THE ALEXANDRIA ORAL HISTORY CENTER
OFFICE OF HISTORIC ALEXANDRIA
CITY OF ALEXANDRIA

Oral History Interview

with

Gerald Terlitzky

Interviewer: *Yahney-Marie Sangare*

Narrator: *Gerald Terlitzky*

Location of Interview: *Alexandria, VA*

Date of Interview: 07/*17/2024*

Transcriber: *Yahney-Marie Sangaré*

Summary:

Gerald Terlitzky's family moved to Alexandria from Maryland in 1964 and owned several businesses in the area. He describes working at establishments like Terlitzky's Delicatessen, Rosenick's, and the Gateway Market. Terlitzky also discusses Black-Jewish relationships in Washington, D.C. and Alexandria in and around the Civil Rights movement and describes his experiences with being Jewish throughout the years.

Notes:

This interview was conducted for the "The Law of the Land, The Law of God: Blacks and Jews in Civil Rights Era Alexandria, Va" internship project in July and August 2024 by Yahney-Marie Sangaré.

Table of Contents and Keywords

Yahney-Marie Sangaré [00:00:01] Okay. Today is July 17, 2024. We are at the Alexandria Black History Museum. My name is Yahney-Marie Sangaré, and I'm 18 years old.

Gerald Terlitzky [00:00:13] My name is Jerry Terlitzky. Let's see. I'm 76 years old, and today's date is 7/17/2024. I'm here at the Black Historic Museum in Alexandria, Virginia.

Yahney-Marie Sangaré [00:00:38] Okay. Where were you born?

Gerald Terlitzky [00:00:40] I was born in Washington, D.C. at the old Sibley Hospital on M Street and North Capitol Street in 1947.

Yahney-Marie Sangaré [00:00:51] What day?

Gerald Terlitzky [00:00:53] Oh, September 1. Labor Day.

Yahney-Marie Sangaré [00:00:56] Who is in your family?

Gerald Terlitzky [00:00:58] Who's in my family? I have a father. Well, had a father, and had a mother. Sam and Mitzi. Mitzi is my mom's nickname, but her real name was Miriam. I have a brother, Steven. And that's it.

Yahney-Marie Sangaré [00:01:21] How did it come to be that your family came to Alexandria in 1964?

Gerald Terlitzky [00:01:26] In 1964, we came to Alexandria. It goes back to when my grandmother passed away in 1958, [and] we moved to Wheaton Woods in Wheaton, Maryland, and my father was still working at Hofberg's [Deli]. We were there until '63. In 1960, my dad had an opportunity to open a restaurant, a kosher delicatessen, off of 16th Street in Summit Hills in Maryland. He brought his brother in from Philadelphia, and they opened this restaurant. You know, it was really popular, but it was in a really bad location. And in three years, it went belly up. So, my dad owed all this money to the builder who owned the property. So, we sold the house in Wheaton and moved to Alexandia. We moved to Van Dorn Apartments on Van Dorn Drive near Taney Avenue. My dad was able to rent his uncle's grocery store on Patrick and Franklin Street; I don't remember the address. The reason why we were able to get this grocery store is because [of] my great aunt. Her husband was named Benny, and he got robbed and killed at the grocery store. So, my father was able to take over the grocery store to pay back the money that he [Terlitzky's father] owed for the restaurant in Silver Spring. Dad came [to Alexandria] in '63. We showed up in '64. We were there for 5 years at the grocery store. The hours were seven days a week, opened at 7:00 in the morning and closed at 9:00 at night, every night. Now, the area that we moved to was kind of a lower poor section of town. It was a mixture of Whites and Blacks living side-by-side in this group. It was near [what] used to be Lee School, I think, but now it's like a recreation thing [Nannie J. Lee Recreation Center]. It was right across the street. The grocery store was on the corner. Next to the corner was a car wash. We did business there, and it was open six days a week, Monday through Saturday. Sunday was off, and we just worked really long hours to pay off dad's debt. My mom wanted to belong to a temple. So, we joined Agudas Achim [Congregation], which was a conservative temple. Mom trained me--My brother went a different route at that time--but anyway, [she] trained me to be kind of a Conservative-Orthodox Jew. I went there a couple times to do my tefillin, which is a little box

you put on the head and on the arm and wrap your arm seven times. It means that you're with one with God. I did that for three years in Alexandria, but I couldn't go to temple on a regular basis, and usually you need to have ten people for minyan to do this. I didn't go on Friday night services because my dad had me working, and on Saturday, I was working. So, Friday night Sabbath, couldn't do; Saturday, the whole day of Sabbath, I was at work. So, I did tefillin on Sunday in my room by myself. I did that for three years until my father gave me a sandwich. I was strictly kosher back then, until the day my father said, "Jerry, you should try this sandwich. It's a beautiful, wonderful sandwich. They slice the meat really thin, put it on white bread, lettuce, tomato, mayonnaise." I took a bite out of it. I said, "Dad, this is a wonderful meat." He says to me, "Jerry, you're not kosher anymore." [*Laughter*] It was ham. Anyway, I had to learn to eat the food that we were selling to the people that were living in that neighborhood, and it was not kosher. None of it was kosher. Anyway, that's how we ended up in Alexandria.

Yahney-Marie Sangaré [00:06:59] How did you feel about the move, and how did your siblings and mother feel about the move?

Gerald Terlitzky [00:07:04] Well, we knew we had to do what Dad said, because Dad was the breadwinner of the house. Mom was too; she worked with Dad. Dad got me started working at the age of 12, when I was at Summit Hills. So, I worked with them during the summertime. I spent a lot of time in the grocery store. Even in the summertime. When I went to school, I went to Hammond High School, which is now a middle school, and I was able to join a program called DECA: Distributed Education Clubs of America. And that was work. Go to school half day, and then go to work. I worked for my dad. So, I went to work every day. I worked from 2:00 in the afternoon 'till about 7:00 or 8:00 at night. I guess when we closed the grocery store, that's when I left [for the day], and by that time I was driving, so I just drove back home. Sometimes, I would close up the shop, because I was 17 at the time--Must have been seventeen, because I got my driver's license in 1965. So anyway, I used to close up. Since I was 17, I couldn't be there by myself, so sometimes, Dad had another worker, and he was over 21. His name was Mr. Morris. Yes, he was a nice guy.

Yahney-Marie Sangaré [00:08:41] So your mother and father weren't originally from Alexandria? Where were they from?

Gerald Terlitzky [00:08:46] My dad was from Philadelphia. South Philly. Let's see, let me tell you a little bit about the history of my dad, because you might be interested in that. He was brought up Jewish, but in a dysfunctional family. He had nine brothers and sisters, and they were poor. Their father couldn't take care of the three youngest ones, which was my father, aunt, and uncle. The father put the three children into an orphanage. So, my father was in the orphanage from the age of 5 or 6 until he ran away at the age of 11 or 12 and ended up driving a car that he said he knew how to drive down to Florida, where he started working at Blimpie's, and he worked down there. That's part of my father's life. Now, my mom, she was born in Washington, D.C. at the old at Providence Hospital, I believe that was. She lived on H Street Northeast above my grandfather's jewelry shop. She had five [siblings], a sister and three brothers. So, it was a family of five, and they were High Conservative, I would say. That's where my mom was born.

Yahney-Marie Sangaré [00:10:36] Did you spend a lot of time in D.C. with your relatives from there growing up?

Gerald Terlitzky [00:10:41] Yes. Since I was born in '47, I was there until my grandmother died in 1959, and that's when we moved away. So, all that time I was in D.C. I went to the DC school, West Elementary School, off of George Avenue. I only remember going to the jewelry shop a couple of times as a kid. I must have been about 4 or 5. I remember my grandmother would always give me borscht with sour cream or chicken rice soup. That was our diet back then. Had chicken, a lot of chicken, [*Laughter*] a lot of borscht. You know.

Yahney-Marie Sangaré [00:11:37] When you moved to Alexandria, how did you feel about the differences between Alexandria to Maryland, that you lived in before, or D.C.?

Gerald Terlitzky [00:11:51] It was different back then. My grandfather died at a young age, and since my dad couldn't really afford to live outside, we moved in with the grandparents. So, I lived at my grandparents' on Decatur Street Northwest. I had a lot of friends in that neighborhood. When I was a kid, around 4 or 5, it was White. A lot of White people; White Jewish people. By the time I hit about 8 or 9, the neighborhood changed to a Black neighborhood, so I had White and Black friends, and we would play in the alley because the only entertainment we had besides the alley and playing with each other was a movie theater down the street, which we all went to the movies on Saturday. So, I learned to live with Blacks, and then we moved to Wheaton. Now, Wheaton was country, you know, it was all Whites. I tried to relate with them, but it was strange. They kept me back one year. I should have been in fifth grade. And they said, "Because you're from DC,"--and the school system wasn't good back then either--"you have to stay back." And I stayed back. But I was Jewish, I was White, and I spoke Black. And those people just couldn't understand. Fortunately, I knew how to street fight, and that's how I survived in elementary school. Because these people were crazy. [*Laughter*] Crazy White people. It was the craziest thing. You should have been there. No, you shouldn't. Anyway. Matter of fact, if you were there, you would probably been the only Black person there. So, I was there, and I was trying to stay alive. [*Chuckling*] Because I spoke Black. I had a very strong accent. [*Laughter*] I remember that. I laugh about it now, but it was really serious back then because I was only a kid. And then we moved to Silver Spring, and then I went to Rich Montgomery High School, a junior high school, and then BCC [Bethesda-Chevy Chase High School] for one year. But by then, there was a kind of a mixture between Blacks and Whites, but not as many Blacks as there were Whites. Then we moved to Alexandria. Everything kind of changed, but back then, they weren't doing any busing. I went to Hammond, and we had about I think 4 or 5 Black kids. That was at Hammond, and I was around White people most of the time. But when I went to work, I was with a mixed crowd, and I felt more comfortable being around the mixed crowd. Working in the grocery store, I met a few people, nice people that I liked, and we were friends. I get along with everybody, because being in the food industry as long as I have been, you learn to respect everybody. You know, whoever they may be, you have to respect them because they're the ones who are paying for our bills, you know. My dad, to go back to the grocery store, because it was a really a big impact for us: they didn't have credit cards back then, in 1964. People would come to my dad and say, "I don't have enough money to pay for food. Can you give me credit?" And my dad said, "Yeah, I'll give you credit. It's no problem." So, dad would give credit to the neighborhood citizens, and it was Blacks and Whites that had that same problem. It wasn't a rich neighborhood. My dad understood that because he was poor when he was a kid. And when I was growing up, we were living with my grandparents. So the only thing I knew is that I got fed, I got clothes, and I was perfectly happy the way things were running. I didn't realize I was poor until they told me that I was poor. [*Laughter*] You know, I didn't know. But Dad gave them credit. Well, that

was an interesting time when dad gave credit to everybody. I think later on, you're going to ask me about something else about, the latter part of the 60s. So, we'll talk about that later.

Yahney-Marie Sangaré [00:16:56] Going briefly back, growing up as a child in D.C., did you think much about playing with Black people or did it just not occur to you?

Gerald Terlitzky [00:17:04] It didn't occur to me, because, you know, we were all neighbors and we were all friends, and, you know. Oh, we had an Italian family that lived there. She was a crazy lady, but I liked her daughter. [*Laughter*]

Yahney-Marie Sangaré [00:17:18] How did your parents feel about it? Did they think much of it?

Gerald Terlitzky [00:17:24] It didn't bother Mom. It bothered Dad. He didn't trust Black people, but he showed respect towards them, even though he had issues when he was a kid, probably, and probably in the military, too. I picked up some of his bad habits. But over the years, I learned that, you know, everybody's equal. Doesn't matter. And that's how I looked at it; I was probably 18, 19 at that time. And I realized, you know, you've got to be square with everybody, you know.

Yahney-Marie Sangaré [00:18:07] So going kind of to that grocery store. You initially had a kosher grocery store that was opened in Maryland, yes?

Gerald Terlitzky [00:18:22] Yes. It wasn't a grocery store; it was actually a delicatessen.

Yahney-Marie Sangaré [00:18:26] What was the name of the delicatessen?

Gerald Terlitzky [00:18:29] Sammy's.

Yahney-Marie Sangaré [00:18:30] Sammy's. What do you remember from that growing up?

Gerald Terlitzky [00:18:34] I remember washing a lot of dishes. [*Laughter*] The first year, I was 12 years old, and he got me working. All I did was clean the bathrooms, wash dishes, pots and pans, and mop the floor. But by the time I was 13, he had me working in the bakery selling cookies and learning how to use a scale and the bread cutter. I did really well at that. I did really well at $0.50 an hour. [*Laughter*] Yeah, I worked, and it was fine. It was very challenging for me when I was a kid. Anyway, he asked me to do this, and, you know, you can't disrespect your dad. You do what he says. And the same thing with Mom. [*Laughter*]

Yahney-Marie Sangaré [00:19:31] I want to make sure I'm getting all the businesses.

Gerald Terlitzky [00:19:32] Yeah.

Yahney-Marie Sangaré [00:19:32] There was a delicatessen in Maryland and then in Alexandria, it was a restaurant?

Gerald Terlitzky [00:19:38] No, first a grocery store.

Yahney-Marie Sangaré [00:19:40] A grocery store. Yeah.

Gerald Terlitzky [00:19:41] That was from [19]64 to '68. We sold the grocery store in '69. Mom and I stayed there for the year to sell it while Dad went into the other restaurant, and the other restaurant was on Cameron Street. Matter of fact, it was 407 Cameron Street, called Rosenick's. The building was owned by [O.L?] Murray. He was my dad's silent partner. Dad worked it. He [Murray] sat back and collected rent and a piece of the action. Dad had no money back then. He was, you know, he just paid off 50 grand to the other guy that he owed, and that was a lot of money back then. And then he got into this little restaurant, and Dad was more familiar with the restaurant, because in the grocery store, he actually made it into a carryout also. So, he sold sandwiches and beer and wine and groceries and of course cigarettes. We had three pinball machines and a jukebox in the back room that I really enjoyed.

Yahney-Marie Sangaré [00:21:07] So when you made the move to Alexandria, what was it like to grow up there? You had really different environments of being in DC and then in Maryland. Where there were there a lot of Black people, and then no Black people, then in Alexandria; What was that like?

Gerald Terlitzky [00:21:31] Alexandria was really quiet. There must have been about 50,000 people living in Alexandria at that time. I met a lot of nice people in at Gateway Market, and I kept in touch with a couple of them, and of course, over the years we've lost touch. But most of the time I was working. I did have a fellow that I didn't meet back then, probably '65, '66. His name was Nelson E. Greene, Jr. His father owned the only Black funeral parlor in Alexandria. His name was, of course, Nelson Greene, Sr. Let's see. This is Patrick [St], okay, there's Franklin [St]. You go down Franklin Street, on the right-hand side is Greene Funeral Parlor. Oh, they're both gone now. Anyway, we met down there, and he would come up into the grocery store, and I would, you know, kibbitz, which means talking. You know, we talked a lot, and he was much older than me. I remember back then I wanted to join a civic organization, you know, and he told me a few places, and then I looked it up on the Yellow Pages. I found a civic organization right down the street called the Progressive Club. So of course, I went down there. In 1965, I was 17. I walked through the door, and a couple Black men were sitting behind a desk, and I walked up and says, "Hi." He says, "May I help you?" I says, "Yes, I want to join an organization. My father and I have a grocery store called Gateway Market. I thought this would be a good place to maybe start doing civic work as a civic organization." And the two Black guys look at each other, and looked at me. He says, "This is a Black organization." I says, "So what?" [*Laughter*] He says, "You can't join because you're White." I says, "Okay, can you tell me what I can do?" So he says, "Go to the Chamber of Commerce. They have a chamber club called Alexandria Jaycees, Junior Chamber." I says, "Okay." I went there, and they said, "Well, you have to be invited." I says, "Okay." So I went back. I didn't do anything after that, and I was really, you know, kind of bummed out that I couldn't even join the Progressive Club, but that's okay. They didn't even have busing back then, you know? [*Laughter*] To my understanding, [the] Progressive Club is still a Black organization. I don't think they allow Whites in there. But that's their business, you know.

Yahney-Marie Sangaré [00:24:38] Thinking also to around that time when you were 17, in 1965, this is not a groundbreaking thing to say, but there was a lot happening in the country and in D.C. at the time. Do you remember the reaction and feeling around some of the major events happening with civil rights?

Gerald Terlitzky [00:24:56] Yes. [*Laughter*] I do. Yeah. I can tell you that in 1964, I was happy to say that I was down there when he was giving his speech. I was at the fountain, and I was there with a bunch of other people. My mom and dad didn't want me to go down, but I went down anyway, and I listened, and it was very inspiring. And I think he was right. I think, you know, Black people at the time deserved to be heard. You know, it's because everybody is the same. Just because we have different colors doesn't mean anything to me. Even though my father had his problems, you know. But I was kind and understanding and, you know, I was against the war in Vietnam, and I did a lot of protesting back then, too, even though I got drafted. [*Laughter*] Which was kind of interesting. I got drafted in 1969. '63, [President John F.] Kennedy got killed. Then RFK [Robert F. Kennedy] got killed and Martin [Luther King, Jr.] got killed. I was very sad about all their deaths. When Martin Luther King died, it's interesting. We still had the grocery store. The story is that Dad was at the store, and I wasn't there, but Dad came home and said, "The people--the Black people and the White people--came to me and said, 'You need to close the store, and don't come back because there's going to be riots in D.C.'" They knew what was happening, and my dad said, "Well, I have to protect the store." And they says, "We're going to keep an eye on the store." Dad took us for a drive down to the store to make sure. And there were tons of people around the building keeping an eye on the building, [so] that nobody would destroy the building because they knew that Dad was a really a good guy. It was their livelihood that they could get groceries there and they don't have to pay money. They had credit, and they felt that Dad was a very worthwhile and trusted person to keep the peace. They actually protected the building, and then they called dad and said, "You can come back now." Dad was very, of course, appreciative of everything. Yeah, that was a real tough time back then. The neighborhood really, really helped us. It was good.

Yahney-Marie Sangaré [00:28:11] And those were Black and White people?

Gerald Terlitzky [00:28:13] Exactly. Poor Black and White.

Yahney-Marie Sangaré [00:28:17] When you went to see Martin Luther King speak for the March on Washington, who did you go with?

Gerald Terlitzky [00:28:22] I went by myself. I took the bus down.

Yahney-Marie Sangaré [00:28:28] Do you remember other people from Alexandria wanting to go or be present?

Gerald Terlitzky [00:28:32] No. I knew I had to go and listen.

Yahney-Marie Sangaré [00:28:37] Interesting. Are there other major events you remember growing up in Alexandria that stand out to you, whether they happened in Alexandria or just things you remember? Well, some of them I'll ask about later, but, things that happened that you remember feeling passionately about or witnessing?

Gerald Terlitzky [00:28:53] Well, to tell you the truth, I was at work most of the time. I read the newspaper, but I didn't really follow the newspaper. The only thing I was interested in the newspaper believe it or not, was comics. It's the same way today for me. I listen to the news. Whenever it's going to happen, it's going to happen. It is what it is. As one person, I can do my voting, but if the other guy wins, I mean, they're going to do what they're going to do. It's out of my

hands. I mean, I can protest all I want, but sometimes it doesn't work. I didn't follow the news back then; I was always working in the grocery store or the restaurants. When we sold the grocery store and went to Rosenick's, we had a young man from India. We had Benny Benberry, who was our cook. He was Black, and we had Danny Knight. He was Black. We had some waitresses. We had Black people working for us, you know, and White people working with us, you know. Everybody got treated equally, [and] everybody got equal pay, you know, except for me. [*Laughter*] Everybody got paid more than me, and I was there all the time. That lasted for a lot of years until 1984. But that's another part. You'll get to that part when you get there. [*Laughter*]

Yahney-Marie Sangaré [00:30:45] So you spoke about how your dad had his biases, but was it common for White employers, his business practice, the way he treated Blacks in Alexandria at the time?

Gerald Terlitzky [00:31:04] Dad treated Blacks just like everybody else. They got paid the same as White people that we had at the store. At the grocery store, Dad had Black kids running errands for him, and he would pay them better than me. Everybody got paid better than me. I remember very well. They would get their tips for running groceries, and everybody hung out at the grocery store, the Black kids, with me, and we all interacted with each other. But it was work.

Yahney-Marie Sangaré [00:31:41] Was that common? Did other White employers in Alexandria have the same practices?

Gerald Terlitzky [00:31:46] When were at that grocery store, we were at the grocery store. What other people were doing was their business, not mine. I never heard anybody say anything bad about the other, but then, I wasn't listening.

Yahney-Marie Sangaré [00:32:05] You talked about who you interacted with growing up a lot. So, I'll kind of ask, how did you see yourself growing up? How I'll frame that is, how did you come to understand yourself as Jewish, if you did? And not being originally from Alexandria, did you feel acquiescent with the Alexandria Jewish community, or did you notice any differences?

Gerald Terlitzky [00:32:27] When I was in Silver Spring and growing up, I went to Beth Sholom Synagogue, which was an Orthodox temple. I mean, I was around Jewish people, and I did belong to a Jewish organization; I think it was called BFTY [Likely affiliated with NFTY and B'nai B'rith]; I think at the time it was called something else. I don't remember quite. But anyway, I belonged to a Jewish organization, and I did work, you know, things with the Jewish kids. And then Dad that got me started working at the delicatessen, [and] some of that stopped. And then I was working. When we moved to Virginia, and there was hardly any Jewish people--except for the temple, but Dad had me working--so I couldn't interact with any of the clubs because Dad had me working. I worked. Dad said, "We need to pay this money back, and I need your help." I says, "Okay." He says, "First of all, you know that $600 that you have in the bank." I says, "Yeah, from my bar mitzvah, yes, I remember." "Can I borrow it?" I said, "You can have anything you want." And gave him all my money. Never saw it again. He put it all in the business until 1984. 1984, he made me his partner.

Yahney-Marie Sangaré [00:33:58] Pivotal date. I look forward to getting to what happened in '84. Especially your mother, because she grew up in D.C., was she very active at Agudas [Achim Congregation]?

Gerald Terlitzky [00:34:14] She was active at the temple when she was a kid. A lot of Jewish people on H Street Northeast back then. She was born in 1925. Dad was born in '23. Her mother spoke Yiddish most of the time. The father would talk Russian Yiddish because the grandparents came to this country in 1918 from Ukraine. They spoke Yiddish around the house a lot. I remember knowing Yiddish when I was a kid. But when she passed away, mom stopped talking Yiddish, and I lost all my Yiddish. I understand a few words, but that's about it, which is really unfortunate. But, you know, that's the way it goes. Mom lived in a Jewish neighborhood, and when her mother passed away, we moved to Wheaton, and there was no synagogue out there, so we didn't go to synagogue. And then we came to Silver Spring, and then there was a synagogue. I started taking up Hebrew lessons at the age of eight when we were living in D.C, until 15 or 16. I stopped because dad had me working at the delicatessen in Silver Spring. But I didn't go to temple that much, just when I was able to. Sundays, I was able to because I did minyan, and I did participate with the club on occasion, but not as much as I probably would have liked to if I had a normal job, but we were working all the time.

Yahney-Marie Sangaré [00:36:21] Do you remember your mother feeling any way about that?

Gerald Terlitzky [00:36:23] Yeah. She didn't like working. She liked being a housewife. And when she was forced into working as a bookkeeper at the restaurant in Silver Spring, she didn't like that. Especially working around Dad. Dad was a hard boss, and he was always on the go. He was a workaholic, Dad. And he made the rest of us workaholics.

Yahney-Marie Sangaré [00:37:10] From what you remember of the temple growing up, how did you feel about it? And what do you remember of it?

Gerald Terlitzky [00:37:15] I remember enjoying going to the services. Mom would take me to services. I would listen to the services, and then I would go on my own when she wasn't around, if I was able to. And that was on Sunday, because they had Sunday school there, and by that time, I was old; I was already 15 or 16. I just went to the temple just to be there. It was very nice. [At] the Orthodox temple, the women were separated from the men. When I was growing up, as a kid, at 6 and 7 years old, I actually wore the tzitzit, which is like a tallis underneath the clothes, you know, hung down. And my grandfather said, "We'll let your sideburns grow into curls." That's funny. They wanted to raise me Orthodox, and it didn't turn out that way in the end. The end is here I am, the way I am. [*Laughter*] Yeah, yeah, just work. Play and going to temple was secondary.

Yahney-Marie Sangaré [00:38:48] You said you were involved in one of the Jewish organizations, although you didn't have much time to go. What was the name of it?

Gerald Terlitzky [00:38:53] I believe it was BFTY. Yeah, I think that's what it was called.

Yahney-Marie Sangaré [00:38:59] Do you remember what it stood for?

Gerald Terlitzky [00:39:04] I don't remember.

Yahney-Marie Sangaré [00:39:04] I can probably find it. Don't worry about that. Also, there was Beth El [Hebrew Congregation]. Do you remember feeling a difference or feeling kind of a chasm between those two [Agudas Achim and Beth El]?

Gerald Terlitzky [00:39:23] Well, like I said, we did a lot of work. I didn't start going to temple until, well, until my heart issue back in 2010. And that's an interesting story about that. Maybe I should wait for that until I get to the 2009 part. I'm going to tell you the whole story about my health issue and what happened and why I now go to temple every other Friday.

Yahney-Marie Sangaré [00:40:09] Okay, we'll get there.

Gerald Terlitzky [00:40:10] We'll get there.

Yahney-Marie Sangaré [00:40:13] So going to your childhood, and this might have been when you were in D.C. as well. What was your earliest memory observing racism? If you noticed that, your earliest memory observing racism against Blacks?

Gerald Terlitzky [00:40:28] I'll tell you the truth. Even though I had friends with the Black kids, we would get mad at each other, have rock battles, throw rocks at each other. Even though they were my friends, they would say something to us about being Jewish. And then, of course, I would say the N-word as a kid because I grew up in Washington, D.C., and that's what they used, the N-word. We would fight and have our arguments, and then the next day, we're back as friends. [*Laughter*] It was a crazy alley thing. It was just alley trash that we, you know. We used to collect bottles together. Some kid had a wagon, and we couldn't afford a wagon, so they had the wagon. So, it would be me and James, James Kirk? What was his last name? Kirk. Maybe it was Kirk, but anyway, it was me and him and a couple Black kids that we knew back then. We would go out and just go up and down the alleys picking up Rock Creek soda bottles. Rock Creek was made in Washington, D.C.: Rock Creek Soda. Little bottles were $0.02, and larger bottles were a nickel. So, we'd load up the wagon and take it down to the grocery store. It happened because it was a DGS store. DGS stands for District Grocery Store Association. That's what it was. The little corner store was called Goldberg's, and Goldberg happened to be Jewish [*Laughter*] and [there was] a little Jewish guy running it. The thing that Jewish people always ran grocery stores and delicatessens, you know, in D.C., as I remember as a kid, and we go down there and collect our money and buy candy, and I always bought Kool-Aid for a nickel, sugar, or lemons. I would have a lemonade stand in the back of the alley for $0.02. People would come by and buy my lemonade or Kool-Aid from me, and I'd make a little gelt: money. Gelt is money. So, I would make a little money. And I had a bank, and I put all the money in my little bank. That's how I was always working at a young age, too. But back then it was like, "Dad was working. I should be able to." You know, that's what we did and then go to the movies.

Yahney-Marie Sangaré [00:43:08] So although you were aware of them being Black, like there was teasing and like sometimes outright like bigotry, the next day it was just--

Gerald Terlitzky [00:43:18] Back to normal. It was just, you know, we're mad at each other today. But the next day, we're back to normal. We go to school together, and there was nothing; you know, school: you go to school, you go to school, and then you go home, and you do your homework. I guess I was [in] third or fourth grade; we didn't have much homework back then. I don't remember,

but I would play with the kids. We went to school together. We would walk to school together. We were buddies, and it didn't bother me, and it didn't seem to bother them unless we had a disagreement, and it bothered everybody. [*Chuckling*] That was the life in the alley.

Yahney-Marie Sangaré [00:44:06] And then in Alexandria, you were obviously working while still being in school, but what was it like for you at Hammond? There were much less Jewish people and much less Black people. What was the environment like?

Gerald Terlitzky [00:44:21] Really White. [*Chuckling*] Yeah. I still had a Black accent, and I wore very bright clothes, like the Black kids did. Well, we weren't allowed to wear jeans and tennis shoes. We had to wear, you know, wingtip shoes, or loafers, or regular pants and shirts. No tee-shirts, no boots. Dresses, you know. But my accent was still kind of a Washington, Silver Spring, more Washington style. I was still talking with a Black accent, like a [wicket?]. And that's today's standards; that's what they're calling it. That's what I was talking. I was talking that way, and I got along with some of the kids, but I really basically stayed to myself. There was more Jewish people at Richmond Montgomery Junior High School and BCC, Bethesda Chevy Chase, that I went to. I really didn't relate to some of them. I related to the kids at the Beth Sholom up on 16th Street. I belonged to that little temple; it was a big temple.

Yahney-Marie Sangaré [00:46:03] Why do you think that was that that you related more to the kids at Beth Sholom?

Gerald Terlitzky [00:46:09] They were there, and their parents were there, and we got along pretty good, you know, as friends. We were friends; we played together because they lived in the same apartment development we did. If you if this is an apartment development, the restaurant was here [next to the apartment], and where we lived is right across the street in this little street here. And that was it. It was you go to work, and you come back, you play with your friends that lived in the area, and that's what I did.

Yahney-Marie Sangaré [00:46:55] So it was tied to the neighborhood more so?

Gerald Terlitzky [00:46:57] Yeah, really tight knitted. I didn't have any black friends at that time. And there was all Whites.

Yahney-Marie Sangaré [00:47:19] In Alexandria, what was your relationship like with gentile community members? Do you recall being made aware that you were different in any way because you were Jewish?

Gerald Terlitzky [00:47:29] No. We didn't advertise [that] we were Jewish. Dad always said, "You know, you don't bring religion into your grocery store, your restaurant. You just cater to those that do come in." And that's how we did it. We just left religion out. Now during the High Holidays, we would close the store, and go to Fort Belvoir. We went to Agudas Achim, but we didn't have really a membership--I think dad did pay a membership fee for that. But if you want to sit with the temple for the High Holidays, you had to pay money for it, and we didn't have a lot of money back then, so we went to Fort Belvoir. My dad had a friend that was in the military. We went to Fort Belvoir because it was free sitting for High Holidays. So we went there during the High Holidays, and that's

Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. And that was the only time we went to synagogue. Not Saturdays, not Fridays, because we were working.

Yahney-Marie Sangaré [00:48:54] So to that extent, then do you think that, regardless of the level of your experience of antisemitism, would you say the experience of being non-visibly Jewish, how did that shape you and your self-perception? How did you feel about it growing up, if you thought about that much?

Gerald Terlitzky [00:49:12] No, I really didn't think about it much at all. I just knew that I'm Jewish. I believe in one God. I don't need to go through a middleman, and the middleman happens to be Jesus Christ. [*Chuckling*] And I always, I always believed that. You know, you could just go to the main guy.

Yahney-Marie Sangaré [00:49:31] And then were there any eminent Jewish institutions you remember outside of the synagogue or the temple in Alexandria? Like gathering places, shops or even prominent community members?

Gerald Terlitzky [00:49:45] Now I'm going to get into the delicatessen. Rosenick's was sold in 1976, and we were there from '68 to '76. Dad opened Terlitzky's Delicatessen at 1324 King Street in Alexandria. New York kosher-style delicatessen. He opened it in '73. Me and mom didn't come until--I think it was more like '75. We came up to the delicatessen to work, because we had to sell the restaurant there. So, we sold the restaurant to a nice couple, and we moved up to Terlitzky's Delicatessen. We sold a lot of kosher style foods, and a lot of Jewish people would come and gather in the back room, where we finally opened the back room, and mom joined Hadassah at the temple. This was at Agudas Achim because we didn't join Beth El until 1986, when my kids were growing up. She would do her volunteer work, and I was still at the restaurant working, and I worked. I worked six days a week. My hours at Rosenick's were only ten hours a day, six days a week. But when we moved up to Terlitzky's, I was putting 12 to 14 hours a day and six days a week, so had no time for anything. Until 1973. '73, I joined, I got invited to join the Alexandria Jaycees, finally. And I went. It was in the evening, so Dad would let me off; let's see. Rosenick's was open from eight in the morning 'till five at night. So anything after five, I was free to do what I wanted to do. So I would go to the meetings, and they always had a dinner meeting. So I went to the dinner meeting, and I met a lot of people up there. Matter of fact, I would say the majority of them were Christian, there was a few Blacks that belonged to the Jaycees, and the rest was Jewish. And I felt very comfortable being around a lot of people. It was fun.

Yahney-Marie Sangaré [00:52:56] This was in '73 that you joined this?

Gerald Terlitzky [00:52:58] In '73, yeah.

Yahney-Marie Sangaré [00:53:00] How were people in Alexandria?

Gerald Terlitzky [00:53:03] These were the children [whose] parents were members of the Chamber of Commerce. The Junior Chamber of Commerce was the children of the parents. The son can invite other people to join that are in the business. So, since my dad belonged to the Chamber of Commerce, one of the guys, his name was… Donnie Levinson, that's what it is. Donnie Levinson. His father owned Levinson's Clothing Store next to the Richmond Theater,

which is now called the Old Town, on King Street. It was right next door to it. He had a clothing store, and the son invited me. [He] came up to the delicatessen, said, "Would you like to join the Jaycees?" I said, "About time." [*Laughter*] Yeah, I joined, so I was able to go, and they would have projects. I couldn't do the projects because it was during the daytime, and I was working, unless I asked my father if I could take off a little early. Sometimes he would. So that was good, but Sunday was my day off really. And I did all the Jaycee projects on Sunday.

Yahney-Marie Sangaré [00:54:38] I know you said you spent a lot of time working growing up, so I keep going back to times where you're like, "I was at work," which is fair, but I do want to ask, when you attended Hammond High School during segregation, I know you said there were around 5 or 6 Black students at the time.

Gerald Terlitzky [00:54:53] Yeah.

Yahney-Marie Sangaré [00:54:53] How do you remember people speaking about segregation or about the national issues, or the attitude in general towards interracial [interactions], people talking and etc.?

Gerald Terlitzky [00:55:05] They didn't talk much about those things back then. Not in my little group of people that I knew, and I only knew a few people, but they were all business-minded, and we were always talking about work. When I was in Hammond, I joined the DECA: Distributive Education, which was, you take business classes, and then at 12:00 you eat lunch, and you go to work between 1:00 and 2:00, and you had no time to mingle with all the other people because you went to work, and you get graded for your work. I didn't pay attention to any of that other stuff. It was, [in] my mind, you go to the grocery store, you work, and take care of the people there. That's how it was for me.

Yahney-Marie Sangaré [00:56:03] So when you went to the March on Washington, was that sort of your first experience?

Gerald Terlitzky [00:56:07] Yes. It was.

Yahney-Marie Sangaré [00:56:09] What was that like for you?

Gerald Terlitzky [00:56:09] It was really cool. I was able to stand. It was hot, though, and I actually put my feet in the water. You know, you have the Lincoln Memorial here, and then you look down and you have that strip of water, the fountain, and I put my feet in the water. It was very good. [*Chuckling*] Shoe and all. Put it right in there. You know, I listened to his [Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr.'s] speech, and I thought that was, you know, "I Had a Dream" speech. That was really a good speech he did. Some people had tears in their eyes. I had a big smile on my face listening to this, and thinking, "You know, we're making history here." And that's what it was for me. I thought that was very cool.

Yahney-Marie Sangaré [00:57:01] What were your parents' reactions when you got home? Did you tell them that you went?

Gerald Terlitzky [00:57:04] I did tell my mom and my dad, he said, "Why'd you go down there? Too many people down there." Mom didn't say too much, I said, "It was very moving, you know." And Dad said, "Well, you have to go to work tomorrow." [Laughter] That's all it is. He said, "Let's go back to work." But it was kind of interesting, when I was growing up. Work: you go to work, you go to work. You come home, you don't talk about work, you talk about vacation, how school was, did you learn anything, you know, stuff like that. And then you go to bed, and then go to school, and then go to school for half day, and then go back to work. And all I did was work. I mean, I started at the age of 12. I worked for my dad for 30 years in the grocery store and restaurant and delicatessen business. 1984, I opened the Laughing Lizard Lounge, which was a comedy club. Well, first it was called Gerald's Food and Drink, and then I closed it. Then I met a young fellow who was a comedian, and he wanted to bring his comedy troupe to the restaurant. And that was in '84, '85. We had the comedy troupe down there, and they would get the proceeds for the tickets, we would get all the food proceeds. That added, a couple more hours a night for me, so I was working 14 hours a day. That's when I was already out of school and everything. Just work, you know. All I did was, unfortunately, work.

Yahney-Marie Sangaré [00:59:01] Did you attend college?

Gerald Terlitzky [00:59:06] I attended for a year and a half.

Yahney-Marie Sangaré [00:59:08] Where?

Gerald Terlitzky [00:59:09] Northern Virginia Community [College]--Well, it's now called Northern Virginia. Back then, it was called Northern Virginia Technical College, and that was on Carling Springs Road in Falls Church. If you go down King Street, going towards Seven Corners, you make a right-hand turn, Carling Springs Road, there's a group of warehouses. That's what it was. In the warehouse was this technical college, and I went there. They only taught computer science, business, and police science, which I never understood what police science was, but I went there for computers. Well, back in the latter part of 1967, 1968, 1969; what happened was I got sick, and they pulled me out of school. I was out of school for a while, and then I was planning to go back. That's when Uncle Sam got me in '69, in June of '69. I got drafted. The college eventually became a community college, but that's where it started from. But I didn't do well in school. I never did well in school because I have a habit of turning my letters, and I didn't know that at the time, turning my words around. And big words always bothered me. But you know, you read slower, you know, and you figure out which words should be--Anyway, [*Chuckling*] it's another--my education. But anyway, I got drafted, and I spent four months in the military. They released me after going through basic training. Well, what happened before LBJ left office--that's Lyndon Baines Johnson, if you don't know-- anyway, [before] LBJ left office, he wanted to put 50,000 men into Cambodia, and I was part of that group. So instead of going through basic training in eight weeks, we went through six weeks, and we were going to get shipped out. I decided I wanted to join jump school, so I went to the Army Jump School. All my paperwork was transferred over to them. They read about it, they read everything in it, and they said, "You shouldn't even be in the army." And I says, "Why?" "You have flat feet. You can't jump out of a plane with flat feet, and you have a heart murmur. So we're going to send you home." I said, "Okay, all right." I got an honorable discharge for medical reasons, and I couldn't get any VA [Veterans Affairs] loan or anything like that, because I only had four months in. But my father was delighted that I came home because he spent 21 months in the Aleutian Islands during World War II fighting the Japanese, and it screwed him up a little bit, but, you know.

Yahney-Marie Sangaré [01:03:05] How did you feel about coming home? I know you got drafted, and you said also you protested against the Vietnam War, right?

Gerald Terlitzky [01:03:11] I did oppose it. We used to go down to Lafayette Park, DuPont Circle, get gassed by the tear gas. You know, protest a lot. Protest at Maryland University and get gassed. [*Chuckling*] But, you know. When they drafted me, I said, "Well, if I have to go, I'm gonna support my country, but I don't like it." But I wouldn't desert my country. I went. I went to Fort Benning, Georgia, and unfortunately, there was only a couple Jewish people there, mainly Blacks and country folks, farmers. Then I saw antisemites right there. Then I realized these people don't like Jews. And Black people didn't like Jews back then either. I used to get into arguments, but I finally said, "You know, I don't want to deal with you people." I stopped talking to everybody. It was just me by myself.

Yahney-Marie Sangaré [01:04:39] If you'd like to speak more on that, what were your experiences with antisemitism like in the military?

Gerald Terlitzky [01:04:47] You know, I had this one Black guy who really didn't like me. He was really tall. I'm only 5'9, and he must have been about 6'3. He always picked on me. He always said, "Come here, Jewboy." And I looked at him, and I says, "What do you want, N-word?" He says, you know, "I'm gonna beat your ass." And I says, "Well, if you have to, you have to." [*Laughter*] And we fought. And eventually, I won the battle. And he left me alone after that. The other Black people, they stayed away from me and I, you know, really wouldn't know them. And the White people, they didn't like me either, because I was Jewish. They picked on me, and I had to fight back my street-- You know, and I didn't like doing that either. I wanted to be peaceful. I wanted to be mellow. I didn't want a lot of issues, you know. I'll do whatever they asked me to do. I'll just do it and get it over with. Spend my two years or three years in the military, whatever, you know, get back home, so I could go back to work with my dad and mom because I really liked living with my mom and dad. Well, I was living with them until I got married. Then I moved out.

Yahney-Marie Sangaré [01:06:24] The experiences you had with antisemitism in like Virginia in that area, were they mainly with Black people, or how did it look different between Blacks and Whites, or even in the military, if it did?

Gerald Terlitzky [01:06:37] Now we're talking about the grocery store era, right?

Yahney-Marie Sangaré [01:06:39] Sure. Yes.

Gerald Terlitzky [01:06:40] We were all together in one group and a small area, and we treated each other with respect. They knew that we were Jewish. As long as Dad was giving them credit, everybody was friendly. I mean, business is business. But the kids, we really never talked about religion too much. We didn't advertise that we were Jewish in the grocery store, but they knew, and we got along just fine. Now, every once in a while, we would have a customer come in and give us grief, and my father would, you know, really spurt out the words. And I, you know, I listened to it, but I didn't want to listen to it. I was more of a peacenik.

Yahney-Marie Sangaré [01:07:47] What was your relationship like with White gentiles? Did you feel welcome or aligned with them, especially in your time in the military?

Gerald Terlitzky [01:07:54] No. One fella said to me, he said, "Are you going to church?" I says, "Will it get me out of work and get the sergeant to leave me alone?" He says, "Probably so." I says, "Okay." I probably told the sergeant at the time that Friday night is the Sabbath for me, and Saturday I had to go to the temple. So I went to temple on Saturday, so I wouldn't have to get volunteered to do whatever they make you do, and then I went to church on Sunday because I wanted the same thing; just to get away from other people. I'd rather pray than be with them. And that's what I did. I went to temple on Saturday for an hour, and then an hour on Sunday, and they would leave me alone. During the weekday, it was different. They gave me bad jobs.

Yahney-Marie Sangaré [01:08:58] And when you were growing up, did you grow up feeling aligned with like White gentiles? I know I kind of asked that in context in the military, but also just growing up, did you feel yourself adjacent and aligned with White gentiles?

Gerald Terlitzky [01:09:10] No, we didn't talk about religion that much as kids. We played with each other. It had nothing to do with religion. Now during Christmas, they had Christmas trees, and I didn't know about Christmas trees at that time. I didn't know anything about Christmas. I knew about Hanukkah, but Christmas I didn't know. I was invited to a couple of people's houses, and they were singing Christmas carols. I thought that was pretty cool. So I would join in singing Christmas carols with them until, you know, until the word Jesus came out, and I was singing Christmas carols. My mom says, "You shouldn't be singing Jesus." I was like, I guess I was eight years old at the time, I said, "They're going out Christmas caroling. I want to go with them." She says, "No. You're Jewish." And that's when, you know, I learned the difference between Jesus and God. I was going to Hebrew school, but still I wanted to experience all the other stuff, you know. So, I didn't go Christmas caroling, and then I learned about Jesus Christ. He was a Jewish guy that got caught up in politics and got nailed. Well, you know, basically, that's what it is. If you make it short, that's exactly what happened.

Yahney-Marie Sangaré [01:10:43] It's a weird kind of question to think about in retrospect, but growing up, did you come to understand yourself as White before being Jewish, or Jewish before being White? How did you think about those identities, especially in Alexandria?

Gerald Terlitzky [01:10:58] I didn't think much about those things. I mean, I knew I was White, I knew I was Jewish, and there was people out there that didn't like Jews. And I just had to, you know, live with that. And I still live with that today. I mean, there's a lot of antisemites out there now. Now, I actually speak up. For an example. Back in 2006, then I was out at the restaurant business. I was working for a food broker. I would visit grocery stores, and I went out to Orange County, Virginia, to do work in a grocery store as I was representing certain products. So, I went out there. I stayed at The Whistle Stop Bed and Breakfast. I went in there, and I made reservations to spend two nights there. The husband was antisemitic. The wife was kind of in between. I walked in, and first thing he says, "What religion are you?" I says, "I'm Jewish." All these bad words started coming out of his mouth. I said, "Do I need to lock my door at night?" to the wife. And she said, That might be a good idea." [*Chuckling*] I already paid my money, so I stayed there for two nights. I had to listen to this crap this guy was throwing at me. When I was leaving, I looked at him and said, "Just remember, Jesus was Jewish. And he was a good teacher. And just because you believe in him,

it's okay. I only believe to the main guy; I don't believe in him." And he threw some more words at me. I said, "And it was nice knowing you." And then I'm walking out and, using the F-word, I said, "F-you." [*Laughter*] You know. That was the first time that I had a real tongue whipping with antisemites. And, you know, it was like, this is not good. But I just, you know, brush it off and say, you know, his parents never taught him right. He's ignorant. And, just left it like that, and hopefully he'll go to Hell when he dies. [*Laughter*]

Yahney-Marie Sangaré [01:13:48] This is where we get talking about, some of the businesses more as well. But before we get into that, there's a few things that happened in Alexandria I wanted to ask about. Do you remember who was the rabbi at Agudas when you came to Alexandria?

Gerald Terlitzky [01:14:07] Elster. E-L-S-T-E-R. [Rabbi Sheldon Elster]

Yahney-Marie Sangaré [01:14:11] How do you remember feeling about him? And I know you didn't get to go as much, but at temple, did people tend to speak about what was happening politically in any sense?

Gerald Terlitzky [01:14:25] They did, but I wasn't paying attention. I was there just to pray and go home. Go to work. Yeah, it's all about work. When we came in again, I came from a family that was poor, and the only thing my dad knew was work. At the age of 12, he says, "You're going to start working for me." And I said, "Okay." So I worked with him, and all I did was work. 'Till 1990, he sells a restaurant, I retire. 42. And I was going to stay off from work for about a year. My wife said, "You need to go back to work." I says, "But I can retire now." She says, "The money's not going to hold out." my dad gave me a piece of change because I was his partner, which was really nice. I finally received something from my dad because all those years, I didn't get anything. [*Laughter*] Yeah. Anyway, I went back to work. I work. I've always wanted to work for someone and then quit because that's what people used to do to us. They would go and work for a couple weeks or a month, and then they said, "Oh, I can't come in anymore. I have to quit." And I said, "You teach them all these things, and now they want to move on to something else?" Benny Benberry stayed for a long time, and even Danny Knight, he stayed for a long time, until we sold the restaurants. They were really devoted workers. Those guys made more money than me. Everybody made more money than me. I mean, you know. It wasn't right. [*Laughter*] No, really, the time I started getting paid good from my dad was--I have a son that had cancer at a year and a half, and I was going into the red. And then my father gave me a livable wage, a living wage. Of course, the son is now 44, and he also has medical issues. But, you know, we just do what we have to do, you know, with children. Yeah. Make sure everybody's okay. So, anyway, I got a livable wage--that was in '84, until 1990. 6 years. I worked for him 24 years before I actually got something, you know? [*Laughter*] Yeah. And then in 1990, we sell the restaurant. I get a piece of change. I end up opening a pizza shop, and I opened another comedy club. The pizza shop was called The Pizza Pantry, and I had that from 1992 to 1994, and I sold it. And then I went into the comedy club at the latter part of '94 to 1999, and that was called The Fun Factory, which was a PG-rated comedy club. Suitable for the whole family.

Yahney-Marie Sangaré [01:18:06] And that was after you did the Lizard Lounge.

Gerald Terlitzky [01:18:09] Lizard Lounge, yeah. Lizard Lounge was fun.

Yahney-Marie Sangaré [01:18:13] What do you think attracted you into going into the same business that your father did? Did you ever want to try something else?

Gerald Terlitzky [01:18:24] I did. 1999, I got out of the restaurant business after 37 years. I finally called it quits. I worked for this food broker visiting grocery stores. And all I did was resets, which is actually: if you ever go to a to the grocery store and the product is not where it usually is, it's gone, and it's gone somewhere else. Have you ever been in that situation? Those are called resets. We go in there, and we take certain shelves, and we move stuff around, and it's just to aggravate the customer, I think. It's all about getting people to try to find stuff, so that if they can't find it, maybe they'll do some impulse buying and buy something else. It's all about impulse buying, really. So, I worked with them for 10 years. I got less than half the type of salary I was getting when I left my dad. But it wasn't about the money, it was really basically my wife wanted me to work. So here, I'm going to work for this company. They're going to give me money, I'm going to give it to my wife, and she's going to do whatever she wants to do with it, which she did. Yeah. Household stuff. And I did that for ten years. At the latter part of 2008, I got sick. I had a heart issue. All of a sudden, the murmur finally comes, and I go into hypertension, and they put a pacemaker defibrillator in my chest. Five months later, the defibrillator goes off. This is in 2009, May 22, as I remember well. It went off, and I got a real shock. It's like being kicked in the face by a horse that's kicking backwards in the chest. It felt like that. I was in the hospital. I woke up. I was in a room. My wife was feeding me something. Then I remember a second shock and a third shock. After that, I don't remember the other 42 episodes of being shocked. They paralyzed me, and they put me in a coma. This all happened in a day and a half. So it was a weekend. Friday, I had the cardio arrest 45 times. Tuesday, I wake up. Everything changed. This is where Judaism really comes into play. This is 2009, but, five, six days, six days later, something like that, I wake up. And I felt that I was touched by God. Because the doctor said, "It's a miracle that you actually woke up. Because what you have, people do not survive even with a defibrillator." And I felt that God touched me. I felt special. After I recovered, it took me--May, June, July, August, September, October, November, December, January; February, I was actually able to go to the hospital to do cardio rehab. That's when I started going to temple. By that time, I was able to drive a car. They wouldn't let me drive a car for six months. Lost the job. Couldn't fly in a plane for a year and a half. I couldn't drink coffee anymore. No caffeine, no alcohol. All the things I used to enjoy doing, like whitewater rafting, roller coasters, horseback riding, all that's gone. Can't do that. Got to stay mellow. Well, I can do that. [Laughter] So I stayed mellow. So here it is, 15 years later. Talking to you. Knocking on wood. I'm still alive. Because what happened back then, it was tragic. But my Judaism came back to me, and I was forced into retirement at 61. Now, here's 15 years later. I go to temple religiously. Sometimes I actually go once every Friday, and then I stop, and I go every other Friday. My rabbi says, "How come you don't come every Friday or Saturday?" I said, I tell him, "I don't want to be a super Jew." I just, you know, I come for welcoming the Sabbath, but I also saying prayers for me because God really saved me. I mean, the doctor saved me, but God was there. He touched me, because when I was waking up--The first time, the nurse came up and asked me who I was, and she tells my mom, and my wife and my son came over closer to me. And they're saying, "He's dribbling. It doesn't sound normal. He's not him. He's saying something else." They asked a question. They said, "Who are you?" I says, "I'm [Kediya Mordechai]." Well, that's my Hebrew name. And they said, "Where are you?" I say, "I'm in Israel." "Who is this lady?" And I didn't know my mother's Hebrew name, I says, "That's [Brina Myriam]." And I said, "tefillin, tefillin, tefillin" three times. Nurse didn't understand that, but my wife and my child, the one that had cancer, he was a college student at that time, he understood what was happening, and my mom understood. But you know. I said that like two or three times

before I actually woke up on a Tuesday. I wake up on Tuesday, they say, "Who are you?" I said, my name is Gerald Terlitzky. "Where are you?" I said, "I think I'm in Alexandria." At that time, when I was saying this stuff, they didn't tell me this until months later about what happened. And that's when I got touched. I think I was touched by God, that he wanted me to be different. I got my spirit back in Judaism. And now I go to temple, and I actually work with the Brotherhood. I started doing volunteer work at the hospital; all the things that I didn't do because I was always working. I did do some volunteer work, but it was at night after the restaurant was closed. I worked for the Alexandria Mental Health Association for the Hotline Medical. This was this must have been--Let's see, I got married in '71, '72; this is before I joined the Jaycees. Oh, maybe it was during the Jaycees also, but I know I worked [at the Hotline] for three years. Got burnt out because I was giving four hours a night. But once a week I would go in and talk to people getting down off of being high on marijuana or LSD or [who were] suicidal. I would try to talk them down. I was trained at the Alexandria Mental Health Association for a couple weeks, and [I'd] do references. "Here's a doctor you can go to," and give information. I remember doing that. So, I was able to get back into volunteer work, which I did for 9 years.

Yahney-Marie Sangaré [01:27:31] How did it feel to come back to religion and come back to this community?

Gerald Terlitzky [01:27:38] Well, for me, it was a miracle that I actually lived through this ordeal that I went into, this cardio arrest business, this heart issue that I have. I mean, it brings tears to my eyes at times. I think about it. When they sing certain songs, I'm thinking about, besides being Jewish, it reminds me that all people are created equal. You can't be negative towards people. You can't be hateful. You have to, you know, love each other because we're all here for a short time, and you got to make the best of it and give. And I do that. I do give. I do everything I'm supposed to do that is right. For me. I do a lot of praying.

Yahney-Marie Sangaré [01:28:39] Thank you for sharing that. I asked some of the other things I was going to ask; I think we also got to answer through, but I'll bring them back up in case you want to talk about them more. So proximity to D.C.-wise, this is when you're running your businesses as well. So, you can talk about as well how you saw it through the lens of what was happening. But in politics, major shifts with Nixon and Reagan, post-civil rights movement, began to shift sort of the zeitgeist formed around the era. How did you feel or react to that, like the Reagan era and Nixon?

Gerald Terlitzky [01:29:13] I didn't really too much. [*Chuckling*] I thought Reagan was a pretty good president. Except he did have his issues, but all presidents do. I just went with the flow. I didn't pay a lot of attention to the news, except for the comic strips. When you're working, it's different. You just don't have time to look at the newspaper. The only parts of the newspaper I like were the sports and the comics. [*Chuckling*] It made me happy. Because, when you're in this area, you're only six miles away from the nation's capital, and they're always pouring this stuff--they just throw this stuff at you know, all the time. All this politics stuff, and it sometimes it was bad; most of the time, it was bad. The only avenue to get to escape these things was to read the comics, and it makes me happy. So, I really didn't pay much [attention] during the Reagan years. I pay more attention to what's going on now. Since I've been retired, I listen to more what's going on in the world, and what's going on in the world is horrible. Especially right now with Israel. I have cousins that live over there, and they don't like the prime minister we have right now. What's going on, it's very scary. And to see how the Muslims are and the Palestinians are; talk about antisemitic. They're the ones that started the war.

Hamas. I mean, if they didn't bomb [and] take all those 1,200 people, this war would have never happened. Because Israel is not going to stand by and let 1,200 people die without, you know. I'll tell you, it reminds me of a story--We'd go to Israel in 1973. We went for three weeks. I was able to talk my dad into letting me go away for three weeks. Which we did. My wife and I. My cousin, may he rest in peace. His name was Alex. He was in the [Israeli] army, and he was an intelligence officer. He would talk to the prisoners, and what he did with the prisoners, I don't know, but that was his business. He gave us a three-week tour, and this was in '73. In '79, they send him up to Lebanon with some paperwork. He was supposed to come home that evening, and they said, "Why don't you just stay here?" And he stayed there. A truck bomb came in and blew up the barracks and killed them. Even though it was only 20 Jews, Jewish soldiers [who] got killed, three days later, they bombed Lebanon and killed 300 of the enemy soldiers. The soldiers there, the Lebanese army, they killed 300 of their people. So, you lose 20 people and, you know, you killed 300. Tit for tat. That's what they're doing. That's exactly what they're doing. That's what Israel did. Israel does not hold punches. If something happens to a Jew in Israel, they're going after the other person. Eye for an eye. Well, this past time in October, you lose 1,200 people, 250 people are hostages. Israel's going to say, "No, we're not going to do anything"? Of course they didn't. Unfortunately, they should have stopped when they should have, but they didn't. They decided to do the whole thing with destroying the Gaza Strip. And, what's going on now, it's just terrible. But it's amazing how the Muslims forget who start the war, and they blame the Jews for everything. The Jews are always getting blamed for everything. The Jews are blamed for killing Jesus. We had nothing to do with that. It was the Romans that killed them. Just because a priest thought he was blasphemous against the Jewish faith; he wasn't. He was just showing them a different way of living. That's all he was doing is saying, "Let's see, you can just look at it this way." He was a nonconformist. He was a hippie of his time, and the priest didn't like that. So they got the Romans to kill him. And of course, the Jews were blamed for that. Okay, so now we're blamed for killing Jesus. So antisemites say, "Jews did that." The Muslims don't like us because we don't believe in Muhammad. Well, Muhammad wasn't really a good guy anyway. Even in the Koran, if you read the Koran, they talked about loving and peace and all this other stuff. But when it comes to Muhammad, well, he did no wrong. So, you have that issue. And then, of course, you have the Christians with Jesus Christ. They blame the Jews for, well, wherever they want to blame us on. The Jewish people are the scapegoats of the world. If there's anybody they hate. You know, the Black people, they tolerate the Black people. That's how I look at it. This is all my own thoughts. They tolerate the Black people. But when it comes to Jews? The Jews are the scum of the world. It's like that. I just feel that way all the time. They look at us and they say, you know, "There's only 20% Jews in the whole world, why don't we just get rid of them?" That's what the Muslims want to do. "Let's get rid of all the Jews." But, you know, the Jewish people and the Muslims, we're almost like brothers. I mean, we believe in the same God. The only difference is they believe in Muhammad, and we don't. We don't even think of him as a prophet. But they do. But that does mean that we're bad. Anyway, that's my thought. I just thought I'd mention that.

Yahney-Marie Sangaré [01:36:31] And while we're on that, with ongoing conversation about our foreign policy in Israel, and in that region in the Middle East, how do you see interfaith relations proceeding? The conventional view places a lot of the foundation for, if there was this idea of a 'Black-Jewish' alliance on a national political level, in that so-called 'Golden Age' era of the 50s and 60s is based in the presumptions of Afro-American Christianity and then Judaism. When the conversation of Zionism is introduced in the 70s, that coincides with the Global South movement of the Black Panther Party, that begins to shift many Black-Americans to the left on issues with the

Middle East and many Jewish-Americans to the right with issues about foreign policy in Israel. With those conversations reemerging, how do you see a future--and not future in a positive way--but just a future of interfaith conversations?

Gerald Terlitzky [01:37:43] Okay. That's a lot. That's a lot to think about. I personally think that, Blacks and Jewish are getting closer to each other, and that's a good thing. I can see it in my temple at Beth El [Hebrew Congregation]. When Rabbi Arnold Fick left and David Spinrad came in as a rabbi, he had ideas. Now he has a son who's Black. I thought that was very interesting and very cool that he actually adopted a black child. Then I knew that there was going to be some changes. Then he started talking about, BLM, Black Lives Matter, and they started bringing a little bit more politics into the temple, which the other rabbis in the past have always said, "You don't mix religion with politics. It's not good. You'll lose, members." Well, it happened. There were members that left the temple because of bringing politics into the temple. To me, I take it as a grain of salt. It's going to happen, it's going to happen. It doesn't mean that I should stop coming here to pray for my God and peace in the world. Eventually, violence will go away, someday. Probably not in my life, but would be nice. Almost like a utopia would be wonderful for this world. That all borders are open for everybody, and people can live wherever they want without the fear of government and religion coming into play. But, you know, it's wishful thinking for me, a utopia. Now we have Black people are joining our temple, which is really good. I'm just going to go back to 1973, when we were in Israel. My cousin tells me, "We're going to a temple. It's the most unusual temple you've ever been to. You'll never see another one like this ever again." I said, "A temple's a temple, you know?" So we walk in. We're the only white people in the temple. It's all Black Jews. It was like, "Wow, this is cool." And they were davening. They were doing all Hebrew. It was wonderful. I said, "This is incredible." And my wife and I just sat there and listened. It was wonderful. It was a wonderful experience. And I says, "This is great. That people were actually the Jewish people." And they said, "These people were born Jewish." And I said, "What country?" "Ethiopia." Ethiopian Jews came to Israel to live. And I said, "This is the first time I ever seen anything like this in my life. This is wonderful. And maybe eventually, in time, people will, you know, respect each other." And sure enough, with the temple we're doing now at Beth El, you're seeing more Black people coming in, Asians are coming in. Gay people are coming in, and we're inviting people to come and convert if they want to. I think that's the best thing our temple is doing. I think it's good. Now, even though we lost some people, that's because their minds are closed. After my heart condition, my eyes opened up to wonderfulness. So I think eventually, in time, good things will occur. I think Jewish people, Black people, people of other races and colors. I think eventually peace will come, and people will respect each other more so.

Yahney-Marie Sangaré [01:42:26] Thank you for sharing that. That would be a great ending note, but I want to ask two quick things.

Gerald Terlitzky [01:42:32] You can ask me anything.

Yahney-Marie Sangaré [01:42:34] So, in 1964, Andrew Goodman, Michael Schwerner, and James Chaney were killed by Ku Klux Klan members in Mississippi. The Freedom Summer activists, which made large national attention. That was also the year that your family moved to Alexandria. And I know you were fairly young, but if at all, how do you remember feeling about or reacting to or even hearing about, the Freedom Summer activists?

Gerald Terlitzky [01:43:14] I do remember about the Ku Klux Klan killing people, and I was crushed. It was like, "This is terrible. People shouldn't be doing this, and these people are crazy, and they should be executed." I felt very much hatred against the Ku Klux Klan, the American Nazi Party: anybody that was non-Jewish that hated Jews and Blacks. It just made my stomach turn. I did not like what was happening. And I was afraid. Afraid for myself, my family, and those around me. I was concerned, but I was only a kid back then, and that was one of the things that really got me thinking, even though I didn't read the newspaper much [Chuckling] except for the comics. But I remember that. And, today if they talk about Ku Klux Klan down south, first thing I want to do is-- I mean, if I was not a peace loving person, I would get a gun, and go down there and shoot those bastards. [Laughter] But I can't do that because I really don't believe in killing anybody. My wife won't let me have a weapon in the house, because she doesn't like guns. She thinks that they can take it away and shoot you. But, if I had my own way, I would have a gun in the house to protect my family in the house. I wouldn't take it out, it would stay in the house, and I would feel safer that way. But then again, I have other things in the house that I can use as protection. You know, hairspray for one. Ever heard about hairspray?

Yahney-Marie Sangaré [01:45:19] I've heard about that.

Gerald Terlitzky [01:45:21] Okay.

Yahney-Marie Sangaré [01:45:22] And kind of similarly, and this is something when I was interviewing, someone else that got brought up, but George Lincoln Rockwell, who was president of the American Nazi Party, he did a lot of resistance to integration in Alexandria and Arlington.

Gerald Terlitzky [01:45:37] He did.

Yahney-Marie Sangaré [01:45:38] What response had that invoke in you and your family? And how do you remember people speaking about it growing up?

Gerald Terlitzky [01:45:48] It bothered me at the time. I don't think I was married at the time. We got married in '71, my wife and I. So, it must have been before that, because I would go down to the American Nazi Party and protest. A few of us people would go down there, and they didn't like that, and I didn't care. Sometimes we'd go down there and throw rocks at their building, [Laughter] you know? I remember years ago, when the internet was fairly young, I did get into a website. Of course, I didn't put my real name down or anything, you know, just some cockamamie name I came out with. And, I would write to these people and talk to them, the American Nazi Party, and I would aggravate them. I says, "So what do you think about Jesus being Jewish?" And they of course didn't look at it that way. And I'd say, "Do you go to church?" I would ask them all kinds of all of these questions, I would just aggravate them. That and the Ku Klux Klan, I would just get on it. Now, I don't do those things anymore. I learned my lesson. I figure eventually they'll find me, you know? [*Laughter*] But, I used to I used to aggravate them and protest because I got bolder.

Yahney-Marie Sangaré [01:47:30] Throughout your time, working at different establishments and different public sort of gathering places. What did you see in the change in attitudes and etc., especially towards racial relations or being together in Alexandria? How did you see it shift from when you grew up there?

Gerald Terlitzky [01:47:49] I think when busing finally came into the school system, things changed a lot. People were being mixed up with other people, Blacks and Whites. My kids went to T.C. Williams High School, and they had more Blacks than Whites at certain times, but the kids got along just fine with everybody. My kids had Black friends, and everything seemed okay with me. When I went to school, busing didn't come until 1970, 1971, something like that. I was already out of school, but I thought it was a good thing, having blacks coming into White neighborhoods and the other way around, too. Went back and forth. I thought it was a good thing. And tell your truth, over the years, people are more respectful to each other. The younger generation, even though their parents, came from the old school, and taught their kids--If I got this right--My parents, parents before them, grandparents were the ones that taught their parents. If they're ignorant, they only taught about hatred against Whites. The situation we have now, when my kids were growing up, it was more that we're all becoming equal and showing more respect. The older generation was in a different zone than we are now, and even though I was brought up; I was in between the zones. That's how I see it. I didn't have a problem with Black children when I was growing up. I don't have problems now. It's just the ones that are ignorant. Those are the ones I'm concerned about. I mean, and there are people out there, both Whites and Blacks are like that. I believe people down in the red states, they're nuts. They just don't get it. And the people up here, the ones that are educated, they know what's going on. And if we can educate the rest of them, eventually things will turn around, and it's going to turn out okay. That's what I say personally. My opinion.

Yahney-Marie Sangaré [01:50:46] Thank you. Is there anything else that you want to mention or reflect on?

Gerald Terlitzky [01:50:52] Well, I appreciate the interview. You did a very good job.

Yahney-Marie Sangaré [01:50:56] Thank you so much for sitting down and speaking with me.

Gerald Terlitzky [01:50:59] I think you asked everything you wanted to ask.

Yahney-Marie Sangaré [01:51:03] So it's currently 4:26 p.m. on the 17th of July. And this is where I'm going to end the recording. Okay.