

Interview Subject: **Norman Kassoff, Law officer**

Date Recorded: **2-18-12**

Location: **MDPL office, Art Deco Welcome Center**

Date of Birth: **9-4-30**

Norman Kassoff was raised on Miami Beach. He became a law enforcement officer and instructor.

Earliest memories of going to a place called Minsky's on the pier. Next to it was a dog track.

You could ride your bicycle everywhere. There was a racetrack that let you ride a little motorized vehicle around a track.

The seasons: when Easter arrived it was a ghost town. But when the Hialeah Race tracks opened the season started.

Worked during high school at the dog track. He made \$4 a night. He would get the dog ready in its jacket and parade him with his number and march them to the photographers if he won. Dog owners didn't really think of them as pets but as moneymaking machine and didn't take such good care of them.

Remembers being in winners circle with dog owned by Martha Raye, the comedian. She opened up a nightclub many years later Dade Boulevard and Alton Road.

A lot of people would go to Joe's Stone Crab, names famous people who were regulars. Wartime memories of World War II, sometime in 1939/1940, seeing a battle way off between a German warship and a British ship. The German ship was captured. They used to collect Bundles for Britain. Gas rationing made a big impact on Miami Beach. Dad was in funeral business so hearses got a high level of rationing. Several times he watched tankers burning off the coastline. The boys would go to the beach and see life jackets full of tar but patrols chased them off. All the hotels became barracks. You couldn't go to the movies without 3/4 of theater filled with soldiers. Military baseball games. Butter and meat heavily rationed, shoes.

They collected old tires. Girls would collect bundles of clothing and ship off, collected fat to make glycerin. Everybody bought saving stamps that you put in a book. Important thing in high school was savings bonds.

In the beginning, you hardly knew there was a war on because they were afraid it would affect tourism. They didn't blackout at first and the Germans used the lights of the city to target the ships.

There were drills in school about blackouts and keeping mouths shut. And then there were German prisoners and Italian prisoners. They would pick up debris and help with maintenance of roads.

Boys would borrow parents' car and go to drive-in on Beach. They went to Baker's Haulover beach where you could make fires on the beach and cook and brings beers.

Movie house near Joe's Stone Crab, cooled by having blocks of ice under the seats. Next to large swimming area. Theaters on Lincoln Road. Lots of movie houses.

Restricted hotels, recalls signs announcing restrictions. Clearly understood that all negroes had to be off Miami Beach by sunset or be in the house where they worked as the maid.

Shifting in demographics in Beach after the War. Attrition of elderly Jews. Condo development and Art Deco preservation.

After the war, went to law school/law enforcement, his department handled all deaths and rapes for the communities.

Father was in funeral business. Mother was stay-at-home mom. Glasses and cookies after school, homework check. Most of his friends' moms were stay-at-home moms. Quite a few prominent attorney and doctors were his friends at Beach High. Emphasis was on stretching your abilities. Beach High had its own weather station.

In Navy reserves, he was the Quarter Master because of his experience on the Beach with lifeguards and semaphore signaling and weather experience at Beach high.

After Navy, never came back to Miami Beach except to visit folks and attend High Holiday services.

Bar Mitzvah and being rapped on the hands with a stick when he made a mistake in Hebrew.

Police Chief Rocky Pomerance and his handling of the 1972 convention. Knew how to keep the lid on. Tragic death after stomach surgery.

City commission meetings and reputation for contentiousness.

1949 summer he worked as bill collector for city water department. His job was to go around and collect cash for past due bills or shut off the water if they didn't pay. Kenneth Howe and JJ Horn. City of Miami Beach was really separate. Had excellent teachers in school system.

Big gap between generations. There's no memory passed along.

Military band concerts on Miami Beach, Glen Miller music, dancing on terrazzo floor, evening breeze coming in, moon outside.

People were much more civil to each other. Politeness expected. Teachers were looked upon as Gods.

Growing up on the beach was wonderful. Would he do it again? "Just give me the pen and I'll sign."

Tells about an encounter with Meyer Lansky. He was a real gentleman. Had his own table at Wolfie's. Nobody ever sat down with him unless he invited them. Donated stained glass windows at Temple, which is now the Jewish Museum, Third St and Washington.

Hoover used to live with Winchell up at the Roney. The mob were big tippers. Never had a problem with them here. There was prostitution, gambling, never heard of any drugs. But never any violence. Where was Al Capone during the Valentine's Day Massacre? Palm Island, visiting an attorney.

Horse racing was very glamorous. Hialeah was it, full of Lincolns, Cadillacs. Hoover and Winchell were big horse players.

The Jewish mob and the Italian mobs mixed here. They came here for fun.
They never solved their problems here, only back in NY.