

[M.S. is Marshall Solomon speaking]

*This is interviewer Natalie Mapou, I'm interviewing today, Dorothy Brooks Solomon. The date is June 23, 2005, and we are at the location of Temple Emanuel. I'm going to begin now. Dorothy, please tell us where and when you were born and about your ancestors and family history.*

I was born in Warsaw, NC, March 29, 1922. My parents were Mary and Abe Brooks. And they were just absolutely impeccable in every way, manner, or form. There weren't nicer people or more wonderful or loving parents. I had the distinct pleasure of having an older sister, Francis Brooks Stein, who was indescribably remarkable in every way that you could think of. Well-known throughout the state. Unfortunately she died at 51 years old. I had a wonderful younger brother who was indescribable as well. Tragically, he lost his life coming home from the University of North Carolina when he made Phi Beta Kappa in his junior year, and he was killed on his way home. So, there were tragic parts of my life and I never forget them not for one day.

*What brought you to Greensboro? Did you come with your parents?*

No, I came with my husband, who had just finished dental school at the medical college of Virginia, and we were looking for a nice place to spend our lives. We heard glowing reports about Greensboro and its Jewish community, in particular at that time, which was 1949. And we just decided to come to Greensboro, and it was indeed one of the smartest decisions of our lives with respect to being in a fantastic community. It has always been ideal in every way. Which is my opinion. I think it's also my husband's opinion.

*Do you know what year that was, when you came to Greensboro?*

1949. He started a dental practice on his own, and was called back into the service. He had been in the service in WWII, in Burma, before that, and he was called back after 2 years of practicing dentistry. And he had to go back. Then we resumed our life here. 1951, we had our daughter, Paula Solomon. And she has been the delight of our lives.

*Does she live here?*

She lives in Columbia, SC with her husband, who, luckily for us, is also a very fine person. They visit us regularly. Actually, they're coming tomorrow.

*Let me ask you about your first home in Greensboro. What was it like, did you have renters or boarders?*

We lived in an apartment which is currently and was in Lindley Park Apartments. And after army and school, we thought we were in the Waldorf Astoria. We thought we were really...it was lovely. It was just great, and we lived there for 2 and a half years. Then we moved into a home where we lived for 15 years. Then we built our present home where we've been for over 40 years.

*Tell us about your childhood back in Warsaw, about your schooling, growing up, everything.*

Well, we had 8 month school 11 years, and we had teachers that came in from other cities, and we were lucky if they happened to be good teachers. And some of them were excellent. But somehow the three of us were able to go to excellent colleges, which we did.

*Which college did you attend?*

I started at the College of William and Mary in Williamsburg, VA, and then I decided that I wanted to come to UNC Chapel Hill, which did not admit girls at that time until their junior year unless they were pharmacy students. So, my junior year, I transferred to UNC. Both choices were absolutely superb for me. And I enjoyed them and still hear from some of the girls.

*When you graduated, what year, do you remember?*

'43. And I also went to a secretarial school for a year in Richmond. And that was my formal education. All of which was wonderful and never to be forgotten. Just meant a lot until this day.

*What type of work did you pursue after graduating?*

I taught school for one year. A rural school, was that when you were in Burma?

MS – Mm-hmm.

And that was quite an unusual experience, being a Jewish teacher in an area that was completely rural. Even more rural than Warsaw which was a village, Magnolia, NC. The school now is gone, and is, has been gone for many years. But it was an excellent experience. It really was. I had wonderful students many of which hadn't done a day's work before they reached the classroom. And when he came back, we went to dental school. He went to dental school, and I was there. And I worked as a secretary, and could not get a job teaching which was what I really wanted to do. And it was not available in Richmond, despite the fact that I felt I really had the credentials. But anyway, I worked for the YWCA in Richmond, which was a wonderful experience. I stayed there because I enjoyed the people. They were just great to me, I made friends, and their philosophy was as it should be which was not true of other organizations, including the YMCA. So, it made them stand out as a group, and it was the YWCA of Richmond.

*Now can you elaborate? What do you mean it was not as it should be?*

They welcomed, now I'm speaking of life in the '40s in the south, in Richmond, VA, which tells you something. They were united with the African-American YWCA, all friends, all worked together, which was not the policy that reigned during that time. Because they were – this is as it should be, but it wasn't that way in most organizations, but they were, they were very forward thinking in the right ways. As they welcomed me as a Jewish person, and it just was a great experience. Not particularly the work. It was rather humdrum secretarial work, but it was worth it, staying there.

*Now you mentioned that it was after becoming a teacher at that time...*

No, it was not easy for me to get a job in Richmond at that time.

*And that was because of what reason?*

I was brought up not to blame religion for anything that I was unable to achieve. That's how wise my parents were, and I didn't want to think that I didn't get a job because of my religion, but somehow, I felt that had been a factor. Because I was prepared, and I loved teaching. And I may be wrong, but

we'll never know at this point. But that's the only time that ever occurred to me. And I may be wrong. But that doesn't matter now. It didn't matter then too much, but I thought it did.

*You mentioned before, your husband, so tell me a little bit when you got married, and you were in Greensboro -*

No, we were in Richmond, and then in the service. We didn't move to Greensboro, we got married in '43, and we got here in '49, so -

M.S. No, we were married in '44.

'44, we graduated college in '43. '44 is right. June 11, '44.

M.S. I didn't make that mistake.

*Tell us a little bit about your life, your family life in Greensboro, your community life, what it was like to be part of a Jewish community.*

Most of our activities began at Temple Emanuel. Most of what we did revolved around Temple Emanuel and the Jewish community, which was a very close-knit community. Everyone either knew each other or knew about each other. It was just a great Jewish community, which attracted many other Jewish people. Many of whom were traveling salesmen at the time, and they had their choice of towns where they could live, and many of them chose Greensboro because of the quality of life that they could have here.

*Did you attend services on the Sabbath and holidays?*

Yes, we did. We missed that particular thing this time, but it's our fault. We did attend services. My husband was president of the congregation, and I was president of the sisterhood. Both of which were very active groups.

*Can you tell me approximately when that was?*

M.S. I was president in '62 wasn't I?

I don't remember.

*OK, approximate.*

Mine may have been '59. I think. But it was a very active group. And all of the women, we had many new Jewish couples coming in almost every year. Many of them had not belonged to a congregation before, when they lived up north, many in NY or wherever they lived. They felt that it was important to join when they moved here. And they became very active in the Temple or the synagogue, whichever they joined, and we had a very vibrant community. We met some of the nicest people, and unfortunately some are gone. It was just a superb place to live.

*This was in the 1950s and '60s, you mean.*

Absolutely. It was indescribable. Life was great here, our daughter seemed to like the fact that we

were part of a Jewish community.

*She was involved too?*

She went to Sunday school and did whatever the young people do, did, and presently lives in Columbia, SC. They belong to a synagogue there, she and her husband. You might be interested in one thing, in these small communities, like Warsaw, Wallace, Bergoff, Jacksonville, NC, all these were very small communities, and they all had at least one Jewish family, sometimes two. And occasionally three. The only way we ever knew the Jewish people at that time was to meet at each other's homes. And that's how we got to meet most of the Jewish people in the eastern part of the state. And many of us would congregate at the beaches, usually Wrightsville or Carolina Beach, and we would meet at a certain spot, the people, the new Jewish people who came to the beaches would know that the Jewish people who came to the beach would be at a certain spot at 3 o'clock in the afternoon or whichever. And we met most all the Jewish people in eastern North Carolina in that way. I thought that was fairly interesting because in our communities we had lovely friends, lovely friends, but they weren't Jewish, and our parents wanted us to meet Jewish people as well. That was how we did that, which, the situation no longer exists in this manner. People don't stop to live in the rural areas any more, because the world is entirely different.

*So, even people in the north heard about Greensboro and relocated even in the '50s and '60s?*

That's as I said before, many of whom were traveling salesmen, who knew this would be a nice place to live. I can't think of possibly one person, who moved here from NY, who after being here briefly returned to live in NY. They loved it. Some of them came under duress. They didn't want to leave NY, because that's what they knew. They didn't think any other place would be up to their standard of living. But when they got here and met the people, and became involved in the activities, they loved it. I can't think of one person who resisted, and that covers a lot of years. So that says a lot for Greensboro and its Jewish communities. Of course, we don't know that many of them now, they're young, that's how it has to be. You know, but I'm sure that they're of the same calibre that they used to be.

*Did you experience any difficulty as a Jewish person in your life in NC?*

We were very fortunate in that we really didn't experience any. My parents were beloved by everybody. My father was about as close to being a saint as anybody that I ever met, and the people recognized this. They didn't know any Jewish people, and this is, some of them thought that despite the fact that we were Jewish, we were the nicest people that they knew. They only knew about Jewish people what they had heard in their backgrounds. They accepted us, and we lived a very nice life with them, some of whom I'm still in communication with at this ancient age. One of my girlfriends actually came to visit me a couple of years ago which was a lot of fun. That was our experience. I understand some people did not really have the same relationship in other communities. Which I don't really know anything about personally. All of us, the three of us, did well in high school...My sister was the best all around, and so many times they had to discontinue that particular thing because she kept winning it. We did fine, we did well scholastically, and were able to get into good colleges. She got into Duke, and did fantastic there. Duke had a quota for Jewish people at that time. One half of one percent. And she overcame all of those obstacles and wound up being one of the leaders at the university.

*So you said you had non-Jewish friends.*

Yes.

*And you did different activities, was dating accepted?*

We usually had parties all together. And we could go out on dates. But as I said earlier, my parents said that when it came to a serious relationship, it must be with a Jewish person. But we had parties and dances. There were things that would be considered extremely simple by today's standards. We did a lot of dancing and playing the piano, which is what I always did.

*Talking about your younger years, did you have a Jewish education?*

No, I did not unfortunately, I did not have a Jewish education.

*What about your parents, can you tell me a little bit about, were you parents traditional in the Jewish community, were they observant,*

We observed all the High Holidays. We went to Wilmington where my father felt comfortable. My mother took us. We did not feel comfortable, we resented having to sit upstairs and not know what was happening. And we were missing school for something we were not prepared to have any knowledge about. So mother decided to take us to the Temple in Wilmington, and Daddy thought that was an excellent idea, so we went to the Temple. And at least we could understand.

*So your first experience sounds more like a Conservative -*

The Reform temple in Wilmington was a very Reform temple. They had Reform and Orthodox in Wilmington.

*Oh, Orthodox, that's where the separation occurred. That's why you were uncomfortable.*

That's right. So we observed Passover. We didn't observe other holidays, but we were, we knew that we were Jewish and we upheld that and knew that it was very important somehow. Even without the education, which we, when we came to – my sister lived in Fayetteville, and she was very much a part of that community, Jewish and non-Jewish. And we took part in everything that was going on Jewish-wise.

*Did you belong to any civic organizations?*

We had great interest in political organizations, in the sense that we knew exactly where we stood. My sister took a very active part, she was head of the Democratic Women in North Carolina when she was living. Under Terry Sanford, and she was very involved.

*And where was that?*

Fayetteville, NC. He was governor of the state. All of us have been very, I wouldn't say liberal in our politics, because I don't like the word liberal and conservative, but I think fair in our thinking and interests.

*Was there a country club, a Jewish country club here in Greensboro?*

There was not a Jewish country club in Greensboro. Some of the Jewish people joined Starmount, and some joined Greensboro Country Club. More belong now than used to. We used to belong to Starmount, and then we were not using the facilities at all.

*Were Jews commonly members of the country club, was there a distinction between Jews and non-Jews? Was it difficult becoming a member?*

I don't think it was difficult becoming a member of Starmount. I think it was difficult becoming a member of Greensboro, more difficult. But not, but I don't think it was difficult to become a member of Starmount.

*Do you remember Jews being elected to different civic organizations -*

In Greensboro that has been prevalent, hasn't it? Weren't there one or two Jewish mayors?

M.S. Ben Cone.

Jewish people have been very active in the political life of Greensboro.

*Can you tell me about who they were?*

The Cone family. C-O-N-E, Ben Cone, his family. Leah Louise Tannenbaum, who was very much involved in everything, political and educational.

*Was he mayor of Greensboro, you think? When was that?*

Yes, that was quite a long time ago, and I am unable to produce a date.

M.S. I think we ought to mention the fact that the country club was started by the Sternberger family and was related to the Tannenbaums.

That's right. Which may have been a reason why -

M.S. He owned all the land in the Starmount area. Starmount is Sternberger.

Which has something to do with the way Jews have been accepted in Greensboro. The Cones and the Sternbergers have very much to do with the quality of life that Jews experienced and experience present day. And I think people should realize that, because that is a fact. They set the tone, the climate, and I think all of us should be grateful.

*Going back a little bit again, during WWII, did you or family members serve in the military?*

My husband served in the military. He was in Burma, which is presently Myanmar.

*When was that?*

He was on the ship 54 days getting there and he was there at least a year.

*How did the military life, the war impact the community of Greensboro, do you remember? Did [end of side 1, beginning side 2] Can you tell us a little bit about what life was like during the war, here in Greensboro?*

We were not here during the war. We came in '49, but there was a military camp here, and I don't know much about it, but it was here. I don't know how many years.

*When Mr. Solomon was away, during the war, you were in Richmond?*

When he was in India was when I went back to Warsaw to teach school. It was during that year. And after that we went to Richmond to dental school.

*Let me ask you a little bit about religious life in your home. Did your family keep a kosher home?*

I didn't grow up in a kosher home, and we do not keep a kosher home. Our daughter does, because her husband feels it's very important. But we, that is not the manner in which she was brought up.

*Do you participate in any of the tradition today, attend Passover seders...*

Yes.

*Attend Temple activities these days?*

Not like we did, but it's our fault, because they're available. They're here, they have a very active group, but at our age sometimes we don't do the things we used to do.

*Have you seen any strife in the, in Greensboro between different ethnic groups over the years?*

I know that it has existed, it has not affected us personally. So we have been fortunate, because of the statements that I made about people who have made Greensboro what it is, I think that has something to do with the fact that we have not seen more anti-semitism than we did. I'm sure that plays a big part.

*Did you attend any group get togethers, such as Wild Acres?*

We have unfortunately never been there, but I understand that it's wonderful. Everybody who has been has benefited from it, but we somehow missed that.

*Do you consider yourself a southerner?*

Well, I really have to since I was born here. If I said anything else, it would be slightly foolish.

*Do you think Jews in the South are different from Jews in the North? Or different from other southerners?*

I really don't consider myself different. Maybe other southerners consider me different, but I don't consider myself to be different.

*Thank you Mrs. Solomon.*