

Kay Albert-Spector Transcript

Bernice Heinstein: – Saturday, 1999. I am Bernice Heinstein interviewing Kay Albert in her home under the auspices of Temple Emanuel's Oral History Project. Now you say something.

Kay Albert: I am Kay Albert. I live at Two Golden Drive, Apartment Eight in Winthrop, Massachusetts, 02152.

BH: Kay, I'd like to begin by asking you some reflections on your life. Think back as far as you can and tell me what life was like growing up? Where did you grow up? What was it like having brothers and sisters? Maybe something about your parents and your grandparents.

KA: Well, I was born in the South End, and I have had a brother and a sister. They both passed away. I had beautiful parents. My father passed away many, many years ago, and my mother passed away, also many years ago. Although she was ninety-five years old when she passed away. I lived in the South End for many, many years, and then we moved to Dorchester. While I was in Dorchester, growing up there, I lived in several places – Wales Street, Lucerne Street, and when I lived in Lucerne Street, I used to teach piano. I went from one place to another. In those days, it was nothing to go to the different homes in Dorchester and any of the streets, and I loved it. And after that, I can't seem to remember.

BH: Go back and talk maybe a little bit about having a brother and a sister when you were really young. Because where were you in the family?

KA: Well, I was the youngest of a family. My brother lived with us for a while, but eventually, when he got married, he moved to Monticello, New York, and opened a

business there, and was very, very successful. My sister, of course, lived with us for quite a while, then she got married and moved to Brookline, Mass. We were very, very close. My brother used to visit us every year, and there was a store, a restaurant on Blue Hill Avenue in Dorchester, called the G & G. Every time he came to visit us, we went in there to eat because we loved it. The potato kugel, all the Jewish foods were just wonderful. My brother was very good to us and took us out all the time, would stay with us for about a week or so every year.

BH: What do you remember about growing up Jewish? Did that mean anything one way or the other?

KA: Well, my late mother was very, very religious, and we had a kosher house, and I stuck to the religion and being kosher, I stuck to that too, until the time that I got married. For some reason, I sort of got away from it, even though I don't say that I'm very religious, but I still go to shul and enjoy that. I feel I'm a good American at heart, but I'm still involved with my Jewish religion, which I enjoy very much.

BH: Do you have any recollections of World War I or World War II?

KA: No.

BH: Nothing?

KA: No, I cannot remember.

BH: Do you remember your grandparents at all?

KA: No.

BH: No? Okay.

KA: Well, if I recall, they passed away in Europe.

BH: And was everybody in your family born here?

KA: No, my late mother and father were born in Riga, Latvia. My sister Etta and brother Max were born there, too, and I was the only one who was born in Massachusetts, in the South End.

BH: And what brought them here, do you know, to Massachusetts as opposed to someplace else?

KA: I can't remember what it was, but they came at a very early age with my late mother and father, and went right to the South End, where they resided for many years. Then we moved to Dorchester.

BH: And do you have any recollections of special things that went on when you were young as a teenager, for instance, other than giving the piano lessons? How did you learn to play the piano?

KA: I took lessons in many places. I remember I used to travel to Savin Hill, and my teacher was Clarence Chase. He had two pianos there, and I enjoyed learning from this Mr. Chase. I had given recitals. Also, we both gave a recital on the two pianos. Then I studied at the Staley College of the Spoken Word, and I started doing radio work while I was studying at the Staley College. We called ourselves the Staley Trio. There was my pianist, violinist, and cello. This was very interesting at that time. Also, as I was growing up, I had worked in the Pride restaurant on Harrison Avenue. I played the piano with a trio many, many years ago, which I enjoyed very much. For many years, I have played in a dancing school that was at least for twelve years or more, when I moved from Brookline. First, I lived in Dorchester, and then I lived in Brookline for a while. Then, when I got married, I moved to Winthrop, Massachusetts.

BH: Now, how did you meet your husband?

KA: A friend of mine introduced us. We had a blind date that was Harry Spector, and then he passed away many years later.

BH: Did you have any children with him?

KA: I had my sons, Stephen Spector and Murray Spector. [inaudible] Then, when Harry Spector passed away, I met Eddie Albert while I was working at Novick's Hotel in Millis. After a couple of years, we got married and honeymooned in Florida. Then we made our home in Winthrop, and he passed away twelve years ago. We had a very happy life together.

BH: Can you tell us something about the different times when you were at Novick's? Were there other places where you worked?

KA: Yes.

BH: This is when the children were grown up.

KA: First, I worked in Magnolia Manor for a number of years, which was very, very interesting. I worked there summers.

BH: And what did you do?

KA: I was in the office. I did secretarial work. Then, after a few years, I got work in Bethlehem, New Hampshire, at the Strawberry Hill Hotel. I was in the office there, and I worked there for a number of years. Also enjoyed the hotel work very much. Then, when I got through there, I got the job at Novick Hotel in Millis. I was there for at least ten years, all the High Holidays and also during the summer. That's where I had met my late husband, Edward Albert. The work was very interesting.

BH: What did you do?

KA: I was office manager there. I also did about everything else, waiting on table when they were short on help, serving coffee, entertaining – varied work.

BH: Now, tell me something about the different hotels? Were they mostly Jewish clientele, or were they mixed? What exactly was it like there?

KA: The Magnolia Manor was a Jewish clientele. I would say ninety percent Jewish people. Once a week, we had an entertainer. Art (Rubin?) was our director of social activities. Once a week, all the help used to entertain, which I did. Novick's Hotel was strictly kosher. Also, I mentioned Magnolia Manor.

BH: Strawberry Hill?

KA: Strawberry Hotel was strictly kosher.

BH: Are any of these hotels still in existence today?

KA: No, they're not there anymore. I don't know whether –

BH: [inaudible] era gone by.

KA: I know that in Millis, Novick's Hotel has been taken over by – I can't remember what they were called, but they were nonsmokers. They used to wear the robes, and they were like a sect.

BH: Monks?

KA: I can't remember what they actually were called. Strawberry Hill Hotel is not there anymore. Magnolia Manor was not there anymore.

BH: Tell me something about some of your friends as you were growing up. Do you still have any of those friends?

KA: I did have many friends, but sorry to say that most of them have passed away. Now I have many friends in Winthrop. Also, I played in several dancing schools. For twelve years, I played in Irene's School of the Dance in Winthrop, and also for Dorothy Kincaid. There was a place in East Boston, which I cannot remember the name, but I did twelve dance recitals during the time I played at the dancing school. Then I used to teach piano for a while in Dorchester. I don't know whether I had mentioned that, but I enjoyed teaching. It was very easy to go to all the different homes because it was not dangerous at the time.

BH: So really, music was your life.

KA: Music has been my life and my therapy. To this day, I feel that way about it. This day, it is my therapy now.

BH: Can you explain a little bit more about how it's your therapy?

KA: Well, I do a lot of volunteer work in the nursing homes. I have my own choral group, and I have worked there in Revere, at the JCC, the Jewish Community Center. I've been there for about ten years with different directors as the pianist there, and we go out to perform at various places, like nursing homes. I also play for all the temples when they ask me to play "Star-Spangled Banner," [inaudible], or if there's something with the Hebrew school and they want me to play for the children during Purim or Hanukkah; I am always there to help them out.

BH: Now, have you played at any nightclubs?

KA: Yes. My great-nephew owns his own band. My great nephew, Stephen Heinstein, had me play for (Mama Kin?) about three, four years ago. They wanted me to open up with some of my Sophie Tucker numbers. And then also, there was a place on Commonwealth Avenue; I think it was a Paradise Club. They had me perform there. And then seven years ago, when my nephew, Herbert Heinstein, had a surprise sixtieth

birthday party at the Zanzibar – this was unexpected. They asked me to play the keyboard, which I was very happy to do, and that's how I performed in nightclubs.

BH: And did you like it?

KA: I loved it.

BH: Maybe what you could do is play something for us. [inaudible] would you play? Go ahead.

KA: I'd like to play [inaudible]

BH: Anything you want.

KA: [inaudible] or "Ain't She Sweet." What would you like better?

BH: Do "Ain't She Sweet." Then you can do the other one.

KA: [inaudible] [Kay plays piano.]

BH: Now, sing it. You sing it usually, don't you?

KA: I don't think it's good.

BH: Not today?

KA: I don't think it's good.

BH: Okay. Want to play the other song?

KA: The [inaudible]?

BH: The [inaudible].

KA: [inaudible]. Would you like to hear it?

BH: [inaudible] I would love it.

KA: [inaudible] and I will be playing some songs [inaudible] sing. [Kay plays the piano.]

BH: Would love to ask you – what do you think life would have been like had you been born a man?

KA: Well, it's very hard to explain, because I don't think I would want to be a man. I'm very happy as a woman.

BH: What was it like to be a man when you were growing up? What were men like? Were they dominant?

KA: Well, when I was single, I had a lot of boyfriends, and the reason I was invited to many parties [was] because I played the piano. At that time, there were always house parties. So, I was always invited to house parties, but I always managed to have a boyfriend. At that time, I enjoyed the company of a man. Now that I'm much older, I don't enjoy them at all. I wouldn't want to go out with men because I wouldn't want to cook for men anymore. But during my marriage, I had some very good times, but plenty of tragedy, unfortunately.

BH: Do you want to talk about it all?

KA: Yes. Well, also my older son, unfortunately, lost his family. That was at least twenty years ago, but to this day, it's very, very difficult. Even to this day. His wife and his daughter got killed, and about four years later, his son died. It happened that they were adopted by his late wife's family because at that time, I lost my husband, and there was nothing much that I could do about it. When I was married to Eddie Albert, he had a leg amputation. Unfortunately, I've had a lot of tragedy during my marriages.

BH: But you have survived.

KA: I have survived because of the fact – with so much tragedy, I had to be a fighter, and that's what I became. I became very strong because of all of this. To this day, I am strong, and I'm very independent, and I try to keep going to the best of my ability, mainly because of my music, because I love that. I'm involved with several organizations, and also where I live, I'm on the executive board.

BH: Where do you live?

KA: In Winthrop, at 2 Golden Drive.

BH: And is that [inaudible] house?

KA: Yes, it is.

BH: And how did you get involved to live there?

KA: Well, of course, I have lived in Winthrop for about fifty years, and at the time my husband passed away, I just felt that because of the fact that they were raising the rent so high, I started to look around. I came here to look at an apartment, and when I saw this apartment, I was very pleased. I've been here about twelve years, and I'm very comfortable here and enjoy living here.

BH: One last question. For future generations, from everything you've lived and everything you know, what advice could you give to future generations based on your experiences?

KA: Well, first of all, I'm against smoking, especially for women or girls, and I hate the idea that so many young people are on drugs. To me, it's a terrible thing. I say that an education is very important for young people, and, of course, good health, and try to do good things in life. Think of others, but be good to yourself. Love yourself first before you

can love others, and that's very important in life.

BH: That's probably what helped you lead such a long, healthy, good, decent life.

KA: Yes, I would say – I can't say my health has been good because I had a very bad winter, but because I've done things for people, which has given me a great deal of pleasure, and become involved with the community, whenever I was asked to do something, I never refused them. I helped them get entertainment. If they want me to come and play something, I'm glad to do that, and I try to think positive, but the tragedy has not helped too much. I'm still independent, and I do the very best that I possibly can.