

Final 9/14/21

Oral history interview with Rita Guyes

Date of Birth : 03/17/1931

Interview Date: 08/15/2021

Place of interview: Rita's Den

Interviewer: Janet Guyes Webb (daughter)

Rita Goldstein Guyes is a native to Greensboro, North Carolina where she was born at Sternberger Hospital located on Summit Avenue. The hospital has since been torn down and replaced with a shopping center. Most of her mother's side of the family came from Ireland and her father's side, from Russia. Her grandfather, Jake Goldstein, was a founding member of Temple Emanuel. He was in the furniture business and, with another Temple congregant, owned a lot of property in Greensboro and High Point. They also owned the property where Bennett College is located. When her grandfather died, *in respect*, all of the Greensboro courts and businesses closed.

Rita was raised by Helen and Nat Markowitz. She and her brother, Jerry Goldstein of Atlanta, along with their cousin, Jane Markowitz Rosenbloom of Raleigh, daughter of Helen and Nat,

grew up in the Markowitz home on Meadowbrook Terrace. Nat had the house built and imported all the stone for the house from the North Carolina mountains. The home now belongs to the Lane family of Lane's Laundry.

Rita, Jerry and Jane had a full life attending summer camps, ice skating, playing tennis and riding horses. They enjoyed a circle of childhood Jewish friends, like Betty and Buddy Chandgie, the Cones and Tannenbaums, all sharing a meaningful, lifelong connection to Temple Emanuel Greensboro

Flossy took care of them growing up and cooked most of the family meals including the best chocolate pie! Rita vividly remembers Nat and Helen hosting dinners at their home to serve the servicemen in town and feed Jewish traveling salesmen. She also remembers beggars ringing the doorbell asking for food. These were the years of the Great Depression.

Other childhood memories also include going to Atlantic City with relatives and spending time in Baltimore with The Needle

family, (Helen's sister, Dutchie Needle). Rita remembers Nat Markowitz making reservations under the name of P.T. Wilson because Jews were prohibited in some northern hotels, restaurants and clubs.

Rita met her husband, Leonard Guyes in Sunday school at Temple Emanuel. They both attended Greensboro Senior High (now Grimsley High School). After high school, Rita attended Bryn Mawr in Philadelphia, where she majored in Art History. She was not involved in Jewish life in college as there was no Hillel at Bryn Mawr. Leonard remained in North Carolina and attended the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill where he played basketball.

After settling in Greensboro, she and Leonard joined Starmount Country Club where there was a large Jewish presence.

She does not recall a lot of anti-Semitism in Greensboro, but does remember it was difficult for a Jewish family to live in Irving Park unless someone recommended you. At one point, Leonard wanted to obtain a mortgage, and the bank refused to

allow him to use his Jewish attorney. The bank would only allow a person to use the non-Jewish attorneys they employed.

Leonard refused to get a mortgage with that bank until they let him use his attorney of choice. They purchased their first house at 1615 Wilton Drive for \$22,000 in 1964. Today the next door neighbor at that residence is Mayor of Greensboro, Nancy Vaughn. **insert photo of Rita and Leonard.**

Rita and Leonard raised two children: Alan Guyes of Roanoke, owner of Audiotronics; and Janet Guyes Webb, a nurse, currently living in Greensboro; they have three grandsons: Eric, a scientist who lives in Israel; Adam, an accountant and manager with Grant Thornton in Chicago; and Michael of Wilmington, owner of Dubspeed Auto Sales, LLC.

Leonard was an owner of Prago-Guyes, a ladies retail store, in downtown Greensboro, and he was the President of the Merchants Association during the Woolworth sit-ins. He was very instrumental in convincing store owners downtown to hire African-Americans. He was the first businessman to permit

African- Americans to try on clothes and shoes in his store. One of his former employees still stops by every year at Christmas to bring Rita a box of grapefruit.

Rita and Leonard went on many buying trips to New York. Rita had worked prior to marriage as a front desk manager at J.P. Stevens. With another Temple congregant, Rita rented property to African-Americans. After getting married she was a homemaker. Bessie Reid was hired to help with cooking and household chores and became a beloved member of the Guyes family. Bessie began working when Alan was an infant and continued working in a limited capacity until she died at age 75. Rita tells the story: once, when Bessie was in the hospital, she told the nurses that Bessie was her sister so they would permit her to visit Bessie in the ICU.

Rita was very active in the Women's Jewish Investment Club. She also volunteered for the Greensboro Garden Council and served as President in 1979. She is very proud of the generous donation made by the Garden Council to help the Rotary Club

build the Merry-Go-Round at the Natural Science Center here in Greensboro. For many years, Rita was the buyer and manager of the Weatherspoon Art Museum Gift Store at UNCG. She also delivered Meals on Wheels, served on the Mobile Book Mobile and in Youth Care. Other memberships included the Jewish Federation, Temple Emanuel Sisterhood, Council of Jewish Women and Hadassah.

At 90, Rita is still active in the Jewish and secular community. She is filling the position of President of the Anniversary Garden Club for 2021-2022. She also stays busy making sixteen monthly arrangements to go on the dining tables at a local nursing home, Alpha of the Concord.

Rita enjoys spending time with her family, reading and working in her garden on cool days.

Rita brought art, culture to Greensboro with all her volunteer work.

Thank you, Rita, for all you've done.

