

## A TEI Project

# Interview of Aaron Kuppermann

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## 1. Transcript

### ***1.1. Session One (January 22, 2008)***

#### **SEVERAL**

Okay. This is Michael Several. I am with Dr. Aaron Kuppermann in his office at Caltech here in Pasadena, and we are going to continue our oral history project by interviewing him. One of the first things I...well, I first wanted to say that the website of Caltech has great information about your background, your academic and professional background. So this interview is going to be largely focused on your experience as a Jew and your experience, your growing up as a Jew, and the first thing I would like to learn is could you talk about the Jewish community in Sao Paolo?

#### **KUPPERMANN**

Sure. Sure. Brazil has two major Jewish communities, one in Sao Paolo and one in Rio de Janeiro. Each one has in the order of 70 to 80,000 Jews living there, and they are by and large not descendant from the original Brazilian Jewish community that came in with the Dutch into Northeastern Brazil in the middle 1600's with...when the Dutch invaded Brazil and tried to conquer it from Portugal. They brought with them a large contingent about...there were 5,000 Dutch soldiers and 5,000 Jewish merchants, and however, when they were expelled by the Portuguese in the late 1600's, or the 1700's, if my memory serves me right, those Jews left. Most of them went back to Holland. Some of them as a group came to the New Amsterdam via Curacao. They spent two years in Curacao waiting for Governor Stuyvesant to approve their coming to New Amsterdam. They didn't want to have Jews, but the Dutch company of the West Indies was able to exert their political clout and get them to permit and invest where all this Jewish community of the United States came from. The El Toro synagogue---they all come from these Dutch

Jews that came from Northeastern Brazil who originally came, not really from Holland, but they originally came from Portugal and Spain right after the Inquisition. So about 150 to 200 years later, they came to Northeastern Brazil, and then about 50 years later or so came to New Amsterdam, New York and so that is a different Jewish community. The Jewish community in Sao Paulo and Rio from where I stem were mainly immigrants from Eastern Europe, from Russia and Poland that came to Brazil after immigration to the United States had been closed and curtailed in 1926 so that not being able to immigrate to the United States and still wanting out of the dire economic and political circumstances in the late 1920's in Poland and Russia, they started migrating further south, and that's where the Jewish community that I come from stems from.

**SEVERAL**

Is the community concentrated...I mean do you find in Sao Paulo Jewish neighborhoods like say you would find the Lower East side of New York for example?

**KUPPERMANN**

In the early days, yes, for example in the...in the...in Sao Paulo which currently has a population of about 20 million, and when I grew up, it had a population of about 1½ million. The first wave of Jewish immigrants in the late 1920's, early '30s did concentrate in Jewish neighborhoods. In Sao Paulo it's a neighborhood called Bom Retiro meaning natives of the good retreat, but as time went on and the Jewish community became more...more financially well-to-do, they started moving to the wealthier parts of town, and right now it's very hard to say there is a Jewish neighborhood in Sao Paulo. There may be one or two where it has a slightly larger concentration of Jews than the other wealthy neighborhoods, but by and large, they are distributed among the wealthy neighborhoods and some among the poor neighborhoods. There are some poor Jews, and something similar happened in Rio. So those two communities account for 90% of the Jewish population of Brazil.

**SEVERAL**

In terms of your own experience, did you...when you were a child, was the Jewish community a concentrated community, or was it still spreading out?

**KUPPERMANN**

Oh it was still...it was still concentrated. This neighborhood of Bom Retiro was where most of the Jews lived when I was a child, and they started diffusing about ten years after that, roughly speaking, and at the time of World War II and slightly thereafter in the middle '40s, they were diffusing very rapidly.

**SEVERAL**

Were you...what was your...where was your family from? Where were your parents---or was it your parents who migrated, or was it your grandparents?

**KUPPERMANN**

Yeah. Well my father came from Warsaw. He left Poland, Warsaw, right after World War I presumably not to be forced to serve in the Polish army, and he spent four years in Germany in Dusseldorf from about 1919 to 1922, but he was a very adventurous soul, and after four years in Germany, he decided to go to Brazil where he had another brother who had already immigrated to Brazil a few years earlier, and so he decided to try the adventure of South America. So that was before that period, 1926, when immigration to the US had ceased. That was a few years before that, and he was not driven by wanting to emigrate to the wealthy United States. He wanted adventure, and so he came to Brazil then, and my mother is from a small village in Ukrainia, \_\_\_\_ (8:06) which my wife and I along with our daughters and one of our grandchildren visited last year, and that was a small community plagued by \_\_\_\_ (8:22) and by economic duress, and she emigrated from there to the United States when she was about 14 years old together with three half-brothers. So the four of them went together to the United States.

(Knocking)...Come in. You remember Michael Several? Woman: Oh yeah. How are you?

**SEVERAL**

I'm fine. How are you

**KUPPERMANN**

And so...okay. Alright. Any how, Sue and her mother and two siblings, twin siblings stayed on in \_\_\_\_ (9:21). Her father had died, and so the older brothers came to the United States, and the mother and the two siblings stayed on, and eventually they moved directly to Brazil, again in about 1922 after my mother was in the States already for eight years, and because her younger sister married a---somebody from around the same neighborhood, the \_\_\_\_ (9:58)...not \_\_\_\_ (10:01) but \_\_\_\_ (10:03), and so she married one of those young men so that she and her mother and her twin brother moved to Sao Paolo in about '22, and so in 1924 after they---her mother---had been in Sao Paolo for about two years my mother became a U.S. citizen and was able to travel, and so she went to visit her mother in Brazil. By that time my mother was in her middle 20's, and that's where she met my father, and they got married, and that's where I was born in 1926.

**SEVERAL**

Were your parents religious?

**KUPPERMANN**

No they...my...they both came from Orthodox religious families. When I say orthodox, it's a pleonastic expression. They were only Orthodox, though, nothing else, but they were secular Jews, and...and...but they...all their friends were Jews. All their social life was among Jews, and there were...there was Col. Reddy Shue (11:23) and synagogues in Sao Paolo, but to the best of my knowledge, they didn't belong to one, but they did it to get married in one.

**SEVERAL**

Yeah. Were you---what was your religious training? Did you have any? Were you bar mitzvahed?

**KUPPERMANN**

Yes. I was bar mitz...my father was an atheist, very anti-religious but very nationalistic, and he...for him, keeping up the Jewish culture and civilization was very important, but I'll come back to that in a moment, but after I was six months old, my mother could not get used to the provincial life in Sao Paolo because she stemmed from--her adolescent years and early adult years were in New York, and so she wanted back and convinced my father to move with her and me back to the United States. So when I was six months old, I came to New York, to the Bronx, but shortly after when I was three years old, my mother came down with breast cancer and died three years later from the disease, and so in the interim years when she was in the hospital, I grew up in an orphanage and in foster homes in Newark, New Jersey because my father had to work for a living, and so when...after she...and take care of my mother...so after she died, shortly after, he decided that he wanted to move back to Brazil where...where he had relatives, and my mother had sisters and brothers, and so...so when I was about eight years old or so, that's when we moved back to Brazil, so that my first eight years of life were in the United States. So I didn't experience those years in the Jewish community of Sao Paolo, but after that I did, and so I was brought up in spite of my father being an atheist, he was a very nationalistic per---man. The only Jewish holiday he observed was Passover because that was a holiday of freedom for the Jewish people. It did not have the religious connotations of the other holidays, and so...and I had...I had a private tutor who taught me not only Hebrew but Yiddish grammatically correct Yiddish, and I spoke Yiddish with my stepmother. He got remarried in Brazil, and she was from---my stepmother was from \_\_\_\_ (14:25) Poland, and there they pride themselves in speaking what is considered by some to be the proper Yiddish, and so she spoke Yiddish with me, and I learned grammatic Yiddish from my bar mitzvah instructor as well as Hebrew, and he...he wrote my speech in Yiddish which I delivered at the synagogue. I had memorized it of course, but it was a very erudite one.

**SEVERAL**

What was the facility like at the synagogue? Was it kind of like a little wooden synagogue or was it a major structure like---

**KUPPERMANN**

Oh Sao Paolo by then had this...we're speaking about 1939 so it was just before World War II started with the invasion of Poland by the Germans, and so there were three or four major synagogues. The one in which I had my bar mitzvah was in the neighborhood where I had been born although I didn't live there, and it was a respectable synagogue. It wasn't a wooden structure. It was more or less modern, but modern meaning the architecture

of the times which were not what you would call modern today, but no it wasn't small...not a...not a major one...not a...but a medium sized one.

**SEVERAL**

Were your friends, when you were growing up an adolescent, were they non-Jews or were your friends, your social life, pretty much within the Jewish community.

**KUPPERMANN**

The social life---both my parents and mine---were entirely within the Jewish community and...but centered around the synagogue as I was centered around...as friendships...and I went to school...there was only...there was no Jewish...there were no Jewish schools when I was growing up when I went to school in a private elementary and high school in private schools that were non-Jewish, but life in Brazil then and to a certain extent still now did not involve a very heavy socialization in school as we have in the United States. High school is a place where not only do you learn, but you also establish friendships and social lives. There you went to school, and there were n hours of classroom, and you went home. There were no extracurricular activities that you...one didn't usually develop friends in school because the people came from all over town to the schools, and friends were mainly sons and daughters---my friends were mainly sons and daughters of my parents' friends, and that's the nature of the social fabric there.

**SEVERAL**

Well...so you were about 19 or 20 when Israel was formed?

**KUPPERMANN**

Yeah, that's right...I was...no a little older than that. I was born in '26, and Israel was established in '48, and well the partition of the United Nations was in '47, but the implementation was made in '48 so I was 22 years old.

**SEVERAL**

And was that a major event in your life...in your kind of concept...your parents...your dad's life. I mean, from what you have said it seems like it would have been.

**KUPPERMANN**

It was! It was a very major happening in my parents' lives and in my life. I was always zionistically inclined and nationalistically inclined, and I was...I had a much greater identification as a member of the Jewish people rather than as a member of the Brazilian society. So for me it was a very important happening. The Jewish community, however, was very divided---not in its support for Israel but in how Israel should develop as a nation, and so you had...you have different Zionists, political parties with different political flavors, and there was...there was the more left wing inclined Hashomer Hatzair, and then there was the extreme right wing which was the so-called Revisionists and the \_\_\_\_ (19:31), and then there was one or two in between, and so the Zionists, they fought among each other depending on what political inclinations they have---

**SEVERAL**

They still are! (LAUGHING)

**KUPPERMANN**

But they are all pro-Israel, and my wife's parents---her father most especially---he was a leader of the Revisionist community. He was president of the Revisionists' association in Sao Paulo. That's a few years later. Not too many years later, two or three years later. Whereas, my father was apolitical, but he was more inclined toward the left-wing side.

**SEVERAL**

So did you---as far as you personally were concerned---did you belong to any of the Zionist organizations?

**KUPPERMANN**

Yes I was...well, not official membership, but I was...I was attracted, let's put it that way, to the center-left. It wasn't the---I forget the main---Hashomer hatzair was one slightly more to the right. There were two leftish ones, and I was not the extreme left but the middle left, and...and...but I really...I belonged, and I was a member of the board of directors in my late teens and early twenties of two distinct Jewish youth organizations. One was called the Renaissance, which was devoted to cultural Jewish endeavors, and the other one was called AMI, which is an acronym which was chose on purpose stands for ami is a Hebrew word for my people, but in Portuguese it was the acronym for \_\_\_\_ (21:35) meaning Association of Youth of...Jewish Youth, and so that was more of a social group involving again Jews who were interested in socializing with each other and so on, and so I was on the board of directors of both of them when I was in my late 19 or 20's.

**SEVERAL**

Where did you meet your wife?

**KUPPERMANN**

I met my wife in two distinct periods independent of one another. When I was around 21, and my wife was 17, a distant cousin of mine was engaged to a distant relative of hers, and so as was traditional in Brazil then whenever a young coupler were engaged, they had family that threw parties for them for members so that the families of the bride and groom got to know each other. That was usually a year or two before they actually got married, and so at one of these parties that was held at the house of an uncle and aunt of mine, I was there with my parents. I was invited from the bride's side, and my wife Rosa was there with her parents invited from the groom's side. So that was when we first met. As I said, she was...she was about 16 I think, and I was about 20, but then we didn't meet each other at the party. We were there together, but there were other people at the party. Then as our parents were walking back to the bus---none of us had automobiles then---her parents, my parents, she and me walked together because we were going to the same bus stop, and we...we started talking. That's when I first met her. Then I hadn't seen her again for another two

years when she enrolled in a cram course to take an exam to enter the University of Sao Paulo, and it was typical then that each university had its own entrance exams, and people studied them by cram courses just like the Kaplan courses nowadays when people cram for one of these license degrees. Those were for entrance examinations, and so she joined one of those, and I was a teacher of one of those. I was at the university then, but our family was very poor, and so I helped support us by teaching in these cram courses. I taught two subjects then very different subjects. One was organic chemistry, and the other one was analytic geometry, and she was preparing for entrance to the department or faculty of chemistry in the University of Sao Paulo. She took that course, and so that's how we got to know each other a little better.

**SEVERAL**

Did she get in?

**KUPPERMANN**

\_\_\_(25:16) about two months later or something in the summer, accidentally I was vacationing at a beach resort near Sao Paulo with some of my friends, the Santos', and she was vacationing there with her mother, and I had a group of my friends with us in a Jewish hotel, and she had a group of friends and their parents at another hotel or not the same hotel maybe, and we were a bigger group that had social cohesiveness, and so we started seeing each other more intensely during those one or two weeks of vacation. That's when we established a bond, and out of these two groups of about ten or so young men and young women about eight marriages resulted about two or three years later.

**SEVERAL**

Wow! Did your wife get into the University?

**KUPPERMANN**

I'm sorry?

**SEVERAL**

Did your wife get into the University?

**KUPPERMANN**

Yes. She entered the University, and she studied and got a bachelor's in chemistry, and while she was in her third year, I had already graduated from a degree in chemical engineering from the University, and we got engaged when she was 19 and I was 23 and then or 22, she was 18, and then a year-and-a-half later we got married while she was still a student at the University, and I now had already graduated from the University, and I was a young assistant professor at a new university near Sao Paulo in a school of aeronautical engineering, and so we were married while living apart, and so I lived at the university houses for faculty, and she lived with her parents, and we met---came to Sao Paulo on weekends, and we had...we met, but then, I mean I came for weekends. We had already a house in Sao Paulo which her parents gave us when we were married, but we normally didn't

occupy it because I was in another town, and she was with her parents so...so we commuted back and forth on weekends and vacations. She spent at our other house in \_\_\_\_ (28:20). So only after I resigned from that university that I came back to Sao Paulo and worked in Sao Paulo. That's when we settled into our house in Sao Paulo.

**SEVERAL**

You came to the United States in 1955?

**KUPPERMANN**

No before that. I came in '53.

**SEVERAL**

'53 to the University of Illinois or---

**KUPPERMANN**

No...I...in 19---during 1952 for sort of scientific reasons, I decided that I didn't have enough of a background to follow my scientific inclinations. I needed to go to graduate school, and graduate school was not very well known in Brazil, and so I applied to scholarships to Britain and to the United States via the British Consul that has been in the news in the last few days. That's what...when they closed their offices in St. Petersburg and another Russian community. The British Consul have an office in Sao Paulo. They're a cultural organization---

**SEVERAL**

Yeah.

**KUPPERMANN**

Funded by the British government, and they had...they acted as intermediaries at getting scholarships. At the same time, I applied to what is now the USAID, the United States Agency for International Development that has cultural activities at the consulate at Sao Paulo, and I applied for one year scholarships at these two places, and I got them both. So I was able to take one in Britain first and then in succession after that the second one in the States. So the first one in Britain was in Scotland in Edinburgh, and the second one in the States turned out to be Notre Dame. I applied not to Notre Dame, but I applied to...my number one on the list was Caltech. Number two was Harvard. Number three was Berkley, and only years later when I joined Caltech on the faculty did I find out how my papers wound up at Notre Dame. It turns out that my papers came to Caltech. I had said that the things that I wanted to study were theoretical chemistry and radiochemistry. Radiochemistry because Brazil had a new nuclear reactor where I could hope for a job, and theoretical chemistry because I really was interested in it, and it turns out that my papers came to the chairman of the department at Caltech as a first place because I had picked that, and it came to Linus Pauling, and he became a friend later in the later years, and he told me that he remembered very clearly the...and he said, he looked at those papers and said, "Certainly we have theoretical chemistry at Caltech. That's me, Linus Pauling, but we had no radiochemistry." But Notre Dame has both

theoretical chemistry and radiochemistry so he sent my papers and said I suggest to the idea that you send this paper to Notre Dame. Turns out he was mistaken. Notre Dame did have theoretical chemistry but did not have radiochemistry. They had another field with a similar name called radiation chemistry that was very good, and it was a new field, and Pauling didn't know the difference between radiochemistry and radiation chemistry, and similarly I wound up in Edinburgh in Scotland before that it was, for the same reason, I wanted a place that had theoretical chemistry and radiochemistry, and Edinburgh had them both, but they didn't. They had theoretical chemistry or which actually was theoretical physics---a very, very famous quantum mechanician, Max Bourne, was a Jewish founder of quantum mechanics who ran away from Nazi German and wound up in Edinburgh, and then had radiation chemistry not radiochemistry! So radiation chemistry was no good for me to get a job back in Brazil, but it was the same mistake in both places I went to---Edinburgh first for a year and then to the States at Notre Dame for the second year. So that's how I went---because they made me an offer, and I didn't know in those years that you could apply directly to whatever university you wanted to, and they would examine your papers, and if they liked you they might give you a scholarship! Those are unknown sociology to the Brazilian greenhorn.

### **SEVERAL**

So it was at Edinburgh where you studied with Max Bourne?

### **KUPPERMANN**

I was...I didn't...I wasn't...I was a visiting graduate student at the University of Edinburgh as a so-called British Council scholar. I just took courses and then researched without working for a degree, and in one of the courses, I took was a day tour with Max Bourne, but then when I went to...to Notre Dame the year after, they asked me wouldn't I like to enroll as a graduate student, which I hadn't in Edinburgh. I said, "Okay. Fine. No harm." And then after one year, my adviser said, "Well wouldn't you like to continue to get a PhD.?" But there's no such thing! For Brazil it was not very important. I know, but it may be fine, you would learn more (4:20) so I agreed, and then after I got my PhD. At Notre Dame---in two years, \*I was accelerated." My adviser said, "Well, there's a position at the University of Illinois. Can I nominate you for it? I said yes, but I really wanted to go back to Brazil where her my wife was lonesome for her family in Brazil and wanted to go back, and my friend said yes, but if you have some experience at a university in the States, that would improve your academic chances, and so I said okay, fine. So I got the position at Illinois, and after...after being at Illinois for about four years, an opportunity came from Sao Paulo for a position at their nuclear reactor, and Rose had wanted very much to go back to Brazil, and so I agreed to go for a 1-year trial, and if it worked I would stay. If it wouldn't I'm sorry. I took a leave of absence from my position on the faculty at the University of Illinois. I found somebody who would take my

place for a year, and then when we went, but it didn't work out. After a year, I found out that I had...I could choose living in Sao Paolo, and I could choose being a scientist, but I couldn't do both of them in Sao Paolo. I would either live in Sao Paolo, or if I wanted to be a scientist, I decided that I could not be a scientist in Brazil. There was very primitive support for science. It wasn't then adequate so I came back to the University of Illinois. By that time, we had...we had three children already, so it was a very major move.

### **SEVERAL**

So what brought you into Caltech? Was it the prestigious and the institution and---

### **KUPPERMANN**

Well, it's...you know, the way academic careers move in the United States is that you're young faculty, they had a passive rather than an active role. I was at the University of Illinois and doing well and doing interesting science and publishing, and I got first an offer from Indiana, University to go there which was too far away, and I decided that would've been a lateral move, and I turned it down, and then I got an offer---I didn't take the initiative---and that's normal. I got an offer from Columbia, and Rose and I just didn't \_\_\_ (7:29), and I decided we had young children...the oldest, that was 1960---so they oldest was...not 1960...or was it 60? No it was 50, 1950...yeah, maybe it was 1960, and our oldest was born in '54, so he was 6 years old, and the other two were younger so I decided after looking more carefully that wasn't a good place to bring up children. So I turned that down, and then a few months later, I received an offer from Caltech, and I came with Rose and visited, and decided that that would be good move because Pasadena is a nice place to bring young children, and Caltech has an institution---an outstanding institution. Illinois was very good also, but Caltech was better. So on that basis I decided to accept the move.

### **SEVERAL**

Did---when you moved out here, were you advised that there were some places that Jews don't live. I mean, were you advised say don't look for a house in San Marino...

### **KUPPERMANN**

No...no when we first moved here which was in 1963, I had acquaintances (9:10) and friends and so on. There was no such constraints. Later on I found out that there were country clubs that if we wanted to join them, we would not be accepted. It turns out---it's an interesting incident---but one of them was the Altadena country club which has the golf course, and the other one was the Anandale country club, but at the time I wasn't aware of that. I was aware that there were places that when you bought houses you couldn't---they were strict about whom you sold them to. So when we bought our house in Altadena in 19---late 1963, before I signed the purchase agreement, I read the legal documents, and they said that I was subject to the constraints of the CCNR's. I didn't know what that was, and so

I brought that to the Caltech JPL lawyer, and he said those are restrictions. They call this an abbreviation for Covenant Constraints and Restrictions, I believe, he says, but they don't \_\_\_ (10:39) validity. I said, yes, but I don't want to sign a piece of paper which has something in there. I don't know even what I'm signing. Can you get me a copy of these CCNR's? And yes, he did, and I read them thoroughly, and there was indeed that I would not be permitted to sell my house to somebody of Asian---it was mainly against Asians. There was no mention of blacks. It was mainly Asians, and I inquired into it, and it turns out that I was told that the Asians they meant were the Chinese, and the Chinese they meant had to be with laborers who had been imported from China to build the railroads in Southern California during the rubber baron age, and that's when those rules and regulations got set in. Well, there's a whole history between the CCNRs and Altadena. It turns out that they are, again, indeed directed also at blacks, but I was guaranteed by the lawyer that they had become illegal---legally invalid---so that I could sign those, and I wouldn't be violating anything. So that was the first constraint that I saw, and it wasn't directed against Jews, but then after we were living in our house in Altadena for a couple of years, living across the street from us was a family that became our friends. They had children the same age as ours, and our children became friendly, and that family belonged to the Altadena country club where they played tennis, and they had our---they had a swimming pool, and our daughter liked her friend across the street, so they said, "Why don't you join the country club?" And I inquired with them. I found out they didn't accept Jews, and so we told our friends across. We said, "No we won't apply because we won't be accepted, and even if we were accepted, the simple fact that they don't accept Jews would make us not want to apply." The neighbor who is still a close friend said, "No I don't believe that. I'll ask them to send you an application form." I said, "Fine." And it passed two months, and our neighbor asked, "Did you get the application?" I said, "No we didn't." "Oh that's strange!" And then she went back, and then she dug into it and found out that indeed they didn't accept Jews and wouldn't send us an application form. Years later, eight or ten years later, we received a request---could we please join the Altadena country club. It turns out that they were in financial difficulties. The popularity of these country clubs had gone down, and I said, "Look how come you don't accept Jews? We wouldn't want to join you on that---" They said "Oh those are due to the old people who are now past their prime. They are no longer influential, and our policies have changed." Thank you very much...so that was one incident of blatant, open anti-Semitism. The other one was there was a party at the Anandale club by some of our friends. We were invited for a dinner, and then that's when we found out that they don't accept Jews. This was for just one dinner for friends honoring them so we went anyhow, but that's how we found out that they don't accept Jews, and finally when Caltech had it's first Jewish president, Harold Brown, who

became the country's secretary of Defense, he was refused membership in the Jonathan Club. That's a Los Angeles club. He was just one of the Jews who never observed Judaism and the \_\_\_\_ (15:15)...they...they didn't identify themselves as Jewish. I only found out that he was Jewish was when I looked him up in the American Who's Who. I found out that his parents' names were Abraham and Sarah Brown. Anyhow, then he doesn't hide that his parents are Jewish. Anyhow, they found out that there was some latent anti-Semitism in Los Angeles' high society that would affected even somebody who was president of Caltech. Those are my only three examples of anti-Semitism in Southern California.

**SEVERAL**

How did you happen to become a congregant at the Pasadena Jewish Temple? Did you temple shop? Did you look around at the other temples and then---

**KUPPERMANN**

We...we wanted to give our children a Jewish education. Both my wife and I are agnostics, but we have very strong Jewish identities, and there were no Jewish Day Schools in those years. The only way of giving the children a Jewish education other than whatever we could provide at home, would be for them to try the Sunday school---the Leon Silver school---and we felt we wanted to show the children that we had a Jewish identity which we did have, and so we felt it would be appropriate to join the synagogue in spite of the fact that it was mainly for sociological rather than religious reasons. We wanted an active identification with the Jewish community in Pasadena. We felt very uncomfortable. There were many, many Jews in Pasadena who didn't identify, didn't belong to a synagogue and felt very strongly that regardless of religious, theological aspects, Jewish survival depends on their continuing their identification as Jews. So it was the Pasadena one was the natural one that was in the neighborhood, close to where we lived, had a Sunday school. So we didn't really shop around, just joined...

**SEVERAL**

After joining and your kids went to Sunday school, did you participate in other ways with the congregation? Did you join any committees, or ---

**KUPPERMANN**

Yeah. The answer is yes. First of all, we...we...we had a strong identification with the community. We had yearly sadirs attended by, roughly speaking, 40-45 people, and that meant our friends almost all of them members of our sadir were Jewish...one or two guests always, but...and all of them....most of them were members of the Pasadena Jewish Temple and Center, and so that was...wasn't quite affiliated an activity...affiliated with the Temple, but it was a Jewish activity, and we...we went to mainly High Holidays, and I was a member of the board of trustees for a few years...for five years, but I...I stopped being that and lost interest when...when the Temple started trying to raise funds to supplement the income it had from its membership because

I felt that the membership dues were too small, that as a Jewish community we had an obligation to support that, but I was not willing to raise funds by engaging in activities such as raising funds via sports. I had nothing against sports. I'm not that sports enthusiast. I did play tennis while my joints permitted, but I don't find it to be a particular Jewish activity, and so I was very uncomfortable when I was being asked to help raise funds through sports types of activities. At that time I stopped being a member of the board of trustees. In addition I felt that the cultural activities of the board, sponsoring conferences and so on were very weak. I felt that the board was very---not very Jewish identified. Their activities were not what I, at the time, would consider proper Jewish activities, so my official connections lapsed, but I never stopped being a member of the Temple. I felt an obligation even after the children finished their education and left Pasadena, I always continued to be a member because I believed that was very important for the survival of the Jewish community.

**SEVERAL**

In your involvement in the High Holiday services---did you go to any of the bagel breakfasts?

**KUPPERMANN**

Sure! I'd sponsor...help sponsor some of the bagel breakfasts thirty years ago when I was a member of the board and I was a member of the committee for social concerns. Yes. But I still feel uncomfortable for example with the nature of our Jewish community. We are the only temple in the area that has no Hebrew name. We are officially the Pasadena Jewish Temple and Center. That's a very strong break with tradition, and it was put to a vote by our congregation a few years ago, and the majority voted for not having a Hebrew name. For me, I feel that that's somehow an attempt to be excessively non-Jewish. It's reminiscent to me of the attitude of the German Jews in the late 1800's or the early 1900's. They wanted to---their Judaism was a secondary aspect of their---there were Germans and Germans who happened to be also Jewish, but that's not...I don't like that. I think that our survival depends on a strong identification of our Jewishness and not having a Hebrew name for our synagogue is something that is to me very unsatisfactory.

**SEVERAL**

You mentioned that there was activities I guess that you would like to see but you don't see...I mean what---

**KUPPERMANN**

They seemed to have a knack that those activities that I would have liked to have seen weren't there. We didn't have a social concern committee then. Instead we had a sports committee. I felt that having one and not the other was not---right now we do have a social concern committee, I don't remember it's name, and we do have more Jewish activity, and we've since then become more Jewish, and the residue of my concerns of lack of

Jewishness is the name. I would love to see it being called \_\_\_\_ (24:25) other than Pasadena Jewish Community Temple and Center. The absence of the Hebrew name is a glaring omission for me.

**SEVERAL**

Did you have---what was your dealings with Rabbi Galpert?

**KUPPERMANN**

Oh they were wonderful dealings. I admired him. He gave me the impression that he was really an agnostic. He was really a literary man, and he would have liked to have been a professor of English literature, but such jobs were not available to the Jews at the time, and I think that his becoming a rabbi was a second choice, but he had very basic important ethical and moral values for me and the fact that he...he didn't take religion excessively seriously was for me a very great positive, and he...he was the rabbi that officiated at the bar mitzvahs of our two sons---not of our daughter because she had her bat mitzvah while we were on a sabbatical in Israel, but he also officiated at the weddings of our two oldest children. He just didn't do it at the third one because by then he was dead. So he was really a father figure for our children while he was alive, and...and one of my oldest sons married a non-Jewish woman. She was half-Japanese, half-Mexican, but because of our insistence she converted, and Rabbi Galpert presided over her conversion activities, and he was very helpful \_\_\_\_ (26:42) in seeing that that came to pass. It was to no avail because they within two years without having children, they divorced, but he is somebody I felt very, very comfortable with because we didn't have this tension of the theological aspects of Judaism. Belief in God or non belief in God was never an issue. You're a Jew because you are a Jew because you accept a set of morals and principles and values, and we liked that, and so we got along very well. So to the best of my recollection he was even at one of our sadirs. I'm not a hundred percent sure. I'm only eighty percent sure because these things get fuzzy with time.

**SEVERAL**

I heard a foot noise here...I wasn't sure whether---

**KUPPERMANN**

Whether it stopped...

**SEVERAL**

Yeah, but it's still recording. Now what---a little surprise that because Rabbi Galpert apparently, your impression of him, your reaction to him, your view of him as being really basically agnostic is confirmed by other people...and he...but the congregation during that time was, you know, basically...I mean that's when the sports stuff was going on right?

**KUPPERMANN**

No. He was a great fan of sports. He had his football Mondays group. They came to---they were the group that went to his house to watch the games. He was an encyclopedia about baseball, and fan---he was a great fan of

sports, but...but that was his private life. It's not that that in my perspective created the less Jewish atmosphere at the Temple.

### **SEVERAL**

Did you go to Friday night services? Let me tell you, some people had said they would go to the Friday night services just to hear his sermon.

### **KUPPERMANN**

Erratically. Now we enjoyed his...he was very erudite...a very well-read man, and we in addition to the High Holidays did go to Yorkside to see (29:36) of our parents and some special occasions, and it was indeed very enjoyable to hear him talk, and mostly we were very, very positively impressed with him (29:54) because his sermons and his speeches had a very profound, more on ethical, component, and he simply did not touch too much on the more theological aspects of things. There's been a swing not only in our temple, but in the current generation, younger people as opposed to people of my age, Jews, have become more what they call spiritual and more attuned to--I can't find the exact word---to theological beliefs, dogmas and so on, which they lumped together under the word spiritual. I am a very rational type of person, and there is a general debate going on in the sociology and sociobiological community these days. Why is it that some people have the propensity for believing in God whereas others don't, and...and that quite apart from the more central issue as to whether God exists or not---putting that aside, some people find it easier to believe in God and others don't, and this is more and more being ascribed not because of educational background or ignorance about nature, but it is more and more being ascribed to the possibility that as the human species evolved, there was a selected advantage for some groups and some individuals that have a belief in the supernatural and were less egotistical as a result to be of value for the community and hence for the group, and hence prevailed in natural selection, whereas for others this also---for sociobiologists---this also happened, but not as a direct advantage but as an indirect advantage, but anyhow both the atheistic sociobiologists and the God-believing sociobiologists have...are slowly coming to agreement that there's something about the ability to believe in God that has...is embedded in some of our genes...not in everybody's genes but some people's genes, and so that issue--if one understands it that way---can become much less divisive. You may have a facility and a propensity of believing in God. I may say, "Oh I would love to believe in God because it's such a comfortable feeling, but my rational understanding of the nature of nature makes that belief not easy for me...not possible for me," but that shouldn't matter. The Jewish community has *raison d'être* that I personally believe transcends the issue of the belief in a God, or whether the Ten Commandments are a direct investment of God and our beliefs---that's it's of a historical significance for me, but it's not central for the importance that I believe the Jewish people have. I believe the Jewish people have contributed to the benefit of humanity way above

their numbers would justify. I don't claim to understand why that has happened, but the simple fact that it has been a force for good makes me believe that it is worthwhile to continue. That continuation I think should transcend whether our feelings about God or non-God are those 5,700 years ago or 13.6 billion years ago is direct intervention or not intervention are even relevant, and that's why I want to see Jewish continuity. I want to see our temple to continue as a healthy congregation, not necessarily so strongly attached to some theological concepts.

### **SEVERAL**

What---I assume the---there is a high percentage of Jews on the Caltech faculty. There are very few members in the faculty that are members of...that are affiliated...why do you---I mean I guess there's still questions that are really...the same question...why aren't there more Jews affiliated, or maybe the same question is why are you affiliated---although I think you answered the question why you're affiliated...why aren't more Jews on the faculty affiliated?

### **KUPPERMANN**

Well that's a good question. The number of Jews on the faculty (PHONE RINGS). I think my secretary is here, but I'm not sure...she is, okay. The number of Jews on the faculty, I've not made a survey so I'm speaking for...from the basis of a generalized feeling, I think it's been decreasing. Bright Jews who used to be strongly attracted to the sciences seem to be more attracted nowadays to...to other realms of endeavor, business administration being one of them. They are less attracted to medicine, in my view. Again, I don't have hard facts to back this up, but the impression is that the intellectual attractiveness of an academic life in the sciences for the Jewish community has decreased. That by itself it would explain the decrease in the number of Jewish faculty at Caltech, but even as regarding that and just going back for the years that I joined the faculty there were indeed a fairly large number of Jews. I once made an estimate of something of the order of one-fifth...people that weren't necessarily identify themselves as Jewish, but because of their names and my knowing them personally, I knew they were Jewish, but they were still not affiliated with the Jewish community, and the reason is that for many of these Jews that went into science, that was their being attracted to science in general---not in all instances but in general---had to do with a more rational view of the nature of the universe and the nature of life, and hence, something based on a religious belief was not attractive, and the idea that nevertheless even in the absence of a religious belief, that there was a positive in maintaining your identification, that's why they themselves were scientists. It was because they inherited some intellectual traits from their forbearers seems not to have been a potent enough reason for them to maintain their Jewish identity, but I was chairman of the United Jewish Appeal activity at Caltech in 1966-67, and I approached my Jewish colleagues and asked for

contributions to the United Jewish Appeal, and got relatively \_\_\_\_ (9:06) June of 1967, all of a sudden I got in the internal Caltech mail checks for the United Jewish Appeal that came not only from those people that I knew were Jewish but those that I didn't even know were Jewish. It turned out that they were Jewish or partly Jewish, and there was an outpouring of support for Israel and the 6-day war. So they had this latent support that never manifested itself in an affiliation with the Jewish community, but when that episode come to pass, they felt that there was a danger...that something in their background triggered their concern. So it's a very curious thing, and then years later when Mickey Alper who---I guess, died before you joined the community---

**SEVERAL**

Well, we actually joined in 1980 for our daughter's bar mitzvah training, but I didn't really get involved until after he died, so I really didn't know him.

**KUPPERMANN**

Well anyhow, he retired from JPL. And...his health was deteriorating, but he wanted to remain active, and so he wanted to re-institute a united Jewish appeal campaign at Caltech and JPL for funds, and he came to see me, and I told him, "Mickey, look, I wish you well, but I don't think that you'll find the Jewish community of Caltech very responsible." It was that community that was shaken in '67, but a few years after, that disappeared and indeed, he tried a little bit, but it's really part of the assimilation process, and relatively a few Jews that are attracted by science tend to accept the principle that the Jewish nation---or whatever you wanted to call the Jewish groups---should be preserved in the absence of a theological being. That seems to me to be your conscious or unconscious attitude, which is consistent with a lack of Jewish identification and most of the Caltech Jewish faculty.

**SEVERAL**

You mentioned Harold Brown---there was some other Jewish presidents. What---Marth Goldberg

**KUPPERMANN**

Yeah, Marth Goldberger. David Baltimore, yeah.

**SEVERAL**

To my knowledge, neither one ever came around.

**KUPPERMANN**

Oh no that's right. David...David...not that... Marth Goldberger I think was asked by somebody. I don't know who. I forget who...whether he wanted to join the PJTC after he became president of Caltech. He was at Princeton before that, so he became president when he moved to Princeton, and to the best of my recollection, he said no he didn't. He was not a religious person and didn't see a constructive component to that. Then in Baltimore, I don't know whether he would just approach anybody and talk to them, but I know he was bar mitzvahed. He volunteered that at a lunch at a round table at \_\_\_\_ (13:44) a couple of years ago. So he doesn't hide his Jewish identity, but

he doesn't have any----his Jewish background I should say---he doesn't really have a Jewish identification either.

**SEVERAL**

It seems though that many Jews may not have a strong sense of identity, but on High Holidays, they do go, but...but---

**KUPPERMANN**

\_\_\_\_(14:18) too...

**SEVERAL**

But...but ...but even the Caltech faculty, they don't go or---

**KUPPERMANN**

No they're...they're...they're...the ones that do go are the ones I think that, who were or still are members of the Temple. I can think of about four or five that do come for High Holidays. Marshall Cohen, Fred \_\_\_\_ (14:48). I'm sorry, the only ones that come to mind, and of course while he was alive. Oh yes, our current provost---I'm having a mental block. He just became provost a few months ago. He was a geologist, doesn't identify himself Jewish.

**SEVERAL**

Stopher (15:30)?

**KUPPERMANN**

Sorry...

**SEVERAL**

Ed Stopher?

**KUPPERMANN**

Ed Stopher, that's right...Ed Stopher, his daughter I believe was bat mitzvahed in the Temple. He was a member of the Temple, I don't know if he still is.

**SEVERAL**

Apparently not...

**KUPPERMANN**

And of course Sam Epstein while he was alive was a member of the Temple. Those are the only ones. Other prominent Jewish members of the community never were...our good friends, the Sternbergs---Eli and Rae Sternberg---who were atheists, but there is Jerry and Naomi Wassomberg who had a strong Jewish identification but were never members of the Temple.

**SEVERAL**

They don't \_\_\_\_ (16:25)

**KUPPERMANN**

Hans Littman who was half-Jewish who was a very famous aerodynamicist never really identified himself as Jewish, but it was known to me after the 6-day War episode, he was one of the people who sent me a check. One that I never knew was Joel Franklin. He was a mathematician. Apparently he was half-Jewish, and...but...some of these people as I said are known to be

Jewish. Others weren't generally known to be Jewish, but they were not members of the synagogue, and I think it's because they generally speaking viewed Judaism as a religion where I view Judaism as a nationality, and this difference is very, very important. If I were the ones that identified Judaism as a religion I wouldn't be a member of the Temple. I would see no reason to have my children educated there, and quite possibly my identification is because I think of Judaism as a nationality, which does have for some people a religious component. Not for me, but I don't care. It's the nationality that's important to me.

**SEVERAL**

Did—you did a post doctorate \_\_\_\_ Institute (18:08), and you were a visiting professor at the Hebrew university---did you pick these places because they were in Israel, or---

**KUPPERMANN**

Well I went...I went on the Post and \_\_\_\_ (18:21) I had what is labeled officially a national science foundation postdoctoral or a national science foundation fellowship something or other. I was professor at Caltech by that year. I couldn't be postdoctoral fellow---

**SEVERAL**

Oh! Oh!

**KUPPERMANN**

But I...I...and then I did...I was a visiting professor at...actually I was...I spent two sabbatical, parts of sabbatical years at \_\_\_\_ (18:54) and one at Hebrew University, and all three of them was because for two reasons: They were very good institutions, and they were in Israel because I have strong attachment to Israel, and at one time, I even considered moving to Israel. I have an offer from the \_\_\_\_ (19:15), but...I couldn't convince my kids to move with us. They were in their late teens and early twenties, and I was not willing to move away from them and leave them in the United States, but I and they have a strong attachment to Israel. That was an important reason for picking those places for a sabbatical.

**SEVERAL**

How many children did you have? Three?

**KUPPERMANN**

Four.

**SEVERAL**

Four, and they---where do they live?

**KUPPERMANN**

Where did they---?

**SEVERAL**

Where do they live now?

**KUPPERMANN**

Do they live...

**SEVERAL**

Yeah.

**KUPPERMANN**

Well the oldest, Barry, he is a professor of Medicine at the University of California in Irvine. He is head of what they call the Retina Vitreous Center. He is a retina ophthalmologist. So he lives in Laguna Beach. \_\_\_\_ (20:26). Number 2, Miriam, she lives in Marin County. She has a PhD in Molecular Biology but a Masters in Public Health, and she is a professor of Medicine at the University of California in San Francisco although she is not a physician. She is a professor of obstetrics, gynecology and reproductive sciences at UCSF but doesn't have a medical degree. She filed in public...public health, and that's very important work, and number 3, Nate, he is head of the department of Emergency Medicine at the University of California at Davis Medical School, and he lives in Davis. Number 4, Sharon, she has Down syndrome. She lives in---she is affiliated with Villa Esperanza which is a small school for handicapped children in Pasadena. Developmentally disabled is the right PC word these days, and she lives in Pasadena, and she is 41. She is the youngest, and the oldest is 53.

**SEVERAL**

Oh wow. Are they all practicing Jews and affiliated with congregations?

**KUPPERMANN**

Almost. The oldest, as I said, was divorced and is married to a Thai woman who was born in Thailand and moved to the United States when she was 9 years old. She is Buddhist, but they have two boys, and they are being...they are going to Day School at the...at the \_\_\_\_ (22:22) Torah school in Newport Beach, and it's a Jewish Day school with a strong religious component. The kids are required to \_\_\_\_ (22:41) all the time, and...but it's not a...it's a Jewish school that teaches religious things, but it is mainly secular, and so the kids are being---and they observe the Jewish holidays in their home like Passover and so on, but they are not affiliated to a Jewish congregation. The oldest, their oldest son is 10 years old and is going to start preparation for a bar mitzvah pretty soon, so I imagine they are going to become affiliated, but so far, they are not. Number 2, Miriam, she has three boys. They are members of the Temple \_\_\_\_ (23:30) on San Francisco which is a Reformed congregation. They live in Marin County, but they used to live in San Francisco, and they liked that congregation so much that when they moved to Marin they still kept going to Temple \_\_\_\_ (23:48). The two oldest boys have been bar mitzvahed there, and the youngest one is still ten years old, and they observe all of---well not all...they observe the High Holidays and Passover. Usually we are all together for Passover. So the only non---the oldest son...the only non-Jewish component was that they were not affiliated to a congregation, but they observed the Jewish holidays, and number 3, Nate, he lives in Davis, and he is a member of the only Jewish synagogue in Davis which is a reformed one also, and they live a Jewish life. Number 4, Sharon, we decorated that...she lives in a house with half a dozen young

women and two counselors in Pasadena, and from the holidays we would help decorate their house with a menorah and Happy Hanukkah signs and so on, and you ask her, and she says, "I'm Jewish. I don't celebrate Christmas." I'm not sure she quite understands what that means, but she knows...she knows that there is a difference.

**SEVERAL**

Well, why don't you check---Well you know I...we could go on...Actually there is one maybe last question. Did you have any contact with the cantors? Cantor Breene? Cantor Blumenthal? Cantor Julian?

**KUPPERMANN**

What was the last name?

**SEVERAL**

Julian. Did you have any---

**KUPPERMANN**

Yeah. Some. Not very much. We did have some contact with Cantor Breene who was the cantor at the time our oldest son was bar mitzvahed, and as I said our daughter was bat mitzvahed in Israel during our sabbatical year, and our youngest son was bar mitzvahed four years after the oldest one. I think it was Cantor Julian at the time. I'm not a hundred percent sure about that.

**SEVERAL**

Yeah. Yeah. One of the things we heard or somebody said that Cantor Breene, he likes singing. He had a good voice until it gave out, but he wasn't too involved I guess in the teaching of the kids for bar mitzvah and bat mitzvah. Was that your---

**KUPPERMANN**

I think that's reasonably accurate that the instruction of the bar mitzvah for the boys was done with the help of the mothers. It might be---I'm not a hundred percent sure---it could be that Mr. Davidson was involved a little bit. My wife would remember more about that. Cantor Breene really was really loved being a cantor, and...and in a certain sense, he didn't seem to welcome too much the bar mitzvah boys taking control over the services on the Saturday morning that they became bar mitzvahed. I think he felt that that was his responsibility not that young man's responsibility.

**SEVERAL**

(LAUGHING)

**KUPPERMANN**

So he really had a passion for singing. Cantor Julian, to the best of my recollection, whether or not he was the cantor when Nate was bar mitzvahed, he had a much greater rapport with the young people, and so when he...when he left, I forgot the circumstances...can you refresh my memory?

**SEVERAL**

I don't. I can't. I mean...I mean you mentioned the circumstances. I don't seem to recall there were...there was something...something about his departure that didn't sit well with---

**KUPPERMANN**

That's right.

**SEVERAL**

With some congregants, but I don't remember what the issue was.

**KUPPERMANN**

I don't remember the issue either. What I do remember is that when he left, there was great consternation on the part of the parents who felt he was very very good with the young...with the children, bar mitzvahed and bat mitzvahed too. That's...he was a nice man. I remember him well. He left to go to another temple in the area...

**SEVERAL**

Right. Arcadia maybe?

**KUPPERMANN**

I really don't know.

**SEVERAL**

Was your---is or was your wife involved in the Temple, in any way, on committees or anything like that?

**KUPPERMANN**

No she was not. She...she...she was a teacher, a chemistry teacher at Westford school for 25 years, and with that and four children---when the children were young of course she didn't have any time, and even when the children grew up and left, she was professionally totally occupied, and so when she retired about 12 years ago, since then she had been on and off thinking of trying to become more actively involved with the congregation but hasn't...hasn't done that yet...at least not yet.

**SEVERAL**

Well I think we'll end it at this point, and I really appreciate...really appreciate this.

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