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Katya Bennett interviewing Mr. Herman Bainder in the Calvert Street Apartments for the Action in Maturity program. This is October 22, 1979.

Mr. Bainder, I'd like to ask you some questions about your childhood, and you know your childhood is up until your twenties. And I'd like to ask you about the older people in your life when you were a child, and we're counting older people as those over sixty. So we're going to start with your family. When you were a child, who were the other people in your family?

MR. BAINDER: Well, that's a question that doesn't have a great many answers. I did not know my grandparents on my father's side. They had died during my very, very early childhood. I did, however, meet my grandmother on my mother's side, who was an elderly lady arriving from Lithuania in New York when I was thirteen years of age. And I remember going up with my mother to meet my grandmother for the first, and I believe the last, time. At that time—it must have been about 1929—we stayed in New York I believe overnight and I had several sessions with my grandmother, who did not speak any English, and I wasn't very good with foreign tongues, so that my impression of a very stalwart and plucky lady is simply a rather fleeting recollection. However, in the later years—in fact,
up to the time of World War II— from time to time I would address envelopes for my mother who wrote to my grandmother in a foreign tongue. My grandmother came to live with another daughter in Texas and stayed with her for a period of perhaps ten or fifteen years, during which time I never saw her but frequently wrote addresses on an envelope so that she got letters from my mother. In her stay in the United States, my grandmother was somewhat disappointed in what she felt was a lack of true religious spirit. And she was very eager to go to what was then the Palestine Mandate. She left accompanied by another elderly lady and went to live in Palestine in the city of Tel Aviv, and for many years I addressed letters for my mother to my grandmother in Tel Aviv. My grandmother died during the World War II years and I am afraid we concealed the fact of her death from my mother so that occasionally I would have a letter to be sent to the grandmother and would pretend to put an address on it. The letter, of course, would never get to its destination.

I happened to travel in what was then Israel in 1964 or 1965 and lo and behold! came upon that very address that I had written so many times for my mother, but I did not go in. I had no idea who was living there and I thought it would be a difficult thing to explain my presence there some twenty years after my grandmother had died at that particular spot.

I: What was your grandmother's name, do you remember?
A: Her name was Riva Mary Gordon.
I: If you could spell that for me?
A: I guess it was R-i-v-a Mary Gordon, G-o-r-d-o-n. I suppose that was an anglicized version of it, of a Lithuanian
name. Some of my cousins who live out West told me that some Scotsman who came to Lithuania became enamored of my grandmother and stayed and married her, so perhaps Gordon was the true name. My mother's father had died and this grandmother had remarried Gordon. Her name when my mother was, I think, her only child at that time, was Riva Mary Miller.

I: Did you have any other older relatives like aunts or uncles that you remember?

A: I had aunts and uncles but I believe it's hard to place them then in the over-sixty bracket when I was growing up. One particular aunt, whom I remember very favorably, was an Aunt Sara Perlstein. The reason I remember her so well was the crisis in my life at age 16. I graduated from high school and wanted to go to college, but we were in very difficult financial bind at that time, and it was this aunt who provided the small amount of money in light of today's funds that was needed for me to enroll at what was then Towson State College.

I: So you were very --

A: I was very grateful to her, and I remember that from my first one or two checks when I began teaching in the Baltimore City school system I felt a strong obligation to return this fund, this amount of money, to my aunt because I was so grateful for her help.

I: This was your mother's --

A: My father's sister. She was an amazing woman. She could not write, and I'm not sure that she could read even in her foreign tongue. But when she had come over here she went
into the tailoring business which was my father's business, particularly in the matter of making men's vests. This was a highly specialized form of tailoring, and this aunt, who I believe was separated from her husband, who apparently was a non-provider, worked along with the men and earned the money that kept her two daughters in financial security, managed to hold down the job, managed to cook, managed to buy a home, all without the usual expectation of literacy. So I had great admiration for her, and I also recall that in times of great family stress she seemed to be the Rock of Gibraltar to whom people would turn with their difficulties.

I: Can you tell me what seemed important to your family during your childhood?

A: Well, my parents stressed with me the need for an education. My mother had had an education in Lithuania but it was not of particular value to her here. She struggled through a few grades of night school, and she, too, was in the tailoring area of occupation. I was strongly encouraged to do my school work and to be as good a student as possible, and I believe my family in my early days kept telling me that I must become a doctor, but that never came to pass.

I: Your aunt, you were saying she was a very important person in your family. Did the other people in your family treat her as, you know --?

A: I don't know exactly how my brothers and sisters felt about her because of this problem: My mother and father had been married before they had married each other. My father was a widower with six children, my mother a widow with two. When
they married, I was the only product of their second marriage, and the next older than me of my half-brothers and half-sisters was ten years older than I, and so our communication in those days of my childhood was rather limited. By the time I perhaps had finished elementary school, if not even at the time I began it, almost all my brothers and sisters were gone. So their reaction to my aunt is one that I am not able to talk about.

I: Now, then, we're going into the non-family, other people other than your family --

A: I have one more to discuss. The lady whose name I suggested to you as my favorite cousin, Stella Jacobsen, she lives at 3508 Langrehr Road, that's zone 21207. She's in Apartment 1D. She was the daughter of my Aunt Sara, and it was to her that many of us turned. She is now a lady of eighty. When family difficulties developed, she seemed to be the one that would be our resource person, with great comfort and often great wisdom in our trials. Her sister had died during the terrible flu epidemic in World War I, and her sister had left a daughter who became a sort of a daughter to my cousin Stella. All through my childhood and through my early years and even into my current life, Stella has just been the most wonderful person, great warmth and great understanding, and many times very helpful at moments of trial. I have a rather amusing anecdote about it: My mother became mentally ill during World War II period when I was in the Marine Corps. My father had separated from her at a time of great stress and my mother went from one nursing home to another before she was institutionalized. I remember coming over to my cousin Stella's home for dinner one
Friday night and was explaining the many problems I was having relative to placement of my mother and said I just didn't know where I was going to go at that particular time. She said, why not stay here? And I stayed for seven years. I had come for dinner and I was really the man who came to dinner, so no wonder I feel this very strong bond for her.

She at that time was married and had a young son living in the household. I guess he was sort of like a younger brother to me at the time that I was there. At that time I was in my early thirties. But this contact that we have had, this very strong bond, continues even to today. Her husband is dead and she is living alone in this apartment. But she is always there with some great advice and some great warmth whenever troubles are great.

I: Does she have any wise sayings that you can remember in particular?

A: No, I don't remember any particular wise saying, but what I do remember is her ability to kind of see into the heart of a difficulty, and often what seemed to be so terribly complex and so insoluble would, in her rather understanding way, somehow present some kind of practical solution, or at least the idea of making the best of what might be a troublesome situation. I wish I could remember a particular saying, but I don't at the moment.

I: Okay. Well, now about the non-family: What other elderly people did you know as a child, like teachers, neighbors, church group leaders?

A: You're going to draw a blank at this point, because I
don't recall anyone who presented a close contact. I of course
had many teachers whom I enjoyed greatly, but I can't believe --
Most of them retired at the age of sixty, so that my elementary
school teachers, of whom I generally was quite fond, and my
junior high -- Oh, in my senior high school I do recall a
gentleman, but I doubt if he was over sixty. My Latin teacher
was a Mr. Templeman, who was a retired -- or at least had an
army career. I don't know whether he was retired because I,
as I say, I don't believe he was sixty at the time. He was a
man of great wisdom, had a great deal of firm foundation in his
subject that he taught. I was taking an accelerated program
at Baltimore City College at that time. It was a program that
offered five years of schooling in four, including the first
year at Hopkins. Mr. Templeman taught us Caesar's Gallic Wars
-- he would facetiously say Caesar's garlic wars -- and we also had
Horace and went into some of the lesser-known Latin writers.
But the power of Mr. Templeman was so great that I think almost
all of us in our class would spend hours doing our Latin hom-
work first, and if there was anything that had to be skipped, it
certainly was not going to be the Latin homework. To be called
upon in his class and not be prepared was, I guess, almost just
a fate equivalent to near death, and not because he was so
irascible but he expressed such disappointment that I think we
were put on our mettle to do our best and to achieve in his class,
whatever we might do in some of our other subjects which would
perhaps, as far as practicality is concerned, be far more impor-
tant to us at the time, more important than we realized.

I: Did you have any contact with Mr. Templeman outside of
class?
A: No, outside of class I did not have any contact with him, but I just admired him greatly. I felt that if I could retain even a small part of my Latin as well as he could impart it to me, that I would be eternally grateful. I think that what he did was to instill a serious sense of study in all of us in that particular class, and I think those study habits carried over and were fruitful in later educational experience.

I: How do you think that older people in general were treated when you were a child?

A: Well, I was in a patriarchal family. My father's word was law, and not one of the nine of us, when we were all home at the same time, ever dared defy or contradict my father. He came from a European Russian background and I presume was brought up in that patriarchal tradition. So elderly people in my family were people looked up to, people listened to, and people respected. The current approach to putting the elderly on the shelf, if not actually ignoring them, was not part of my background. Or of my family background. Because attitudes toward older people were very different, it seems to me.

I forgot to mention one gentlemen, an uncle of mine, after whom I'm supposed to take and I'm so sorry that I omitted him. This is my father's brother, and his name was Morris Bainder. Because of the unique ways that immigration interpreted foreign names, his name somehow came out Bender, B-e-n-d-e-r, instead of Bainder. But my Uncle Morris was very, very erudite in Biblical lore. Everyone in the family, my cousins and I believe my aunts and uncles, maybe my father, respected his learning, knowledge. He was a rather stern appearing man. I
never in any sense was close to him, but I believe the fact that
the aunts and uncles so respected his learning, even in Biblical
lore rather than in American or English area, perhaps by osmosis
I got an idea that to become scholarly or to delve into learning
thoroughly was a worthwhile approach and worthwhile goal. Per-
haps some of that did rub off. I noticed in later years many of
my cousins would say, oh, you're so much like your Uncle Morris,
but I don't see any resemblance, physically, and I really don't
even in my, what little attainment I have, in educational areas.
I don't think I approached his thorough knowledge in Biblical
information.

I: The elderly people that you knew as a child—did they
seem happy and satisfied with their lives?

A: My family was not a well-off family, and it seems to
me that people were hard-working, trying to keep the proverbial
wolf from the door. But they took pride in doing a good job in
their tailoring activities. They worked long hours and I suppose
the pay was not great by any standards. These were immigrants
and they were making the best of the situation. I presume they
would have been felt they were better off than if they had remained in Russian
Empire area. There were parties. My Aunt Sara cooked up a storm,
I recall. We would go over there almost every Saturday night
when I was a child, and for my parents that was somewhat of an
street-
ordel in that I became/carsick every Saturday night like clock-
work somewhere in the course of the ride to my aunt's. She
lived on the other side of town. I would get ill and I would
throw up whatever I had eaten in the earlier part of the day, or
be ready to do so and my father would know the warning signals
and would have to get off the streetcar wherever we were and walk all the rest of the distance to my aunt's. And this repeated itself to the point where I almost knew what fate would be in store for me every Saturday when we embarked on the streetcar for the long ride to my aunt's house. But we went there nonetheless, and I guess the point I'm trying to make is that there was always a plenitude of wonderful food, cooked so much better than my mother could cook, I must say. And then at the end of the meal there were always desserts and cakes, pastries, also prepared at home with great skill and so delicious that I could almost forget my travail in having my misfortune on the streetcar going to my aunt's place.

I: Do you think it was better or worse to be old years ago than it is today?

A: I believe—and I know this is possibly not an accurate statement—that because the elder folks in my family received, demanded and received, a great deal of respect from the younger members of the family, that they felt, in spite of poverty, a certain degree of importance. They were without a doubt managing the household affairs. They were making the best of what life was affording them. They lived, if not in great comfort, I believe there was no central heating in my aunt's house. There was this huge iron stove in the kitchen on which she cooked and baked, and the heat from that pervaded into the dining room. But nonetheless, it seems to me life was simpler. Life consisted of work and family, occasional movie, perhaps, for entertainment. My aunt, for example, had a record collection and some of it was relatively good, because as a young child, I've been fond of.
music ever since. Although no one was trained to play an instrument, the records were played on the Saturday night visits, and occasionally my aunt -- I don't believe my father ever danced, but my aunt would do a polka with my mother, and there was a general air of festivity. I suppose they aired their troubles. I was fortunate in that there was — I mentioned my favorite cousin, Stella. She had been married during World War I also and not only did she lose her sister, but she lost her young husband in the flu epidemic and posthumously, after her husband's death, came a child who was about three years younger than I, so that my visit to my Aunt Sara meant also a visit with my cousin Stella, a visit with her son, whose name was Emanuel—he is now deceased, unfortunately—and the niece of Stella. When her sister died, she left a young child who was perhaps six, and Stella became mother not only to her own child born posthumously after her husband's death, but the child that was left when her sister died. So these two were sort of friends. On my Saturday visits occasionally, if they came early enough, my young cousin, Emanuel, and I could go off to a movie not far from my Aunt Sara's house. And that was a sort of a nice touch to the Saturday visit after my misfortune on the streetcar.

I: Okay, we're going to move on now to your middle years, about twenty to fifty, and the role that elderly people played in your life then. When did you first realize that parents and other people who were older in your life, when did you first realize that they were growing older, and how did this make you feel?
A: Well, I guess the biggest tragedy in that period is the fact that when I first began to teach is the period when my mother became mentally ill. My mother was thirty-five when I was born, so I was about nineteen or twenty when mother was about fifty-five, and she became mentally ill and was never cured not even to her death at the age of eighty. So that this was a first-hand experience, and her mental illness was not easy to cope with. It was diagnosed as hardening of the arteries of the brain, and she was quite difficult.

My father -- I mentioned he had been a vest-maker -- during the 1930s, when the depression came, men's suits no longer had vests. That meant that my father was unemployed. It meant that he had to struggle greatly to find a means of livelihood. He opened a little neighborhood tailor shop which almost did not pay for itself, let alone keep the household going. He was a heavy smoker and he began to show signs of emphysema, an endless amount of coughing and later on, almost, too, about the time that I began to teach, his health broke down with not only the emphysema but he began to have some indications of heart difficulties. He was a very irascible man. I think his temperament certainly didn't help in the matter of keeping a kind of a calm being that perhaps is better if you have to face up to heart difficulties. He lived, however, to the age of seventy-five. He was forty-five when I was born. His latter years, illness really, were a terrible burden to him. He was a small, wiry man, but his ability, his mobility, were both damaged.

I: What about -- was there an older person in your life not a family member, who perhaps guided you through the early stages of your career?
A: Yes. I remember very favorably a teacher in one of my early teaching jobs who taught a few doors from my room. She was already perhaps close to sixty at that time, and her name was Camille Jenowith. She is a lady who had been a teaching missionary in China, and she had some fabulous experiences. She was a very devout woman, and I'm afraid I'm not a devout person, but nonetheless, there was something about her that struck me very favorably and we became close friends as well as colleagues. She has a nephew who still lives in the city who is now retired, and in the course of my later teaching career I worked in the same school with Stanhope Hoskins. He perhaps would be a gentleman who would have even greater knowledge of this aunt of his and her influence perhaps on him. I don't know him too well, although we know each other. Perhaps you might say we are acquaintances. But Camille had such strong faith, one which I lack, and had such a calm spirit that it was a pleasure during lunch-time particularly when we were free of our immediate teaching burdens and we could share lunch together. We had many a chat not only at lunch time but before school and after school. I think she was not averse to hearing my troubles, some of which dealt with the illnesses of both my parents at this time. I was finding it difficult to cope with the problems financially and perhaps even emotionally. So I think of her with great warmth and great appreciation that she took the trouble to listen; and if her advice was perhaps the kind that turned to God and I didn't feel that that was very practical, nonetheless there was something very stalwart about her and very supportive, and so I think of her fondly. I recall her memory very vividly. In her later
years, after she had retired, she developed cancer, and I am sure that she had great discomfort, but that calm spirit just seemed to stay with her even during her trials. I visited her a number of times while she was at her home during this illness, and I came away respecting her fortitude and her strong faith even at this time of great personal crisis. I suppose she never made me aware of how much pain perhaps she was enduring.

I: What about the general conditions in life for older people, like thirty or forty years ago? Do you think that most of the older people seemed to support themselves? Or did their families support them?

A: I find it hard to generalize, since the older people that I was in contact with during that time would have been the teaching staff of various schools. When I was a young teacher those were approaching retirement age. They were usually self-sufficient and actually they were very competent in their teaching. There were some that I thought were perhaps too set in their methodologies of teaching and perhaps too stern, and although I liked a disciplined classroom, I felt that there was a place for a stronger rapport between the teaching generation and the pupil generation. But I don't really recall knowing at first-hand elderly people such as, except for example when my mother was institutionalized, I began to visit either the nursing homes that she had fleeting encounters with before Spring Grove became her place of institutionalization. Then I saw derelict people. My heart would just go out to the the flotsam and jetsam that seemed to be in here, warehoused into these places. Many of them seemed to have no programs such as are currently at least
sought, if not always actively found. It was really quite heart-breaking, and I think I became aware for the first time at this first-hand encounter just how miserable old age could be for so many people.

I: What about your Aunt Sara? Did she--you said she worked at making vests--did she also, how long did she do that?

A: She lived until a ripe age. When she passed the point of time when she could work, she had a home with her daughter Stella who at this time had remarried, back when I was living with Stella; I mentioned that I stayed for seven years. At that time her mother had already died, but in the dwelling prior to that particular one, where I had my seven years, and it was in that same area near Druid Hill Park. The declining years of my Aunt Sara were spent in the daughter's home until her death. And I would venture to guess, you would find a better answer from my cousin Stella, that it was a decade, this period of her decline.

I must say that Stella and her great heart also took in my Uncle Morris -- I mentioned him as the one that was scholarly in Biblical patterns -- in his older years, he developed cancer of the stomach, I believe. He was in considerable agony. I guess that's a contact with illness that I have not mentioned. I was then at Towson State College, so that I must have been sixteen or seventeen or eighteen, nineteen years of age. And Stella provided him with a home until death came. I visited there a number of times when he was ill, and he was just as gaunt as a skeleton and in great, great agony, because I don't think drugs, pain-relieving drugs were available then as they are now, and even today's drugs sometimes can't kill pain.
I: Were you aware of any community services or programs for older people

A. I believe I was in great ignorance about that kind of thing. I don't recall any service for the elderly at that time. I knew there was the public welfare assistance program. And that reminds me of another elderly lady at a time about the 1950s. I took a sabbatical leave in 1953-54. My cousin Stella had separated from her husband and had gone to Florida. Her younger son, born of her second marriage, was grown and married. Her husband had developed some mental problems which were resolved, I think, with shock treatments. But after he was cured, Stella thought that she should go her own way. I was still living with them when their decision to separate came, and I guess that was my seventh year, and Stella went to Florida. I had already asked for sabbatical leave and this separation developed as somewhat of a surprise. I, however, had to find my own apartment, and I found a very small one on Eutaw Place, which was a kind of a fringe, declining area, but it was, I guess, the first apartment that I had that was my own with no parents there. I was no longer living with my relatives. I was in the rear basement apartment and in the front basement apartment was a woman who was either in her sixties or seventies whose name was Amelia Platz. What a dear lady! She had given her entire life taking care of nieces and nephews. She had never married. She was living on welfare, and when she told me that, it almost broke her heart. Here was this woman who had worked all her days for family. I think she had very briefly held a saleslady's job, and in her older years--she had never married, and there were
no children to look after her, and her nieces and nephews had gone their respective ways, and she had a tiny, I think the minimal Social Security allotment—this would be 1953—and she had to go to public welfare to have that basic allotment which—perhaps it's twenty or thirty dollars, I can't remember specifically—to get some additional assistance so that she could stay in that little one-room kitchenette bathroom apartment. And the pain that it caused her to put herself as a charity case on the public. It grieved her so terribly that—we knew each other well enough at that point for her to be able to tell me—and it was a fate almost worse than death for her to have to accept charity, and yet, to survive, that had to be. She remained in that apartment until she began to have blackouts. She blacked out one time on the floor of her apartment during that—well, it wasn't necessarily that sabbatical year, because I stayed in that apartment for five years. But at the point when this blacking out became more and more frequent, I did know one—I had the address of one niece who seemed to be attentive, and finally the niece had to arrange for some nursing home solution for Miss Platz. Her nickname was Micey; I don't know how she ever got it, but I recall it now. And I would go to see her in the nursing home. It was way out in the Edmondson Avenue area, near Ingleside Avenue. And she was in sort of a big ward of elderly laides, and she was beginning to show signs of senility and suspected some of her comrades of taking her things, or saying cruel things about her. She was deaf as a post. You had to shout for her to hear. So her declining years were very unhappy ones and I was so—well, disturbed, really, that there was no such thing,
apparently, as therapy, and she was just warehoused in that situation. And I felt that perhaps some medication or something might have been done to give her some assistance. So I guess it all boils down to the fact that I was quite ignorant about programs for the elderly, if they existed up through the 1950s.

I: As you watched people you knew get older, how did you anticipate that your old age would be?

A: Well here I am sixty-three, and I suppose I never really formulated any clear-cut notions about my old age. While I was teaching and working in the Department of Education and subsequently in administrative posts, I was always involved in things beyond the classroom and beyond the job. I'm a theatre buff and I belong to the Vagabond players. I've belonged, I guess, for thirty years. I've enjoyed concert music. I guess love of music, as I mentioned, had started even in childhood and one thing, my father at one point insisted that I take piano lessons, although I hated at the age of eight. Nonetheless I learned enough rudimentary skills before I stopped within about a year of my starting. And I play a little bit at the piano each day. I'm fond of opera, concerts. I love to travel, and now that I'm retired and my pension is adequate, I take at least two foreign trips a year, and I've done this ever since my mother's death in 1962. I couldn't do it before then because the nursing home costs were such that any money that was left over from my immediate needs went into that area. Because I have many hobbies, and I enjoy reading. I'm not a great athlete but I enjoy walking now, even though I still do some jogging, and walking, I try to do some exercising. Life
is extremely full. I take a Music Appreciation course on Mondays and an Art History course on Thursdays. I take lessons on Wednesday nights. I'm taking bridge lessons for the first time in my life. I never had an interest in cards. My father was overly fond of the cards and I think I reacted in the opposite direction. I work as a docent, volunteer work, at Walters Art Gallery one day a week, taking people on guided tours. Art has been another hobby. On Tuesdays I work at the nearby Union Memorial Hospital as a volunteer. And there's a social life on weekends, as well as during the week, since I don't have to worry about a job, I'm as busy as I can be. And my health is reasonably good, fortunately. So life is very, very full and I enjoy it thoroughly. What will happen later -- After I moved into this cooperative building the move was such an ordeal that I said, more or less facetiously, that the next move I make will be in a box. Whether that will come to pass that way or not, we certainly don't control our destinies in that sense of when or where we will go. If I have my faculties, and as long as I can maintain myself physically, I would want to stay here rather than move again, and I would feel unhappy. Some of my friends are moving out to places like Broadmead where you get what is called perpetual care. If you become ill you will be hospitalized there, you'll get medical care there. They have an apartment or townhouse there. I like a cross-section of life. I much prefer staying here where I'll be able to do something.

I: What are some of the hardest things that you felt about growing older?

A: I guess the increasing aches and pains that one
encounters. When you're young and you hear old people complaining—at least, this was probably my case—I thought, perhaps people are just becoming too self-centered. They are getting too wrapped up in their own physical condition. With relatively good health in my youth, I just couldn't believe that people's physical situation really deteriorated as I now know is the case: a bursitis here, and a something-else there. I'm well aware now that we're not as indestructible as I once thought we became.

I: What kind of image or model of growing older do you think that you present to other people?

A: I hope I'm not being immodest, but I think people, younger members of my family, my siblings who are all still alive—the oldest is now eighty-two, and if we are not close, we are congenial; we don't see each other too frequently. But generally, I'm thought to be relatively stable emotionally. I think my folks and my friends think that I am rather even-tempered, and that is generally true. And they think that I—and I believe that I am—try to be considerate of others. I don't know what else I might add. I try to keep an open mind about things, although I suppose some hardening of the arteries about changing patterns of life-styles today may grate upon me. I still, I suppose, can't accept with good grace some young man with hair down to his navel. There are things of that kind that I still find a little bit difficult to take, but I try to keep my peace about it and realize that life has changed.

I: What about the younger members of your family? What kind of relationship do you have with them?

A: I regret to say that I have not been terribly close to
the younger members of the family. I have a niece that I guess
now is about fifty who lives where Baltimore City meets Baltimore
County out the Liberty corridor. At one time I think our rela-
tionship was much closer than it is now. She has two children.
I recognize and know that there is no closeness and I have cer-
tainly not been an influence in their lives. I have a nephew
in New York. I correspond with his mother but I see him rarely.
I am sure when he was going to school I was probably a model for
him to emulate. If he doesn't hate me, I guess I'm fortunate.
A couple of
I have/other nieces that live out of town and I see them very
rarely. Our relationship is hardly worth mentioning. The
closest of the next generation is the niece that I mentioned,
whose name is Florence. Her brother, William, is retired. He
was the athlete in the family. He tried when he was a young man
to give me some skills, for example, in baseball, but I think
eventually he saw it was a tougher job than he could manage.

I: What about your relationship with people who aren't
your relatives? Who are your friends now?

A: Well, I have a circle of friends that are of two areas,
in that the people that I met through theatre work, I have a
bond. I'm secretary of the Vagabond Players. And I have a
number of bonds with people in the theatre and local amateur theatre
circles.

I: Are these younger people or people your age?

A: They span considerable age range. I'm also on the
board at the Essex Community College theatre, which is called
and so my board members and I are very much
more than formal partners. But I was in some
of their productions during the summer, and formed some friendships with people that I met.

I guess the stronger bonds, however, is with people who are my former colleagues. I have a great many retired teachers, retired principals, who are my friends. A former classmate from high school, however, is my closest friend and traveling companion. He sat in front of me for four years in high school. We kept in touch during the years, but he went into the Washington area. His retirement a few years ago brought him back to Baltimore, and we've been taking all these foreign trips together. This January we're going to Spain for six weeks. We had a freighter trip to Brazil this year, and December of last year and January of this year we went to Canada, the Canadian Rockies. In August of last year we went to Indiatogther. The year before that we went to Egypt together.

I: Very nice. What is his name?

A: George Asendorf, Jr. He's not a teacher. He was in the business world. And before he was on the scene, I had someone who lived in this apartment complex who worked for Social Security, who was a very close friend and traveling companion for about sixteen years, who died of cancer at the age of forty-four. Who was a very fine man. He was not in the teaching field. He worked in Social Security, and some of his friends in Social Security business area have become my friends. So I guess I said two, there are really three areas: the teaching profession, the theatre group, and Social Security.

I: What kind of things do you talk about when you get together?
A: Well, a lot of the retired teachers are talking about going to Broadmead, which is a development that's out in the Cockeysville area, I believe. It's a perpetual care place, where you rent an apartment, you buy, I guess, rather than rent, your own apartment or townhouse and you are guaranteed for the rest of your days medical care of whatever variety you need until your end, until your demise. That is a topic I am almost annoyed to hear brought up, since I have such a strong reaction, unfavorable reaction to it. But I listen and I try not to be unpleasant. But we talk of different things, like politics, the energy crisis, the world of the Middle East problems, that sort of thing, current affairs. And we also share—I forgot to mention somewhere along the line that the travel series at the Lyric sponsored by the Maryland Academy of Sciences, there are a number of us who go to those presentations to get some travel ideas that we haven't yet experienced, or maybe to review some that we have experienced. There are a group of us—six of us—who do that. Some are teachers and some are their friends, so that travel is a topic that brings us together. And at the Walters Art Gallery and becoming a docent, some of the people that trained there we are very close friends the art world is generally what we discuss.

I: Do you think that your relationships with your friends have changed over the years? Have they become more important or less important to you?

A: I think my friends are probably the most important things in my life. That's speaking right off the cuff, without
But I just almost couldn’t imagine what life would be like without having friends. I share in so many aspects of living. I would almost have to say that they are more important than my family. Because I see my family on relatively few occasions, and while I respect my family, I guess I really love my friends.

I: Aging often means loss: loss of work, of children leaving home, loss of physical capacities, loss of loved ones. Have you helped your friends live through any of these losses and how?

A: My friend who was in this building became ill with cancer, and he got to the point where he was almost not ambulatory and spent the last five months in the hospital. And I was there every day of those five months. I had fortunately retired. I got him out of bed and I got him to his bath, fed him because he had lost the ability almost, the ambition had gone. The cancer was between the eye and nose. Yes, I was there every day to help him as best I could. And I saw him the very day of death. I had a very close experience with him. I’ve helped in more temporary ways, people. At that time this gentleman was my best friend. And I was glad to help. I’ve given casual help to people who have to keep medical appointments, and people who are hospitalized, I’ve visited and I’ve brought some things maybe that they needed. When people aren’t ill but they have to catch a train or get a plane, or they have to get back to Baltimore from a plane, I don’t mind being helpful. This Sunday I moved my cleaning man, who is a man who is unfortunately an alcoholic and gets into many difficulties including serious
financial ones, but I physically moved with him, moved his bed, furnishings, and I'm really not up to that stuff physically, but I felt that he was down and out and needed help. I've had his services for twenty years. I almost feel he's like a member of the family. He's of another race, and he's illiterate, but I guess in my way I feel responsible for him.

I: What about people who are considerably younger than you? Do you have a special relationship with any younger people?

A: I regret to say that I don't. I and my family are very seldom--while we're cordial with each other, we're like strangers except for perhaps the one niece that I mentioned. Oh, I didn't mention a nephew that's down in North Carolina with my oldest sister, but we're just casual with each other. And I don't, outside of some of the theater contacts that I've had, have a strong love for people that are younger. There's a former pupil of mine who I guess is about forty with whom I have relatively frequent telephone conversations and I think we have a mutual esteem. But I really don't have much contact with younger people. Direct contact, that is, a body contact.

I: Would you like to have more relationships with younger people?

A: I think it would be a good asset of living for me. I don't know how that would ever come about. I would certainly feel that it was a way of staying alive.

I: When you retired, did you retire when you turned sixty?

A: Oh, no. I retired at the age of fifty-seven because we had as a superintendent of Baltimore City Schools at that time a man whom I felt to be most incompetent, and I just couldn't
stay on feeling as hostile as I did. My job—so I decided it was
time to go. And I went.

I: Do you enjoy your retirement?
A: I love it.
I: You seem to.
A: I really do love it. I think the first week after
retirement, if I—had been called back by someone in the
upper echelons and asked to reconsider my decision to retire.
I maybe vacillated in my mind for a few days, but I didn't change
my mind and I'm so glad. Yes, retirement is great. I really
can't say enough to praise it.

I: Do you know of any services or activities particularly
available for older people in the community?
A: Well I'm enjoying some of them. I mentioned some of
the things I'm doing. My music appreciation course is sponsored
by AIM. And a retired nun, Sister Theresine, is giving courses.
This is the second one with her that I've taken. The art history
course that I'm taking on Thursdays is sponsored by AIM. The
bridge lessons that I'm taking on Wednesdays is sponsored by
AIM. So I'm well aware of the—occasionally there are theatre
tickets, although I am generally over-subscribed to those things
on my own. Once in a while something crops up that gives me an
artistic experience through the beneficence of AIM. So I am
thoroughly aware of that sort of thing. Fortunately, I did not
have to rely on that. At least I can take care of my financial
needs and I have not had to seek resources of that nature, but
certainly the cultural activities that AIM has offered, I have
enjoyed tremendously.
I: Do you believe that there should be other services or activities that are offered for senior citizens?

A: I am aware that AIM has employment counseling if I needed a job, and I certainly don't. I know that AIM, I believe, in its offices there is something that handles food stamps. I believe that AIM also provides legal services for those who make a will or have some other scrape with the law that perhaps they need some assistance with. Oh, I forgot to mention that I did go down to the Waxter Center. They were having a class in disco. I used to be a good ballroom dancer when I was younger. I enjoyed it tremendously and in my middle years I did a lot of folk dancing. I sort of stopped all that when -- I stopped the ballroom dancing when the twist arrived and all the dances thereafter, so that things like the mambo, fox trot, the cha cha, and the waltz, which I used to do with such delight, that music disappeared from the orchestras' repertoires. Then when disco came back it was a beat that I felt I could do. So I went down to the Waxter Center, I joined the Waxter Center, which had a disco class. And I guess there were about thirty in the class and a young, vivacious teacher. I was a drop-out, however, after several sessions because the same step was reviewed and reviewed and reviewed and there were still a good many who couldn't do it, and I guess because of my experience at dancing, I got those dance sets and I thought, well I'll be doing this for the rest of my days and I'll never get any further. So after several sessions, and then that was about the time that I got ready to go on my Brazilian freighter trip at the end of last year and beginning of this year, I dropped out of the disco class
and hoped that some day I would resume it. I regret to say that I have not, because dancing is a great deal of fun. And I think I could do the disco.

I: Do you enjoy the disco?

A: It's a little noisy for my eardrums, but the beat is something that I think I can deal with. So some day, I hope not too far in the future, before I become too decrepit, I might resume. But probably I'd have to do it with a private teacher or a small class of people who were able to move ahead with the dance. I regret that I don't dance any more.

I: When older people need special care and attention, do you think that the family, or government agencies, or who do you think should provide this kind of special care?

A: I was brought up in the tradition of the family taking care of its own, but I know that that isn't always possible, and I know that it is no longer legally enforceable. Something has to be done for many elderly people who for one reason or another are in a financial bind and who need so much care and attention. I believe it should be a combination of local, state, and federal funding and know-how to provide adequate care all along the line, whether it's medical, emotional, social, and perhaps, certainly to some degree, financial support where it is absolutely necessary. Social Security as I understand it can provide sufficient funds for living for an elderly person. It can supplement but it is not constructed to be the chief means of survival. However, something must be devised. I wish I could be more fruitful in my ideas about it.

I: This entire interview has been about older people,
their role in society, kinds of contributions they can make and do make, and in conclusion there are just a few more questions: Do you think society in general respects older people?

A: Definitely not. I think that we have some of the rudest, most inconsiderate of all the civilizations that I have seen in the various areas of the world that I have traveled. In the Orient, India, in Japan, elderly people are looked up to and respected. In my family background, which had a European tradition, elderly people are respected. Certainly it does not seem to me that -- In the United States we have a youth cult and unfortunately so many older people who knock themselves out trying to remain young, because I guess they dread this business of being put on a shelf and ignored, if not victimized. I think the daily papers, with the accounts of the muggings and the terrible ordeal that many elderly people who go out on the streets for necessities, not necessarily at night time but in daytime. It's a facet of our society that is completely deplorable. I wish I knew an answer to it.

I: Do you think that our society encourages older people to share their experiences?

A: In a very limited way. Now and again, I think -- I guess I'm speaking from the point of view of the arena of education. Retired experienced administrators or experienced teachers who have had a successful career may be called back to impart some wisdom or knowledge or experience. But I think that's more rare than common as an approach toward the elderly. In the fields of the sciences, I guess those who have expertise perhaps can remain in greater demand and maybe this might be true of the
medical profession also. But I think in the daily run of life, those who have just done their jobs and have completed enough years to retire are very easily forgotten. And that's not so terrible, to be forgotten, but the disrespect, and the savagery that elderly people meet is to me completely horrifying. I must say I am not speaking from personal experience. I have yet to have my encounter with mugging. It might happen tonight. I guess I shouldn't have opened my mouth on the subject.

I: Do you think that anything can be -- what do you think can be done to improve communications between generations?

A: I don't have any kind of solution to it. I feel one aspect of the problem is the matter of working parents. I think I encountered this sometimes when I had problems with individual students. Very often a student was pretty much on his or her own in the household. Perhaps with siblings or perhaps without. But the parents were so busy, sometimes necessarily busy, and just the dollars and cents to stay alive, that the children really didn't get a great deal of encouragement and a great deal of attention. Parents arriving after a hard work day aren't particularly anxious to hear, or perhaps aren't emotionally able to hear children's problems. And I think the gap begins to grow all through the city between parent and child. How to resolve that I don't know, but many women are working, not through desire of a career but because it's just a plain necessity in the inflationary time in which we live.

I: Right now, what do you think is the greatest contribution that you can give to people?
A. I'm at a loss for an answer on that question. I am completely baffled by an answer to that. I suppose my greatest contribution is the fact that I try to be a good friend to the friends who are good to me, and I share their lives and whatever points of contact we have. That seems about the most thing I can do. I have never been particularly distinguished. That's not in the realm of modesty. It's just a fact of life. And I really don't know what special contribution I have to offer.

I: Thank you very much, Mr. Bainder. I appreciate your letting me do this very much.
Clarification of items mentioned in interview and proper spelling:

1. Feder duchet—German, literal meaning is "feather cover". It is a quilted-like bed cover but is only stitched on the edges.

2. Marie Baurenschmidt and Persis K. Miller—School #76

4. Long Ball—Game played in school; similar to dodgeball.

5. Red Line—An alley game. Interviewee has no recollection about how it was played.

7. Vic & Shirley Doda—Leaders of the Locust Point Civic Assoc.

9. William Boucher III, Councilmen Caplan and Edelman—City council hearing on Fort McHenry By-Pass

6. Bilenki and Stankiewicz—Names of neighbors
   Stella Maris

7. Mrs. Crane—Present principal of School #76.

8. Deutsche Vereinigte Evangelische Christus Kirche—Translated as: German United Protestant Church of Christ, Built in 1887, It is now named the "Christ United Church of Christ."

9. The school which interviewee watched burn down was located at the corner of Hull & Clement Sts.

* This is what interviewee believes, but I cannot find "duchet" in a German-English Dictionary.