

Moody Grishman Transcript

Rosalind Hinton: This is Rosalind Hinton, interviewing Moody Grishman at his home in Biloxi, Mississippi. Today is Thursday, November 9, 2006. I am conducting the interview for the Katrina's Jewish Voices project of the Jewish Women's Archive and the Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life. Moody, do you agree to be interviewed and understand that the interview will be video recorded?

Moody Grishman: Yes.

RH: Could you just begin by telling me how your family got to New Orleans and a little bit about your life in New Orleans?

MG: Well, from what I was told by my parents, my father came to Ellis Island in 1905 from Russia. Subsequently, he met my mother, who was from Krakow, Poland, and eventually they were married. He originally worked on the Lower East Side. He had family on my grandmother's side, and he had a pushcart like many of the immigrants had. He then went to work for the BRT [Brooklyn Rapid Transit Company, the elevated train in New York. On my mother's side, Sherman, she was – her maiden name Levine, Anna Levine – on her side of the family, it was the Sherman family, and one of the Shermans had gone to Houston and posed as a Merchant Marine selling dyed rabbits. He persuaded my father to move to Houston and work one side of the street, and he'd work the other side. On his way to Houston, he came through, by way of New Orleans, and was very much attracted by New Orleans, and subsequently left Houston and moved to New Orleans and went into the fur business, ladies' ready-to-wear furs, coats, jackets, scarves and he was at 829 Canal Street, which was next door to D.H. Holmes.

RH: What was the name of the business?

MG: B. Grishman, Incorporated, Furriers. We originally lived on Bernadette Street, and my mother passed away in 1919, April of 1919, on Bernadette Street, and my father bought a home on 1731 Milan Street, a two-story frame house, and he was remodeling that house. The contractor was a Jewish contractor, and my father was going to New York to buy fancy paper and so forth. He didn't have anywhere to leave us, and he was going to leave us in the Jewish Orphan's Home, both my brother and I. The contractor told him – he says, “You can't put those boys in the Jewish Orphan's Home. They're going to have to stay with me.” And he lived up on Melpomene Street up by the Irish Channel. We lived there for quite a while until they finished the house, and we then moved to 1731 Milan. Later, my father dated a young lady from Newcomb College, Edna Davis. She and her mother lived up on Jackson Avenue and St. Charles Avenue. She was just nineteen. My father was much older. That marriage didn't last very long, and they were divorced. He then married a young lady who was originally from Alabama and a Baptist who later converted. Rabbi Silva, on Napoleon Avenue of Congregation – I was thinking it was Beth Israel – but Congregation Gates of Prayer, that's the name of the synagogue. It was a Reform Synagogue. And Rabbi Silva converted my stepmother, and she saw to it that we were raised in a Jewish environment. I went to Hebrew School at the Hebrew school on Josephine Street. That's just off Canal Street off of St. Charles Street. And our principal was Rabbi (Lissitzky?). My teacher was (Spall?), and I had another teacher there, (Spall?); that was his son. In 1928, my father had to declare bankruptcy, and he was without a livelihood, a home of any kind. However, my stepmother had relatively poor family in Alabama, and in desperation, we had to move to Alabama and live on a forty-acre farm that raised corn and cotton. Yeah, corn and cotton. It was a small farm with one mule. We got there in the latter part of October of 20 –

RH: Where in Alabama?

MG: What?

RH: Where in Alabama?

MG: This was a community near Lincoln, Alabama. Actually, it was on the Coosa River. It was called Riverside. I was just fifteen then. That winter, I heard them talking about who was going to do the crop, do the plowing in the spring to raise the corn and the cotton. They were not blood relatives, naturally, and I referred to them always as Aunt Etta and Uncle John. Uncle John was up in age, not too ambulatory. He had to hire hands to do the plowing, and I felt somewhat like – I thought we should reciprocate even the poor living that we had there. No facilities whatsoever. We had to draw water out of a well, take baths in a number ten tub next to the wood stove. Such inconveniences as that. I offered to do it if they would show me how. Well, that spring in March, Uncle John showed me how to hitch up the mule. He set the plows for me, and I plowed from sunup to sundown. I plowed for two years there at Riverside, Alabama. During that period of time, I had an aunt and my grandmother living on the Gulf Coast. They came to visit us, and they were so distraught at the conditions that we were living in and insisted that we move to Gulfport and find a farm. We eventually found a farm, and the lady that owned the farm – [Recording paused.]

RH: So you found a farm in Gulfport.

MG: Yeah. We found a farm in Gulfport. Actually, it was six miles north of Gulfport in what was known as the Orange Grove Community. The lady that had the farm was a Ms. Anderson, originally from New Orleans. She had remarried, and her husband insisted they have a farm, and that's why she bought this farm and moved over. However, he didn't want to get up until ten o'clock in the morning. Well, they had ten cows to milk, and they had six hundred white-legged chickens laying thirty-dozen eggs a day, and you don't get up at ten o'clock and be a farmer. You farm from daylight to dark.

RH: Right.

MG: Well, she got rid of that husband and put the farm up for sale. It was a very nice farm. It was a forty-acre farm. It had fifteen acres of grafted pecan trees and ten milk cows, the chickens, and a five-acre vegetable garden of which we were anxious to acquire that farm. In addition, it had all of the plow tools. It had a fine house. A free-flowing well. A Model-A delivery truck that didn't have five hundred miles on it. All for a very, very, very reasonable sum. And she required eighteen hundred dollars as a down payment and a balance of it she was willing to carry the paper herself at six percent. Well, we didn't have eighteen hundred dollars. However, my father had a very dear friend in New Orleans by the name of Harry (Rushakoff?). And we went to see Harry (Rushakoff?) with the possibility of borrowing the eighteen hundred dollars. Mr. (Rushakoff ?) was originally in the furniture business down on Frenchman Street and had retired. He lived on General Pershing Street. Harry told my dad, he said, "Ben, you don't know anything about farming." He said, "I'd be glad to lend it to you, but you don't know anything about farming." He said, "No, but Moody does. Moody has been farming, and he knows all about farming." Mr. (Rushakoff?) replied, "Moody's not going to stay on that farm." I said, "Yes, I will. I'll stay there and help him pay it off." And for that period of time, almost ten years, I was out of school. I had been to Warren Easton in New Orleans at one time, and I had also briefly gone to Woodlawn High School in Birmingham, Alabama. But I had not finished high school. Well, I stayed there and milked the cows and gathered the eggs, took care of the chickens, and produced all kinds of vegetables. Took them to town and sold them. Sold the milk, and finally, in 1940, I decided that I ought to be leaving. In 1935, my stepmother insisted that I get back to school, and I got back to high school at Orange Grove High School, and I finished Orange Grove High School with a diploma [and] a tuition scholarship to LSU. In the meantime, we were two months behind on the installment payment to Ms. Anderson. I wrote a letter to President Roosevelt and told him that — emulating Thomas Jefferson — if we did not have a moratorium on the foreclosures of farms and homesteads that we would probably have anarchy in the United States. I got a letter back from his secretary [inaudible] saying that

they appreciated the letter and they were referring it to [Henry] Morgenthau, who was then the Secretary of Treasury, and it was shortly thereafter we had the moratorium. The moratorium provided that the mortgage holders, if they were desperate for cash, the government would settle with them for fifty cents on the dollar. We owed \$4,200 as the balance due, and she agreed to take the cash. She was hard-pressed for money. She took \$2,100 cash. They restructured the loan for us at \$2,100 for thirty years at three percent. Well, in 1940, I decided to go back to New Orleans and get a job. I felt my father had fairly well handled the farm there and was able to take care of the payments. I went to New Orleans, and I got a job with the National Life of Tennessee, collecting insurance policies, these little five- and ten-cent insurance policies. C. L. Tucker was the Manager for the district that I was applying for the job, and the district was from City Park Avenue all the way out Canal Boulevard to the Lakefront and from Canal Boulevard all the way to West End Boulevard, which was quite a large territory. In those days, it was not built up like it is today. In fact, there were a lot of truck farmers even out in that area. Well, Tucker asked me if I had an automobile, which I didn't have, and he said, "Well, it's quite a large territory, and I don't think you'll be able to make your collections by Wednesday. Come in, turn in your accounts, and then go out and try to sell little nickel policies for the rest of the week." I said, "Well, I've been walking behind a mule from sunup to sundown. That will be a pushover." Well, he was amused at that, and he decided to give it a try. Well, that year, I led the district in the highest percentages of collection and the highest percentages of writing new business, and I made quite a good salary out of it. They paid you thirty-five cents of every dollar that you put on the books of new business, so I had accumulated quite a bit of money, and I bought an automobile. The second year, I fell from grace. I was too lazy to get out of the automobile, and as a result, I did not do as well as I did the first year. And Mr. Tucker, at the sales meetings, often told the salesmen, "If you get out of the automobile and walk around and call on your accounts like Moody Grishman did his first year, you'd be a better salesman and have better success." Well, anyhow, I saw an ad in the paper for a liquor salesman with

the Sazerac Company. And the CEO of Sazerac at the time was Ben Martinez. I worked for Ben Martinez for a short period of time and [inaudible] Company, which was a wholesale drug house and also had ownership of whiskey – it's a distillery in Kentucky. They owned quite a bit of liquors, and they'd bottled liquors under private labels and also were great importers. And I worked for them for quite a while. During that period, my father had an opportunity to take over the management of a restaurant in Gulfport on Highway 90 called "The Diner." He had, after my second stepmother died, remarried my third stepmother, Julia (Prine?), who was a waitress in Hattiesburg at the Edwards Hotel. She was somewhat familiar with the restaurant business, and they took over the management of The Diner restaurant. They did quite well. At that time, Mississippi was dry. It was a Prohibition state. However, he could buy what they called black market whiskey from dealers on the coast, but they had to pay high prices for it. It was not OPA-controlled. As a result of my being in the liquor business with [inaudible] (Lyons?), I was in a position to help him get OPA-priced liquor in New Orleans and bring it back. He did quite well and accumulated quite a bit of money in the restaurant –

RH: What's OPA?

MG: What?

RH: What's OPA?

MG: Office of Price Administration. However, he did not sell the liquor at OPA prices. He sold it at black market prices. He prevailed on me to come to the coast and take over The Diner restaurant. I had, in the meantime – while I was in New Orleans, I had gone to Delgado Trade School at night, hoping to enlist in the Army. I figured we were going to go to war, and I didn't want to go in PFC as a private. I took up aviation mechanics [inaudible], including instrument work. I went to enlist, and they turned me down on account of my eyes. They told me to come back in six months, and I did. They turned me down for the second time. Well, I was desperate to get in the service, and

they suggested that I go to Camp Livingston and try to enlist at the camp. That they could not, as recruit officers, knowing I was not acceptable, could not go ahead and take me and send me up there, but if I go up there and they want to take me, then that would be all right. Well, I went to Camp Livingston, and they asked me why I was up there when I lived in New Orleans, and I told them I'd been turned down in New Orleans. They said, "Well, we'll do your eyes, and if you pass that, we'll do the rest. If not, you'll go back to New Orleans." They turned me down again on account of my eyes. I went back to New Orleans, and there was a big one-page ad looking for inspectors at Vultee Aircraft. Vultee Aircraft was building these PBVs, these hospital ships that were out in the Pacific. They gave me an application, and the application asked and had a column, yes or no, if I was familiar with different types of instruments, gauges, optical flats, inside, outside calipers, and all that. I put yes for everything and didn't know anything about any of it. However, the last question got me. It said, where did you last work and how long. Well, I had to tell them – I had not had a job as an inspector, but I was familiar with the instruments. They said, "Well, we want somebody that's familiar, and we're not ready yet. We'll call you in thirty days." Well, I left there and went to Silas Bookstore across from the Roosevelt Hotel, and I bought a book on gauges, and I boned up on gauges, familiarized myself thinking they were going to call me as an inspector. They did call me, but not as an inspector but as an expeditor. The job being to see that the parts were put on the assembly line. They had a machine shop that could build any part that they needed if those parts were not in stock. The other alternative was to order the parts from San Diego. In any event, I could take the parts off of hulls that were not immediately due and take these parts to the hulls where they needed them immediately. Many times, I put in overtime at night. I had, in the meantime, married.

RH: Did you have a Jewish wedding?

MG: No. I was dating a very fine Jewish girl in New Orleans. I was very fond of her. I dated many Jewish girls. This one particular girl I was very fond of. However, I was also

dating a niece who was to be my wife, Elizabeth Cowan, and she came to New Orleans and was going to stay with her aunt who lived down on Royal Street in the French Quarter. That's where the Brulatour Courtyard is now. And when I went to meet (Fleta?) for my date, I met Elizabeth, and I don't know what came over me, but I was infatuated with her immediately. And subsequently, we married and rented a house up on Barone Street, not a house but an apartment on Barone Street. I insisted we buy a house, and I was only making fifty dollars a week. She was an anesthetist, and I told her that if we got married, she would have to sell her machine and be a housewife, take care of the house, the cooking, and the children if we had any children and one request that I was going to make, that those children if we had any, were to be raised in the Jewish religion, not that I thought any less of her religion or any other religion, but I did not want my children to grow up and not know the Jewish religion. Subsequently, if they wanted to adopt some other religion, that would be fine. I had no objection. But I did want them to know the Jewish religion, which she had no objection. As far as having a Jewish wedding, I did not have a Jewish wedding. I did not insist on a Jewish wedding. Nor was I willing to have a Catholic wedding. We were agreeable to have a wedding by a Justice of the Peace who was down on St. Bernard Parish, a fellow by the name of [inaudible].

RH: Were you involved in the Jewish community at all?

MG: Oh yes. I went to Communal Hebrew School. I belonged to the B'nai B'rith. I belonged to what was the junior B'nai B'rith. There was an order of a – I can't think of the name of the order, but anyhow, I belonged to all of them. I went to Congregation Gates of Prayer. My wife went with me. Our first daughter was – our first child was a daughter named Melanie. When Melanie grew of age, she went to Sunday School, Jewish Sunday School, and came home and asked why we didn't go to services on Friday and Saturday. And my wife said, "Well, if she wants to go, we'll go." So, we went to services at her insistence and subsequently continued. And on through the years after we moved to the coast, my wife was active in the women's Jewish community, and in fact, they made her

President of the Sisterhood. And she told them, she said, she avowed, "I'm not Jewish." They said, "We don't care what you are, but you're President of the Sisterhood." Her father insisted –

RH: Was there much prejudice in New Orleans toward Jews?

MG: Yes. Yes. I can remember when I lived on Milan Street, I went to E.B. (Crutchin's?) School, and I can remember walking to school and kids calling me "Sheeny" and Christ-killer and all these adjectives that were used at that time. In fact, I have a scar on my knee where one of them hit me with a brick. However, the Communal Hebrew School, at three o'clock, they used to send a bus to pick up all of the Jewish children who were going to Communal Hebrew School, and I went to Cheder Hebrew School from 3:30 to five o'clock in the afternoon. My father would pick me up on St. Charles and take us home.

RH: As an adult, do you remember much prejudice when you went to look for a job or anything like that?

MG: No. I did not sense any prejudice because everybody knew I was Jewish. There was no antisemitism that I experienced particularly. I ran into a little antisemitism here, not of any serious consequences. But getting back to my father's operation of The Diner restaurant, he had insisted I come over here and take over The Diner, that he had made quite a bit of money at it. In fact, I had picked up a lot of bonds from (Scharf?) and Jones in New Orleans. Ike (Scharf?) was Jewish, and he had helped my father with investments. My father wanted me to pick up these investments and bring them over here. But when I got over here, my father said, well, he had decided to stay at The Diner for a little while longer, and he had another little restaurant that he wanted me to buy that was doing very good and unfortunately, he was not telling me the truth. This restaurant, I had to give him five thousand dollars for it. It was not for nothing. And it wasn't taking in twenty-five dollars a day. I was a chief cook and bottle washer and bartender. However,

I was there for ten years. I built up a fine restaurant business specializing in BBQ, charcoaled steaks, and the like. I had a fine cocktail bar. I had one of the biggest package liquor businesses on the coast. I used to go to New Orleans with an Army, five or six canopied truck and bring back a truckload of liquors that overloaded the overload springs on the truck. Finally, in 1952, I decided to get out of that business. [Estes] Kefauver had closed down Chicago, and I figured the next thing he was going to do was come down and close down the bootleg coast and all of the vice that was going on. I thought that the time to sell is when you're doing good, and I sold the business to (Salvador Bertucci?), who was an operator of a casino, not a large casino like you see now, but it was a casino, and it was operated by a Jewish fellow by the name of (Abel Koon?), who was ex-military and he was in the casino business. He knew all about it, and (Salvador?) had him as a manager. (Salvador?) finally bought – when I put the word out that I wanted to sell, he bought my business and gave it to his brother-in-law. His sister was married to a restaurateur who had lost his restaurant in the '47 hurricane. I lost my business in the '47 hurricane, but that was September 19, 1947. By October, Halloween, I had the building back, and I was back in business and had a Halloween Party. I also, as a Jew, observed St. Patrick's Day on St. Patrick's Day. I was the first one on the coast to offer St. Patrick's Day beer, green draft beer. It wasn't in bottles. It was draft beer. How I devised the way to make it green, the freezer cabinet on one shelf had glasses, Pilsner glasses, that did not have a drop of green vegetable coloring. Another shelf had Pilsner glasses with a drop of green vegetable coloring. When you take a glass with the vegetable coloring, put it under the spigot, and draw your beer, it would come up green. And there was people who heard about it because I advertised on the radio St. Patrick's Day beer and all of that – all of the Mulligan Stew you could eat for 50 cents. And people came all the way from Biloxi to Gulfport, where my restaurant was, to get the green beer. And they could have made it themselves. At any rate, I sold the place, and (Salvador's?) brother-in-law did not maintain the same business that I did. His specialty was meatballs and spaghetti. He was Italian, and he liked meatballs and

spaghetti. Well, the people I had as customers evidently didn't like meatballs and spaghetti that much, and in two years' time, he lost the business. In the meantime, in '52, I decided to go into the real estate business, and I've been in the real estate business since '52. I've been in the real estate business over fifty-four years. I was very successful in the real estate business. I loved it. In fact, it was the one vocation that I actually stayed in the longest of all of the vocations that I experienced. I have even been briefly in the lumber business. I have briefly been in the shrimp business. As I say, of all of the vocations, I like real estate the best, and I was the most successful in the real estate business. I was about six or seven years ago elected to the Real Estate Hall of Fame. I am past state President of the Realtor's Association of Mississippi. I am a past National Director for the Real Estate in Mississippi and twice-past President of the Biloxi/Ocean Springs Board of Realtors. In fact, on the fifth of December, I have been asked to be the installation officer for all of our new members, which I feel is a signal honor. And then, getting back to experiences and antisemitism, these people all know that I'm Jewish. In fact, for a long period of time, mail that came anonymous to "Rabbi," Biloxi, Mississippi, I got the mail. I don't know why the post office thought I was a rabbi, which I was not. I was instrumental in building the first synagogue on the coast, the Congregation Beth Israel, which had some severe Katrina damage in the social area but not in the sanctuary. The sanctuary is intact.

RH: What was the decision? How did you decide to build a synagogue? How many families were you when you decided to build a synagogue?

MG: We had quite a few Jewish families, and we observed the Sabbath and the holidays in different areas. When I say areas, that's different buildings, different churches were kind enough to let us use their facilities. The community continued to want a synagogue. They wanted a synagogue, as they say in Yiddish, for a metzia. A metzia is a cheap way of doing something. I was very familiar with a man by the name of Paul (Scametti?), who owned a home where the present synagogue is located. Paul (Scametti?) built the home

and subdivided that area into the greater Biloxi subdivision. When you hear the story of the House of Seven Gables, I think he attempted to outdo the seven gables; he must have had twenty-one. He had a story-and-a-half house, and every window had a gable.

I met with him often and also with a Catholic Priest, Father Mullen. We were very good friends, and I often took Father Mullen to Howard Johnson for ice cream, and they accused Father Mullen of possibly wanting to proselytize me, which was a big joke.

Anyhow, Paul (Scametti's?) house burned. He settled with the insurance company one hundred percent loss, and he called me and told me, he said, "Moody, this house can be remodeled, and I'll sell it to you very reasonable." It was a large tract of land, went from one block – took up a whole block, and I said, "Well, I'll take a look at it." I envisioned building a triplex. The way the house was designed, it could have been an efficiency apartment on one end and an efficiency on the other end with all of the plumbing facilities and everything, and then the upstairs would have been another facility, and it had all the plumbing and so forth. It was at that time there was a lot across the street that was vacant and for sale for three thousand dollars. They were still wanting a metzia. Rubin Goldin, who is long deceased, Jack Goldin's father; George Altbach, who was a member of the community – he was originally from New Yor – and myself, we each put up a thousand dollars and bought the lot to hold it in trust to try to get enough funds to build a synagogue on that lot. Well, there was a lot of opposition. They said it was going to cost too much money. It wasn't a metzia. So, as a result, I sold the lot to the church, which was right across the street, for four thousand dollars, and we each made three hundred dollars, I guess, profit. And then came Paul (Scametti's?) opportunity. I told him, "All right, you want a metzia. We can buy this entire property for eight thousand." I said, "I have looked at it, and it can be remodeled. It's not as badly damaged as you think it is."

And I said, "I estimate I can do the remodeling. In addition to the eight thousand we pay to buy it, I can do the remodeling for six thousand dollars." But that was not with a sanctuary. That was just with the social area, which we used in conjunction with the services. They said, "Well, we're not going to have the money. Can we get it financed?"

I said, well, "I'll go to the bank and see if we can get a mortgage loan." I went to the First Federal Bank in Biloxi, and they agreed to lend us the money. The congregation put up a few thousand dollars for escrow money, and the balance of it was mortgaged. I remodeled it, and it was with the help of some of the members who was in the building materials business and – (Art Nathanson?) at Harris Lumber Company provided a lot of the materials without cost. We had that for a couple of years. In 1958, they wanted to build a permanent sanctuary, and I added a wing and added this sanctuary that is now there. We use the social area strictly as a social area with the sanctuary adjoining it.

That was dedicated in 1958. We did not have considerable damage in Camille. We did have damage to the social area in Katrina. However, the sanctuary is in such a condition that it didn't sustain with just a broken glass. The social area could have been remodeled for less than \$800,000. We would not have had a mortgage because we have got considerably over that in the building fund. Handleman, a Jewish department store operator who operated out of New Orleans, had a store here. He wasn't doing good here. My son, in Jackson, who is a tax attorney, was the tax attorney for Handelman.

Handleman wanted to donate the property and take the write-off, and he said, I'd like to donate it to some Jewish organization. My son suggested that he donate it to the Congregation Beth Israel. He agreed to it. For a period of time, my youngest son, Milton, who is now in the real estate business with me for some time, managed it, rented it, and finally sold it.

RH: We're going to have to – this tape is ending. So we're going to have to get another tape.

MG: Oh.

RH: Okay?

MG: Yeah.

[END OF PART ONE]

RH: This is for Katrina's Jewish Voices. And if you could tell me a little bit about – you were talking about the damage to the synagogue.

MG: Yeah.

RH: But that you do have a building fund.

MG: Yeah. We have a considerable building fund which \$200,000 resulted out of the sale of the Handelman property that was donated to the congregation. Subsequently, I had the brochure printed with a brief history of how we came about to build a synagogue, and a flyer was put on this little brochure asking for building fund donations, which we did receive some real, fine donations. The synagogue, as a result of Katrina, as previously stated, had a broken glass near the altar, near the bimah. The ark that was donated when we were originally building a sanctuary came from Chicago. (Art Nathanson's?) mother, who is a member of a congregation in Chicago that evidently decided to move, and they did not move the Ark, and they stored it. It was in storage along with the Sefer Torahs, the Siddurim, and the Tallisim. He asked his mother if those Siddurim and the Ark could be donated to the congregation here. We needed one. It is customary that you donate these articles to another worthwhile congregation, the organization of a synagogue. As a result, we got these beautiful Siddurim and the Ark. In addition to that, on the bimah, there are two beautiful walnut, high-backed walnut upholstered chairs. These chairs, originally, were the king and queen chairs for the Mardi Gras at the Buena Vista Hotel. Every year at Mardi Gras, the king and queen sat in these chairs. Jimmy Love, who owned the hotel at the time, when the hotel was abandoned, and I knew he had these chairs and he had them in storage, and I asked them if he would donate them to the synagogue. He graciously agreed to do that. They are beautiful chairs. In addition to that, a [inaudible] member donated the Ner Tamid that hangs there now. For a long period of time, we had no Rabbi, but members of the congregation officiated.

Each one took turns officiating. Later we were able to bring temporary Rabbis for the High Holidays.

RH: Did you ever officiate?

MG: Yes. Yes. In fact, I bought a book from one of the Jewish bookstores in New York on sermons. I felt like I needed to have some guidance in delivering sermons, of which I would take from this book.

RH: What was your relationship in Gulfport to the New Orleans community and the Mobile community? Can you tell me if –?

MG: Well, for a long period of time, a lot of the members, before we had the permanent synagogue and congregation organized, a lot of the members went to New Orleans.

They went to Mobile for the High Holidays. It wasn't until after we had the sanctuary and Hebrew School, which my brother taught Hebrew to the Hebrew classes, and now Milton is the Hebrew teacher. But many of them went to Mobile for the High Holidays and also to Mobile. In fact, on occasion, I had gone to Temple Sinai in New Orleans on the High Holidays.

RH: Did any of the members from any of those synagogues help support the Gulfport Synagogue or –

MG: Yes. We had building fund donations made as a result of these brochures that we had mailed out.

RH: I know a lot of people have second homes in this area, in Gulfport from New Orleans, and I was wondering if they were involved with the synagogue in any way.

MG: Yes. In fact, when Milton and my nephew were bar mitzvahed, they were bar mitzvahed together. Dr. Joseph Cohen, who at one time lived in our home on Milan

Street, not only was the doctor of the family, but I really embraced him as a very, very dear friend. I was in Alabama on a farm for the summer, and I got a letter from my father and stepmother, that is, Euna; we nicknamed her Dolly. Dr. Cohen was getting married to (Millie Palter?), and I wanted to go to that wedding. I hitchhiked from Alabama to New Orleans to be there in time for that wedding. My aunt up there – I called her Aunt Etta – didn't want me to go. She wanted me to write and get money and go by train. I had two dollars and a half saved up, and I said, “No. If I wait for the letter to get to New Orleans and back, I'll be too late. I've got to go now.” And I left. I took a change of clothes, hit the road, and got to Birmingham that night. Spent the night with some of Dolly's relatives. They wanted me to go back to Lincoln. I wouldn't go back. One of her brothers was a freight engineer. He wanted me to get on the train and go back to Lincoln. I wouldn't do it. I got up the next morning at daylight, hitchhiked, and went all the way to Bessemer, Alabama, caught a ride to Eutaw, Alabama. Finally caught a ride across the Tombigbee River and got to New Orleans that night about three o'clock in the morning. And I was at the wedding for Dr. Cohen. Dr. Cohen and Eugene Bernstein, who were also very, very dear friends of ours from New Orleans, who was in the fur business – when Milton and Barry, my nephew, were bar mitzvahed, they came to the bar mitzvah. Dr. Cohen, I think, was the most elated of the two members for the simple reason – when I got ready to get married, Dr. Cohen objected to it. He did not want me to marry out of the religion. Nevertheless, I think what really made him very happy was to see that despite the fact I had married out of the religion that here is the children being raised in the Jewish religion making their bar mitzvahs. All of the children, all four of them, have made their bar mitzvahs and bat mitzvahs there in that synagogue. That synagogue has a certain sentiment attached to it. There are many of the members whose children were bar and bat mitzvahed in that synagogue. Regretfully, today, they don't want to go ahead and refurbish and reinstall in that location. They said it's too close to Katrina. Wherever you go, you're going to be subject to some kind of damage. You're not safe anywhere. You have tornados in other countries. You have earthquakes. This

location is very, very handy to the Gulf Coast, that is, Highway 90, and many of the Jewish people who are coming here, of the few that are coming here, are coming here for the casinos and as a result of the condominiums, and they feel as though being north near I-10, that the greatest majority of the Jewish influx will come on I-10. I can't perceive a Brooklyn, New York, or the Lower East Side coming down I-10 to come to our synagogue. The few Jews that will come eventually to the coast will be coming down Highway 90. It's very easy to find. Easily accessible. More so than where they're purporting to go. Three Rivers Road, which is way north – it's not easily accessible. You have to get off either at Gulfport and find your way over there. Or you can get off at Cowen and Lorraine Road and find your way back to where the proposed new synagogue is going to be. The synagogue, if they built a sanctuary and social area and accommodations for a sexton, or a traveling rabbi, or a part-time rabbi. If they build that much square foot, it's going to be an undertaking that's going to require a mortgage, whereas they could have restored what we had for considerably less than our building fund is now with no mortgage. Personally, I'm not in favor of the relocation.

RH: Can you tell me why you decided on making the synagogue a Conservative as opposed to a Reform?

MG: Well, most of the people who – prospective members preferred Conservative. Personally, I do too.

RH: Yeah?

MG: Like they say in Yiddish, it has a different ta'am. It has a different flavor. The Reform is not as much Yiddishkeit as Conservatism is, and I like the davening, and I like the whole order of the service as a Conservative. I don't say I dislike Orthodoxy because, frankly, I think that if it wasn't for the Orthodox, we would not have Judaism. I think it's the Orthodox in Europe who perpetuated Judaism. I feel closer to Orthodoxy in that respect. But from the standpoint of attending services, I like Conservatism the best.

RH: Did your family have Shabbat dinners before going to synagogue?

MG: We had Shabbat dinners. In fact, my wife cooked the Shabbat dinner. She prepared the Seders, and she could prepare a Seder as good as any Yiddish mother could.

RH: Really?

MG: Really.

RH: She had good latke recipes for Hanukkah?

MG: She prepared any Jewish dish that you could think of. We observed Hanukkah. We had a Sukkot. In fact, Saint Stanislaus in Bay St. Louis, which is a Catholic girls' school, they asked my sister-in-law, that is, Irving's wife, who is a nurse and head of the emergency ward at the Gulfport Hospital – a Catholic doctor there knew that she was married to my brother who was Jewish, and she went to services. She didn't change. She didn't formally become Jewish. But she went to services. At that time, he asked her if my brother could come to Saint Stanislaus and present a Seder supper for the Catholic girls to see how a Seder supper was conducted and what it consisted of. Well, at that time, my brother was TDY. He was with the Air Force, and he was shipped over to the northwest somewhere, and he wasn't available. However, she said, "He has a brother that might be willing to do it. And his wife can prepare as good a Seder supper as any Jewish woman." Well, as a result, we went over there, and in the gym, all of the girls were seated up in the bleachers with the sisters. We had a siddur, and we had a table down on the floor and all of the preparation of the wine and matza, the gefilte fish, the whole nine yards, and we presented the Seder supper. In the Seder supper, one thing that you do – you have a cup for Elijah, and you open a door, and you invite Elijah and anyone who is hungry to come and eat. This is a part of the order of the Seder. However, there is a more subtle reason for opening that door. That reason, in Europe,

was for a dual purpose in addition to inviting Elijah. There was antisemitism to the extent to where they said the Jews used Christian blood to make the matzas. For that reason, they opened the door to let the Christians see that there were no Christians being massacred and their blood to make the matzas. I told them that. I told them that with emphasis because it is something that they should know of how vivid the antisemitism was in Europe years and years ago. A lot of it naturally migrated to this country, and I guess we have antisemitism wherever you go. But, for the most part, here on the coast, the Christian churches – Protestant churches, Methodist, Baptist – all provide their facilities during this interim period until such time as we get a permanent synagogue back again. At one time, I was able to – I had piano lessons, classical piano lessons for over fifteen years. I had to give that up after I lost my sight to some extent, and also my hands. I also had art lessons in New Orleans at the Royal Arts and Crafts, and I preferred watercolor art. It is a hard medium to work with, much slower than the oil colors. But I did an oil painting of the Phoenix arising from the ashes – a large watercolor. I had done this many years ago, and it struck me after Katrina with the advent of the restructuring and the emphasis and the effort that's being put forth now to bring back Biloxi, that there is some semblance to the Phoenix. I asked Mayor A.J. Holloway if he thought, and I had a digital picture to show him, and I said, if you think favorably of this, I'd like to give it to the city as a memento and symbolism of the rise of Biloxi again. He said he would be delighted to have it. A couple of weeks ago, at the City Council, I was invited to bring the picture, and Milton went with me. I presented the picture to the City of Biloxi, and I got a very nice card from the mayor stating how much he appreciated it and that he was hanging it in a very prominent place at City Hall. So, those things that – people knowing that we are Jewish, they have no antisemitism. Where I'm staying here, they all know I'm Jewish. In fact, there is one man here who considers himself a Zionist Christian. Now, I had never heard of that before. He came knocking at my door one day, and I opened the door, and he's standing there with a tallisim and a yarmulke. He's no more Jewish than any of these other gentiles are

Jewish. But he says he's a Zionist Christian.

RH: Can you tell me one of your favorite memories of being in the synagogue?

MG: Well, I wouldn't say it's my most favorite memory. I would just say that my second most famous memory is having the opportunity to build it. I kind of alluded to something probably that may be a point. I am a Master Mason. I am a Shriner.

RH: You're a Shriner?

MG: I am a Shriner.

RH: And Jewish?

MG: A second-degree Mason.

RH: And a Mason?

MG: Yeah. I was given my third degree, which is the high degree in Masonry as far as the Masonic Lodge is concerned. I was the only Jewish member in the Magnolia Lodge #120 in Biloxi. I was the only Jew. I was given the honor to get that third degree by the past Grand Master of the state of Mississippi. All Past Masters of lodges in Mississippi, I was a candidate. Now, that's gone a long way from antisemitism.

RH: It sure is.

MG: And the young man that coached me was a Protestant. (G. W. Scarbold?) approached me and all of my works to get prepared to get that third degree. But I would say, probably, the most favorite memory would be the conduct of the synagogue, the conduct of the – all of the members, children who have had bar mitzvahs and bat mitzvahs. That is probably the most favorite memory.

RH: Is there anything that you would like to conclude with? Because I think this has been a beautiful interview about the Jewish community here. Anything special or unique that you think about this Jewish community?

MG: Yes. There's not that many members. The fact of the matter – the truth of the matter and the fact of the matter [is] we don't have enough members to meet the budget. The dues have been raised, and it's still not sufficient to meet the budget. Going to another location where they propose to go, there will be some of the members – the older members are not going to go to the new location for two reasons. They feel a certain sentiment [about] where we are and where we started, plus the fact that some of them are not able to go to this other location. They're not ambulatory. They don't drive or what have you. Many of them, more easily accessible to this location where we were. And frankly, I think they're going to find it hard. If they have a mortgage, they're going to find it very hard to meet the budget. We don't have a mortgage now and can't meet the budget.

RH: Are you going to go to the new synagogue?

MG: No.

RH: You're not?

MG: No. Nope. I would not even pay my dues to the new synagogue. You know what I am really hoping for?

RH: What.

MG: Eliyahu Hanavi. Some Jewish member would come to this coast and sentimentally, financially buy that property and restore that synagogue, and I would go then.

RH: That's nice. Thank you very much, Mr. Grishman.

[END OF INTERVIEW]