

Interview with Beatrice Levin Goldberg

January 10, 2001

BC: What are some of your earliest memories.

BG: I remember things from way back, when I was 2,3,4 years old. Little incidents. When I lived in Wilmington.

BC: Talk about that. My dad talked about that. How old were you then?

BG: About three years old. Frances was a baby. That's when your father almost drowned. Did he tell you that? And Ruth and him had an argument and she threw something at him, hot coffee, scalded his leg. He still has a big scar. Did you notice it? Those things I remember.

BC: Talk about your parents.

BG: My father was a shoemaker. We lived in the country for two, three years in a house, an old country house. I think it had outdoor plumbing. There was another family. The man was Jewish and the wife was gentile. They had a load of children, about twelve. When I got older we used to take trips out there. I stayed over at their home. We'd walk on the railroad tracks. We'd go here; we'd go there. The oldest one was a boy, he was around my age, a couple of years older. We'd go out together. He bought me a ring. I was about 18 years old. I didn't realize too much about getting married and that. After a while, I gave him back the ring. We broke up. They used to come out to Chicago and stay at our place.

BC: You were back in Chicago then?

BG: Yeah. We were back in Chicago.

BC: Where in Chicago did you live?

BG: Springfield and Spaulding. Right near Roosevelt Road. 1243 I think, at that time. 1243 Springfield. I went to The World's Fair with him a few times.

BC: What did you think of that?

BG: It was nice. We saw a lot of interesting things. Of course, we had to take a street car.

BC: What year was that?

BG: 1933, 34. That's when I was grown up already.

BC: You lived in Wilmington until you were how old?

BG: I don't know. Four or five maybe.

BC: Why did you move back?

BG: In the beginning, we moved to Wilmington. Frances was a premature baby and she was getting rickets or something.

BC: She was a twin.

BG: Yeah, but the twin was born dead. She was a seven month baby, two and a half pounds.

BC: The twin was a boy?

BG: Yeah. He was born dead. The doctors recommended that she drink cows milk straight from the cow. So I guess that was the reason they moved to Wilmington. She straightened out. We had company in the summer, aunts and uncles and cousins came by and stayed over. Then I think we moved to Paulina Street on the east side of Chicago. Ruth and Max went to school in Wilmington, but I didn't. When we moved back here I started school. I never went to kindergarten, I went to first grade. We lived on Paulina Street for four years and had a lot of fun there.

BC: Do you remember your address there?

BG: 1050 South Paulina. Ashland and Taylor. Not far from Roosevelt Road. There were movie shows there, we'd go to the shows. In the winter it was cold in the house, we had a stove. In the summer it was hot. We were on the third floor.

BC: What did your father do in Chicago?

BG: He was also in the shoemaking business. He was working for an uncle.

Frances and I, when we were older would wait for him on the corner to come home from work on the streetcar. Us young people would sit outside in the summer, not just sit - we'd play, we'd jump rope. In the summer time we'd jump rope all evening. My mother couldn't get us to come in. Of course, it was very hot sleeping upstairs on the third floor at that time. And there were three girls, all sleeping in the same bed. Your father slept on a cot in the front room. that they put up and took down.

BG: Yeah. My mother and father had theirs. And that's what we did on Paulina Street.

BC: Did you have chores to do around the house?

BG: Nah. We were kids.

I was about ten when we moved from there. There were four grammar schools that I went to. I went to Gregere, Clark. when we lived on the east side on Paulina Street; Holland, was on the west side already; and Henderson. We had moved, my father opened up a business on the south side, also shoemaker. We lived there for four, five years. I think 6600 South Ashland Avenue. I went to Henderson School. It was a Gentile neighborhood, so you had gentile friends, but we got along nice. There were a few Jewish families, that we got real close with. We used to go to the beach together.

BC: What did your bathing suits look like?

BG: Our bathing suits! I have pictures of them. If I had time I'd show you pictures. Skinny little girls on the beach.

BC: You had pajama parties. I saw pictures of them.

BG: We were older, we were teenagers already. We lived on the west side. We lived at 1243 during the World's Fair. We lived in one apartment, then we moved to another apartment down the street. at 14th and Springfield, then we moved to 16th and Springfield. I got married when we lived there. Ruth got married when we lived on 14th.

BC: Do you remember how my father met my mother? I thought it was around the holidays. Aunt Ruth was friends with my mother. I thought that was how he met her...

BG: There were three, four girlfriends that your mother was friendly with - and my sister. I wasn't with them too much because I was four years younger in age. Your mother used to come to our house before they were married. We'd go out on picnics and things like that.

BC: Did my father date a lot of girls before he got married?

BG: He wasn't home too much. He was living in Pontiac and working for Uncle Sol.

BC: Do you remember how old he was when he moved out there?

BG: I imagine that he was in his late teens or early twenties.

BC: I think he went to high school, but he didn't finish.

BG: No. He went to a trade school. Then he went out there to work. I didn't see him too much when he was younger. He had boyfriends..... I imagine he had a lot of girls.

BC: Why did he go out there?

BG: At that time work wasn't too..... he didn't have a trade, so my uncle suggested, or someone suggested. His cousins, I don't know if you remember, Lawrence and Sidney and Ralph. I think they were all out there at the time.

BC: Who did they stay with?

BG: I don't remember. I was much younger.

BC: How much younger?

BG: about six years.

BC: How did you celebrate the Jewish holidays?

BG: When my mother and father went to shul , we would go in and visit them.

BC: Do you remember your grandparents?

BG: Grandma Marcus lived with us later on when Aunt Esther moved to Wisconsin Dells. Grandpa lived with us too.

BC: What were their names?

BG: Bessie and Ben. They had a bedroom and us three girls shared a bedroom and my parents had a room. Your father wasn't home most of the time. I really didn't know him too much at that time, because when he was home, he was with his boyfriends. We really got closer together when we were older, after your mother passed away. We went out to Arizona and got closer at that time, and have been since.

BC: Do you remember the war years.

BG: I met Julius at a dance, my husband.

BC: What year was that?

BG:We married in February of 44 and I met him a couple years before at a dance.He was called into the army. So we used to corresponded. Then he left.....He was stationed in_____. He was gone two years or so.I married him before he left. He came home for a furlough when he was in the states and we made our date for the wedding.We had a nice wedding in a rabbi's home. After we were married he went back and I went to stay in Texas, near the base.

BC: All by yourself?

BG: Well, he'd come in at night , or on weekends.Then I thought he was going to go overseas, so I didn't go with him. But then he got notice that he wasn't going overseas, so I went out there to stay with him.

BC: Did you have a job there?

BG: I got a job at a store. But then I was able to collect unemployment compensation.

BC: So you lived in Texas for most of the war?

BG: No, no. I went out there when I first got married, for about three months. Then he was going to go overseas again, so I went back. This happened again and I went back there again. When he was going to go overseas, I went back to Chicago to live with my mother and father. He was there a couple of years, he was a first class corporal and a sergeant. He was in charge of ammunition, food, and all that stuff. He had a big job there. When he came back a few years later we moved in with my mother, because at that time we didn't have a place to live and in those days you lived with your parents.

BC: Do you remember food stamps?

BG: Oh yeah, there were stamps for sugar and meat and gas and whatever. I don't remember all that stuff.

BC: Do you remember D -Day and VJ -Day?

BG: I remember the dates, but I don't remember anything special.

BC: You don't remember people out in the streets screaming and yelling?

BG:No. There wasn't any screaming and yelling that I can remember. There might have been in certain places.Then I became pregnant and had Barry.

BC: How old were you when Barry was born?

BG: I was 28. Around that. We lived with my mother for a few years and then Julius's brother got married, and he moved out, (they were living with his mother). so then Julius wanted to move in with his mother, so we did. Not that I wanted to. But it had to work out that way. We lived there until his parents died and I had Leonard there.

BC: How old were you when Leonard was born?

BG: About 32. We lived there until the black people started moving in.

BC: Where was this?

BG:Near Roosevelt Road on the west side. You lived out there....

BC: We lived on Douglas Blvd.

BG: Then we moved to Foster and Sawyer near the college. We lived there for 17 years

BC: When your father died, your mother came to live with you?

BG: My mother lived with Frances and Sam when they lived on Monticello. Then they bought a house in Skokie.

BC: What did your dad die from?

BG:His heart. He had a heart problem, I believe.

BC: Didn't he die of lung cancer?

BG: He smoked so much but I never heard that mentioned.

BG:How old was he when he died? What year was that?

BG: 1966. Or did my mother die in '66? I had it all down pat, but now I can't remember.She died about seven years later.

BC: What did she die from?

BG: She had cancer. She had a breast removed and then later on about seven years later.....

BC:You were always close with your sisters?

BG: Always.We were always close and got along very well.

BC: Talk about the Cousins' Club

BG: We had the Marcus Family Club and we had the Levin Cousins' Club.

I wasn't married yet. Frances got married, Ruth got married, I got married.....
Somewhere in that time.

It went on from there. We had all these parties and meetings. Chanukah parties - Uncle Oscar gave the children silver dollars, real silver; Purim parties. We met in different places. We had picnics, in the summer time we'd go to different places for picnics. We had lunches. We had a nice time. Also, we brought, like we did later on, everybody brought something and we had a real nice gourmet dinner, lunch, whatever.

BC: You worked in a Bakery at one time?

BG: I worked in a bakery, around the corner.

BC: How old were you then?

BG: Oh, I was married and had children. The bakery was Simon Brothers Bakery on Lawrence Avenue. I worked there part-time, when the kids were young, for about four years, or so. I lived down the street from there, about three, four blocks, so I was close to home. After that I didn't work for awhile.

BC: Do you remember when you first got your period?

BG: Oh G-d! (Laughter)

BC: Maybe you don't want to talk about it?

BG: Yeah, I can talk about it. You want to put that in there? (Incredulous)

BC: It's interesting. Girls never really talked about it in those days.

BG: I lived on the south side. I was about thirteen years old.

BC: Did you know about it ahead of time?

BG: No. Mothers didn't tell you anything. Terrible.

BG: It was a Saturday morning I remember the day I got it. Frances and I went to a show, (we used to go Saturdays to the show). Ruth, I think was working at some department store. I went to the show like that. I didn't say nothing - I was nervous, I was scared. I didn't know how to tell my mother - so finally at night, I took off my pants, and showed my mother and I said, "Maaaa look!" (Laughter) So what - she gives you a rag and you fixed yourself up. You know. I was never told how to do it or anything.

BC: Aunt Ruth never said anything about it?

BG: No. Ruth never told about it either, no. I knew about it because the girls would get periods and that. Usually they say that you got a slap on the face, but I didn't get a slap. (Laughter) Frances, I think got it.

BG: Did you tell Frances about it, since she was the baby?

BG: I think I mentioned it to her, I'm not sure. So, it went on like that. Parents didn't talk about it too much. Hush, hush. My G-d! You didn't talk about sex. You didn't talk about it. Everything was hidden. My parents didn't make any like love in front of us - hugging or kissing. Whatever they did was in the bedroom. At least I didn't see it. It was kind of a scary time, until you got used to it. Then when you had to go in and buy sanitary napkins it was embarrassing.....

BC: Did they sell them then?

BG: Oh sure they did. Ruth was older, so she started in with them and then later, we started. Those belts you used to put on to tie them up and all that. So you go into a drugstore and here there is a MAN! that you've got to ask for sanitary pads and you're embarrassed, you know! (Laughter). About thirteen, fourteen years old.

BC: I remember the packages of pads were wrapped in brown paper, so no one would know what you were buying. (Everybody knew anyway)

BG: I don't remember brown paper.

BC: So they were available when you were using the rags?

BG: Sure they were, but you were poor and they cost money, so you used rags. Then you have to soak 'em and wash 'em and use 'em again. (Laughter) Real sanitary! That's what it was - three girls and my mother.

BC: Did you still sleep in one bed?

BG: We did when we were younger, like on Paulina Street.

and I slept in the bigger bed. We got along. You didn't know anything better. That was the life. We walked to school, about eight blocks. No car rides.

BC: Did you finish high school?

BG: I went two years.

BC: What did you do after that?

BG: Selling jobs mostly. It was a poor time. Nobody made too much money.

BC: Was this during the depression?

BG: The depression was when we lived on the south side on Ashland Avenue. Uncle Oscar used to come by quite often. He had worked himself up.

Sol was the oldest brother. My mother was the oldest. Sol was next, then Oscar, and then Irving and Esther.

BC: They both had their own businesses?

BG: Sol was in the shoe business. Oscar had the paint business, and Irving, I don't know when he was younger, but when he got married to Eva, he was working for Don and Company.

Uncle Oscar, he was more generous. He used to come in the winter time and buy us coal, when we lived on the south side during the depression. He'd order in a couple bushels of coal. He was very he bought us our first pair of roller skates, Frances and I. I learned how to skate and I fell down a thousand times, but I survived.

BC: Do you remember when your Marcus grandparents died?

BG: They were living with us. First my grandfather died. They weren't old, but they were "old." My grandmother died when we lived on 16th Street. I knew Julius at that time. She passed away there. She might have been in her sixties.

BC: Did you get a bigger apartment then when they lived with you?

BG: We had three bedrooms at that time.

BC: And one bathroom!

BG: ONE BATHROOM!

BC: How did you manage?

BG: Knock on the door and wait. (Laughter) HURRY UP, I GOT TO GO!

BC: Things were a lot different then.

BG: Sure. We managed. We didn't know any better.

BC: No air conditioning -

BG: No. Oh my G-d, no. We didn't have air conditioning until we lived on Sawyer. But not right away, quite a few years later. We lived there 17 years. Julius finally got us a couple of air conditioners.

BC: Do you remember when you got a telephone?

BG: When we were young we used to go to a neighbor or something. We had a telephone you put nickels in and a guy would come up and collect the nickels every month or so.

We lived on the south side behind the shoe repair store and one Sunday we went to the west side to visit the grandparents, we used to go there almost every weekend and somebody broke into our place while we were gone and stole some of my father's supplies, leather goods, and whatever, and the telephone, they pulled out of the wall, and your father's leather coat.

BC: He had a leather coat?

BG: He had a leather coat.

BC: Did your father make the coat?

BG: No, no. I guess your father must have bought it. He was working at that time. At the time we had a big vase, a flower vase. We used to throw pennies in it. The robbers didn't see that. I had a couple of nice presents that I got for my birthday, and they stole that. I was very aggravated about it.

BC: How old were you?

BG: I was probably in my early teens.

BC: I remember seeing some very intriguing pictures of your pajama parties. Talk about that.

BG: Pajama parties? They were baby doll parties!

BG: Yeah. We all got dresses made short and put our hair back, fixed ourselves up with a bow. We had baby bottles, and drank from that. We took pictures of us. We had a photographer come in and he took pictures. We had a nice time. We enjoyed it, there was quite a few of us.

BC: I saw the pictures.

BG: Did you see them? I was going to see if I could find them now, but it takes time.

BC: They were great pictures, very cute! How old were you then? You were in your teens.

BG: We were older, we were in our teens, or young twenties.

BC: Did you have a sleepover?

BG: No, no.

BC: Was it for a birthday?

BG: No. We just decided to make a party, and get together. We had fun. We had suckers, and all these baby things, and sucking on the bottles. We all pretended we had stomach aches, and we'd all be rubbing our stomachs, for the pictures. Now when we look at the pictures we enjoy it.

BC: Anything else you'd like to say? We are almost to the end of the tape.

BG: I went through Paulina Street, the west side, the south side, school,..... work, babies, marriage. I think we went through most of it.

Addendum:

She started talking about my father again.

BC: My father was making a scooter?

BG: It was in Gary. We lived in Gary, Indiana. I forgot about that. Is it on?

I remember when he was a young boy, he made himself a scooter from the wooden boxes and the roller skates. I still remember that in my mind.

BC: Did you ever go to any of the live stage shows?

BG: I was kissed by one of the Ritz Brothers! I went with my boyfriend. We went downtown to the Chicago Theatre and the Ritz Brothers were there. I was laughing so loud, he came down and kissed me. I was embarrassed! I said, " GO WAY! GO WAY! (Much laughter).

I saw Danny Thomas at the 5100 Club. I went to the black clubs. Julius used to like to go over there. He worked in a black neighborhood. What was the name of the club? Club Delia, I think it was. We used to go to quite a few movies, Julius and I.

BC: You had to get all dressed up in those days.

BG: Yeah, You couldn't go out - you had to have gloves, and high heel shoes, hats, stockings, girdles and garters and all that stuff. Not like now, they go out in jeans, and they're out on the town. It's much easier. WHAT AM I GOING TO WEAR? WHAT AM I GOING TO WEAR?

BC: The women looked very glamorous then. When I look at the old pictures - they were always all-dolled up.

Morrie has come in.

BC: What do you think Morrie?

BG: We are now interviewing my dear friend, Morrie Shapiro, and I am a lot older now.

MS: A lot of water has gone under the bridge. People in my age group have experienced many things in life. But I'm still glad I'm here.

BG: And he was married for 61 years to the same woman.

Memories of Bea Levin Goldberg

were recorded by Beverly Levin Copeland (niece), in the living room of Aunt Bea's apartment at Park Plaza, a retirement complex in Chicago, IL. We were alone initially, but were later joined by Morris Shapiro, Aunt Bea's dear friend and companion.