

Druxman (Klein) Family Interview
for the New Mexico Jewish Historical Society

(Participants: Noel Pugach interviews Lillian Klein Druxman, Michael Druxman and Lee Druxman)

Noel: Today is Tuesday, December 26, 2017. I'm in the home of Lillian Druxman and we are going to discuss her father, his career, the family involvement in New Mexico history. At the table with me is her son, Michael, and her grandson, Lee Druxman. All right. So, let us start, Lillian, by your telling me, first of all, about yourself and we'll go around and do that. I want some basic biographical information and date of birth, place of birth, names of parents, your education, so forth.

Lillian: August 28 --

Noel: Start with "I am."

Lillian: Oh, I am Lillian Druxman.

Noel: Okay.

Lillian: Born August 28, 1926, in Douglas, Arizona. My mother was Frances Jeanette Krepps, and my father was Samuel Klein.

Noel: Okay. What was the level of education for you?

Lillian: I had three years at the University of Southern California.

Noel: And what was your major?

Lillian: Business.

Noel: Did you get a degree?

Lillian: No.

Noel: Okay. What was the level of education of your parents, starting with your father?

Lillian: I think my father went to the eighth grade and my mother went to the sixth grade.

Noel: All right. Where did they grow up?

Lillian: My mother grew up in New Jersey. I don't remember the city. But my father grew up in New York City, in the Bronx. [Census data shows Manhattan]

Noel: Okay. Was he born in New York?

Lillian: My parents were both American-born.

Noel: Okay. Where did your father's parents come from?

Lillian: My mother's parents, I know, came from Galicia, which was Russia at one time. I don't know where my dad's parents came from.

Noel: All right.

Lillian: But he was American-born and nobody else in that family was.

Noel: Okay. And your mother's parents, where did they come from?

Lillian: Galicia.

Noel: Oh, Galicia, okay. You mentioned that, okay. All right. Do you have any siblings?

Lillian: I had an older brother, Howard, who passed away about 22 years ago, and I have a younger brother, Melvin.

Noel: Okay. Now, I gather Melvin's nickname is Sonny?

Lillian: Sonny.

Noel: Okay. All right. Now we're going to pass this to Michael, and Michael, will you give me the same basic information?

Michael: This is Michael Druxman. I was born in Las Cruces, New Mexico, January 21, 1953.

Noel: And your parents' names?

Michael: My mother is Lillian Druxman, known as Sis. My father was Jay Druxman.

Noel: All right.

Michael: My father was from Huntington Beach, California. He was born in Canada, came to the US when he was approximately three. My mother was born in Douglas, Arizona.

Noel: What is the level of your education?

Michael: My education -- I received a bachelor of university studies from the University of New Mexico, and an associate's degree from Berklee College of Music [Boston, MA].

Noel: What was your occupation?

Michael: My final occupation was a financial advisor with UBS Financial Services, and many years prior to that, I was a professional musician.

Noel: And I understand you played with a number of leading bands?

Michael: I did. I played with the San Francisco Opera Company for two years. Marin Symphony. I played with the Temptations, the Supremes, Ronnie Spector, Tavares(?), Manhattans, Stevie Wonder, Ella Fitzgerald...

Noel: Quite a number.

Michael: And on and on.

Noel: Okay. And what instrument did you play?

Michael: In those days, I was playing trombone. I'm currently a bass player.

Noel: Okay. Lee, the same thing.

Lee: My name is Lee Druxman. I was born in --

Noel: Any middle initial?

Lee: Lee Daniel Druxman. Born in 1983. I have a bachelor's and master's in electrical engineering from the University of Southern California. I'm currently an engineer at Sandia National Laboratories.

Noel: In?

Lee: I work in Livermore, California.

Noel: Okay. And are you married?

Lee: No.

Noel: All right. Okay, Lillian, back to you.

Lillian: Okay.

Noel: All right. So, how did you meet your husband, Jay. When did you meet him?

Lillian: We both went to the University of Southern California, and we met on campus.

Noel: All right. When were you married?

Lillian: Let me think. March 30. What year? Lee, what year was I married?

Lee: In 1947.

Lillian: 1947, yeah. Couldn't remember that.

Noel: Okay. And the names of your children?

Lillian: There's Michael. And --

Noel: Is he your oldest?

Lillian: No, Michael's the youngest. Janet is in the middle and Louis is the oldest.

Noel: Okay. So, when did you marry . . .

Lillian: Jay.

Noel: Jay? In '47?

Lillian: Yeah.

Noel: And what was his occupation?

Lillian: When I met him, he was a student at USC and he was working for a large men's department store and was planning to stay there with them, and instead of that, we moved to Las Cruces, and he was first with the Las Cruces Furniture a short time and then he opened up Men's -- Jay Druxman Men's Apparel.

Noel: Okay. So, let's focus for a while on Sam Klein.

Lillian: Mm-hmm.

Noel: When was he born? Do you know?

Lillian: No. Michael, you don't know, do you?

Lee: Yep. This is Lee -- he was born in 1894. I believe we have a birth certificate.

Noel: Okay.

Lee: Right there.

Noel: August 3, 1894. That is what the birth certificate says. And where was he born?

Lillian: Wasn't he born in New York? Yeah, he was.

Noel: Right.

Lillian: He was born in New York.

Noel: Okay. And what was the level of Sam's education?

Lillian: He went to the Eighth grade.

Noel: Within the New York Public School System?

Lillian: Yes, he did.

Noel: Okay. And what was his occupation? How did he start it off, start as far as working?

Lillian: Okay. He was not working when he was a young man, except he became a runner for a law firm, which was, they would give him money to go buy their lunch and that was when he would go to, in those days, a local bar, where they made lunches, if you bought a beer. So, he would buy a beer, pocket the money and take the lunches back to the law firm. And I remember them -- I remember my Aunt Gussie saying they always wanted him to study the law. They were willing to put him in school to study the law. But he didn't.

Noel: Okay. So, he worked for a while with the law firm. And then what does he do?

Lillian: As far as I know, he -- my younger brother once told me that he worked for a milk company, but I -- that I don't remember him ever telling me that.

Noel: And then?

Lillian: Okay, and then when he was a teenager, both his parents died within the same year because my father was an afterthought in their lives, because my Aunt Gussie was already a married woman with children. My Aunt Ray was already a married woman with children, and the two uncles were all-- so he was way late in life.

Noel: Okay.

Lillian: When he was literally orphaned, my Aunt Gussie wanted him to come and live with them because he was no longer living at the parents', and he must have made the decision on his own, because he jumped after a while. I don't know how long it took him -- he got on a freight car, freight train, and got off in Douglas, New Mexico -- Douglas, Arizona. No, Columbus, New Mexico, that's right. And he let his parents, his sister, know where he was. That he wasn't dead, and he stayed there, and found a job.

Noel: He found a job? Doing what?

Lillian: He worked in -- as far as I can remember him telling us, he worked in a furniture store.

Noel: Okay. And so, he got some experience in the --

Lillian: Yes, he did.

Noel: -- in the business. So, then, why and when does he move to New Mexico? To Las Cruces, in particular?

Lillian: Okay. The story is that he stayed in the southwest until the first World War started, and he went back to his home in New York and joined the army, and

was shipped overseas to France, or wherever it was. He was gassed in that war, and they gave those men the option of where they wanted to be discharged, and he said, "Arizona." So, he came back to Arizona and was discharged and in the meantime, he had met my mother in New York when he'd gone to join the army. He went back East. They got married and they came back to Douglas, Arizona.

Noel: Okay. So, he's in the army. He's discharged in Arizona, and then what happens?

Lillian: Well, then he was married, and he went to work for a furniture store in Douglas, Arizona.

Noel: Okay. Where was he married?

Lillian: In New York.

Noel: In New York, okay.

Lillian: Lee, you don't have any blank birth certificate -- I mean, marriage certificates?

Lee: There may be.

Noel: Okay, so he's married in New York and then what happens?

Lillian: Well, they came west and made a home in Douglas, Arizona. He went to work for a furniture store and he had two children, my brother Howard and myself.

Noel: And, how long are they in Douglas, and was he at the furniture store?

Lillian: Okay. About -- I would say, about four or five years, because my brother Howard was born there, and I was born there, and we left Douglas when I was three.

Noel: Okay. So, where does he go?

Lillian: From Douglas, we went to Las Cruces, New Mexico.

Noel: Why Las Cruces?

Lillian: Because he had heard that there was a store for sale, a furniture store, owned by the Stowe's family who were Jewish. And, he -- Joe Rosenfeld was there, and was the owner of the Boston store, which was a department store. And he told my father about the furniture store, and they went there, and he bought the Stowe's furniture company.

Noel: Joe was --

Lillian: Joe Rosenfeld was my father's cousin.

Noel: A first cousin? A cousin.

Lillian: No. He probably was a second cousin, but he was a close relative.

Noel: Okay. So, he buys the store. Where did he get the capital?

Lillian: That's a good question. I have no idea. Unless Joe Rosenfeld gave him -- helped him, or it could be my Aunt Gussie, who was very successful. She might have backed him.

Noel: Okay. Interesting. All right. So, he's in the furniture store. Does it carry all kinds of furniture?

Lillian: Yes, it did.

Noel: And it's the only one in Las Cruces?

Lillian: It was.

Noel: For many years?

Lillian: For many years.

Noel: Okay. And where did he get his merchandise, do you know?

Lillian: Yes. There used to be traveling salesmen in those days, and most of them were Jewish, and they would come to Las Cruces with their . . .

Noel: Catalogs?

Lillian: -- catalogs. My mother always had them for dinner. Always. And then as things got better, my father used to go to the furniture market. They even went to New York to the furniture market. So my mother could see her family. They went back East.

Noel: Okay. Did they generally take the train or drive?

Lillian: Yes, they took the train.

Noel: Okay.

Lillian: And I'm supposed to remember this, but I don't. My brother, Howard, and I went with them a couple of times on the train, but I don't remember that.

Noel: Now, did your father require him to employ others in the business?

Lillian: Okay.

Noel: Or was he --

Lillian: I can almost tell you that --

Noel: Did he handle things himself, everything?

Lillian: No, no, no. He had a man that worked for him. Fred Garcia was one. And Morales, I don't know what Morales' last name was, but they worked for my father all of my life. And so that was his help.

Noel: They were both of his local Hispanos.

Lillian: They were what?

Noel: Local Hispanics

Lillian: Yes, yes, they were.

Noel: Did your father learn Spanish?

Lillian: Perfect. He spoke the most perfect Spanish and he actually learned Spanish in Arizona, not in Las Cruces. He came to Las Cruces speaking perfect Spanish. As soon as everybody knew he spoke perfect Spanish, then he was asked to come to the courthouse. The legal part of whatever it was, because they needed people to translate.

Noel: Okay, that's interesting.

Lillian: It was.

Noel: All right. Did he have any interesting experiences that you heard about? Translating for the local Hispanos?

Lillian: No. I don't- I don't remember any of that. I just know that he was always asked to come and be the interpreter, so, because he did speak perfect Spanish. And then you know, that he could understand them, they could understand him.

Noel: And I gather almost -- the great majority of the population at the time was Hispanic?

Lillian: They were.

Noel: In Las Cruces?

Lillian: They were.

Noel: Okay. Do you know anything about the expansion of the business as time went on? Did he have to enlarge the store? Did he have a big showroom? What can you tell us?

Lillian: Okay. When he bought that store, it was on Main Street. And the store itself was next door to the only grocery store in Las Cruces. Thrift Market, I can remember that. And then he moved across the street, on Main Street, and it was a large building and he put a balcony in that. I can remember that because we all thought it was so much fun to go up to the balcony.

Noel: So, then the second level.

Lillian: It wasn't a second store. It was just a balcony where he had furniture.

Noel: Okay.

Lillian: He stayed in that store until they built -- there's a picture somewhere of the -- being built of the big store that they had on the corner of Main and -- what was the little side street, do you remember it? I don't remember either. The street is still there, but I don't remember.

Noel: Okay. Did your father enjoy the business?

Lillian: My father liked everything. He was a happy person. And he loved people. And people loved him. Just as a side thing, about my father, the Episcopal Church, which is still standing in Las Cruces -- actually it was in Lucia Park, had a minister, Reverend Lewis, and my father used to give him money all the time, to help him. He used to sit in the window of my father's furniture store

and crochet hats. He gave them to all the babies in town. Everybody had a hat from him. You had a hat. Everybody had a hat.

So my father's personality was such that he was very outgoing, completely opposite to my mother's. My mother was very quiet and very restrictive in her outgoing. She never learned to speak Spanish. We always used to joke about it because they always -- everybody had help in the house. They were nice Mexican ladies, and the only thing my mother could say in Spanish was "venga aquí." And my mother would say "venga aquí and bring the broom." "Venga aquí and bring the mop," but she could never learn to speak Spanish.

Noel: Did your mother work in the store?

Lillian: No.

Noel: No. She was totally a housewife and raised the children.

Lillian: Mm-hmm.

Noel: What was your father's involvement in community organizations? We'll get to the political shortly. We have to talk more about that. But what groups did he join, was he a member of?

Lillian: He was in Lion's club, I can remember that because we used to have a parade and he was a member of the Masons, and --

Noel: Do you know what degree?

Lillian: No. And the Elks. I don't know what else. There's a Shrine hat up in my closet still.

Noel: So, he was a Shriner? That's a Mason.

Lillian: Yeah.

Noel: Right, okay.

Michael: Wasn't that Dad's hat? Dad was a 33rd-degree ...[Comment: Jay Druxman was a 33rd degree Mason.]

Lillian: Oh yeah, that was --

Noel: That's -- okay, that's what I wondered about. So, he was a 33 -- a 33, I don't know --

Michael: That was *my* father.

Lillian: Yeah.

Noel: But it was your father's?

Lillian: But he was all those. He did all that stuff.

Noel: Okay. And what about your mother? Was she a member of any --?

Lillian: Just the Eastern Stars, that's the only thing I can remember that she participated in. And the plan of the parent organizations -- but my mother was not an outgoing person.

Noel: So, she was not a joiner?

Lillian: Not really.

Noel: Okay, but your father was?

Lillian: My dad was.

Noel: All right. And, what was their degree of observance of Judaism? Was your father and your mother raised in an Orthodox tradition, Reform tradition? We want to talk about that.

Lillian: You know, I really don't know how they were raised. But I assumed that they had Jewish homes. They came from Jewish homes. The home that we had as the Klein family in Las Cruces, my mother lit candles every Friday night. Okay, we observed that. I think I mentioned the High Holidays. We observed them completely with as much as we could do in the home because we had nobody to lead us.

Noel: Did you go to El Paso for services?

Lillian: We did. We went to B'nai Zion and --

Noel: That's a Reform congregation.

Lillian: No, it wasn't. It was -- not Orthodox, but they were Conservative, yeah. We belonged to temple in El Paso, and also that, but we went to that one, because there was a family in El Paso, they were called - they were *Galitzianas* [Galicians in Yiddish] and we became part of their family. So, when we had to go and break the fast, that's where we went. They were a lovely family. But we observed as much as possible in our home. [The Kleins belonged to the Reform Congregation, Temple Mount Sinai.] But they often went to the Conservative Congregation because of their close relations with the *Galitzianas*.]

I think I mentioned this, my father, as somebody who became known in the community, would get telephone calls from people, from Deming and Lordsburg and wanted to know if there was Jews, and was there a service, and my father used to say, come to 223 Greening -- that was our home. They'd show up, my mother would fix enough food for an army, and we'd have services, and --

Noel: You'd have services?

Lillian: We had services.

Noel: And who led the services?

Lillian: Whoever wanted to. Whoever thought they remembered something.

Noel: Did your father know enough to lead services?

Lillian: No, my father did not.

Noel: Did he read Hebrew?

Lillian: No.

Noel: Did your mother have any Hebrew education?

Lillian: My mother could read Hebrew. From, I guess, from her home, I don't know. But my father couldn't.

Noel: All right. So, tell me what happened later on, because I know they were very important factors in organizing the Jewish community in Las Cruces.

Lillian: Okay, my father passed away in 50-

Michael: Three.

Lillian: Yeah, '53. And before that, though, we had a small handful of Jewish women and we used to meet and then we all had kids too. This family was observing all the Jewish holidays, within our own home. My mother's especially, and we also observed all the Christian holidays too. We celebrated Christmas with a tree.

Noel: You had a tree?

Lillian: We had a tree in my father and mother's home, besides in mine. Because my father had an invitation out: Christmas Day, come to his house for an open house. The whole town came. There was booze and food. And that was my father. He loved to celebrate. But in our home, we celebrated the Jewish holidays and we celebrated Christmas, and we all made a joke about this yesterday.

My brother, by this time we had moved into houses that my brother [Howard Klein] and my husband [Jay Druxman] had built, side-by-side, a whole street of them. And they lived next door to us, and my sister-in-law, who's still with us and lives in Cruces, wouldn't let anybody put a tree up in her house. So, they didn't but they put all their Christmas toys under our tree next door, so we used to joke about it. Anyhow.

Noel: All right. And so, when was the first building of the Beth-El, Congregation Beth-El built?

Lillian: Okay, I'll tell you. Before that, this small group of women, and it was the women got together and we used to party. I mean, you know, have coffee and

tea. And then the decision was made, that we had to make a decision about our children. Because none of these -- we all had kids. None of these kids were learning anything, so we formed a Sunday school and there was a woman in El Paso, who was the head of this Sunday school at Temple Mount Sinai, and she became my friend. She brought us books, and once a month, she came up and she sort of taught us what she could about having a Sunday school. And so, we formed a Sunday school and we had no building, so whoever lent us a room, we used it.

Noel: Now, do you know what year the Sunday school started?

Lillian: Let me think. Okay, Louis's class was the first. So, Louis was seven, so, what year would that make it?

Michael: 1954?

Lillian: That's -- I think so.

Michael: 1954, because that would make him approximately seven.

Lillian: Seven, yeah. It was about 1954. And so, we started this small Sunday school. Well, I think I had mentioned to you that before that, that's when White Sands Missile Range came into our lives, and that was through the efforts of my father and Senator Anderson, and Governor Miles.

They all [Sam Klein, Senator Anderson, Governor Miles] went to Washington at that time to see, because somebody else wanted White Sands Missile Range, and they procured it for Las Cruces, which made Las Cruces go from 3,000 to

9,000. Almost instantly. With those people came a lot of Jewish families, and they wanted a Jewish life if they were going to live in Cruces.

So, the first thing we did as far as going past using other people's buildings, we raised enough money by a delicatessen dinner -- you remember that? I mean, everybody worked for that. And we raised enough money to buy a Baines building. Do you know what that is? A Baines building is a tin shop --

Noel: Right a metal --

Lillian: We bought one and we bought this piece of property on -- the name just went out my head.

Noel: If you think of it, you'll tell me later.

Lillian: Okay, but anyhow, we put this one small building there. By law, we had to have a kitchen and a bathroom, so we did that. And we had services there for the first time and that was Temple Beth-El for the first time.

Noel: And the year was, 50-?

Lillian: Let's see. The year was about '60; '62, I think, yeah.

Noel: Okay.

Lillian: And then we stayed in that building and we didn't have rabbis, per se, but rabbis used to show up in Cruces, and the one I could remember the most was this little old man, and he had a little old wife, too. He didn't want to be paid. Of course, we didn't have any money anyhow. We weren't paying dues. And the only thing he asked was that if he died, would we bury him as a Jew in our cemetery, and so that was the agreement, and he did die, and he is buried in

Temple -- in the Masonic cemetery. I don't know if his wife is buried there or not but anyhow we didn't have that -- really, we didn't have a rabbi.

Noel: Do you remember his name?

Lillian: No. Levi -- his last name was Levi.

Noel: Okay.

Lillian: It was.

Noel: All right. So, let's go back to the furniture store.

Lillian: Okay.

Noel: Your father dies in '53? That's right?

Lillian: Yes.

Noel: What happened to the store? In other words, did he still own it when he died?

Lillian: My father?

Noel: Yeah, my father.

Lillian: Yes, he did.

Noel: Okay. So, what happened after he died, to the store?

Lillian: I had two brothers and they both were still in the business with him.

Noel: So, they had been brought into the business before? Okay. And how long did the furniture store last?

Lillian: I don't --

Noel: Did it change its name at all?

Lillian: No, it didn't.

Noel: It was always known as --

Lillian: Las Cruces Furniture.

Noel: So, how long did the furniture store last?

Lillian: Okay. It lasted until -- okay. My older brother passed away; my younger brother was still in the business and that business was closed. Okay, first of all, the Main Street of Las Cruces was a regular Main Street until the powers-that-be decided it should be a mall. When that happened, lots of the businesses on Main Street went under because there was no traffic.

The Las Cruces Furniture Company was still open until, oh, let's see. It was just rebuilt this year, and not as a furniture store. It's now a home schooling or something, I don't know. The property was sold. They were in business until about five years ago, when they actually -- my younger brother, Sonny, closed it out.

[Jay Klein and Sonny (Melvin) ran Las Cruces Furniture after Sam died. Then the company finally went out of business in 1995. The building was sold.]

Noel: Okay. And it was no longer a furniture store after that?

Lillian: Un-hum.

Noel: Okay. By the time they closed it, was there a lot of competition?

Lillian: There was one store in Cruces, it was Ikards and it's still there. It's also a family owned business and they came into business in Cruces when white Sands opened up, but they're still in business there. They still have a store.

Noel: Did your family, first your father and your brothers, advertise a lot in the newspapers?

Lillian: There was one newspaper -- the Las Cruces Sun News, and I guess they ran an ad once a week or something, I don't know.

Noel: All right. I'm going to ask your son and grandson, now, if they could tell us, what they remember about growing up Jewish in Las Cruces. And what kind of education they had, Jewish education, and what they remember about the store. Okay, so first, Michael Druxman.

Michael: All right. Growing up, we had Sunday school in the old First National Bank building on the upper level, which was pretty much empty and abandoned, and after that, we were at a Unitarian Church and we used to have most of the High Holy Day services at the Branigan library. Which was built by my grandfather, Sam Klein.

Noel: What do you mean, it was built?

Michael: It was a WPA project that he --

Lillian: Branigan, the family of Branigan gave him money.

Michael: Okay. So, it wasn't WPA? But I thought the library was WPA because it had all the WPA murals, and --

Lillian: Yeah it did.

Michael: It was designed in that old New Mexican style.

Lillian: The Branigan family had given the money.

Michael: So anyway, that's where we had our High Holy Day services because it was on --

Noel: So that was on campus?

Michael: No, that was downtown.

Noel: Oh, okay, so Branigan --

Michael: That was right on Main Street.

Noel: At NMSU, right? [To clarify: there is also a Branigan Library on the NMSU campus.]

Michael: I'm not sure, but that's possible.

Noel: Okay.

Michael: But this was right on Main Street and they built an auditorium that I thought my grandfather had requested.

Lillian: Yes, he had. That's right.

Michael: So, we used to do that and the people who taught Sunday School were all lay people and to my knowledge, most of them didn't have a great depth of knowledge. Services were led by Mark Wechter who had a very nice cantorial voice and could read Hebrew and read the Torah. I think he was raised in a much more Orthodox --

Lillian: He was. In El Paso.

Michael: And that's who usually led our services. But the teachers really didn't have much depth of knowledge, and I didn't think my education was very extensive. I was bar mitzvahed, and I was really not taught anything. There was an individual who came to Las Cruces from Massachusetts. His name's Mike White and he basically would say, "Here's a recording of your haftorah. Memorize it." And that's the extent of his help.

Noel: Did you learn to read Hebrew?

Michael: Really, no. I -- it was -- it was very limited. To this day, I can recognize a few words and letters. But, the education was really not there. It wasn't really taught as a language. It was, and as I said, for my bar mitzvah, they handed me a recording of my haftorah and said, "Memorize this."

Noel: Right.

Michael: And so, you'd listen to it and memorize it. Then you'd have a transliteration that you could follow along with, but no, I don't ever remember being able to actually read out of the Torah.

Noel: Okay. You're not alone. What do you remember about the store? Did you go hang around there?

Michael: Well, my father worked at Las Cruces Furniture Company for a short while and then he opened his own store, Jay Druxman Men's Apparel, but I remember the furniture store very well. I remember the balcony and it had an old freight elevator and it was always fun. We'd go over there, and we'd jump on the beds and play with the recliners, and you know, all the appliances, and we pretty much had free rein, and nobody would ever tell us to stop doing anything. But my father opened his store, probably what, 1956?

Lillian: Mm-hmm.

Michael: I think around 1956, also on Main Street. And he had a nice men's store that carried very nice clothing.

Noel: Leading brands, Hart Schaffner and --

Lillian: Absolutely.

Michael: Yeah, Hart Schaffner and Marx.

Lillian: With the pants and everything.

Michael: Yep, exactly.

Lillian: The most expensive.

Michael: And he did very well. His store did very well. It was very well accepted. My father was probably one of the best dressers I've ever met in my life, right up until the day he died. And that's how he ran that store, and I used to be able to run around that place, and everybody who worked for him was my buddy.

Lillian: Michael didn't like to be on the floor and sell, but he would wash the windows and clean the toilets.

Michael: Well, when -- eventually my father built a custom design store. And it was very elegant. And I probably started working at the store when I was in fourth or fifth grade, by mopping the floors and cleaning the windows and cleaning the bathrooms. Then, I would be the one who would deliver all the tailoring to the tailor and bring it back and steam it out so we could give it to the customers, so I'd steam all the suits and open the pockets and do things like that, and then by junior high and high school, I was selling, and my father was one of the best salespeople you'd ever meet.

He taught me everything I know about how to sell and work with people. I did that all through high school and you know, when that store closed, I helped

him run the final sales, and then he and I worked to open his next store. And, unpacked all the merchandise.

Noel: Which was what?

Michael: Well it started out -- his second store was called Jay's Clothes Rack.

Noel: Jay's what?

Michael: Clothes Rack.

Lillian: Clothes Rack.

Noel: Okay.

Michael: And so, I helped him open that and stock all the shelves, and you know, do all that work. I continued to work at that store, until I graduated. I went to college. When I'd come back in the summer, I'd still work in the store as a salesperson, or whatever else needed to be done. And I don't know, what else?

Noel: Okay. Well, you've given me a picture. Well, Lee, one minute, I'm going to -- I forgot to ask you, if your mother worked in the store? The clothing stores?

Michael: She did. She was the bookkeeper. She handled the finances. She also sold on the floor. Christmastime, all of us, my brother and sister and her would be behind the counter, wrapping all the packages, because we had free gift wrapping included. So, yes, she was very involved in the store.

Noel: Okay. Thank you. Now I'm going to ask Lee to tell me something about his growing up. So, where did you grow up?

Lee: So, I grew up in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

Noel: Okay. And you were born in what year?

Lee: Born in Albuquerque in 1983.

Noel: Okay. And what kind of a Jewish education did you have?

Lee: So, we did holidays at the house. There was probably always Hanukkah and Passover with a lot of family for both of those, because of cousins that lived nearby on the Druxman-Klein side. I started religious school, I believe, in the third grade at -- we called it Temple Albert, but it's now Congregation Albert.

Noel: Right.

Lee: And went through from third grade, had three years of Hebrew school for my bar mitzvah. And then continued and had confirmation in tenth grade, I believe.

Noel: Okay. Well, thank you. All right. Now, let's turn to politics. So, Lillian, you tell me how and why Sam got involved in politics.

Lillian: Okay. I thought I remembered but it had something to do with -- there was something that they needed, or they wanted, and he couldn't get -- what was it, Michael?

Michael: If I remember correctly, there was something in terms of getting use of some land --

Lillian: That's it.

Michael: -- and he couldn't get it done. He wasn't the, you know, the city council wouldn't allow it, and that's what got him involved in politics.

Lillian: And he ran -- he ran for city council, not the mayor. He ran for city council the first time.

Noel: Well, in your account, Lillian you have that it was a dispute involving a hauling ordinance.

Lillian: Okay.

Noel: Does that bring back the memories?

Lillian: Yes, yes, yes. Yes, it was that. But he ran for -- I know he ran for the city council and then in those days, you didn't run for mayor. You ran for the city council. Then you were picked as mayor. I think that's how he started.

Noel: So, the city council chose the mayor?

Lillian: That's right.

Noel: All right. And how long did he serve on the city council?

Lillian: The first time I think their terms are four years. I think he just kept serving. No, he -- there was a period where he wasn't the mayor. I forget -- Lee, what was it? What was the time then?

Lee: I would look on that picture.

Noel: So, this photo in front of the --

Lillian: Klein Park, yeah.

Noel: Klein Park. It says he was county commissioner of '26 to '30, and the city commissioner '34-'36, and mayor 1932-'34, 1935-'44, and '46 to '53. Okay. Now this article on Sam says he died in '59? And then you wrote in --

Lillian: No.

Noel: Didn't he die in '53?

Lillian: Yes, he did.

Noel: Right. So, the article is wrong?

Lillian: Yes.

Noel: Okay. So, he first was on the city council, and then the city commissioner.

Lillian: Well, he was county commissioner. And through that county commissioner, the WPA was in Las Cruces like it was in a lot of places, and they used them for what Trump wants to do now, redo the streets and the bridges and the other-- that's what they did in Las Cruces. And they built the courthouse in Las Cruces. It was built by WPA.

Noel: All right. Did your father have anything to do?

Lillian: The only thing my father wrote -- he signed the checks.

Noel: Oh, okay. Now, why, besides this hauling ordinance, did he stay in politics? What was his interest in politics, what excited him about politics? Could you make that come alive a bit?

Lillian: I think it was just his personality. I mean, he liked people, and he liked to be in the middle of everything, and that gave him the opportunity to do that. And by that time, Joe Rosenfeld was his partner in the furniture business because Joe Rosenfeld's business had burned to the ground. The Boston Store burned to the ground. Joe Rosenfeld came into the Las Cruces Furniture and I don't know, there was money or what, but he became a partner, and so my father was out running around with politics and Joe Rosenfeld stayed in the store.

Noel: Okay. All right. What did he consider to be his major achievements?

Lillian: Well, let's see. He built the courthouse. He built the city hall. He got gas lines into Las Cruces. He built a hospital, which we didn't have before.

Noel: When you say he built?

Lillian: He had it built -- we had never had a city/county hospital.

Noel: All right. So, it was a city/county project.

Lillian: It was. And so, that was the first time that we'd had a real hospital.

Noel: Okay.

Lillian: I would say the biggest accomplishment was getting White Sands Missile Range stationed across the mountain from Las Cruces, because it completely changed. Las Cruces went from, as I said before, 3,000 nice farm families that made a living with their farms and the various one thing or other, into a completely different city because White Sands was a big business.

Noel: Sure was. Okay. And did that require any city services? How was your dad involved in that?

Lillian: Okay.

Noel: I mean, if you have many more people, you know, they expect something from, you know, the city.

Lillian: Well, the thing that happened to Cruces was that homes were being built, new homes for people to live in. And that meant streets, and that meant water lines and gas lines. And he was involved in all of that, making sure that it got done.

Noel: Okay. What were his major frustrations as mayor? Disappointments, frustrations?

Lillian: Well, I don't know about disappointments, but I think the main thing was I think it was hard for him not to realize some of the things he wanted to accomplish. I mean, you know, I think he thought he was going to do everything, and he did as much as he was going to do, but not everything, so...

Noel: Well, what were some of those things that he wanted to do, but he couldn't?

Lillian: You know, I really can't tell you, because I mean, he was not an unhappy person with what he was doing. And the fact that he was always involved, it was what made him happy.

Noel: Well, did he talk a lot about politics at home?

Lillian: Never. I think I told you, we lived on Greening Avenue, and like most houses, they had a big front door and it had one of those peepholes that you open, and the doorbell would ring, and my mother would open that and if one of the politicians, local, were standing there, they'd say, "Is Mr. Klein here?" She'd say, "Nope, he's not here."

Noel: Oh really?

Lillian: She wouldn't let them in the house. My father used to say, "Mom, you can't do that." And she'd say, "Yes, I can."

Noel: Well, how would you describe his dealings with the city council when he was Mayor?

Lillian: No, I think he had a very good relationship with most people. And will say, I think the Hispanic population was crazy about my father, and he had a wonderful relationship in that area. He really did. I'm sure he had enemies.

Because he was a pushy kind of a guy, got what he wanted done. But he was very well-liked.

Noel: Who were his close associates in politics? Any names that you can recall?

Lillian: Well he was very close to the governor of the state of New Mexico which was Governor John [Miles].

Noel: We are on side B, and you were talking about his association with the senator? Senator Anderson?

Lillian: Yes.

Noel: Could you say anything about that relationship?

Lillian: I don't know anything about it. I really don't. I know that he had a relationship with those people and he traveled to Washington with them, and he was included in a lot of their meetings, but other than that, I don't know.

Noel: What about in Santa Fe? Did he go often to Santa Fe?

Lillian: He went to Santa Fe a lot, to -- because the governor was in Santa Fe, and he went up there to get favors done for Las Cruces. And I don't remember the -- Mecham) -- no, Mecham was not there. Mecham was there but afterwards, I can't remember who was the governor -- Johnny Miles, I remember. And Tingley, that was another governor. So, he had a -- he had a relationship with those people, because he knew how to treat people and they knew how to treat him.

Noel: Now when he was mayor, did he actually then have to campaign for mayor? Was it then separated from the city council?

Lillian: No. He campaigned for mayor in later years, I can remember that. I mean, it was like politics, not like it is today, but in those days, I mean, there was a lot of paying and giving and taking people to polls, and who knows, how clean it was, I don't know.

Noel: Well, what I mean, is -- when he was mayor, was it ever an elected office?

Lillian: It was.

Noel: All right. So, when did it become an elected office?

Lillian: I don't remember. I have no idea.

Noel: So, at one point, it was no longer appointed by the council.

Lillian: That's right.

Noel: He had to run.

Lillian: He ran for mayor, yes. And I don't remember what year that was.

Noel: Was it a partisan election or a non-partisan?

Lillian: No, it was partisan because I can remember some of the Republicans that ran against him. Wayne Whatley, for one. I can't remember the others, but I do remember Wayne Whatley. So, they had a -- there was a campaign. Democrat versus Republican, there was.

Noel: And do you know of any of his associations in the Democratic party? The state Democratic party?

Lillian: Well there's tons, I don't remember their names. They were just people to me.

Noel: Okay. So, he didn't talk politics at home. But were you in any surroundings where he did talk politics?

Lillian: Well, we went to some of his campaigns. But I mean, he talked about the city of Cruces, what he was doing, and like all campaigns, but that wasn't in our house. And we didn't have people into our home that were political. We didn't.

Noel: Okay. And did he have strong support from the business community in all of his campaigns? Or was he at odds with the business community?

Lillian: No, no. The only time he got it -- was because Main Street was the business end of Las Cruces, and I would say he was friends with most everybody who was in business. A lot of those people that were in business lived in El Paso. They had stores in Las Cruces, and lived in El Paso, so, I mean, if he had any trouble it was that way, but no. He he had a relationship. I don't want to make it sound like it was perfect, but he had a relationship with most people.

Noel: Now throughout his service as mayor, was it ever a paid position?

Lillian: No. Cost him money.

Noel: Well, I'm sure. Anything else you can add about his political career? I'm trying to get some idea.

Lillian: I wished I could, but you know.

Noel: Well, maybe your son will --

Michael: One of the stories were -- he was being taken to court.

Lillian: Okay.

Noel: You want to talk about that, Lillian?

Lillian: No. well, the only thing I can remember about that was -- Michael remembers that too. The only thing I remember was that there was a piece of property that he needed to build his furniture store, and so he was going to swap and give them something and he was going to get this small piece of -- anyhow, then they -- the story came out that we had built a swimming pool in our backyard. Well, we didn't have a swimming pool, period. Anyhow, it went all the way to the court in Santa Fe.

Noel: Was he accused of?

Lillian: He was accused of taking land and not paying for it. And so, they said --

Michael: I thought he was accused of building a swimming pool in the backyard, using city funds.

Lillian: Yes. City, WPA money or something.

Michael: Or WPA -- yes, using WPA money.

Lillian: Yeah.

Michael: That's what his enemies accused him of.

Lillian: Yes.

Michael: His political enemies.

Lillian: Yes.

Noel: Good. So, Michael, who were his political enemies?

Michael: You know, I really don't know anybody in particular.

Lillian: I don't either.

Michael: They were there.

Lillian: They were.

Michael: But he was accused, and he went to court --

Lillian: In Santa Fe.

Michael: And there were many observances outside the courthouse. The Catholic nuns stood outside the courthouse and --

Lillian: Right.

Michael: -lit candles, praying for my grandfather because they loved him as well. And that -- that was a big deal. He was eventually found not guilty of anything. It was all just a made-up story. But I think it took up a lot of his time and energy.

Lillian: And money.

Noel: And money.

Michael: But yeah, the Sisters of Loretto, I think were the ones who held a candlelight vigil outside the courthouse for him.

Lillian: Yes.

Noel: That's very interesting. Okay. Anything else you'd like to add about his political involvement? Any memory?

Michael: Well, I don't really know much. I don't know a lot other than what I've been told because he died one month after I was born.

Noel: Oh, poor thing...

Michael: So, I -- I've only gotten everything second hand. All I do know is he was popular. There's a park named after him. They had a big mural of him painted on it.

He brought electricity. The area of town where the park is, was a really poor area of town and he brought all the electricity and gas lines to it. The city of Las Cruces did not have the financial resources to actually bond with the gas company, El Paso Gas and Electric. And so, they trusted my grandfather to the point where all they wanted was him to sign his name, saying that he would be responsible. And so, El Paso Gas and Electric put in all the gas and electric lines, based on essentially his word alone, that if there was any problem --

Lillian: He'd have to pay.

Michael: He would pay, and of course, he didn't have any money to do that. But they trusted him enough that if he said it would be good, then it would be good.

Lillian: It would be good.

Michael: Until eventually he was able to turn that bond over to the city of Las Cruces.

Noel: And later on, when you grew up in Las Cruces, did people ask about your grandfather?

Michael: No, not really. That was never really brought up.

Noel: Was he ever known as the Jewish mayor?

Lillian: Not in Las Cruces. But he was known as the Jewish mayor in other areas, you know.

Noel: How?

Lillian: Because of the same thing I said about people in other little cities in New Mexico, they all knew that there was a Jewish mayor. I'm talking about Jewish people, knew that there was a Jewish mayor, in Las Cruces.

Noel: But did non-Jews ever refer to him, "Oh, he's the Jewish mayor."

Lillian: No, no. Not that I recall.

Michael: Well, There was some anti-Semitism. In fact, when my Uncle Sonny, Melvin, was born, my grandfather received a letter or a Western Union, I forget, and we have a copy of that, threatening to kidnap him, and with references to Hitler, and how Hitler would be coming, and you know, everything would be better once Hitler came and got rid of all the Jews like him.

Noel: And when was that, do you know?

Lillian: Well, Sonny was an infant.

Michael: Yeah, it was when he was born.

Lillian: Born, so Sonny's six years younger than I am. I was born in -- born in '26. He was born in --

Michael: '32?

Lillian: '32. Yeah.

Noel: Yeah. Okay. Anything else you'd like to add? And Lee, if you would like to jump in and add something that you've heard as part of your research?

Lee: No, I don't --

Lillian: Well, he's found so many nice things that I wouldn't even remember half of that.

Michael: I know I've heard stories about how when he lived in Columbus, that's during the period when Pancho Villa came across the border, and they kidnapped -- it was, I think it was the people he worked for, the Ravels.

Lillian: I don't know whether it --

Michael: Is that right?

Lillian: They had a son and he was friends with the son. You know, the Ravel brothers.

Noel: Yes, I know.

Michael: Pancho Villa kidnapped, and I think my grandfather, what I've heard, was in the party that crossed into Mexico to bring him back.

Lillian: To bring him back.

Michael: If that, -- is that correct? I'm not sure, it could just be family lore. There's lots of stories about how he and my grandmother came first to Douglas, and how every time the train would pass through some place that had two little adobe huts, my grandfather would tell my grandmother, that's Douglas! And she would get very upset, until they finally got to Douglas which in those days, was a very nice city with paved streets and very prosperous.

Lillian: It was Phelps Dodge owned the city of Douglas.

Noel: Sorry?

Lillian: Phelps Dodge.

Noel: Yeah, the copper industry was big there. Southeastern corner of Arizona, southwestern corner of New Mexico. Right. Okay. Let me just check my notes -- when did your mother pass away?

Lillian: Let's see.

Michael: 1984.

Lillian: Oh yeah.

Noel: '84.

Michael: Her obituary is in there.

Noel: Good, okay. And did your family have any connections with the Freudenthals, who were a major family in Las Cruces.

Lillian: You know, the Freudenthals, Carmen Freudenthal was a wonderful smart woman. Max Freudenthal was a nice, dull person.

Noel: Dull?

Lillian: He was. But they were part of the Jewish community, but not like the rest of them. They didn't participate as far as coming to services when we had the -- but they weren't against it. That just wasn't their thing. Especially Max, it wasn't his thing. But Carmen was very, very important to the state. She's the one that got Planned Parenthood in the state of New Mexico.

Noel: That's right. I understand that.

Lillian: And they were big farmers.

Noel: Right.

Lillian: So was Gene Stern, a big farmer.

Noel: Yeah, tell me about Gene a bit.

Lillian: Well, Gene Stern came as a young man. I think he came from the same area -- I forget where he came from, but anyhow he came, and he came to the United States. I have to tell you that Gene Stern and Joe Rosenfeld and my dad were cousins of sort, but Gene Stern came from an extremely wealthy family in Europe, and they were part of the family. But I don't -- my father wasn't the wealthy one.

But Gene Stern came as a young man. He went to Hobbs, New Mexico and he met a woman there who was already married and had a child. And he decided that's who he wanted. Her name was Mable. She was a wonderful woman. He married her and had six kids with her in Las Cruces. And he was the one that had the department store. But he also had --

Noel: The department store. I thought Rosenfeld --

Lillian: That was the Boston Store. Gene Stern had the White House.

Noel: Oh, okay.

Lillian: And his family is very interesting. They didn't know what the Jews were, or Presbyterians, it didn't matter in those days. But they were an interesting family.

Noel: Well, I understand the Freudenthals played a very important role in getting the irrigation district. And the Conchas Lake.

Lillian: You know, you could be right about that. Because that was his life, was farming.

Noel: I know and dependent on irrigation.

Lillian: Yes.

Noel: I was told, read something, that the Freudenthals played a very important role.

Lillian: I'm sure that's true.

Noel: In Conchas Lake.

Lillian: I'm sure.

Noel: Elephant Butte, I think was already --

Lillian: Elephant Butte was a government project, anyhow. But --

Noel: Conchas was but it took a lot of lobbying to get Conchas.

Lillian: Yes.

But they were very important in the farming area, they really were.

Noel: And they were connected to another very important family in southwestern New Mexico, Lesnsky? In Arizona? Do you know about Lesinsky?

Lillian: Un-huh.

Noel: Lesinsky developed the Longfellow Mine in Arizona. And was extremely wealthy, and then his wife hated New Mexico and worried about the education of their kids. So, they eventually moved back to New York. They originally came from New York. But Lesinsky was related, I'm trying to think of how, to the Freudenthals, and they were related also to the Solomons.).

Lillian: Oh, the Solomons, I had heard of, but the Freudenthals in Cruces kept to themselves. They had two children, and I think the son, I think died. I think the daughter -- no they had one child. A girl and she has since had a -- she had

a child. I don't know what's happened to them, but they were not part of, I mean, it's hard to say this because, but they weren't part of our little group. They weren't part of it. But they weren't against it, I'll put it that way.

Noel: Right. Good.

Lillian: But they were Jewish, and they never denied the fact that they were Jewish people.

Noel: Do you think it was their wealth that separated them from the others?

Lillian: I don't know. I don't know. I always -- I thought Max was a very unusual kind of man. He was very quiet and very withdrawn. Carmen was just the opposite. She was just out in the world.

Noel: Well I've heard a lot about Carmen and about her responsibility for Planned Parenthood.

Lillian: She's very political. She was very political. And smart. She was really smart. They lived in an absolutely wonderful house. And not that you'd want to live in it, because it had little tiny rooms, but it was built like a -- it was like a Mexican house, that's all it was. Nice house.

Lee: Did you talk about driving there to Los Angeles with your parents every year?

Lillian: No, well, we did that.

Noel: Well, tell me about it.

Lillian: Okay, I'll tell you. Everybody in Las Cruces thought we were rich, because, number one, we lived on Greening Avenue, which was paved. There weren't many paved streets in Cruces. My father put the three kids in the car

sometimes, with the dog. And we drove straight through to California and we stayed three months at the beach.

Noel: Really?

Lillian: True. My father took us there and he stayed a week with us. Then he came back in the middle of the summer for furniture market and he stayed a week with us. Then he came back the end of the summer and picked us up, and took us home. And we spent three months at the beach.

Noel: Did you have any family in the LA area?

Lillian: Not a soul. But it shows you how the Jewish families -- I mean, we stayed in two different apartments, and the one that we stayed in the first couple of years, was next door to the Sea Breeze, I can remember the Sea Breeze. And my sister-in-law in Cruces was married to my brother. Her whole family was the Nogales Capin family. All the Capins and all that -- that's a whole story in itself.

[Lillian told the story: Well it's a wonderful story. There were six. The father Mr. Capin was a tailor. He wanted my father to go into business with him. And my father didn't want to be in the clothing business with him at the time. They were in Nogales, Arizona and he ended up ? Capins had three huge department stores right on the border. They became extremely wealthy and there was I think six brothers. And that's a whole family story that ought to be written about. But anyhow that was our summer. This Jewish family, all these Capins

from Nogales were next door to us. I think back now, and how could anyone have afforded to stay three months.

Lillian: Oh my God. Well, it wasn't a luxurious apartment. I mean, it was two rooms and when my father came, I ended up sleeping in a cot and my mother and he slept in the bed and my two brothers slept together.

Noel: Did relatives from New York ever visit you?

Lillian: This is so -- that you asked it. My Aunt Gussie was an extremely wealthy woman, on her own. She was a self-made rich woman.

Noel: How?

Lillian: She started a department store. They called it the Shirtwaist House in those days. And she had a partner, a Jewish woman, and that went from one thing to another.

Noel: In New York?

Lillian: In New York. And she became very wealthy. My Uncle Louie never worked a day in his life and he was one of these guys that stood on the corner and gave speeches. [Added after taped interview: But my Aunt Gussie was a rich woman. They lived when I was thirteen years old on Central Park West in an apartment on the twelfth floor, an apartment [that had] four bedrooms, its own little maid, and with its own elevator. But my Aunt Gussie and my Aunt Ray, they had never been to Las Cruces. They didn't think they had inside toilets. And when Jay and I got married, my father insisted that they come for the wedding and they did. They were shocked that we lived in a nice house.

Noel: So Gussie visted---

Lillian: And Louie came, and Ray and Dave came.

Noel: Did they come again, or just that one time?

Lillian: Never again, no.

Noel: Okay. Did you have any --

Lillian: But my father used to go East at least once a year.

Noel: To buy?

Lillian: No, to see them. And to buy, yes, uh-huh.

Noel: Okay. So, anything else to add that might help us?

Lillian: I don't know.

Noel: Lee? Michael?

Lillian: I can't imagine anybody'd be interested in all this. I mean, I think I think it's the same as any family that, except that, you know, my father was the mayor for such a long time, but I'm sure you could interview people, old-timers in Cruces that would know a lot about his dealings with people, but you know what? My dad kept us out of that. And he kept my mother out of it too because my mother did not like it.

Lee: What other family did he bring up to Las Cruces?

Lillian: Oh well, my mother was lonely for family. So, she had a sister that was married, Gertie and Myron -- he was a plumber in New York. And Joe and Ethel was my mother's brother. He was in the shoe business. And my dad

brought them out here, set Myron and Gertie up in the plumbing business and gave Joe and Ethel a small furniture store to run so my mother had family.

Noel: What a gentleman! Okay. Thank you.

[end of recording]