

*Today is July 13, 2005. This is interviewer Natalie Mapou, and I am interviewing today at Temple Emanuel, Dr. Marshall Solomon. Dr. Solomon, where and when were you born?*

I was born in New Brunswick, NJ, on November 22, 1921.

*When did your ancestors come to America, from where?*

From what I know, my grandfather was born in this country, and my father was born in this country. He was born in 1892, and my mother was born in New York in...I'm not sure of the year. I think it was 1898.

*When and why did your family first come to this community?*

Why did we come to this community? Well, after graduating from dental school, we had to find a location.

*This would be your wife now? This would be your wife coming to this community? When did you first come to Greensboro?*

We first came to Greensboro in 1949, and, I thought you were asking me why we came to Greensboro.

*Well, yes, that too.*

Because we thought that the atmosphere, the Jewish people, was the best in North Carolina, in Greensboro. We looked at other cities, and we looked at Goldsboro and Wilmington, but we settled on Greensboro.

*Now, what do you mean by atmosphere? Can you elaborate a little bit more?*

The Jewish community here was very vibrant. And it seemed like the Jewish people were well accepted in this community. They were all very friendly. They took us in when we first came to the city.

*Where was your first home here?*

Well, when we first came to Greensboro, we settled in an apartment on Ashland Dr. These were new apartments. While we were in school, we didn't have anything as nice as this. Actually, we lived in a five room bungalow with another student and his wife. And the landlady slept in the living room. And we each had a bedroom about the size of my car, so it was a big change when we got our own apartment on Ashland Dr.

*Where was that previous home with the other student? Where was that?*

Oh, that was when we were in school.

*Was it just you and your wife in your household? Did you have any boarders or other people?*

No.

*Do you have any siblings?*

I do not.

*How did you meet your wife?*

Oh, that's a long story.

*Good.*

We were both at the university, and I remember we were taking a course in psychology, and we, I saw her coming into class. And she was very attractive, and I thought that was someone that I wanted to meet. And we saw each other on a regular basis when we were in school.

*And how much, how long after that did you -*

And then, of course, after graduation at the university, I went to medical college, and she came up to Richmond and worked for awhile. And after several years, we decided that we would like to get married.

*Did you remain living there? In Richmond?*

I remained in Richmond for awhile, and then went into the service. Actually I was in the service when we were married. So, then when I got out of service, I completed my dental education.

*Did Mrs. Solomon remain in Richmond while you were in the service?*

No. No, she went home, and I think she mentioned to you, that she taught in a small town, Magnolia, while I was in the service.

*Can you tell us about your children or your child.*

Well, we had a wonderful daughter -

*Tell us her name again, please.*

Paula. And, I just can't brag enough about her, because she's very understanding, and we always had a very good relationship. There was never any problem between father and daughter.

*Where does she live?*

She lives in Columbia, SC.

*Did she grow up in Greensboro?*

She grew up in Greensboro and went to high school in Greensboro. And then went to GA, to the University of GA for 2 years, and then to the University of North Carolina, and graduated from UNC after that.

*Going back to you, Mr. Solomon, what has been your occupation?*

Well, I practiced dentistry for about 35 years.

*In Greensboro?*

In Greensboro.

*And your spouse? What did she do?*

Dot was pretty much of a housewife, a caretaker, and my best friend.

*Let's talk a little bit about community life. Can you tell us a little bit about what life was like in a Jewish community, when you -*

When we first moved here, I think everyone in the Jewish community knew each other and were very friendly. Of course, there were two congregations, but we were friendly with members of both congregations and still are. Today, we don't know many of the younger people. We hardly know anyone compared to the way it was when we first came here.

*Were there any Jewish neighborhoods? Would you classify any that way?*

Jewish neighborhood? I'm not exactly sure what you mean by a Jewish neighborhood. But for a town in the south, I think we had a nice Jewish community. I wouldn't say, they certainly didn't all live in the same neighborhood, but we enjoyed our life here. And the Jewish community was very important to us.

*So the Jews were dispersed throughout Greensboro. There was no kind of...*

No, there wasn't a ghetto.

*Ok. Did you have non-Jewish friends.*

Oh, sure. But not to the same extent as Jewish friends. But I had other friends who practiced dentistry, and that we were, that we liked very much. Today that isn't so much the case. I can't say that we have too many non-Jewish friends today.

*Did -*

We have non-Jewish acquaintances, but not that we're really friendly with, that we go out to dinner with and socialize with.

*And were you a member of*

We've always been a member of Temple Emanuel, when Rabbi Rypins was the rabbi, who was a very, very fine man. And then Asher, who was outstanding. And when he left here, he went to Temple Emanuel in San Francisco, and was the chief rabbi there for many years.

*Did you become a member of the Temple right after coming here in 1949?*

Yes, yes. In 1949 we became members. I guess we're one of the oldest members.

*From the beginning, did you participate in the activities revolving around the Temple?*

Oh, yeah...

*What kind of things?*

I attended all the functions that the Temple had, and I became interested in the Brotherhood, and finally, I was elected president of the Temple.

*When was that?*

That was 1968. I'm not positive. I think it was around '68.

*And what kind of activities did you kind of organize for the Brotherhood? How big was the Brotherhood?*

Oh, I don't know how big the Brotherhood was. I guess there were maybe 50 members in the Brotherhood, and it was a closeknit group of people.

*Did you do community activities? Was it a Brotherhood that went into the community?*

I can't say that we had any real, from my memory, which isn't as good as it used to be, I can't say that we did any major community functions. I think today they are doing more.

*Did your daughter attend Hebrew school through the Temple?*

Yeah.

*Can you tell a little bit about that?*

She was confirmed, at that time they didn't have any bat mitzvahs. But she was confirmed, as a matter of fact, her picture's up on the wall.

*Alright, was that a party like activity like we would have now?*

I can't say that it was a party-type, it was a nice... I think at that time, when she was confirmed, Rabbi Asher was the rabbi, and he was a really outstanding person. You know that he must have been if he was asked to come to San Francisco.

*Was there a Jewish country club or other Jewish -*

I wouldn't call it a Jewish country club. Most of the people were members of Starmount Country Club, which at that time was owned by Eddie Benjamin. Starmount means Sternberger. Or Sternberger means Starmount. And this was the Sternberger family, which was associated with the Cone family.

But, there were some members of the Greensboro country club. At that time many people who wanted

to join the Greensboro country club were turned down. I think, perhaps, it might be different now.

*Why do you think they were turned down?*

I think they were turned down because they were Jewish.

*But nothing was evident, it was just, nothing was expressed openly about why one was being turned down?*

Well, I mean, that's what one had to think was the reason that they would be turned down, because many of the people who were turned down were outstanding citizens. So that's what you would consider.

*Now, that's not true today.*

Not to the same extent. I really don't know. I don't know if I applied for membership at Greensboro country club if I would be accepted or not. I sort of think that I might be. Because I know enough people over there who are members who would vouch for me.

*There might be some anti-semitism involved in...*

Well, there's always anti-semitism involved some in every place, unfortunately, but it's true. You probably even see it at Starmount, I don't know. I'm no longer a member of Starmount.

*Were there any particular Jewish organizations that you recall? Any civic organizations?*

Not really. The main thing was members of Temple Emanuel, the Brotherhood. There was a B'nai Brith organization at one time, but that fell by the way.

*Any idea why?*

Well, you can't be in everything. So you have to give your main support to the organization that you feel does the best work.

*Do you recall, were Jews elected to public office, back in the '50s or from when you can remember being here? Or service leaders?*

I don't know too many Jewish people who were elected to public office, except Ben Cone, who was mayor for several years. But I don't remember right off, any Jewish people being on the City Council.

*Would you think that was due to feelings of anti-semitism?*

No, I wouldn't say that. You know before you can be on the City Council, you have to run. I don't remember too many people who did run. I can only think of 2 people who have run for City Council. And both of them were defeated. And I'm not sure that that had anything to do with anti-semitism.

*You mentioned that you served in the military.*

I sure did. Several times.

*Can you elaborate on that, please?*

Well, in 1944, I was in the army. And went through basic training in Abilene, TX and Missouri. And then I was invited to go overseas. And I was on a troop ship from Los Angeles to India for 52 days.

*When was that?*

That was 1944. We made a little stop in Perth and Melbourne, Australia along the way. From Calcutta, India, I took a little trip further east and went into Burma. I spent a little time in Burma. I ended up running a dispensary in Burma. And then I came back to Calcutta. We were getting one ship a month to take us home, and another friend was also in Minchenau at the same time, and then we were sent to Calcutta waiting for a ship.

*So your service revolved around dental?*

No, no, I was not a dentist at that time. I was just a private, and finally I became a sergeant. But this friend of mine, who's name was A.B. White, and I used to meet each day in Calcutta and wait for the ship. Finally I was sent down to the port to pick up the ship, and as we got down there, the ship was pulling out. A.B. White was standing up on the deck grinning and waving his cap at me, and the ship didn't come back to get us. Finally we were called to DumDum Airport, which was the airport outside of Calcutta, and told we could fly home. So we flew home. And I was home and discharged before A.B. Every got back to the states. We remained friends and wound up together in dental school. Unfortunately, he passed away about a year or so ago. In fact, all my friends are leaving me. I was in practice for about, until 1953, and then Uncle Sam wanted me again. And I was recalled, and ended up, this time I was a dentist, and practiced dentistry in London, England. This was during the Korean War. I was fortunate in going to London. Dot was supposed to come over, but there was a law that had been passed that said if you had served previously, you could apply for discharge. So, although she had sent all of our household things over, we decided that she shouldn't come because then I might have to stay a little bit longer. So I was there during the coronation in 1953. I was there during the season in London, and it was very nice. But I was glad to get home, and I finally got back in September of '53 and restarted my practice.

*So, Dot remained in Greensboro, while you -*

No, she went, while I was in England, she went home and stayed with her folks in Warsaw and taught school.

*Why didn't she stay in Greensboro?*

It was a matter of being with family. And Paula was just a couple of years old.

*I see. Dr. Solomon, what was the Jewish background of your family? Can you share that?*

They've always been reformed. As a matter of fact, my grandfather was one of the founders of the Reform temple in New Brunswick. So I was born up in an ultra-ultra Reform congregation. Although my mother's family, I think, were quite religious. But, when my mother and father were married, they both were more interested in the, in the temple than they would be in the Conservative congregation.

*So they were also Reform?*

Reform.

*Can you tell us a little bit about your Jewish education? Did you have a-*

Oh, I was bar mitzvahed when I was 13, and I used to go to Hebrew school and Sunday school. Until I was bar mitzvahed and that was about the end of it.

*Did your parents attend Temple in New Brunswick?*

Oh yeah. Temple Ashiemah [not sure about name]. Mainly, they weren't regular attenders. Maybe on the High Holy Days.

*Did your parents or grandparents speak Yiddish?*

No. My mother and father used to speak German to each other when they didn't want me to know what was going on, but they didn't do a very good job speaking it. But they did not speak Yiddish.

*Did they have any books in the house relating to Jewish life or Jewish culture?*

Oh, yeah. They did, sure.

*Would that be a novels or prayerbooks, or...*

Well, there were novels and prayerbooks and also some history.

*The prayerbooks, were they in Hebrew or English?*

Well, partly Hebrew and partly English.

*So they were able to read the prayerbooks in Hebrew?*

No, neither one of them could read Hebrew.

*Can you read Hebrew?*

I can follow along. But I couldn't read it. Now, my grandchildren can, but I don't think Paula can. But her husband can. I think he was brought up ultra-Orthodox.

*Let's talk more about Paula. So, Paula went to Hebrew school in Greensboro?*

Oh, yeah. And she was confirmed.

*And she learned Hebrew?*

She learned Hebrew. But her husband is, as I said, came from a real Orthodox background.

*Where does he come from?*

Charleston, SC. A lot of people came into this country and landed in NY as you know, but a lot of people landed in the east coast in Savannah and in Charleston. And his family landed in Charleston and have remained there.

*And your daughter has raised her daughters Orthodox?*

No, no. Conservative. Although, Paula keeps kosher, and the girls, more or less, are careful what they eat.

*Have they gone to Hebrew school?*

Oh, yes. They were both bat mitzvahed in Columbia, SC.

*Did your family, your parents, grandparents, keep a kosher home?*

No. Paula keeps a kosher home. And as of now, I can see that the girls are leaning toward that too.

*What about some other rituals. Did and Mrs. Solomon attend Sabbath services, light candles, do any of those traditional things?*

The only time we light candles is when Paula and her husband come. But we say a little prayer every night before we eat. We've continued to do that.

*Can you compare what services were like when you and Mrs. Solomon first came to Temple Emanuel to what it's like now?*

It's entirely different. It was a very ultra-Reform congregation. Almost everything was in English. I'm sorry, I mean English. Most of the service was in English. But today, I would say less than half of the service is in English. So it's become almost Conservative, I would say. It's very, very different from the way it was when we first came to Greensboro.

*Now, was this Rabbi Asher who was the rabbi when you first came here?*

No, it was Rabbi Rypins.

*So he did services in English, then?*

Almost all in English. Oh, there was some Hebrew, Shema Yisroel, I don't know how else you would say it.

*The congregation was not able to -*

This is what the Reform congregants wanted, it's what they expected. It's similar to what I was used to. Which that too, was very, very ultra-reformed.

*Did the Temple have a choir or a chorus?*

Yeah. And we had an organ. This was something they decided, not to have an organ, just to have a



piano. Mable Beech was the organist. And she'd been the organist for many years?

*So, was the singing done in transliteration? The singing that was done by the chorus?*

Well, actually, the chorus was made up of non-Jewish people, and still is to a large extent. So it had to be in transliteration, because they couldn't read in Hebrew.

*So, the prayerbooks then, that you [end of side one, beginning of side 2] Were the prayerbooks in Hebrew?*

Oh sure, half in Hebrew and then the translation was on the opposite page.

*Is there anything else you want to add about the service or the Temple?*

I can't think of anything, because the congregants today are much younger, and consequently we don't know many of them. It used to be that you knew everyone, when you were in the Temple. Actually, the Temple has grown under Rabbi Guttman, and we're a thriving Temple today.

*Do you recall about how many members were members of the Temple when you first came in 1949?*

I probably would be mistaken if I gave a number, but my guess would be 350 or possibly 400. That's a guess.

*Do you recall any names of the Jewish leaders in Greensboro?*

Well, the Cone family has always been highly thought of in Greensboro, and Leah Tannenbaum, one of our good friends was superb. Everyone in the city knew Leah, and all the good that she did. And now, her daughter, Jean, is following in her footsteps. Stanley Frank was very philanthropic and was certainly one of the leaders, not only of the Temple, but of the community. And there are many more, I could go down the list, but these are the ones that come to my mind.

*Going back to when you first came to Greensboro, do you recall the attitude toward the state of Israel?*

At that time, there wasn't much talk about Israel. It really wasn't until after Israel became a state in 1948, that people began to take more of an interest in Israel. And then during the wars, people became very interested. This community, for its size, showed a great deal of interest in the survival of the state of Israel, and still do.

*Going to Israel?*

Oh, yes. A large percentage of the Jewish people, the Jewish community have visited Israel. In fact all of my friends have been there, that I can think of.

*Was that even back in the 1950s?*

Not so much in the '50s. A little bit later, in the '70s probably was when that started. And Rabbi Guttman is extremely interested in Israel. And has been a leader in taking groups, especially young people to Israel every year.

*Now, going back to the war years, do you remember how you found out about the Holocaust?*

To my remembrance, we didn't hear much about it, and didn't really realize what was happening in Germany and Europe at that time. I don't think we would have believed it at that time.

*So, when did you first learn about it?*

It wasn't, probably, until after the war was over, I realized to what extent the Germans had killed 6 million Jews that we know of.

*Did the newspapers -*

No, they didn't -

*But when the war was over, and you did find about about it was that through the newspapers -*

Not to the extent that it is today. I mean, if something, if a person doesn't know anything about the Holocaust, then he hasn't seen a newspaper, but I don't remember anything to that extent. I remember I heard about it, what it was really like, one of my good friends, Dr. Rogers, was in the service, and he helped liberate one of the camps, and he told me about it. But that was after the war was over.

*So, when the community, the Jewish community learned about the Holocaust, what was the reaction?*

It was just that, the thought that, there's nothing we can do about what has happened, but we will do everything in our power to see that something like this doesn't happen again, and also, we will give our best support to Israel, because this is the only place where Jewish people can be safe today, outside of this country, and we hope it continues like that. But having a strong Israel, helps us in this country.

*Have you visited Israel?*

Yes, we visited Israel, in I think it was 1972.

*You went with Mrs. Solomon.*

Yeah.

*Tell us a little bit about that.*

Well, we were with a group, and we traveled around in the country, and it was exciting. It was very vibrant, unfortunately, today, now you're beginning to see Jew raise up arms against Jew. And this is a disastrous thing. It can be very, very, very harmful to the state of Israel.

*Has your daughter been to Israel, or your grandchildren?*

No. Abby has been to Israel. She was on this March of the Living. They go to Poland first and go to the camps and then to Israel, so she has been. And I'm sure Paula and her husband will eventually go.

*Do you maintain networks with or ties with Jews in other Jewish communities outside of Greensboro?*

I would say no.

*Did you attend Wild Acres?*

No, I haven't. I've never been to Wild Acres.

*Can you tell me about Wild Acres?*

I really don't know that much about it. As I understand, it's a learning process where you go to see what's happening to Jews all over the world.

*Do you consider yourself a Southerner first?*

I'm just an American. No, I don't think there's any real difference between a southerner and a northerner.

*I think it's an interesting question to ask people, and I like to ask them, who are you? What's your response to that?*

That's a difficult question. I think that Mrs. Solomon and I have had a good life together. We've been married 61 years, we've had a lot of friends, and still have many of them, unfortunately, a lot of them have left us. But, I'm very sympathetic as far as helping people who need our help. It's unfortunate that the world is in the situation that it's in today. You know, 2000 years ago people were starving, and needed help, and we keep praying that this will get better as the world goes on, but it hasn't gotten any better. There's something wrong. We have so much in this country, and we should be sharing more. And yet, some of the funds that went to help people are no longer available, and I won't go any further on that.

*How have you enjoyed helping other people? Can you elaborate?*

You know when I was in dentistry, if there were people of need, I used to do what I could to help them, you know, from a dental standpoint. And their children.

*Do you think that Jews in the south differ from other southerners?*

I'm not sure I know exactly what you mean. You mean from -

*Yeah, does being a Jew in the south make you different from somebody who is not a Jew, but a southerner?*

Well, I think that, maybe I've been brainwashed, but maybe their ideals are a little higher than some of the -

*Who's ideals, what do you mean?*

The Jews. I think they're more sympathetic to the needs of people. Again, I don't want to elaborate on that.

*Well, you can.*

Well, it goes into a political situation.

*OK, but you can share that if you feel comfortable doing that.*

I feel this administration has not done all it could to help the needy. As a matter of fact, I'm talking about real needy, not the people who could be out working and earning some kind of a living, I'm talking about the needy and the people who are ill. They need help, and the funds that were allotted to them, as I understand it, are no longer available.

*So do you think that the southern Jews are more apt to be community oriented or helpful than non-Jews?*

No, I'm sure the churches are, the major churches are very active in doing what they can to help people who really need it. No, I don't think there's any real difference. I think there are good people and bad people in all religions. It's not a question of whether or not you're Jewish. I think you have good Jewish people and bad Jewish people. I think people are all the same given the same circumstances.

*Well, Dr. Solomon, is there anything I haven't asked you about that you'd like to share?*

Oh, you've asked me everything that I could imagine.

*OK. Thank you.*