. We didn't celebrate the holidays. Actually, we did celebrate the major holidays, like the High Holy Days, but we did not celebrate Friday nights.

J.G. Tell me something about your parents- I'd like to know a little bit more about them personally, how they met etc.

F.C. My mother's oldest brother had married my father's oldest sister about 12 years before they married. They married in 1909 - so the others probably married around 1897 or 1898. My mother's brother served in the Spanish American War. I think he was the only one in the family that was in that conflict. My father worked for Lesser Goldman Cotton Co., which at that time was one of the largest cotton companies in the country. He started working when he was 14 years old.

J.G. What did he do for them?

F.C. He was a cotton classer and he was exceptionally good at it. Later in life he would serve on the board of arbitration whenever there was a question about the grade of the cotton and they would call him in to verify it. He did one other thing during the war period, he did enamel work; he was quite artistic and probably if he had had more education in that field, he could have done many more things. He only went thru the 6th grade and that was a hindrance.

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J.G. What about your mother? What education did she have and did she work?

F.C. She went thru the 8th grade. She only worked for her father. She did sewing, but

she never worked outside of the home. She was a great seamstress and could design clothes, but never had any formal training.

J.G. You said that your family moved from St. Louis when you were around three. Where did you go and did you have other siblings at this time?

F.C. I had a brother Herbert who was born in 1911. He and I and Mother and Daddy moved to Little Rock. Daddy was transferred to another Lesser Goldman office. He bought and sold cotton. He would travel around places around Little Rock and southeast Missouri to the gins and buy up cotton for Lesser Goldman. Of course, he would have to class it, so that he would know he was getting the right cotton and paying the right price for it. Mother had other family in Nashville, but I did not know them. Their name was Weinbaum and I think there were at least 2 brothers. All I can remember is one family member's name was Pinkus Weinbaum. Mother talked about all her cousins but only by first names so I don't know who they really were. I think at one time they had a department store in Nashville. This was probably in the early 1900s or even before then. I don't know what they did in Memphis, but I know that Grandpa had this manufacturing place in St. Louis. Mother was a twin and they were the 10th and 11th children in the family. Only 6 lived to be adults. My father was one of 8 children in the family; one died as an infant. Grandpa was self-taught. He served in the Missouri Legislature, which was a great undertaking for him because he was a foreigner and had just moved to this country.

J.G. This was on the Frank side?

F.C. Yes this was the Frank side. On top of that he was one of the organizers of the Progressive Order of the West, which was a Jewish organization. I don't know too much about it, but they honored him several times and with a life-size portrait.

J.G. Where was this?

F.C. In St. Louis.

J.G. When you were in Little Rock did your family participate in any Jewish activities and how long did you live in Little Rock?

F.C. We lived in Little Rock at that time probably 4 years; we moved back to St. Louis and lived there about 9 months and then moved to Booneville, AR, and lived there a year and then moved to Russellville, AR, and were there 2 years. This was the time of World War I. The Armistice was signed while we lived in Russellville and I remember school being out and it was a glorious day to think the war was over and we thought there would never be another war and that would be the end of it. I was about 9 years old. From Russellville we moved back to Little Rock and lived there about 5 years and moved back to St. Louis and lived there about 3 years. I graduated from Roosevelt High School in St. Louis.

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J.G. Why did you do so much moving around?

F.C. They would compromise is what they were calling it. In January he would be paid

for the rest of the year. So he didn't have to work. Mother loved St Louis and always wanted to go back because her family was there. So we'd go back and stay from January until August. We did this on 2 or 3 occasions. The new cotton crop would come in in September so we'd move back to Little Rock or Russellville or wherever we were going. He would sign a contract - this is the way most cotton men did at that time. Then he decided to go in business for himself in southeast Missouri and he did very well for a while, but he had a partner that didn't really tend to business and he had gone to St Louis and they lost the business. So he went back to Little Rock again.

J.G. You mentioned Herbert. Tell me about your other sibling.

F.C. Herbert was born in 1911 and quit school in the 10th grade and went to work. We

were extremely poor. That was the year that I finished high school. I was 16 November 28th and graduated that January. I went to work the next morning. I really wanted to go to college so badly. I had taken a college preparatory course and a commercial course in high school thinking that I would somehow or other be able to go to college, but I wasn't able because my family needed the money. So Herbert and I both went to work and had to subsidize our parents.

J.G. You graduated at a very early age while moving around. Was that hard for you?

F.C. No, it was extremely easy because every place I moved, they would put me up. I

was a conscientious student and I loved school.

J.G. Did you make straight A's?

F.C. I was always on the honor roll. I just enjoyed school, I loved it. I really wanted to go on.

J.G. What was your favorite school?

F.C. I liked them all - Little Rock probably - I went to junior high and had 2 years of high school in Little Rock.

J.G. Did you graduate with any special award or honor?

F.C. No. I don't know that they gave them then, but I didn't.

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J.G. Tell me about your other siblings.

F.C. I have a sister Cel (Cecilia), who was born in 1914. She was a beautiful little girl. My mother was sick from the time I was about 8 years old. I helped a great deal at home. Teddy was born in 1919.

J.G. What is his full name?

F.C. Theodore William Frank. He was named after Theodore Roosevelt who had died that previous year. He was not an exceptionally strong boy. He wasn't ill, but he never was very active and neither was Herbert. They probably didn't have the proper food when they were little. I was lucky that I was as healthy as I was.

J.G. What kind of meals did you have in your home?

F.C. We had one dish meals. We had a dish of beans, a dish of rice, green beans. Sunday we had roast or chicken. We went to school most of the time and we were the only Jewish children in the school.

J.G. Did you experience any problems?

F.C. No I really didn't. Mother emphasized the fact that we had to be nicer than anybody else so that we would be accepted. She explains to us that we were in a minority and we had to act properly so that no one would ever have anything against us.

J.G. In some of these small towns, did you have any Jewish friends your age and did you participate in any Jewish synagogues you attended or Sunday School classes?

F.C. I never had a friend my age in any of the towns and we did not go to Sunday School in the towns we lived in. But when we moved back to Little Rock I started going to Sunday School.

J.G. About what age was this?

F.C. I would say about 10. From 10 to 15 I attended B'nai Israel Temple in Little Rock and was confirmed and was valedictorian of the confirmation class. I was extremely studious at Sunday School. I loved it. It wasn't hard for me to excel because I was about 2 grades ahead of everybody in my class in school so it was extremely easy for me and I did study and I participated a great deal. I liked it.

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- J.G. You returned to St. Louis and you graduated high school in St Louis and then you went to work. Before we talk about work, tell me about your St. Louis relatives and any religious experience you might have had through them and any influence they may have had on you.
- F.C. We did not attend any synagogue while we were in St. Louis.
- J.G. Did the rest of the family attend a synagogue?
- F.C. The men attended on Saturday mornings, but not any of the women attended. They may have, but I didn't know about it. I stayed in St. Louis until I was about 18.
- J.G. You graduated high school at 16 and you immediately got a job. Tell us about the job.
- F.C. I worked for the Laclede Gas Co. in the Home Service Dept. They had cooking classes and I did office work there. I would gather information and type it up so that when they went to classes they would have pamphlets to hand out to the people.
- J.G. How much were you paid? Do you remember?
- F.C. \$80 a month, which was considered a good salary at that time especially for a 16 year old girl who had just graduated from high school. I was thrilled to death. When I came home and told my mother she was so excited. I gave her my check every month and she gave me back 50 cents a day for car fare and lunch money.
- J.G. How much did lunch cost?
- F.C. Never over a quarter and usually I tried to keep it 20 or 25 cents and I think bus fare was 10 cents each way. So I usually saved a nickel or dime out of that 50 cents.
- J.G. What would you buy with that?
- F.C. I had to buy my hose or whatever I needed to wear to work. I had a cousin who used to give me all her clothes.
- J.G. Tell me about your family life. Did you interact with the other relatives and were there any Jewish activities in your family?
- F.C. There was no Jewish activity. We were very Jewish in our feelings, but we did not participate in synagogue worship.

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J.G. Do you remember any Jewish conversations with your parents?

F.C. Not particularly.

J.G. Did you get together with your relatives for the holidays?

F.C. No.

J.G. While you were in St Louis do you ever remember any interaction from your Jewish perspective with Gentile people or blacks?

F.C. The company I worked for did not favor hiring Jewish people, but I never had any problem.

J.G. How did you know this?

F.C. It was just general knowledge.

J.G. That they knew you were Jewish?

F.C. They knew I was Jewish.

J.G. Do you see a lot of different changes between your Jewish life in St. Louis and your life in Memphis now?

F.C. A LOT - I am well part of the community now. I wasn't able to do it when I was in St. Louis. I worked two jobs - I worked 8:00 to 5:00 at the gas company and worked from 6:00 to 9:00 at a grocery store every day. My uncle owned the store and I would help in the butcher department. I cleaned chickens most of the time because the butchers did not like to. The only chickens that were available then were cold storage chickens and they had to be cleaned. They were not dressed when they arrived. I did other things, but that was one of the biggest things I did.

J.G. What sort of money did you make there?

F.C. I wasn't paid, but they helped my family out a great deal with groceries.

J.G. Were all of you living there in St. Louis- your parents, your brothers and sister?

F.C. Yes. We were all living there. Then they left and I stayed on another year.

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J.G. Where did they go?

F.C. They went to Little Rock. I stayed there one more year and then I went to Little Rock. My mother had been very ill by this time. She never had been very strong, but by this time she was very ill.

J.G. Do you know what was wrong with your mother?

F.C. She had encephalitis. I think she had a blood clot on the brain and it was gradually deteriorating.

J.G. Did you have to help at home?

F.C. Definitely.

J.G. What sort of things did you do?

F.C. On the weekends I would do all the washing and I would buy the groceries and cook. Most of the time I had to cook dinner at night if I got home in time. Sometimes I had to work late.

J.G. This was after you moved back to Little Rock? What kind of work did you do after you moved back to Little Rock?

F.C. I went to work for a very fine ready-to-wear store. I worked in the office.

J.G. Do you remember the name of the store?

F.C. Palais Royal. Everyone sold no matter what capacity you were hired for. So when they were busy on the floor I would go down and fortunately I was a very good salesperson so I ended up staying at night, watched them dress windows, and learned everything about the business and I stayed there for 5 or 6 years and then I got an offer to come to Memphis.

J.G. Tell me some more about working for this particular establishment.

F.C. I was very very fortunate because this company had 12 stores and had a wonderful auditor who taught me many things that I knew nothing about - things you don't get in school. He taught me how to recheck everything - never take anything for granted - to be precise about everything. I really didn't know anything about business until I worked there. Not *only* was he wonderful, but the man who owned the store was a fantastic merchandiser and knew what it was to keep customers. He explained to us that you greet everyone as they came in; you tried to remember what they bought before so that you could talk to them about it; you tried to remember who their children were; little things that meant so much to a customer as they walked into the store they would think "Oh my goodness, they remembered me". He exercised this and I really appreciate everything he taught me.

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J.G. Was this valuable later in life?

F.C. Definitely- very valuable. I've used it to great advantage. When I came to Memphis, it was nothing to run the store. I had never been on my own before. I had helped run a store, but I had never actually done it.

J.G. Before you came to Memphis, while you were in Little Rock, was this the period of the depression?

F.C. Definitely. In 1929 the banks all closed.

J.G. How did that affect you personally?

F.C. Actually moneywise, it did not affect me because we had no money in the bank. It affected business a great deal because people did not have surplus money. Salaries were very low. Actually it sort of helped me because they had to let the high-priced employees go - the fact that I had learned so much, I was able to fill in and do many things. It's amazing I had learned so much. I came to Memphis December 31, 1934.

J.G. New Year's Eve?

F.C. New Year's Eve. There was a group coming over to spend the New Year in Memphis and they drove me over. I had all my belongings in one suitcase. I had made arrangements to stay at the Claridge Hotel because it was only 2 blocks from the store.

J.G. Why were you coming to Memphis?

F.C. As manager of the Lerner ShopJ.

J.G. How did you get that position?

F.C. The district manager knew me from Little Rock. There was a Lerner store on the corner from where I worked and he knew me from over there and he approached me and asked me if I was interested. I really didn't know what I was getting into. I didn't know that they had 3 or 4 managers who had not stayed. It was a terribly run-down store at the time. It didn't bother me that much except the first week I was here, we had a snow and sleet storm and no customers at all and I thought "Oh, what have I gotten into." But then things changed and I loved Memphis. What was so nice about it was that I had never been in a place where there were so many Jewish people and I thoroughly enjoyed it. I met so many because the mothers would bring their daughters downtown. Every Saturday you would see mothers and daughters and they would come into the store and it was easy for me to get acquainted with them.

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J.G. Were they all dressed up?

F.C. Not at that time, but as of today, you would say they were dressed up. They would come down, have lunch at Gerber's and then they'd come over to Lerner's. I met the Wurzburg family. When I first came to Memphis, I only knew about 3 people. There were several that had worked in Little Rock and I had known them and the Wexner family, who my Mother was very friendly with. There was a Thalheimer girl that had married a Felsenthal here in Memphis. That was Pearl Felsenthal. That's Cecile's mother. I knew Sarah and Henry Wexler. I knew 2 Rovin boys, who were their nephews and most of them worked at Levy's. So I got acquainted with them. Their mother worked at Levy's. Lena Rovin. Their mother was a friend of my mother's brother in St. Louis years before.

J.G. It's funny how you meet up with people again. When I walked into the Claridge, I met a group from Mississippi that had been over to Little Rock and I knew them and they took

F.C. me to the Menorah and I thought "Isn't this wonderful?"

What is the Menorah?

J.G. It was a building by Baron Hirsch. I guess a social hall of Baron Hirsch. It was on 4th Street I think. I was so thrilled and I went out that night with a whole group and I thought "This is just life" and I couldn't have been happier. Anyway, I lived here about a

F.C. year before I met Sam Cooper. I had met many people that he went with, but he had never been in the group. I accidentally met him. The crowd used to go to the Claridge on Tuesday nights and the Peabody on Thursday nights.

J.G.

F.C. i, ,Was this for dancing?

Yes. I loved to dance and so did he. They had tag dances. Someone tagged me so my date couldn't tag me so that he had to get someone else to tag me; so he went and got Sam. So I met him then. That was in January of 1936. We sorta had fun, but I didn't think much of it.

Why is that?

He was a nice person and a good dancer (I liked that). The next month there was a dance at the Y.E.D. Fraternity. They had a dance at the Peabody and I was there and I met him again and he asked me for a date and we started going together

We went to the Silver Slipper that date.

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J.G. Where was the Silver Slipper?

F.C. It was in the county off of Macon Rd. It was a beautiful place.

J.G. Was it a night club?

F.C. Sort of. It was an eating place and used to get good bands. We were real fortunate in Memphis then because all the big bands came here. That was why the Jewish crowds always went to the hotels because we heard the best bands in the country and it was very inexpensive. You could go for a quarter or 50 cents. The fraternity I think got special rates and you never ordered more than a coca cola. You didn't eat there - just had a coke and danced. So in 1937 we knew we wanted to get married, but we didn't know when because we both had obligations to take care of.

J.G. What were his obligations?

F.C. He had a mother and 3 younger brothers and sisters that he had to take care of and at times help his older brother and sisters. I had a mother and 3 brothers and sisters to take care of.

J.G. Where was your family after you moved to Memphis?

F.C. They moved to Memphis too. They had been living in Fort Smith and they came to Memphis and I got a house for them on Maury St. We lived here.

J.G. Did you live with them or were you still living at the Claridge?

F.C. I was living with them. Then they moved back to Little Rock because Cel wanted to move back to Little Rock and I moved back to the Claridge.

J.G. Was your Dad still doing the same sort of work?

F.C. He wasn't in Memphis - he was some place over in Arkansas most of the time. He sort of wandered off.

J.G. I wonder if you would tell me more about the era of the depression and how it influenced your life mainly through the years.

F.C. It meant that I always had to save something for the future and I was so afraid that I would have to spend everything that I made because I could see what was happening to people. Even wealthy people lost so much that they were destitute. All my life, although I didn't have anything, I had a Christmas savings certificate so that I'd have money at holiday time. I always put part of it away so that you'd have something to fall back on.

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J.G. At that time how did you dream of the future? What did you see your life in 10 or 20 years or now - 70 years into the future - how did you picture yourself?

F.C. I never thought about it. When Sam talked about getting married, he asked me

what I wanted. I told him I'd love to own my own home and have \$10,000 in the bank. To me that was a fortune. We were able to accomplish that in about 4 years. I worked and we lived off of one salary.

J.G. About how much were you making then at Lerner's?

F.C. \$45 a week then.

J.G. What hours did you keep? What was your daily routine?

F.C. The hours were terrible. We would leave the house at 7:30 AM and Sam would leave me off at Manassas and Jackson. Then I think it was a street car that took me to town. When we first married we lived at the Gilmore Apts above a restaurant at Madison and McLean and we saved up enough the first year to buy a lot out in the country then. It was the 3800 block of Poplar.

J.G. What is that near?

F.C. It was between Highland and Goodlett on Poplar. Goodlett was the city limits. People thought we were absolutely crazy to live out there, but I wanted to have a garden and raise chickens and have a big yard. I didn't have the chickens because the lady next door raised chickens and she sold them to me at a very reasonable price. So I didn't do that, but I did have the garden.

J.G. What did you grow in the garden?

F.C. Corn, green beans, tomatoes, okra, onions and lettuce. I had a nice garden. I had it tilled it in the spring and then I would break up the ground and keep the garden going. I used to get up at 5:30 or 6:00 in the morning and work in the garden and then go in and take care of the children.

J.G. We left off when you were still working. When you built this home, were you still working?

F.C. Yes. We built the house the second year. We built just what we could afford. That's when FHA came in and we were able to borrow \$5,000 and our notes were \$45 a month. We knew we could take care of that even if I didn't work. In the meantime Sam started getting raises and then he would get a bonus at the end of the year and of course, we still were helping others, but we were getting more income coming in.

J.G. He was working where?

F.C. It was out on Thomas St.

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J.G. What was the name?

F.C. Humko and it was owned by S.L. Kopald and Herbert Humphreys and they both had a lot of faith in him. He had a wonderful reputation.

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J.G. I meant to ask before about the wedding. Tell us about where you were married, who attended, what you wore and how much it cost.

F.C. We wanted to get married at the Claridge, but after we figured it out, we couldn't afford it. We had to pay for our own wedding- none of the family could help us. I had been a very good friend of the Little Rock Orthodox Rabbi's daughter. The family had been wonderful to me and I used to spend holidays with them on occasion.

J.G. Do you remember their name?

F.C. Yes, Shapiro. They asked me a number of times to be a witness at weddings when out of town people came in so I knew they did this. So I asked them if we could get married at their house and they agreed and Sam's brother Lawrence brought the food over.

J.F. Why did he bring the food?

F.C. He was in that business and he brought kosher food over - otherwise none of them would have eaten it.

J.G. The Cooper family kept kosher?

F.C. Yes.

J.G. But yours did not?

F.C. No.

F.C. I bought a lace dress at the store. I think I paid \$2.98 for it or not much more.

J.G. Do you still have it?

F.C. Yes. I don't know where it is.

J.G. I think it's in your treasure box.

F.C. It was just a plain long lace dress with a little jacket and Cel wore a kind of a rose colored lace. She was my only attendant. Gilbert and Harry Cooper and Herbert and Teddy held up the chuppah.

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J.G. Why was it in the Rabbi's home instead of a synagogue?

F.C. We couldn't afford to rent the synagogue. Sam's family were all Orthodox and I felt that it was what they would have wanted. It really didn't make that much difference to me. I thought that being Jewish, it didn't matter if you were Orthodox, Conservative or Reform - it didn't matter what. I never felt that great divide between the different forms of Judaism. I knew enough about orthodoxy, being a friend of the rabbi's family, that I knew that everything would be all right.

J.G. Did you go on a honeymoon?

F.C. Sam's oldest sister lived in High Point, NC, and she just had a little boy. His name is Alan Platkin-he is a doctor now. He was about 6 weeks old and Sam's mother who we called Mima, wanted to see him. So Sam and I drove her to High Point, NC, and we were there a couple of days.

J.G. That was your honeymoon with your mother-in-law?

F.C. Yes. She was a wonderful wonderful woman and I appreciated her. From there we went to Washington (I had never been to Washington) and from Washington we drove to St. Louis. We did all this in a week's time so you can imagine----

J.G. What time of the year was this?

F.C. August 8th, 1937. No air conditioning in the car. We didn't have air conditioning then. We drove to St. Louis and my aunts and uncles all had a dinner and I think it was at Garavelli' s, which was a place that everyone ate at in those days and Sam met my mother and father's family there. They liked him very very much and I was so proud of him. I think we stayed there one day and came back to Memphis.

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J.G. So at this point you moved into Gilmore Apts and then you moved out to Poplar.

F.C. We lived there 15 years - it was originally only a 2 bedroom, one bath house because that was all we could afford with the \$5000 we had borrowed. We had paid that off many years before. We enlarged the kitchen, built a patio, another bedroom, another bath and a den and a barbeque pit in the back yard.

J.G. Tell me about the size of your family at this point.

F.C. In 15 years we had 4 children.

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J.G. Who were the children?

F.C. Joyce, Beverly, Carol Ann and Anita-4 girls. We lived there 15 years and the older girls wanted rooms of their own. We got prices to build 2 bedrooms and a bath upstairs and it was \$10,000 and we thought it was foolish to put \$10,000 more in that house - it really wasn't, but we thought so at the time. We looked for a house, but couldn't find one. A real estate agent called me one day and asked me if we wanted to sell the house and I said "Sure if we can get our money out of it". I didn't stop and think of how much it might be worth, but I figured out what we had in it and I told him and he sold it and they gave us 6 weeks to get out. I couldn't find another house that we liked - we really wanted to buy another one - there were very few apartments and no one wanted to rent a house with 4 children, even though mine were wonderful. So one morning I just got up and went looking for a house I could buy. So I found one on the corner of Cecilia Lorece - a brand new house that the builder had built for his own family, but they hadn't moved in and it was very adequate for us. It was extremely nice in a lovely neighborhood. So I made an offer on it and they took it. So we moved in, but only intended to live there about a year - but we lived there 4 years because we didn't have a lot and we didn't have a house to move into. So we found a lot and it took 2 years to build- so it was 4 years later that we moved into 50 Waring Road.

J.G. I didn't cover this before, but why are you called "Frankie Cooper" and when did that start?

F.C. When I worked, people called me "Frank" - don't ask me why.

J.G. It was your last name.

F.C. Then Henry Weiss (who was a dentist here) started calling me "Frankie" and everyone else picked it up. It's funny, my given name is "Frieda" and all through my life I have never been called "Frieda". Where I worked I was "M i.ss Frank" and even after I married, it was hard to change to "Cooper". It seems like it was the name that everybody picked up and it didn't bother me what people called me. So it stuck. Anyway, I had been to Temple a number of times after I came here-I didn't join, but would go occasionally and liked it very very much, but I would never ask Sam to give up his orthodoxy. But he wanted to do it on his own. He got to know people at Temple; he liked the way they thought and he felt much more at home there than he did in the synagogue because he didn't really understand the Hebrew and there was so much of it.

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J.G. He could read Hebrew.

F.C. Oh yes, he could read, but he didn't know the meaning of it and he seemed to enjoy the services at Temple so much more. At that time Anshei Sphard did not have a Sunday school, so when Joyce was about 6 years old, we discussed it and he said "Let 's join Temple". So we did, and we still had our membership at Anshei Sphard and most of the time at Baron Hirsch too.

J.G. Was that 1946 or 1947?

F.C. It was 1945 or 46.

J.G. Did you belong to both congregations at this time?

F.C. We belonged to 3 congregations. We didn't pay a great deal of dues to any one of them, but we belonged to them all.

J.G. Did you go to regular Friday night services?

F.C. We started going to Friday night services at Temple Israel and we liked it very much. Sam particularly liked it and I was used to it because I was raised that way. Joyce started Sunday School and the next year Beverly went. I was very active in the Sunday School. I was active in their school work and their Sunday School work. In about 15 years they asked me to be treasurer of the Sisterhood. I was the treasurer for 9 years. During that time we started selling flower bulbs. I used to go to Temple 2 or 3 times a week because different things would come up and I'd have to take care of them. Then Amy Allenberg and Rana Goodman had a project selling flower bulbs. They had a hard time keeping up with the statistics and the money.

J.G. The financial part of it?

F.C. So I walked in one day and I said "If you will sell the bulbs, I'll take care of the rest of it" and I did and that's been 50 years ago and it's been a wonderful project. We'd buy the bulbs in bulk and make up the packages ourselves.

J.G. Where did you do this?

F.C. In the basement of the Temple. It was very difficult. We'd put the boxes at the top of the steps and throw them down and they'd break up before they got down there. The boxes were crates and we couldn't get them open any other way.

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J.G. How much money were you making then?

F.C. Probably a few hundred dollars. We started off selling about \$1000 worth, then it was \$2000 and \$3000 and when we sold \$15,000 worth, we thought we had really hit a bonanza. I think the most we've sold has been between \$60,000 and \$70,000 and we are able to give the Sisterhood at least \$35,000. We have saved what we can through the years for other projects that the Sisterhood has done for Temple so it has been a very lucrative thing for us. For a while we delivered all the bulbs, but after a while we couldn't do that because there was so much, so we charged for delivery. A lot of the sales girls deliver the bulbs they sell without charge, but we deliver about 100 packages at least every year.

J.G. You've been the treasurer of this project all these years?

F.C. Not only the treasurer, I've ordered the bulbs, made up the price sheets, done all of the work connected with it! In the meantime we have gotten other little towns around here to sell bulbs and then give them a percentage of the profits. So it's helped us too.

J.G. Tell us about the Dumas organization.

F.C. Elsie Phillips lives in Dumas and she's the treasurer I believe of the Southeast Arkansas Sisterhood. This is a group of women from all the towns - some have Temple and some don't. So we help them out - they sell and we give them a percentage of the sales. They have been very grateful for it because it's their only fund raiser. We do all the book work. They sell and deliver. We do it with Brownsville Dumas and sometimes other little cities join in. It helps us too because we can sell a greater quantity of bulbs.

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J.G. In addition to your work with the Sisterhood, were you involved with any other organizations in the city?

F.C. I belonged to other organizations, but I haven't been a real active member as much as I have in Sisterhood. I've worked for Council, Red Cross, B'nai B'rith, the Jewish Home.

J.G. Any non-Jewish organizations?

F.C. I've been very active in the Woman's Exchange.

J.G. What did you do with them?

F.C. They put out a cook book and I did the same thing for the cook book as I did for the bulbs. I did the book work and the financial work.

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J.G. What is the Woman's Exchange?

F.C. The Woman's Exchange is an organization that helps people sell things that they make themselves- like arts, crafts, children's clothes. It's a very fine organization and it's made up of women of all faiths. I have worked in the shop. A number of years ago I had trouble with my eyesight - so I had to give up something. I gave up all the work except Sisterhood.

J.G. While you were working for the Woman's Exchange, were there other Jewish women involved?

F.C. Oh, yes. This is an organization that is open to all faiths. There were other friends of mine that belonged.

J.G. During your life, have you experienced any discrimination because of your religion - especially in Memphis. Did you feel like there were any problems?

F.C. I don't really believe so. I would go out of my way to avoid anything of that sort I believe if you're nice to people, you'll never have any, problems.

J.G. Have you seen a big change in the acceptance of the Jewish community?

F.C. It's grown so in Memphis - not only in size but it is more part of the community than it has ever been before. I think all of the civic organizations depend on the Jewish people for a great deal.

J.G. What changes have you seen in the black community?

F.C. They need more education. It's not fair to them not to have it. Those who have been able to get an education have really helped themselves. The biggest part I think if they would help other people, I think that would help a lot. That will come in time too. I do remember something that I wanted to tell you: when I came to Memphis, I found out that my father's cousin had been a rabbi at Temple Israel. His name was William Fineshriber and he was quite a renowned rabbi.

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J.G. What this on your father's paternal or maternal side?

F.C. Maternal side. It was my grandmother's sister's child. My father knew him; I knew his mother, but I had never met him. When I visited St. Louis, Grandma used to take me around to see her sisters and his mother was one of her sisters.

J.G. Was he a rabbi when you were here in Memphis? F.C.

No, it was before I came.

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J.G. Do you know the next congregation he went to?

F.C. He went to Philadelphia or somewhere up east.

J.G. Did you ever have any contact with him?

F.C. No, I never did. On my father's side, my grandfather had a younger half-brother and his grandson was a rabbi at the Hebrew Union College in Los Angeles. I did get to meet him.

J.G. So you definitely had relatives who were interested in Judaism.

F.C. Yes.

J.G. Do you think this was because your parents were not terribly interested in Judaism?

F.C. It's because my father was not; my mother would like to have been, but my father was not. On my mother's side, there was a cousin who lived here whose name was Horowitz.

J.G. Do you remember his first name?

F.C. He died and his son Abe moved away from here. He moved to Texas - I'm not sure where he lives. I did know Abe because he worked for Edison Bros. and worked in a store next to the store where I worked in Little Rock. He married into the Pearlman family.

J.G. That's interesting. The interview with Frieda Frank Cooper for the Jewish Historical Society is completed. Thank you very much.
