

1 ORAL HISTORY OF: Matilda "Tillie" Brandwine
2 INTERVIEWED BY: Cheryl Guyer
3 DATE OF INTERVIEW: Friday, November 12, 2003
4 LOCATION OF INTERVIEW: Jewish Federation
5 SUBJECT MATTER: Jewish life, family history

6
7 - - -

8 MS. GUYER: This is Cheryl Guyer. I'm conducting an
9 oral history interview with Tillie Brandwine at the Max M.
10 Fisher Building at the Jewish Federation on November the 12th,
11 2003.

12 I do have permission to use Tillie's words and
13 thoughts in the future for educational and historic research
14 and documentation.

15 So let's begin with a few questions.

16 I read that you were born in New York and we're all
17 curious when and why your family came to Detroit.

18 MS. BRANDWINE: Oh, I think that's quite simple. I
19 was born in Brooklyn and my mother even talked about that if
20 she even leaned out her window, she could see a tree, and then
21 a book came out, A Tree Grows in Brooklyn. And it was very
22 meaningful to us.

23 My mother worked in a blouse manufacturing company
24 and I don't know if you've read about it. During those years,
25 1912 to 1915, they were slave shops, all of them. The
Triangle Shirt Company, there was a terrible fire and many of

1 the girls were burned and some of them threw themselves out of
2 the windows and that kind of thing. My mother worked there
3 and quit the week before. My father worked as a cutter in a
4 tailoring place.

5 Then Henry Ford started with the \$5 a day and my
6 mother's older sister was already in Detroit. By that time
7 the hair was all gone from my head, from my face as when I was
8 born. She thought I was a young beauty. She thought it would
9 be a good idea for her to take my brother, who was three years
10 older than I, and me, to Detroit to see her sister. My mother
11 saw green grass and yards, and my aunt had chickens in her
12 yard and things like that. My mother was captivated and she
13 just wrote to my father and said, if you want us, you have to
14 come here.

15 He started in business on Manchester, which is the
16 southern border of what the Henry Ford factory was in those
17 days in Highland Park. All along that street there were these
18 little kiosks that sold work gloves, work shoes, overalls,
19 aprons, anything. Cigarettes, cigars, chewing tobacco, all
20 that stuff for the workers that were now making all this
21 money, this \$5 a day, and they were spending it. My father
22 had one of those kiosks for a couple of years. That's how we
23 started in Detroit.

24 **MS. GUYER:** And you were on a street called
25 Windemere Street, I read.

1 **MS. BRANDWINE:** Yes.

2 **MS. GUYER:** What was the neighborhood like? Was it
3 a Jewish neighborhood?

4 **MS. BRANDWINE:** It was not a Jewish neighborhood.
5 It was in Highland Park and Windemere is now the Davison
6 Expressway. When I say Windemere now, everybody corrects me
7 and says you mean Wildemere. No, it was not Wildemere. It
8 was Windemere in Highland Park and that's where it was. And
9 it was a very nice. Private homes, big framed private homes.
10 We had quite a tragedy that happened to us there.

11 By brother was three years older than I was. My
12 mother had dressed us up and told us to go out on the porch
13 and wait and not get dirty, because we were going visiting. I
14 don't know where. A little boy across the street was playing
15 with a slingshot and he let go a stone and it hit my brother
16 in the eye. I mean, if he had tried to aim he could not have
17 done that. There was this screaming and this blood. I was
18 about three years old, my brother was six.

19 My mother came out of the house hearing the
20 screaming, and she ran back in and grabbed either a blanket or
21 some such thing, wrapped him in it and ran. I'm writing my
22 history and the thing that bothers me most is, where did she
23 go! There was no 911, certainly. Did she know where there
24 was a doctor in the neighborhood? Maybe she went to the drug
25 store. Maybe she went to a neighbor. My father drove a car

1 but he was in the store. There was no telephone. What did
2 she do? Where did she go? You know, she's gone now and I
3 have nobody to ask. There's nobody to ask. So, you know,
4 when you ask -- you say when the children will ask their
5 parents, they don't know what to ask.

6 **MS. GUYER:** This is so true.

7 **MS. BRANDWINE:** A few times I asked her to explain
8 to me what my condition was, about the hair and everything.
9 It bothered her terribly and she didn't want to speak to that.
10 Today, I would really like to know a little bit more about it.

11 Here's another incident that's driving this. I have
12 never been able to find my birth certificate. Whether it was
13 my condition when I was born or whatever it was. I was born
14 in the Beth Israel Hospital in Manhattan. My brother was born
15 at home three years before that. My brother has a birth
16 certificate. I do not.

17 Through the years it's been a matter of comedy and
18 worry. When the time came that my husband and I could do some
19 traveling, I needed a passport but I didn't have a birth
20 certificate and I couldn't get a passport. I was told that if
21 I could prove that my mother was in the country within three
22 years before my birth and that I was in the country within
23 five years after my birth, that they would issue me a
24 substitute birth certificate. Just wasn't all that easy, you
25 know.

1 My father's citizenship papers -- at that time women
2 didn't have the privilege of citizenship. They became
3 citizens by virtue of their husband's citizenship. So their
4 name is on the citizen certificate. Well, her name is on the
5 certificate and my brother's name is on the certificate, but
6 mine is not. So obviously I wasn't born when he got his
7 citizenship. And his citizenship papers are dated March 1915.

8 **MS. GUYER:** So you remain a mystery.

9 **MS. BRANDWINE:** My mother took me to school. You
10 didn't need any proof. You're bringing me to school, you're
11 five years old. So she brought me to school in 1919. They
12 put down 1914. So on Social Security, on Medicare, on
13 everything, I'm 89 years old, not 88.

14 **MS. GUYER:** Let me ask you something else: In terms
15 of your family life and growing up, was your family involved
16 with the Jewish community in any way or when did they first
17 identify with the local Detroit Jewish community?

18 **MS. BRANDWINE:** Early on. I wouldn't really know,
19 but when I was about eight years old, we moved to a street
20 called Nevada, which is really Six and a Half Mile Road,
21 between Woodward and John R. There were maybe a half a dozen
22 Jewish families. The Helfmans lived around there, the Biners,
23 the Leftons. There were a few Jewish families in the area.

24 There was a lot of empty land on Brush Street, which
25 was a mile away, and they were building some large frame

1 houses there and right across the street from the Greenfield
2 Park School. And so Jewish people started to move in there.
3 My father had a dry goods store in the area and so did my
4 uncle. They got together, they said, look, we've got a
5 minyan. It's time to start a shul.

6 It was my first lesson in fund-raising. They had a
7 meeting at my aunt's house and my mother baked. We invited
8 all the Jewish people from Brush Street and otherwise, and my
9 father told them that it's time to have a shul, for boys to
10 have their bar mitzvahs and we will have a minyan, and the
11 children need a cheder. And this is the beginning of a fund-
12 raising for this purpose.

13 Well, the fund-raising was going very, very slowly.
14 The houses that they bought on Brush Street were about \$7,500,
15 but it was all they had. They had put everything into the
16 house. They didn't have money to give away and most of them
17 were tradesmen. And my father announced a gift and my uncle
18 announced a gift, and then it started. I'll give \$10 over two
19 years. I can give \$5. I'll give \$20 over four years. That
20 kind of thing. But with that kind of money you don't build a
21 shul.

22 **MS. GUYER:** What was the name of the shul?

23 **MS. BRANDWINE:** I always called it the Northern
24 Brush Shul in Talmud Torah until Sol Drachler told me that
25 there was no United Hebrew School by that name. And so many

1 years later I had my grandson drive me over there. Drachler
2 said, there was no such thing. I went there. I know. The
3 cornerstone said 1926. On the lintel it says in Hebrew
4 letters but in English pronunciation: Cong. Shirah Torah. I
5 called Sol. He said, yeah, we had a branch there.

6 **MS. GUYER:** That's terrific. I was also reading
7 that in your early years you were a secretary for Judge
8 Butzel. I wondered if you might want to talk a few minutes
9 about that life experience. He had to be very inspiring.

10 **MS. BRANDWINE:** Well, I graduated from high school
11 at the age of 16 in 1932. Things were very, very bad. My
12 brother was already in college. I thought, you know, if I had
13 taken some typing or something like that. But if you were
14 going to college, you didn't take typing or shorthand. I
15 didn't know where I could go to work to help out instead of
16 going to school. I was 16, I figured I had plenty of time to
17 go to college later. I went back to school for six months. I
18 took typing and shorthand, and I advertised in the Legal News
19 that I was willing to work for experience.

20 In those days there were a lot of young lawyers who
21 were delighted to have somebody in their office that would
22 take the phone. I went to work for five attorneys and an
23 insurance agent, and they decided that I couldn't work for
24 nothing and they each paid me 50 cents. The insurance lady
25 didn't, just the five men. So I was getting \$2.50 a week for

1 car fare and my lunches. I was living at home. I really
2 could have done without that, but it made them feel good. I
3 took it.

4 By this time I'm 17 years old and I know that I
5 could work there forever and I would be working for
6 experience. You know, they were young lawyers and they loved
7 to dictate. I wasn't very good. I had only had six months of
8 this stuff. They would get a contract up. And I got smart
9 all of a sudden. I said, you know, I can read, just tell me
10 the names and the dates that you want and I'll put them in.
11 Well, they were crushed that they couldn't dictate the
12 contracts to me. It was good practice for them. I wasn't
13 interested.

14 We were on the 19th floor of the National Bank
15 Building and down the hall was Stevenson, Butzel & Winston.
16 Upstairs there was Stevenson, Butzel, ^{SIMON}~~Eaman~~ & Long. The two
17 big Butzel firms. But on our floor there was one door that
18 was absolutely blank. There was no air conditioning in the
19 National Bank Building then. So during the summer all the
20 doors were open. I used to see very important people going
21 into that blank door. I wanted to know what's behind that
22 door.

23 One day a young man, his last name is Zwerdling, I
24 don't remember his first name -- stopped by the open door and
25 said, you don't seem very busy. Would you like to make a

1 little extra money by typing the justice's decisions? Sure.
2 After hours.

3 So I went in. There were a some cheap desks and
4 chairs, a tremendous safe built into the wall and a
5 magnificent oriental carpet on the floor. That was it. I was
6 waiting for Justice Butzel.

7 When I was in the eighth grade, I won a speech
8 contest by reciting The Seven Ages of Man. And I'm sitting
9 there and this man walks in. And it's Shakespeare's Justice
10 in fair round belly with good capon lined, with eyes severe.
11 He didn't have a beard of formal cut, full of wise saws and
12 modern instances, and so he played his part. I was amazed.
13 This was my justice. Here he was and I was taking dictation
14 from him. I was in heaven.

15 But there was a downside. He dictated with a big
16 cigar in his mouth. His glasses were pinched to his nose and
17 held there with a black ribbon, tied to his lapel. So every
18 once in a while the glasses would fall off. Then he would
19 bend down to find his glasses and the ashes would go all over
20 his vest. So he would take out the cigar and dust himself off
21 and put the glasses back on, put the cigar back in his mouth.

22 The downside was that he was dictating all this
23 time, and since like I said, I wasn't very good, I was having
24 a lot of difficulty. But apparently they were used to this
25 and when I was through that one night, Mr. Zwerdling said,

1 it's all right. I'll help you along. You'll get it. He
2 said, we don't expect you to hear everything that he says.

3 One night he dictated a decision and when I
4 mentioned it in front of some lawyers recently, they were
5 familiar with the case. At the time, the supermarkets were
6 starting to stock over-the-counter medication and the drug
7 stores were suing so that they shouldn't be allowed to do
8 this. It was his decision and I took it. It was late at
9 night, and they decided that I couldn't go home alone, that
10 there were people out there who might know that I have some
11 information that would be valuable to them, in addition to which
12 it was late at night and I used to take a streetcar to work.

13 There was a well known criminal lawyer by the name
14 of Anthony ^{MAIOLA} ~~Maio~~. And he walked into the office and they
15 told him what the problem was with getting me home. He said,
16 so and so is downstairs. I'll take her down. Takes me down
17 to his long black bulletproof limousine. The chauffeur sits
18 me down and puts a fur rug around my legs. I was scared to
19 death until I got home. At that time we lived just off of
20 Woodward on a street called Longwood, which is about six
21 blocks north of Six Mile Road.

22 **MS. GUYER:** Those were quite some days. Did Justice
23 Butzel ever talk to you about the Jewish community at that
24 time?

25 **MS. BRANDWINE:** No. You know, the justice wasn't

1 that involved in the Jewish community. It was Fred Butzel.

2 But the question to me at that time was how did I
3 get started in Federation. Sometime during this time, this
4 young man, Zwerdling, came up to me and gave me a pile of
5 cards, told me what they were for, and I should solicit these
6 people for money for Federation. They were on Chene Street.
7 I had to take two streetcars to get there. They were a shoe
8 maker, a grocer, a tailor, you know, small businessmen during
9 the depth of the Depression. Most of them said they couldn't
10 give me anything. A few of them gave me 50 cents.

11 **MS. GUYER:** And you went door to door?

12 **MS. BRANDWINE:** Door to door in these stores. I
13 went to one place and this man said, I wish I could give you
14 more. He gave me a dollar. That was my biggest take. He
15 said, but you know, you're doing a good thing. Keep it up.
16 So I did.

17 **MS. GUYER:** Look where it led to. And then you
18 became involved in boards and various agencies.

19 **MS. BRANDWINE:** I went to work after that for a
20 property management company. Today, when I tell my grand kids
21 that I was making the grand sum of \$40 a week, they laugh.
22 They think this is very, very funny. But at that time
23 families were living on \$40 a week.

24 **MS. GUYER:** Very impressive. Very interesting. So
25 you've been on so many boards. I've made a list here. The

1 Jewish Family and Children Services, the Fresh Air Society,
2 the Jewish Community Center Board, the Jewish Apartments and
3 Services. You chaired Culture and Group Services. Is there
4 something special that you wanted to talk to us about?

5 **MS. BRANDWINE:** No, but I was the first woman to be
6 a chairman of a budget committee. And we had the Hillels, the
7 Hebrew Schools, the Jewish Center, the Fresh Air Society.
8 They were all part of our portfolio. It was a difficult job.
9 I had to learn how to read the statements that the different
10 agencies were giving us. I really was not that familiar with
11 it. The biggest problem was the yeshivah's statements, which
12 didn't make any sense at all. They just scribbled them down.
13 But the great thing about that job is that it was during my
14 chairmanship of that committee that the day schools got their
15 first sizeable funding.

16 **MS. GUYER:** And how did that happen?

17 **MS. BRANDWINE:** We had conversations about it. The
18 day schools at that time were getting \$13,000 a year, which
19 was half of a salary of a secular teacher. That's what they
20 were getting. Hillel was expanding.

21 **MS. GUYER:** Were your children at the day school?

22 **MS. BRANDWINE:** My youngest son was a student of
23 Hillel.

24 **MS. GUYER:** So you were really an advocate for the
25 day school. You saw the value in the community.

1 **MS. BRANDWINE:** There was no question in my mind
2 about the day schools. Even the yeshiva, as bad as their
3 bookkeeping was, and the fact that they didn't want to show
4 everything that they owned, so the bills for oil and milk and
5 everything were shoved in the back of a drawer so nobody would
6 find them. The only thing about that was that my brother was
7 in the oil business and he was supplying them with heating
8 oil. He would go in and look through and find the bills and
9 mark them paid, because there was no point in doing anything
10 else. But our whole family was very attuned to Jewish
11 education.

12 I'll tell you a funny story about my Jewish
13 education. We always lived in gentile neighborhoods. My
14 friends were Ruth McAllister, May Anderson and Edna Ingam.
15 But we did have a rebbe come to the house because my brother
16 -- a boy had to have a Hebrew education. I suppose I learned
17 a little bit by osmosis. I knew all the barchas because I
18 sang them with my brother. We did them together. But when
19 this little shul was built and we had the United Hebrew School
20 there, there was really no place for me, because I was way
21 beyond ba be ba. And then there was the bar mitzvah class.
22 So I was the only girl in the bar mitzvah class.

23 Do you understand Yiddish at all?

24 **MS. GUYER:** A little.

25 **MS. BRANDWINE:** I came home one day real cocky, and

1 I said, my teacher said that my eyes are like cherries and my
2 cheeks are like roses. And my mother didn't miss a beat. She
3 said this in Yiddish, so I won't repeat it in Yiddish.
4 Tillie, you have already learned the whole Torah, you don't
5 have to go back to the cheder.

6 **MS. GUYER:** That's great. That's wonderful. Tell
7 me about the year 1967 and how it affected you and all that
8 was going on in Israel, and fund-raising here in Detroit. Do
9 you have any memories of what things were like at that time?

10 **MS. BRANDWINE:** Yeah. You went to work for all the
11 organizations. Everybody needed money. At that moment my
12 husband was particularly interested in the bond program, which
13 was comparatively new. The bond office was in a store front
14 on Six Mile Road and my sister-in-law and I decided we would
15 work there. It was on the ground floor. I remember one lady
16 brought in her Social Security check and she gave it to us.
17 People brought money and didn't wait for receipts. It was
18 really quite amazing and gratifying and tragic. It was
19 everything mixed in. My brother and my husband decided that
20 this was a dangerous place for us to be, my sister-in-law and
21 me. They hired Pinkerton men to stay outside and guard us.

22 **MS. GUYER:** So much money. And then you went to
23 Israel shortly thereafter, I believe, right?

24 **MS. BRANDWINE:** We went to Israel before that.

25 **MS. GUYER:** Was that your first trip?

1 **MS. BRANDWINE:** Our first trip was I think in 1962.

2 **MS. GUYER:** And your memory of Israel at that time?

3 **MS. BRANDWINE:** I never really analyzed my feelings
4 about that. It was just being there was like we were doing
5 something positive. I mean, that we collected money. In '67
6 we lived in Huntington Woods and people were bringing money to
7 the house. The bond money went to the house. Hadassah money
8 went to the house. Federation money. Just, you know, people
9 were coming in, they were dropping it off at the house. It
10 wasn't until morning that you could even think of going to
11 sleep because you didn't have any burglar alarms or anything
12 like that, and if anybody knew where this money was -- but
13 let's go back to '62.

14 We were very active in Jewish National Fund. A man
15 by the name of Chanan Yerdan was the head of Jewish National
16 Fund in Israel. He came to the United States and he visited
17 with us in our home. When we decided that we were going to go
18 to Israel, he said, you'll come to us. His wife -- I wish I
19 could remember her name. I can't and I don't know how to find
20 it either. His wife was a brilliant woman. When Einstein
21 came here on speaking tours, she was his translator. So we
22 spent time with Hannan Yerdan and his wife.

23 Later -- this is very disconnected, but much later
24 we heard that she was in New York so we made arrangements to
25 see her. And the problem was that she was losing her eyesight

1 and she came to New York to see some specialist, to see what
2 they could do. Apparently the response was not a good one and
3 I often think, if somebody told me that I was going blind,
4 what would I do first. You know what she did? She went out
5 and she bought herself a typewriter so she could learn to type
6 before she lost her vision, so she could continue with her
7 correspondence.

8 **MS. GUYER:** How magnificent. Interesting.

9 You have such a wonderful biography that I was
10 studying. Tell us about the years when you were Women's
11 Division President and what were women volunteers like in
12 those days and some of the programs that you had.

13 **MS. BRANDWINE:** Well, let me tell you something.
14 When you read, you get a fax and you get a whole board list
15 and there are husbands and wives, and brothers and sisters,
16 and whatever. Two sisters could not be on the board at the
17 same time.

18 **MS. GUYER:** At the Women's Division?

19 **MS. BRANDWINE:** Uh-huh.

20 **MS. GUYER:** Board of Governors? Women's Division.

21 **MS. BRANDWINE:** Frankly, I don't know whether it was
22 -- but I think so, because where would the Women's Division
23 have received that kind of an injunction if it didn't come
24 from Isador Sobeloff?

25 **MS. GUYER:** Yes.

1 **MS. BRANDWINE:** That was one thing. And when I
2 first started, you wore a hat to the meetings and gloves. The
3 outgoing president received a pair of white gloves as a gift.

4 **MS. GUYER:** How interesting. Were they mostly fund-
5 raising meetings or there was a lot of education, or what were
6 they about?

7 **MS. BRANDWINE:** There was at least as much education
8 as there was fund-raising. There were three education vice-
9 presidents and one of my vice-presidents was Helen Naimark.
10 She's very frail today but I have lunch with her and her
11 husband once a month. It's my turn one month. He just called
12 me the other day, and Tuesday we're going to have lunch again.

13 **MS. GUYER:** Wonderful. So she helped you connect
14 probably to the Jewish Apartments, also.

15 **MS. BRANDWINE:** Well, no, no. I came into the
16 Apartments before she did, as it happens.

17 **MS. GUYER:** Oh, really.

18 **MS. BRANDWINE:** I don't know how I got there. I
19 just got there.

20 **MS. GUYER:** Do you see women volunteering
21 differently today than when you came to meetings? What do
22 women's interests appear to be?

23 **MS. BRANDWINE:** Well, the women that volunteered
24 years ago, not many of the young women were also working
25 outside of the home. They didn't have careers. That's the

1 type of work that they did. I took my baby buggy and I walked
2 up and down the streets of Russell Woods West, and collected
3 on my cards.

4 **MS. GUYER:** Yeah. It was a very different time
5 then. You were also really involved with the JDC and you were
6 on the national board. Do you remember they were rescuing
7 Jews at that time and traveling?

8 **MS. BRANDWINE:** Yes. It happens about that time
9 that we had some relatives in Romania. We were trying to get
10 them out.

11 **MS. GUYER:** What was the year then?

12 **MS. BRANDWINE:** I don't remember.

13 **MS. GUYER:** These are '60s maybe, right?

14 **MS. BRANDWINE:** Fifties, more likely. We got a
15 letter. I'm your cousin. Help. My husband knew nothing
16 about this. He had no idea where this was coming from. His
17 sister was considerably older than he was, about nine years
18 older, and she immediately recognized the name. The name was
19 Hornstein. They were a very prestigious family in Romania.
20 Hornstein was the continental distributor of Studebaker
21 automobiles. The entire European area. They were very
22 wealthy people.

23 The older son was in a DP camp and he was the one
24 that contacted us. He was being used as an interpreter by the
25 United States Army, so he had some privileges. He contacted

1 us and we tried to get him out of the country. It was a very
2 difficult thing at that time because we were able to talk to
3 Paul Kaufman. Not a Jewish man. Can't remember his position.
4 But at one time he was a Studebaker official, but now he was
5 working for the government, and I don't remember the capacity.
6 But we felt that he would remember Sergio Hornstein and maybe
7 he could help us.

8 He did in fact. He said that he was working through
9 the State Department and they had used up just about all the
10 favors they could get from the State Department. One of the
11 people that they brought in was Thomas Mann and people of that
12 caliber. So Sergio Hornstein really didn't rate much. But he
13 said, I can get him into Canada and I can get him a job. So
14 we did, we were able to bring him into Canada.

15 **MS. GUYER:** This was all through the JDC, correct?

16 **MS. BRANDWINE:** Yes. But during the time that we
17 were trying to get him out and then his parents out of Romania
18 to anyplace -- they wound up in Israel for a short time -- the
19 one person that was the most secure, unofficial person that
20 would get people out of the countries that they were in was a
21 man by the name of Charles Jordan. And about that time he was
22 found floating in the river with a wire around his neck.

23 **MS. GUYER:** Interesting.

24 **MS. BRANDWINE:** I mean, it was traumatic, to put it
25 mildly. We then put up money to get the youngest brother out

1 of Romania. I'll never forget the joy that we had. We had
2 sent money but we didn't know who was getting the money. We
3 were told it was the most logical place. Then we didn't hear
4 anything and we thought we were trying to play God. What if
5 this incriminated them? What if it was Marcel Hornstein, his
6 wife Lydia, and their eight-year-old daughter Irena?

7 Some people may still remember Paul Kaufman. We
8 worried so about Marcel because we ^{had} no news, not from him, not
9 from anybody. We had ways of corresponding with him. His
10 Jewish name was Mosha but everybody knew him there as Marcel.
11 We wrote to him that we understood that Uncle Mosha was very
12 sick and we could send him to a hospital, but we weren't sure
13 if that's what we should do. What does he think? He wrote
14 back, by all means send him to the hospital. It was that kind
15 of thing. They sent messages under the postage stamps. Two,
16 three words.

17 **MS. GUYER:** What a time in history that was.

18 **MS. BRANDWINE:** I know I'm way off course, but one
19 thing just leads to another.

20 **MS. GUYER:** One of the things that you are both
21 loved and respected for in current times was the cemetery
22 project. I would love to hear about the cemetery project and
23 how it came to be, where it is now. It's such a service and a
24 mitzvah for all our community.

25 **MS. BRANDWINE:** Okay. You have time?

1 **MS. GUYER:** Sure.

2 **MS. BRANDWINE:** All right. I have a young friend in
3 New York. His name is Jonathan Auslander. Because his name
4 is Auslander, he became very interested in genealogy, to the
5 point where he does it for a living now. He does it for other
6 people. He says, we came from Hungary. But if we were
7 Auslanders in Hungary, then where did we come from? And
8 that's what his whole life was involved with.

9 But I got a call from him and he said, I'm looking
10 for a Max or Marcus Blum or Bloom. And the last we know of
11 him is that he lived in Highland Park in 1929 or something. I
12 don't remember the date. I was ready to say that I can't do
13 this, I wasn't interested in any of that stuff. But when he
14 said, I have the address where he lived, he lived right across
15 the street from us. And I remember my mother talking about
16 Bloom as the boy who shot the slingshot.

17 **MS. GUYER:** Oh my goodness.

18 **MS. BRANDWINE:** At that point there was no way that
19 I could say no. I wanted to find that man myself, but I
20 didn't even know where to look. I didn't know what a disk was
21 as opposed to a print-out on the computer. But I went to one
22 of the church's that are reputed to have good records, but we
23 weren't in it. I went to the main library and they had some
24 wonderful books. Do you remember the Polk directories?

25 **MS. GUYER:** Yes.

1 **MS. BRANDWINE:** I went through all the Bs there.
2 Going through the Bs I came across Biber. My maiden name was
3 Biber. Louis Biber, dry goods store. Wife, Rose. Son, Max,
4 law student. Daughter, Matilda, secretary. Where did that
5 come from? The whole thing. So I looked through all the Polk
6 directories, I looked through a lot of other things.

7 At that time the library was not yet computerized.
8 Do you remember they had oak chests of drawers and you pulled
9 out the drawers and it was alphabetical? It was that recent
10 that it was still that way. Going through the Bs again I saw
11 Biber, and I found my sister-in-law's name and then I found my
12 name. And I couldn't figure out what that was all about so I
13 asked the librarian. She said -- I'm going off on a tangent
14 again -- and she said, oh, those things are in the basement
15 and if you will give me your driver's license I will go down
16 and get it. I don't know why that was necessary, but I did.
17 And she came back up and in this little envelope was a
18 negative of me when I was 22 years old.

19 **MS. GUYER:** Oh, goodness.

20 **MS. BRANDWINE:** I asked where'd it come from. She
21 said, whatever is sent to us, if it has a name and date, we
22 keep it. She said, the only thing I can think about with this
23 is that some photography studio went out of business and they
24 sent us all their negatives and that's how you got to be
25 there.

1 **MS. GUYER:** And how did this relate to the cemetery
2 project?

3 **MS. BRANDWINE:** You're bringing me back, aren't you.
4 Bloom. I decided that I had to find this guy and wherever I
5 went there was no -- and then I thought, you know what, if he
6 was 29 years -- no, let's see. If he was an adult in 1929,
7 then he could be no longer alive. What about looking in some
8 of the cemeteries. I started and then I realized that this
9 was not as simple as it seemed. I called Kaufman, and I said,
10 how many Jewish cemeteries are there? I figured 10, 12, I
11 could do that. And I would go through and find Max or Marcus
12 Blum or Bloom. Thirty-nine. There are 39 Jewish cemeteries
13 in the tri-county area. Well, this was again, a little bit
14 too much for me.

15 So I called a cousin of mine and a few other people
16 I knew and my cousin Edith went to Machpelah and they gave her
17 the print-out just like that. On the other hand, some of the
18 places we went to, why should we give you our information?
19 Well, I don't want your information. Do you have this and
20 this.

21 Anyways, it became very obvious that this was more
22 than just looking for Blum or Bloom. This was history. All
23 of a sudden we opened up our eyes, the few people that were
24 involved in this, and said, look, why can't we make a record
25 of this? We may not find this particular person, but people

1 and their children here that don't know where their
2 grandparents are buried. We know that.

3 Anyway, I gathered together about six volunteers.
4 They didn't all stay very long but a few of them did. Three
5 of them were at this meeting for the Jewish Historical
6 Society, and I really had to have them stand up because they
7 were the kind of people that went to the cemetery and they
8 didn't have records, so you had to walk the cemetery and take
9 the information off the stones.

10 **MS. GUYER:** You had to record from every tombstone?

11 **MS. BRANDWINE:** Yes.

12 **MS. GUYER:** Oh, goodness.

13 **MS. BRANDWINE:** On some of them. We had a lot of
14 records. We didn't have any money, number one. Number two,
15 we didn't have a hechsure. Federation at that time -- when I
16 was finally looking for help -- Federation was involved with
17 the closing of the Borman Hall, if you remember. During that
18 time I wanted to do the Davar Torah for that particular time.
19 Bob ^{ARONSON} ~~Aaronson~~ said, Tillie, I don't want you to talk about old
20 people. So I said, I'm not going to talk about old people.
21 I'm going to talk about dead people.

22 People have asked me how I could get so involved
23 with death and I really never felt that I was involved with
24 death. I was involved with history. We eventually got Bethel
25 and Clover Hill and Machpelah, the bigger cemeteries. At

1 Machpelah, we couldn't get the disk because their computer
2 isn't compatible with anything else. So it's a matter of
3 close to 20,000 names that had to be keyed in separately. We
4 didn't have the money to pay anybody to do that. I was
5 pleading with Federation to take it over and they kept saying,
6 we've got enough on our plate. Mark Schlusel was president
7 at the time. He really owed me, but well, that's another
8 story.

9 **MS. GUYER:** Conversation.

10 **MS. BRANDWINE:** They wouldn't take it. So I did the
11 Davar Torah. It happens that -- time to go?

12 **MS. GUYER:** No. We still have maybe about 15 more
13 minutes.

14 **MS. BRANDWINE:** It happens that the -- you know, so
15 many people give Davar Torahs that have nothing to do with the
16 Torah reading, but I was talking about the Torah reading. It
17 was the death of Sarah.

18 **MS. GUYER:** This was at the board of governors or --

19 **MS. BRANDWINE:** Yes, the board of governors.

20 The death of Sarah. It just played right into my
21 hands. It was perfect.

22 Our father Abraham was looking for a proper place to
23 bury Sarah. He found the caves of Machpelah and the land
24 happened to be owned by a gentile man who was a friend of
25 Abraham's. And he said, I will give you this land for the

1 burial of your wife. Abraham said no, I will pay you.
2 Abraham paid him, so there was a record. And that's why today
3 we know where our matriarchs and patriarchs are buried but we
4 don't know where our own grandparents are buried.

5 Our father Abraham, as all good fathers should,
6 taught us a lesson. And that's what we are doing with the
7 cemetery index. Anyways, I tied it up eventually. Actually,
8 they gave us a little bit of computer time but we still didn't
9 have any money. We were at Leonard Simon's funeral and Sol
10 Drachler sat down next to me and said, how are you doing with
11 the cemetery index? I said, you know, there is so much going
12 on. We should have by the time we're finished, up to January
13 1st, 2000, over 100,000 names. But we don't have the
14 wherewithal to do this.

15 I don't know if you're familiar with this, but Sol
16 Drachler has the most amazing memory of anybody you ever knew.
17 I said, if we had some money -- he said, how much you need?
18 The thing that bothers me to this day is, I could have put up
19 \$5,000. I just didn't think it was my place to do that. I
20 didn't -- well, I didn't think. But I should have. I could
21 have and should have but I didn't. So I said, you know, if we
22 had \$5,000 at that time we could rent a few computers and we
23 could take them home and we can do these things. So he's just
24 looking around the room at this big funeral at Temple Bethel,
25 and he said, Tillie, follow me out. I think I know where

1 there's some money.

2 I started to follow him out and he button-holed
3 Avern Cohn. He said, Avern, many years ago when we were
4 trying to redo the Beth Olem Cemetery [that's the oldest
5 cemetery where General Motors has fenced it off to preserve
6 it], replace headstones and things at Beth Olem Cemetery, your
7 father put up \$5,000 for matching funds -- he always had to
8 have matching funds. If he was giving, somebody else had to
9 give, too. He put up \$5,000. And then General Motors took it
10 over and they're taking care of it, that money is laying there
11 someplace.

12 MS. GUYER: And that's how it all began.

13 MS. BRANDWINE: That's how the money began.

14 MS. GUYER: Where is the project today? All the
15 names have been recorded?

16 MS. BRANDWINE: No. The names haven't all been
17 recorded. Anyway, Avern said, I don't know anything about it.
18 I'll look it up. He looked it up and sure enough it was
19 \$5,000. It had now grown to 6,500 and we got that money, and
20 we were able to put a lot of it on the computer. But I
21 understand that Machpelah, we never got a disk, it still has
22 to be keyed in one at a time. And this can be done today.
23 They can scan it. It doesn't take such a long time. But my
24 understanding from Sharon Alterman -- I can remember anything
25 50 years ago but I can't remember anything today -- anyway,

1 Sharon Alterman, I understood from her that Machpelah still
2 isn't all on the record. There are a lot of things that still
3 have to go on the record.

4 The most important thing is, we never did find Max
5 or Marcus Blum or Bloom.

6 **MS. GUYER:** Is that so? But look where it led you.
7 That was one of your great contributions, I think, to our
8 Detroit community.

9 **MS. BRANDWINE:** Well, it's a very busy website.
10 Strangely, friends of Lois's were looking for their
11 grandparents' grave and they got it from the website and they
12 went out there and took a picture of it. Then they called
13 Lois. The strange thing was, when they took a picture of
14 their grandparents' headstone, behind and next to it, so that
15 it was also in the picture, were Lois's grandparents. My in-
16 laws were at the same cemetery. It's an amazing thing how it
17 all comes together.

18 **MS. GUYER:** That's beautiful. I remember years ago
19 when you won the Butzel Award. I was there and heard the
20 beautiful speech that you made. Any thoughts about those
21 times and what you think your finest contribution was toward
22 our Jewish community?

23 **MS. BRANDWINE:** Well, I think the cemetery index,
24 without questions, is my --

25 **MS. GUYER:** Most lasting. What has given you the

1 most satisfaction? A whole lifetime of good deeds and
2 tzedakah, what do you think has given you such great
3 satisfaction?

4 **MS. BRANDWINE:** I don't think I ever think of it in
5 those terms. I mean, this is my life and this is how I lived
6 it. I didn't do it for the Butzel Award, I didn't do it for
7 whatever else there was there. I did it, maybe it was because
8 I had to have something to do.

9 **MS. GUYER:** What a beautiful story. What have we
10 not covered that you wanted to tell us about?

11 **MS. BRANDWINE:** Oh, I don't know.

12 **MS. GUYER:** ~~Written story, a memory.~~ *HAVE YOU WRITTEN YOUR STORY?*

13 **MS. BRANDWINE:** Well, I think the main thing that I
14 want to say to people is that they should write their
15 histories. I think to me it becomes more and more important.
16 I have three children and their spouses, which means that I
17 have six children. Lois is the oldest one. She was 62 years
18 old yesterday. Then I have eight grandsons. No
19 granddaughters. Then I have one great-grandson and then I
20 have two great-granddaughters. With the husbands and wives
21 and everything, we are 21 in the family.

22 My older son has a home in the Pocono Mountains.
23 That's where we go for Thanksgiving. There wasn't always 21.
24 At one time there were 14 people and it was getting a little
25 bit crowded. And Lois and Hadar said, look, the lodge is just

1 down the street. We'll sleep at the lodge and then we'll
2 come. They came back in the morning. We were all in our
3 robes and pajamas. My daughter-in-law had baked up a storm
4 with muffins and breads and stuff like that. And Lois and
5 Hadar come to the door and we said, we hate it. We don't want
6 to stay at the lodge. We want ~~you~~ to be here.

7 My fondest hopes for the future are that my children
8 will continue to be one family. So I told my son that if he
9 would add two bedrooms and a bathroom to his house, that I
10 would pay for it. When I asked the other children whether
11 they thought I was playing favorites by doing this, Lois said,
12 mom, you did it for all of us. Mark, who is more money
13 oriented, said, well, he's the one that's going to have to pay
14 the higher taxes. So that was fine and we did it.

15 Almost on cue we had five new babies. So now
16 they're talking that the west wing is successful but maybe we
17 should think about the east wing. Forget it. No. That's not
18 going to happen. But my fondest hope is that they will be
19 comfortable there so that they will continue to gather from
20 all over for Thanksgiving and for Passover. Those are the two
21 times that the boys ask me, oh, this honor, grandma, is this a
22 command performance? I said, no, if it's convenient, come.
23 If it's not convenient, don't come. Command performances are
24 Thanksgiving and Passover. They all come.

25 **MS. GUYER:** What are the biggest challenges you

1 think facing young Jewish families today? As a matriarch you
2 can really look. I'm sure you think about this.

3 **MS. BRANDWINE:** As a grandmother of eight and great-
4 grandmother of three and mostly men, intermarriage is the
5 biggest problem. On the other hand, my older daughter-in-law,
6 Beverly, was not born Jewish. She's a convert. Though my
7 husband had a real tough time accepting this, eventually he
8 said, when Warren married Beverly I thought we had lost a Jew,
9 but instead we have gained five new Jews.

10 **MS. GUYER:** That's beautiful. And how do you think
11 it relates to our own Jewish community here? Do you think
12 that's one of our biggest challenges, too?

13 **MS. BRANDWINE:** I think that's a very big challenge.

14 **MS. GUYER:** How do we deal with it?

15 **MS. BRANDWINE:** As far as I'm concerned, Moe said to
16 his son, who said, I want to marry Beverly, but I thought you
17 would always bring home a Jewish girl. And he said, when I
18 bring her home, she will be Jewish. And I think if we instill
19 in our Jewish children the value and the importance of raising
20 a Jewish family, the sons of my converted daughter-in-law, one
21 of them is going with a non-Jewish girl, and he said to me, do
22 you remember what Papa Moe said to my father? When I bring
23 her home, grandma, she will be Jewish.

24 **MS. GUYER:** That's beautiful. You've instilled such
25 values in your children. That's a life of dedication but also

1 by example.

2 What else have we not talked about that you wanted
3 to share and have on tape?

4 **MS. BRANDWINE:** When I get home I'll think about it.

5 **MS. GUYER:** Any other life experiences or memories
6 of the trip to Israel?

7 **MS. BRANDWINE:** Well, our first trip to Israel, Moe
8 insisted that we had to arrive by boat. The Zim Lines were
9 not Cunard. They had services every morning. Everybody went
10 down in their shirt sleeves, too, for the minyan.

11 We left from Naples. On the second day we were told
12 to go out whatever side and we would see Heifa in the
13 distance. We saw the mountains. Somebody started to sing
14 Jerusalem of Gold. And it was -- I feel it going through my
15 body when I say it. It was so thrilling.

16 **MS. GUYER:** It truly was. And in those days, how
17 exciting just to see your dream. Important times.

18 **MS. BRANDWINE:** There was one thing I told about
19 Moe. I think it was a bond deal or something. It was at the
20 Borman home and it was also an honor. Moe's first inkling
21 that there was such a place as Israel, when the white paper
22 was established in England and that there should be a Jewish
23 state, there was a parade on Oakland Avenue and I think Moe
24 was about five years old. His father told Moe that he wasn't
25 going to go to school today and they were going to go some

1 place special. He gave him a little blue and white flag and
2 he took his hand and he said, he knew it was very important
3 because his father had closed his tailor shop for the day.

4 **MS. GUYER:** Oh, what a great story.

5 **MS. BRANDWINE:** They marched in that. Somebody
6 asked, where did it all start, and maybe that's where it all
7 started.

8 **MS. GUYER:** That's beautiful. I think we covered so
9 many wonderful years of Jewish history and you've been so much
10 a part of our own Detroit Jewish history. So we want to thank
11 you so much for this interview. If there's anything else
12 you'd love to add, we would love to listen. We thank you for
13 being such a leader and role model to all of us.

14 **MS. BRANDWINE:** Thank you, very, very much. Some of
15 the women in the community have claimed that I was their role
16 model, that I was their mentor. And some of these women have
17 gone so much further than I could ever hope to go, that I
18 think that was probably the greatest contribution I could
19 possibly give to the community.

20 **MS. GUYER:** Certainly. That you believed in them.
21 You encouraged them to go even beyond you, younger women, and
22 that's --

23 **MS. BRANDWINE:** It's a case of the student outdoing
24 the master by miles.

25 **MS. GUYER:** Very exciting. Well, we thank you so

1 much for your time and all your wonderful memories.

2 **MS. BRANDWINE:** Well, thank you for having me, but

3 like always, I talk too much.