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Rabbi Michael Robinson

July 17,2003

**Down Home Project
Tape Log**

Minute Mark	Topics presented in order of discussion on recording
Tape 1	
00:19	Name, residence etc.
00:34	Where family from - Galveston -grandfather had jewelry store on Pack Square.
1:08	GF (grandfather) worked in Texas, NW, then Asheville (A).
1:22	Father here - civil engineer- trained in Texas.
1:44	Origin from Belarus.
2:00	In Galveston before the Galveston movement.
2:35	Uncle brought Sam (Michael's father) to Galveston - Daniel - GF already there.
3:04	After U of Tex, Sam came to A where Daniel then lived.
3:29	They didn't know anyone here.
4:03	Mother's family came for father's health (TB) from Chicago.
4:50	Lived on Spruce St. across from Wolfe family. Her father boarded at Old Kentucky home.
5:41	Grandmother and mother lived next to temple, across from Old Kentucky home
6:16	Mother close friend with Wolfe family, used to walk with Thomas Wolfe to school.
6:40	When Michael would come to Asheville to give a talk, one of Thomas Wolfe's sisters would come to hear him.
7:05	Likely the house his mother stayed in was a boarding house.
7:33	Mother had no relatives here when she came, but two came later- Sylva and Bryson City.
7:59	Maternal Grandmother born in Leeds, Yorkshire (As many Confederate families moved to England) then to Chicago.
8:37	According to Uncle, family had possibly lived in St Joseph, Mo. (undocumented) before the Civil War.
9:12	Parents met outside maternal grandmother* s millinery shop at 78 Patton Ave. Paris Millinery (previously on Biltmore).
10:11	Uncle had a store in Sylva, Paris Department Store, therefore there were two Paris stores in NC.
10:38	Parents rented on Hillside, then Broad St. then built house in Kenilworth at 108 Forest Hill Drive. 6 children - Abe Simons' (mother's brother) wife died and their daughter moved in.
11:56	GM and father shared rented space at 78 Patton for work. Millinery/optometrist.
12:32	Jewish community in Asheville.
12:38	Division shul and Temple—no cross socialization.
13:20	In neighborhood - Jacobsons—Al and Florence—children.

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- 13:44 No Jewish neighborhood - in Kenilworth Whitlock Lees (Lipinsky) Forest Hill Drive at top; Jacobsons; Breman (Joseph, Sarah) Childs Ave. Also Pollack family, Lou and Ada.
- 14:50 Social group- ladies listed above playing bridge, elegant, southern.
- 15:10 Most Jews lived north part of town - Beaver Lake.
- 15:31 One class with 4 Jews, Ma Bryson teacher. Elaine Galumbeck, Betty Lipinsky, Billy Rocamora and himself
- 16:30 Teacher called the class "Little Jerusalem" and canceled class for Jewish Holidays - She was patient of Dr. Robinson.
- 17:06 Jewish community fairly stable Harold Goldbloom moved in.
- 17:50 Keep kosher? Family influenced by Rabbi Henry Cohen from Galveston, both parents raised reform.
- 18:48 Lit candies and went to Temple every Fri. night.
- 19:00 Father had 1930 Buick with jump seats, They all piled in and Temple started once they arrived. They were dropped off at parties afterwards.
- 19:50 Relatives outside Asheville came every holiday.
- 20:50 Abe Simon (mother's half brother) moved to Bryson City, his second wife not Jewish.
- 21:18 Her brother Dave lived Ellijay GA. with a store
- 22:00 People came to Uncle Dave's store hoping to see horns (he always wore a hat).
- 22:27 Explanation of origin of horns.
- 23:20 Mother made every household decision.
- 23:39 Neither parent had a model as they both came from one parent family.
- 24:27 In 1934 mother went to World's Fair, father bought refrigerator- she returned and was angry. Said she didn't buy his office equipment.
- 25:05 Left Asheville to go to college.
- 25:46 Wanted to go away to study architecture, NC State, summer school at 17.
- 26:35 In the Navy at 18, stayed at Mrs. Hudson's College Inn with job waiting tables.
- 27:05 Father did not approve of job, but he needed it for self respect.
- 27:16 April 1946 out of Navy—changed major.
- 27:42 Still in uniform went to Zageir's Man's Shop and bought clothes, went to Cincinnati HUC.
- 28:36 Didn't know Hebrew letters-head of HUC said don't burn bridges.
- 28:50 Requirement for entrance-translate book of Genesis, know Hebrew grammar. He didn't.
- 29:10 Spent summer of '46 studying with Rabbi Robert P. Jacobs.
- 29:36 Jacobs became Hillel rabbi in Washington U in St. Louis.
- 30:11 Southerner ? - yes Southern Jews different. How? tremendous advantage. "We are in this world and not of it, we are of this world not in it" - attitude towards Blacks different.

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- 31:00 Mother paid 2 times going rate to Black maid.
31:20 Father the only office where blacks called Mr. and Mrs.
31:40 Receptionist hated it.
31:53 Integrated waiting room.
32:10 Patients seen first come first served-whites sometimes walked out if blacks served before them.
32:38 Remembers family meetings about how to feed family.
33:00 Attitude toward gentiles - HUC first all-Jewish experience - 29 years Rabbi at Croton-on- Hudson, NY.
33:38 Congregation attitude towards gentiles different from Southerners; New Yorkers distrusted them.
34:00 Different way of being in the world.
34:25 At Newton School in Asheville only 2 other Jews (Jacobsons).
34:50 Many teachers never had Jews in classes.
35:00 In WNC less man 1 Jew in 1,000; less for mother.
35:35 Roberts Cove, in Reems Creek, teacher insisted Jews had hairy pointy ears.
35:50 Nephew recent (above) experience in Weaverville where M's mother went to college.
36:20 Any negativity took place inside him; he knew he was different, e.g. different calendar.
36:52 Went to Lee Edwards HS. During Passover mother would invite teacher to lunch so kids could eat Passover meal and teacher could understand.
37:50 Anti-Semitism/exclusion. Jews couldn't live in Biltmore Forest and only 1 belonged to A Country Club.
38:30 He was never called names, but NY congregation had a different experience.
38:50 Father employed non-Jews.
39:35 Sister Eva worked for father part time during war and at Dave Steel Co.
40:06 Mother boarding student at St. Genevieve's, on Wednesday went with mother to Christian Science because they were Jewish Scientist, Temple on Friday night.
40:45 All except Eva went to college.
41:06 Great Southern Jewish social life for Eva~AZA, Jubilee (Memphis and Atlanta) her own Jewish Sorority, Tau Gamma.
42:12 Eva met husband through parties.
42:50 Everybody was in social scene, no cong. distinctions. His mother cried because Eva intermarried -- her husband was orthodox.
43:50 Helen went to Women's College, Greensboro (cousin). She taught 5th grade at Crossnore School and Baptist Sunday school even though she was Jewish.
45:15 Eva lived in Augusta GA.
45:25 Leah went to Chapel Hill, worked at Ecusta in Pisgah Forest.

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- 45:50 Dupont, Monsanto never had a Jew. Leah went to secretarial school to be secretary of chem. dept. and left Ecusta with 40 people working under her—she was chemist.
- 46:28 Leah worked for Navy in CA during WWII.
- 46:56 He and father taught Leah drafting in one night before she left to go to CA.
- 47:19 Leah married someone from Brooklyn and mother cried--she didn't know how she could relate to New Yorkers.
- 47:53 Grandfather went to conf. in Raleigh and warned him not to join a fraternity at NC State because they were all from NY.
- 48:49 Part of being Jewish in the South was that his mother was open to the world. Father went to funeral of Black employee, mother asked his wife to lunch. She had nowhere to live so mother hired her to work in their home.
- 49:47 Brother Emanuel went to optometry school of father, worked with him and went out on his own.
- 50:00 Michael lived in NY, Seattle and CA.
- 50:25 Faela went to Women's College and married someone who went to Duke and lived in Winston Salem and Greensboro.
- 50:40 David went to NC State, joined the marines, worked for IBM in A. Had a farm in Reems Creek, raised tobacco, a mountaineer.
- 51:20 All of us talked differently, Eva talked like she was from Charleston and David like a mountaineer.
- 51:45 The Jewish Community regarding segregation. Rabbi didn't lead in social issues. Rabbi Robert P. Jacobs was a Zionist.
- 52:18 My experience in the South is that Jews walked on thin ice. They were afraid. I went to jail during civil rights movement, went to meal at Black church provided by Jewish women. While in jail, President of Bnai Brith was brought in and told us we should not be there. (16 rabbis arrested) He said we did not understand the South.
- 53:50 In Jacksonville, Mississippi, he knew all Jewish women supporting CR, but they couldn't say they were in public. The Rabbi's office was bombed later.
- 54:45 Miriam Ezzell, President of WCTU, powerful Methodist, wanted him to meet a lot of people and gave him a place to stay.
- 56:18 KKK flyer delivered to homes made people worried about NY Jews. Stated 1/3 of Miss. was Jewish to scare people.
- 57:11 Didn't know situation in A. Brother Manny went to EC Goldberg's newsstand and bought NY Times with his picture on front being arrested. Father very upset, sent disapproving letter.
- 58:24 Father worked to integrate the Daniel Boone Boy Scout Council and to get Black kids in scout camp.
- 59:00 At 60th HS reunion he suggested a joint reunion with Stevens-Lee and they said, "Oh no, they would want to be with their own." I thought it was time we got to know each other.

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Tape 2

- 00:06 Father did not own property.
- 00:30 Parents owned home, but not work place.
- 00:40 Services in Temple used the old Union Prayer book - dignity - decorum and format of an Episcopal church service.
- 1:20 Classical reform Judaism, moved by services, Kidusha gave him chills.
- 1:55 It was Age of Reason-different period of history.
- 2:05 He saw the liberal Temple in Krakow, recently.
- 2:29 Age of Reason over now, but it was a beautiful service, gentile choir, Blanch Loftin (?) organist, Joe Dave Kol Nidre on cello.
- 3:11 Different world in the Spruce Street Temple. Silver name plates on the end of pew with the names of owners.
- 3:43 He always attended Temple on Spruce Street. Temple moved to present local while he was in Seminary.
- 4:04 Rabbi Sydney Unger—at his first service and most people didn't know what was happening when he sang kiddish. 1942 new prayer book included rituals for lighting the candies and kiddish.
- 5:02 Not much Hebrew in the service, doesn't remember going to Hebrew school. Got Bar Mitzvah training from Alexander Klein.
- 5:37 Does not know if there was a mikvah. Kosher butcher on Lexington Avenue, the produce street. They were the Rosen's—sold poultry. And Schandlers had the Pickle Barrel on Oak St. which got Ruble's Rye bread on the overnight train from Cincinnati.
- 6:49 Never saw a bagel until he was in his 20s.
- 7:01 The moile came up from Greenville, SC.
- 7:28 Did go to shui a few times. Most people mere were older. His grandfather attended and was a member of both and was agnostic. Shul did traditional davening and had separate sides for men and women.
- 8:18 100 families in the Temple. Shul was a little smaller.
- 8:45 Ruth Feldman was a convert. Took name of Ruth on conversion. She was fully accepted, raised children Jewish, president of Sisterhood.
- 9:38 Brother David's wife was a convert, but much later.
- 9:58 Leo Frank case: only knew as adult.
Joseph Needleman—don't know
KKK—this was not Klan country; had experience w/Klan in civil rights marches in FL.
- 11:33 Depression affected everybody. Father said he was the only Jew in A who didn't lose money in the stock market. He had no stock.
- 12:06 Mother worked outside home much later. Was a receptionist in father's office on regular receptionist's day off. Mother was in 70s then.

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- 12:31 Hitler—Grandfather died in 1941 but he used to sit by the console radio w/ear glued to it for news. It was very personal to him. They never found correspondence but grandfather must've known people in holocaust.
- 13:31 Williams family in HVL and Wolfsons in London and here were related distantly. Connection personal about war.
- 14:00 Gf knew what Hitler was about.
- 14:15 Father was moved by WWII—not a Zionist—member of Americans Council for Judaism, but quit because they were anti-Zionist. He didn't believe in Jews as a nation but in Judaism as faith.
- 15:15 First big UJA drive in AVL his father gave \$10,000—a lot.
- 15:37 A big difference in southern Jews. Southern Jews are Jews by virtue of religion, not secular Jews. Only one family—the Grosses—had a Christmas tree and all the Jews knew it and laughed about it.
- 16:24 Jews are respected in the south as people of the Bible. Every Jewish store was closed on the holidays and offices too. There was respect for that. It flew in the face of anti-Semitic Jews.
- 17:04 We were visible because Jews owned businesses here. There was refugee Zionism, not the political Zionism of Hertzl.
- 17:47 Most of the Jews when he grew up here were southern Jews.
- 18:12 How civil rights affected Asheville -it culminated in the high school integration but not during the movement. Most people are afraid of change.
- 19:18 Southern Jews are an anomaly for many people—when in the Navy he had arguments with people about it.
- 20:06 Jews weren't too comfortable about his being southern. They didn't think he was authentic.
- 20:15 He was more comfortable with Southern Baptists—they shared a common culture.
- 20:36 There is no longer much of a local community in the Jewish community.
- 21:15 The hospitality of this congregation is typically southern though the people are not; they became part of the culture they moved into.
- 21:56 They drop their northeast culture when they come here.
- 22:14 Major Jewish organizations—National Federations of temple Sisterhoods, B'nai B'rith, American Jewish Congress-grandfather member—doesn't know if there was a chapter of that here, and AZA.
- 23:18 Leaders—hard to speak of a Jewish community then. There was the temple community and the schul community. For the temple community it would be the Bremans, Lipinsky/Lees family, Lichtenfels, Robinsons, Patlas, Pollocks.

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- 24:18 Retail business is what Jews did in A mostly. True of the south. Their children became professionals or left the south.
- 24:45 He didn't go downtown much. Sometimes he had lunch w/father at S&W cafeteria.
- 25:11 Kids had no money then. He worked at Finkelstein's Loan Office every afternoon after school. He put away stuff people pawned mat day. People came up from Eagle Street and he was putting away clothes, shoes. On Saturday, he waited on customers.
- 26:20 Customers were either black or country. One day, though, a Biltmore Forest lady --the mother of one of his friends—pawned a diamond when things were tight. The Depression ended with Land lease in 1938 or 39. Asheville's Depression didn't end quickly. He was embarrassed to see his friend's mother come in.
- 27:49 The reform rabbi was the official mouthpiece to the outside world. He was the ambassador to the goyim. The congregation expected it.
- 28:42 Like any southerner, A is home to him. When he was in New York it was down home. His niece's son is the fifth generation in this temple. This is our space.
- 29:51 When he gets away he gets lost.
- 30:15 The community is mostly the same. When his mother had her 80th birthday dinner it was in the hotel built on the same spot where her childhood home was. When she first came here, her family boarded w/the Novicks on Victoria Rd, then she went to school at St. Genevieve's on Victoria Rd; she was in a nursing home and she died there on Victoria Rd.
- 31:25 When he comes back he drives by the house he grew up in on Wyoming Rd and Forest Hill Dr. There are woods there. They were their woods. It was their world.
- VETERANS
- 31:47 He enlisted. Seventeen years old. But not called till eighteen. Was at NCSU. Signal corps had taken over the dorms and he moved into a boarding house.
- 32:24 Everyone had war fever. It was tough to sit in classes then. He was motivated by multiple stimuli to sign up.
- 32:49 In the V (B?)-12 program. He finished high school.
- 33:17 There were many motivations and he knew Gandhi's response to evil—first part, though, not the second part about non-violence. Now he is a pacifist. He never heard of conscientious objector men, though.
- 34:05 He enlisted in the navy. Why? He doesn't know. Older brother was in the army. A response to evil. Today he would be classified ADD.
- 34:55 He went to UVA officer training in engineering. It was the last thing in the world he wanted to do. He went to boot camp in MD.

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- 35:44 Never finished his UVA degree in engineering. The only way out was to flunk. He flunked out of V-12.
- 36:IS He did electronics training in boot camp. He was not interested in that. He was sent to Chicago, Houston, the 7th fleet in the SW Pacific. On a LST—landing ship tanker. They called it large slow target.
- 37:50 Did maintenance for radar, sonar, communications. Never touched electronics after out. He was critical to group because he could fix the movie projector.
- 38:41 The LST carried Japanese prisoners of war. Knife story. No one preferred death to dishonor.
- 40:25 High school reunion. All talked about WWII duty. He talked about how no government would tell him who is his enemy.
- 42:03 Memorable experiences—strictly marking time. On the dog watch from midnight till 4 a.m. Thought a lot about what to do when out. Decided he had to do more. He wanted to try to be a rabbi. He was the first native North Carolinian to become a rabbi. Only person born in Asheville to ever become a rabbi. A disciple of Rabbi Henry Cohen of Galveston. He met him in the Navy when in electronics school.
- 44:01 One Sunday morning he found him at temple and told him who he was. Rabbi knew his father and grandfather—so rabbi said he had to meet his wife. The rabbi flagged down the first car driving by and got a ride to meet the wife and visited. The driver kept waiting and took them back to temple and at the end said, "Thank you Dr. Cohen."
- 45:04 Jews were nice everywhere in the service. He knew a family in Houston. His grandfather had helped the man go to ophthalmology school. They were nice to him.
- 45:41 In the Philippines at the liberation of Manila he located the Jewish community. Mr. Netzor was with the Jewish Welfare Board and the USO. He visited with him.
- 46:31 Sammy Weiss from Brooklyn or Bronx only other Jewish guy on boat. He did not have an attractive character.
- 46:53 A Jewish officer on ship led services. The Navy had few Jews. Blacks could only be stewards, cooks.
- 47:30 On ship they didn't believe he was Jewish from NC. He was the only person on the ship who had gone to college but was not an officer. Some sailors set up a fight against a black steward. He didn't run and hide. He fought some. Then he was accepted.
- 48:36 Got news from home from letters at different ports. His father wrote every Tuesday. He would write one letter and make carbon copies to all kids, addressed in descending order according to age. He wrote about activities, his Sunday hikes and who was at Friday night services.

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- 50:07 His father's most important activities were Sunday hikes and temple services.
- 50:36 He was shipped to Virginia to be discharged. He kept a pewter spoon from the ship. He took a train home.
- 51:24 He felt at home when he stepped off the train at the old depot in town.
- 52:01 He did make close friends in Navy but hasn't kept up.
- 52:15 Doesn't belong to veterans' organizations.
- 52:32 Considers his participation in the civil rights movement more significant than time in navy. Was empowered in the movement. Has been an activist all his life.
- 53:04 Feels his time in the service helped him become a pacifist and non-violent believer.
- 53:37 For example, contracts to Haliburton and Bechtel were in place before we went into Iraq. That's insane.
- 54:06 He loves this country. He loves the mountains of NC. He's not a patriot. He has a love of home.
- 54:55 Had a girlfriend in A—Miriam Crohn—corresponded w/her in service. When home he gave her ribbons and she went to Women's College and wrote him a dear John letter.
- 55:51 He was always in love. Miriam Crohn was the first Jewish girlfriend.
- 56:31 He was scared he wouldn't be able to study any more after he had been in service.
- 57:15 His father let him drive his car when he got home and one day he was watching some young ladies and he hit a police car. They let him off when they saw his uniform and talked to him. They recognized his father's car. It was a period of adjustment for him. His goal at that point was to be a rabbi.
- 58:34 His father believed war was to save the Jews. He had priority but he left his car and walked. His brother David would then take the car and drive to school, coming home before his father got back.
- 1:00:00 In 1942 there was a war bonds program and the Civic Auditorium. Jane Wyman was speaking to sell war bonds. The first Jew to enlist from A was George Wartonberg. He was a German refugee. The Lichtenfels—Uncle Gus and Aunt Edna, everyone called them—brought a lot of German Jewish refugees to A. Aunt Edna was the daughter of Carrie Cone Long of Baltimore. His mother had open house dinners on Sunday nights, inviting the German Jewish refugees and there were always 20-25 people for dinner, counting the family.