

Interviewee: Michael Orovitz, "Raised on the Beach", Beach High, Mt. Sinai Hospital, Jewish Community

Interviewer: Kathy Hersh

Location: 1001 Ocean Drive, Miami Beach, FL

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Kathy Hersh: I am interviewing Michael Orovitz for the Miami Beach Visual Memoirs Project. We are in the offices of the Miami Design Preservation League. Wow, where do we get started? Your family has been so associated with Miami Beach. You told us you came here when you were five.

Michael Orovitz: I was born in 1942 in the City of Miami and my family moved to Miami Beach in 1947, when I was five years old.

Kathy Hersh: You probably have some memories; you were old enough to have some first impressions of the Beach.

Michael Orovitz: When I first came to Miami Beach I went to North Beach elementary school. That was still at a young age. A better recollection of Miami Beach was when I went to Nautilus Junior High School, which was in the third grade. I was at North Beach for kindergarten and first and second grade. Getting a little older, I have better recollections of the Beach.

Kathy Hersh: That was in the post-World War II era.

Michael Orovitz: Yes

Kathy Hersh: Were there still remnants of the war around?

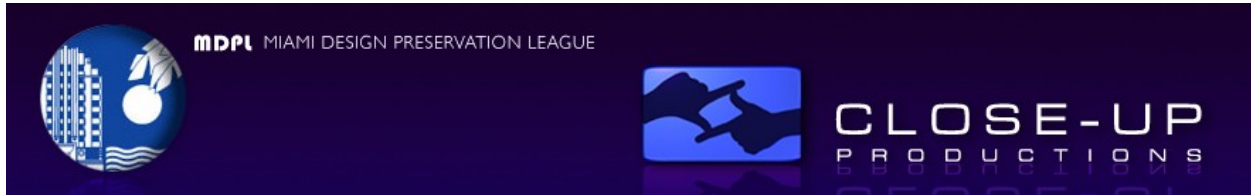
Michael Orovitz: I don't remember any remnants. I know the stories about military being in Miami Beach but I was too young for me to appreciate that.

Kathy Hersh: Certainly parents experienced that. Did they tell you stories about that?

Michael Orovitz: Not that I can remember clearly. My father served in Savanna. I've seen pictures of the military set up the beach and people in uniform.

Kathy Hersh: Tell us about your parents.

Michael Orovitz: My mother was born in Clarksdale, Mississippi and came to Miami in her teens. She went to Miami High. My father moved to Miami from Pelham, Georgia and they were married when my mother was 17. In



those days, people got married, obviously, at a much younger age. They settled in Miami.

Kathy Hersh: What made them decide to come over to the Beach?

Michael Orovitz: I think a lot of their friends had moved over to the Beach. In those times a lot of people moved together and they had established friendships before they moved to Miami where many people lived in the same area. Someone started it off and moved to the Beach first and everybody seemed to follow at the same time.

Kathy Hersh: And what does your father do for a living?

Michael Orovitz: My father at that time...way back before I was born, he was in the construction business and had a company called Scott Terry that did home building, so of which was on Miami Beach. He then, in later years, was in the public gas company, that was bottled gas. And subsequent to that went into the construction business again with a company called Alfred Guest and Company, which merged with a concrete company called Wall Industries, which became the surviving entity. After that, sky's the limit. He did a lot for the City of Miami and Miami Beach. I'm happy to go into some of that if you'd like.

He was very, very involved with the University of Miami; he was the vice- chairman of the board, he was the chairman of the committee until he passed away in 1979. He was very much involved in the establishment of the Law School and the Medical School at the University. He was very, very instrumental in the founding of Mount Sinai Hospital. Back after the war there was no place for Jewish doctors to practice on Miami Beach. A group of prominent Miami Beach people got together; decided they wanted to start a Jewish hospital. My father went to Washington, D.C. and got the charter for the hospital. And he served as the chairman of the board of the hospital until he passed away in 1979. So Mt. Sinai was his baby. He was very proud of what he had done with the hospital. Of course, today it's very instrumental in Miami Beach.

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Kathy Hersh: I understand he was involved in resettling Jews in post World War II Europe. Is that correct?

Michael Orovitz: His involvement with the Jews was not so much in Miami, or Miami Beach, it was what happened. My father was head of the greater Miami Federation in the '40s. He and Rabbi Lehrman and another lady by the name of Fannie Selig, went on a trip after the war, to Europe. And they planned to go to Palestine. It happens that the day they arrived was the day that the United Nations declared partition of Israel and they



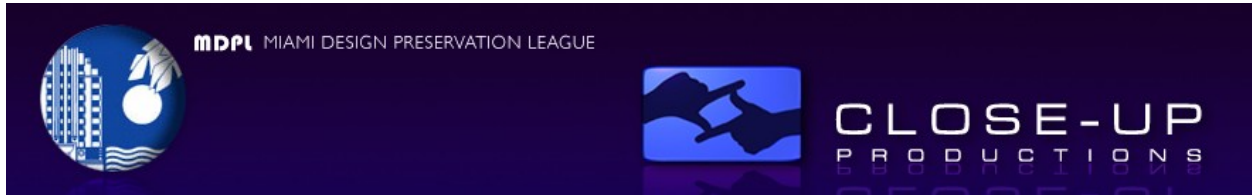
were unable to go to Jerusalem as they had planned. They had to stay in Tel Aviv. They stayed at a very small pension or hotel owned by two brothers, and coincidentally one of the brothers asked my father if he had a large amount of cash, five thousand dollars, which was a lot of money in those days -- in the 1940s -- and my father had a premonition before he went on that trip that he was going to need cash -- just had a premonition. And when my father asked what was the need for, of cash, what was the request for, the brother in question said that that there was a boatload of refugees coming into, now, Israel and they needed to pay the boat captain off. It was a Turkish boat, and while they waited for the arrival of the boat under the condition that he and the others would be able to assist in the unloading of the refugees coming into Israel. They were at Golda Meir's house prior to the boat coming in. And the boat arrived, unloaded the refugees, and the brothers said to my father "what are we going to do with all these refugees now coming into our country." My father being from Miami Beach said, "you need to have tourism. You have beautiful beachfronts. You need hotels and tourists. You'll have employment. It will be a wonderful thing for the economy of Israel." My father came back to Miami after the trip, met with half-a-dozen or so of the same prominent individuals who were involved in the beginning of Mt. Sinai and they formed a group called the Miami Group. They formed a partnership with these two brothers from Israel and that was the beginning of the Dan Hotel chain that became the forerunner of tourism in Israel and eventually the Miami Group (in those days it was impractical to conduct business out of the country. You didn't have the ease you have today). And frankly I'm not sure that you could've been able to do it. So they sold out and the Dann Hotel group eventually became a very very large industry in Israel. That was really the beginning of tourism in Israel. So my father's involvement was more with the refugee end of it, with what took place in Palestine rather than Israel.

Kathy Hersh: He must have been very proud of that.

Michael Orovitz: My father loved it. He loved everything he did. My father was the type of an individual that did nothing for himself. He only wanted to help other people. I have a brother and a sister. What he taught the three of us was the importance of giving back to the community and being grateful for what we had in helping other people.

Kathy Hersh: And what are the things you are proud of that you have done?

Michael Orovitz: For myself, I was a banker for 45 years at City National Banks. I first started with City National Bank of Miami Beach. Then it became City National Bank of Florida that was owned by the Leonard Abbess family, they were the main stockholders of the bank. And I am very proud of what I was able to accomplish over those 45 years. I started at a very



low position by the time I retired I had created a private banking division. I was executive vice president of the division and I gave a lot of contributions to the bank. And banking certainly has changed over those 45 years. My banking was wonderful. It has gotten much more difficult and involved with government regulations today. With Mt. Sinai, I too became very involved. I was the president of a group called "the sustaining board of fellows" which was a junior board of trustees that was created probably in the late 50s, 60s and I eventually became president of that group and became a member of the Board of Trustees of Mount Sinai and today I am a life trustee in the hospital.

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So that's only one aspect of my community involvement. I was as a member of the North Shore Kiwanis club. I am the founder of Mount Sinai as well as a founder with my wife both with Mt. Sinai and the Miami Jewish Home and Hospital. And I became involved with Temple Israel. My wife, Norma, was always very involved with the Temple. Mt. Sinai was my baby, as Norma says, and the Temple was her baby. But I served in the board for many years and eventually I became president in 2001 and served for 2 years and that was probably the greatest accomplishment that I had in the one endeavor that I am most proud of. And I have continued to stay involved in the Temple, on the board, again. Past president or on the board of the Temple as needed and today I agreed to be treasurer for one year so again I've continued to help out. And I got involved with the Jewish Museum of Florida through Marsh Zeravitz who was the Founding Director and served in that capacity as treasurer for several years and today I'm on the board of that, as well. So I continue to give back to the community, as much as I can.

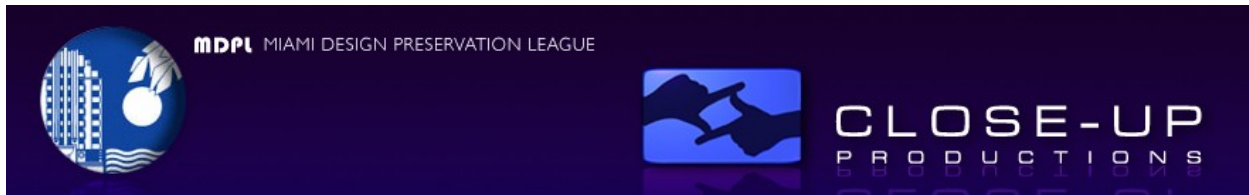
Kathy Hersh: You said that your father taught you and your siblings to give back to the community.

Michael Orovitz: My children are not involved in the direct area...

Kathy Hersh: But your siblings -- your brother and sister.

Michael Orovitz: Primarily my brother served as chairman of Mt. Sinai. My brother was the founding President of the FIU University Foundation. So those are the two main things that he was involved with was FIU and Mount Sinai. My sister and her family as well as my brother and his family continue to contribute to these various institutions as well.

Kathy Hersh: Let's talk about your education on the Beach. You went to public schools?



Michael Orovitz: Went to public school. Started at North Beach Elementary, as I said, for the first three years -- kindergarten, first and second. Grew up on Meridian Avenue across from Bayshore Golf Course, in those days. Then I transferred to Nautilus Junior High School. At which time many of the friends I have today and I continue with throughout high school, also were at Nautilus. In those days Nautilus, I believe, only went through 8th grade. In ninth-grade everyone transferred to Beach High. However, in 9th and 10th grades my family chose to send me to private school in Palm Beach. And I wasn't real happy but I went there it was an overnight school and I had so many friends from Miami Beach that when I went school in Palm Beach, I transferred back in 11th grade and it was a little difficult, because people had continued their relationships among their groups. But I managed to do well and meet some of the old friends I had previously as well as new friends. I actually was at Beach High for 11th and 12th grades. My graduating class was the last class to be at Beach high, the old Miami Beach high school, the new Miami Beach high school we actually transferred over midyear. And I do remember that we had to carry the library books from the Euclid Avenue over to where the school currently resides.

Kathy Hersh: That must've been a big task because other people have mentioned that also.

Michael Orovitz: That's not something you do often so it does stick out. After graduating from Miami Beach high school I attended the University of Miami where I met my wife Norma and majored in Bachelor of Business Administration, a BBA. Majored in marketing but never used it because my entire business career was involved in banking, so I was more involved in finance than in marketing.

[15:00]

Kathy Hersh: And tell us about the Abess family. They obviously were founders of a lot on the Beach and very philanthropic, and so forth. What was it like working at City National?

Michael Orovitz: City National was at that time a wonderful family relationship. And I truly mean family. I grew up... I was 21 when I started at the bank and that was of course my 1st job and only job 45 years later. But it was a wonderful place to work. I developed a tremendous number of good friends. Some of which I am very friendly with today. The Abess family, the founder, Leonard and his wife Bertha, were friends of my parents. At that time, we did not have branch banking so each bank was separately operated and I thought I would be working at the bank that was that was on, today also, on Flagler Street. I worked there one summer. For one reason or another I chose not to take that offer and ended up at City National Bank of Miami Beach on 71st St. in Miami Beach. And that's where I really stayed for -- I would say -- about 20



years of my 45 years. And met a lot of great people. Of course, I knew the Abess' and their son Leonard Abess, Junior. He was several years younger than me and I knew of him, but because of the age difference we were not really close. He then became involved in the bank after graduating college from Wharton, obviously became very close and he became my boss.

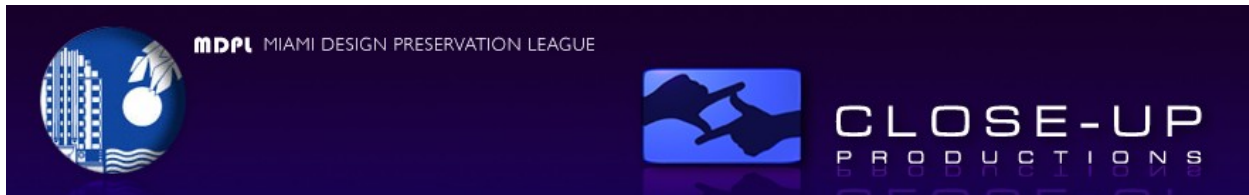
Kathy Hersh: You must've worked with Leonard Abess, Senior then?

Michael Orovitz: Leonard Abess, Senior in those days was the chairman of the bank. I really worked more for the president of the banks, one of which was Leonard Abess, Senior's nephew, Allan Abess. But Leonard Abess, Senior had his office where I worked, so on a daily basis we would certainly see each other.

Kathy Hersh: Do you have any stories about him - encounters with him? I had the privilege of interviewing him, once.

Michael Orovitz: Well the only stories, some of which I heard from Leonard, his son Leonard Abess. They must have discussed banking every night at the dinner table because that I think is where Leonard learned his banking background was discussing what took place not necessarily individuals but the concept of banking. But in those days, and I believe it was true because I did have the opportunity to experience this type of philosophy, there was so much informality versus formality that if somebody came that you knew for a loan you basically made the loan on a handshake. And today, of course, you have to go through so many regulations in order to get a loan then you're borrowing money from the bank you are just opening up an account where you are giving the bank your money. The bank has to be extremely particular in terms of the source of the funds that you're depositing. I mean it was even situations in the last 10 years or so, if an individual was given a loan and they were unable to pay the loan back, there were cases where that individual was going to sue the bank because they said the bank had no right to make the loan. You can turn that every direction you want. And the other story I remember Leonard also talking, was he made a loan and the loan matured and it was time for the customer prepay the loan back well obviously he was happy with the loan he was happy with whatever the interest was in those days, couldn't understand why the customer was paying the loan back. And of course the loan officer would say, "Leonard that's what they're supposed to do pay the money back to the bank." Banking was wonderful in those days. It really was.

Kathy Hersh: Mr. Abess, Senior said that he once, to help someone out buying a first home, I believe it was, took collateral of a mule.



Michael Orovitz: I'm quite sure that's true. I don't what they would do with the mule but in those days again people were given money whether it be for education or whether it would be forgiven for our first house or first automobile, I mean that's how so many people got started today and that's how you retained those customers and their families over generations. I used to work with a lady that was Latin and she had a very large Latin clientele.

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She had pictures of these children she kept over the years. The children of course became grown-ups and had their own children and they would come back into the bank and they would look at these pictures these crayon pictures to show their children what they had done as a child. It's that kind of an institution. It became much more than a business relationship. Not only among the employees but with the customers as well. It was wonderful. I enjoyed... obviously, I was there 45 years and didn't go anywhere else. If I ever tried to get another job my resume would not look very good. I don't think anybody would believe it.

Kathy Hersh: Did your father have stories that he told? He must've dealt with a lot of different people to accomplish what he did.

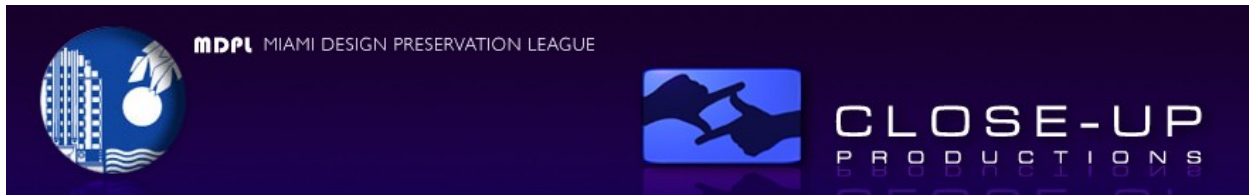
Michael Orovitz: He dealt with a lot of people. But he was very proud of what he had accomplished no doubt about it. But he never talked about it. Other people would talk about it to the rest of the family, certainly, to let us know of their appreciation for what he had done. My father was the type of individual... I heard stories of people who become very successful, particularly attorneys. They had difficulty getting into law school. My father assisted them getting into law school and they've never forgotten it and they became very prominent attorneys in the area.

Kathy Hersh: They had difficulty getting into law school at UM?

Michael Orovitz: At UM.

Kathy Hersh: And why was that?

Michael Orovitz: It may have been a scholarship situation where they just didn't have the grades to make the entrance requirements. The line that I've heard... he would help people and further their careers but under the premise that he never wanted to be embarrassed. He would do for others, but don't embarrass me. I don't think was ever a situation in which he was frankly embarrassed. And there were other situations where people needed money to meet whatever obligations they had and I'm sure there was much more of that than the family ever knew.



He was just that kind of an individual. Felt again, that whatever he had he was grateful for. Of course he worked hard for it to reach that situation, but he wanted to share it.

Kathy Hersh: And your mother, did she work outside the home?

Michael Orovitz: My mother, during all the years that I knew her, my mother's total commitment to life was committed to playing golf. She loves to play golf and many of these people that I've been talking about from the community, the wives played golf. They belonged to West View Country Club. They had golf games and bridge games and whatever. I'm sure she became a little bit involved probably more during the war years but frankly she did not work. That I know of.

Kathy Hersh: Home keeping was a full-time occupation.

Michael Orovitz: We had three children. They had three children. So in 1950 we moved from Meridian Avenue we moved to N. Bay Rd. We happen to move into the house the day of the 1950 hurricane. And of course, now my parents passed away, my mother passed away in 1980 my father in 1979. When I realize how young they were when they moved into these various houses in retrospect my situation my age, one of the questions I'd like to know is why they moved into a house on the day of hurricane. But they moved in. I remember boarding up the house as best as possible during the hurricane. So certain things stick in your mind.

Kathy Hersh: Of course. You are how old then?

Michael Orovitz: 8 years old. And I remember... at 8 I should remember.

Kathy Hersh: When did the hurricane come -- in the afternoon, evening?

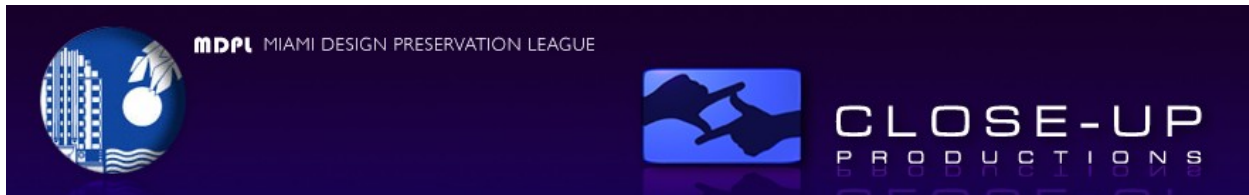
Michael Orovitz: This was in October of 1950 and in those days most hurricanes came probably in the evening and we probably moved in in the afternoon. The only thing that sticks in my mind is boarding up some of the large windows.

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As I say, why we moved the day the hurricane came, I'm sure there was warning that it was coming that day. Maybe they had to be out of the house. But I don't know.

Kathy Hersh: What was the name of the hurricane, do you remember?

Michael Orovitz: No.



Kathy Hersh: Did it do a lot of damage?

Michael Orovitz: Not to the house. In those days, that was the last house they lived in before they moved to an apartment and I got married to my wife, Norma, and we moved out of the house. We were on the bay and the only thing I remember in those days was the rising waters. Over my almost 70 years... I will be 70 in August; we never really had a threat of a hurricane. Certainly, there was no such thing as an Andrew in those days. Most of the storms were north, which was on the beaches, whereas Andrew hit in the south. The most that I ever remember with hurricanes was rising waters but certainly nothing near flood level. I do remember the aftermath of a hurricane where the streets might become slightly flooded. Where there might be fish floating down the street from the ocean, particularly over on Collins Avenue or Indian Creek Drive. And of course the bank always, because the bank I was at many of those years was on 71st Street, was only 2 blocks from the ocean. In those days you had sandbags and you had to block the entrances to the buildings with sandbags to stop the water but we never got the water to levels that you needed for any of that stuff. I was very fortunate. Never really experienced a bad hurricane of many hurricanes.

Kathy Hersh: So it was common to see fish flopping around on the streets?

Michael Orovitz: You really didn't think too much about it. I think was more unusual the day there was snow in Miami and it snowed that one morning. Do you know that story?

Kathy Hersh: When was that?

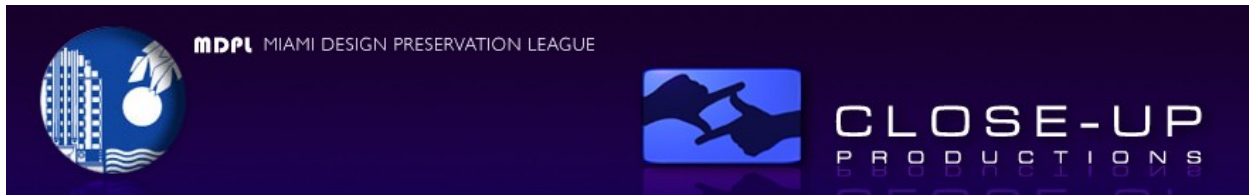
Michael Orovitz: We were married in 1963, so it must have been in the 70s. When I say snow it never hit the ground but it got cold enough that the headlines in the newspaper was "snow in Miami." Literally there was snow coming down. It only lasted a couple of minutes. But that caused more sensationalism than any of the hurricanes.

Kathy Hersh: Did you go out in it?

Michael Orovitz: Yes, of course. I was at work. I remember being at the bank. I'm sure by the time most people got out the door it had already stopped. And don't ask me what caused it to happen. Obviously must've gone from warm to cold pretty quickly.

Kathy Hersh: So you grew up on North Bay Road?

Michael Orovitz: We moved to North Bay Road in 1950. My wife and I were married in 1963 so I was at North Bay Road for 13 years.



Kathy Hersh: What was the neighborhood like? Were there children to play with?

Michael Orovitz: It's a different neighborhood today. I think in those days it was -at least from an appearance standpoint - more family-oriented. Today of course you have more many of the movie stars and fashion people, whatever, and so many of the homes are gated to the point that you can't really see the homes. Back in those days you could see the kids were either playing football in the yards or basketball in the yards and it was much more family- oriented. I'm sure there were parts of it that were with retired people, probably their children had grown up, but again, I met several of my friends in that period of time on N. Bay Rd. who also attended Beach High.

We all used to walk over to Lincoln Road. In those days Lincoln Road had traffic. And the buses used to travel on Lincoln Road. So in order to... and that's in the days when Miami Beach High was on Euclid Avenue, so we actually walked over to Lincoln Road and we caught the bus -- called the R Bayside, now that I remember -- and we took the bus north to our homes: North Bay Road, Pinetree Drive, in that area.

Kathy Hersh: So you really didn't have to have a car?

Michael Orovitz: I don't know that I had a car while I was in high school at all. It was primarily when I started college. No you didn't really have to have a car. There were several people who are known in the community that drove to school but it wasn't necessary at all.

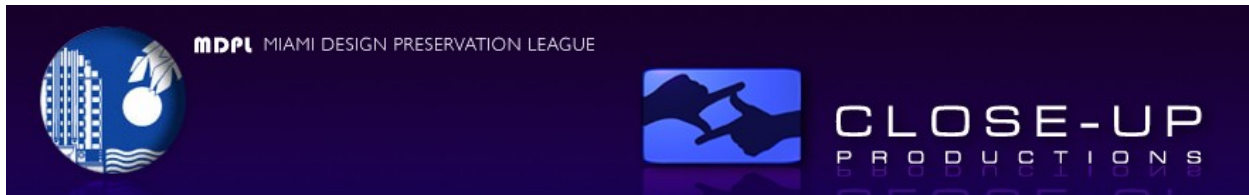
Kathy Hersh: So what was Beach High like to you?

Michael Orovitz: Now were talking 50 years ago. Again, a great experience in terms of developing relationships, which 50 years later we continue to have.

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We have such a good high school experience. It's interesting; I've been very involved in the formation of our high school reunions. For whatever reason my banking background really stuck to me. I've always been the treasurer of my high school class for the reunions. So many of the people we would call to come to the reunions had bad high school experiences and didn't want to come to the reunion, whereas the people that I happened to grow up with, very fortunately, had good experiences and we probably have a greater time planning the reunion than at the reunion. It was a reunion among each of us just at the meetings themselves. In those days it wasn't so much the school experience as the social experience.

Kathy Hersh: Do you remember what some of the complaints were of those who turned down coming?



Michael Orovitz: No they never... it was personal. But people felt they had an unhappy experience.

Kathy Hersh: Socially?

Michael Orovitz: I assume it was socially I don't know if it could have had anything to do with their studies. You really don't know what people think. If you don't get into their minds. So, it was unfortunate that you hear that. The other thing is we had our 50th reunion 2 years ago. We are actually going to have a 70th birthday party in November 2012, this year. We didn't want to wait 5 more years. Everybody had such a good time, so we decided to have a 70th birthday party. But the one very unfortunate thing is -- and I don't know how many there were in our class, it might've been many hundreds, probably 500 or so -- we had about 60 people at that time that had passed away.

I feel, and I think a lot of my classmates, still feel pretty young. We may be 70 or approaching 70, but it's not mentally. Maybe physically but not mentally.

Kathy Hersh: It was a pretty extraordinary place apparently with very high academic standards. Did you get a sense of that?

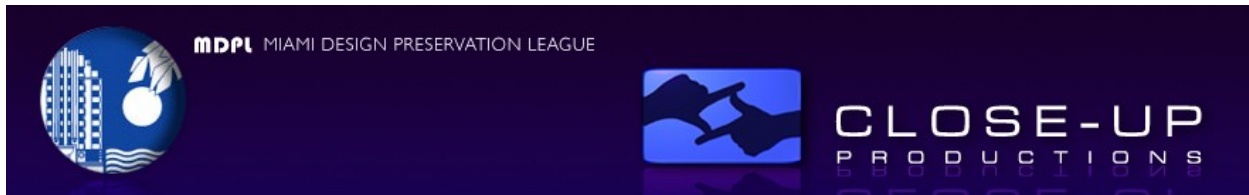
Michael Orovitz: Beach High, certainly. Maybe during the years preceding my educational experience even at the University of Miami, Miami Beach and even Miami was more of a playground. Really, when I went through school, whether it was high school or whether it was the University, I had no feeling it was a playground. It had very high standards. And you are expected to meet those standards. There were a number of classmates of mine at Miami Beach high school that either had left Beach High to go to the Lehrer School because they needed to go to private school for one reason or another. The public school system was very good in those days, absolutely.

Kathy Hersh: You said that you had a hiatus from Beach High and went to Palm Beach.

Michael Orovitz: Private school in Palm Beach.

Kathy Hersh: What was the basis of your parents' decision to do that?

Michael Orovitz: I'm told that they thought I would learn to study better at a private school. Frankly, my grades were fine. I certainly have no problem with grades but I think they wanted me to be in a different type of environment for whatever reason. I certainly was not a playboy. That was their decision and it was very difficult. It was two years. It was overnight and I certainly looked forward to coming home and seeing



my friends but it was particularly difficult going to another school after graduating Nautilus and going on to Beach High. It was a total different. Much more formal more formal environment than, certainly, public school.

Kathy Hersh: But you were able to come back in two years?

Michael Orovitz: Yes and during the two years of course during holidays and vacations and whatever else, absolutely.

Kathy Hersh: But you convinced them or they just decided?

Michael Orovitz: I really don't remember but I'm sure I helped. I think they saw the picture. It's tough to be away from the family even for two years.

Kathy Hersh: What things did you miss most during those two years?

Michael Orovitz: Besides family, obviously my friends. Obviously, what was happening at Beach High. I had always gone to school with so many of these friends of mine from as far back as North Beach Elementary that I lost the continuity. And not being in Miami. I love Miami, I love Miami Beach.

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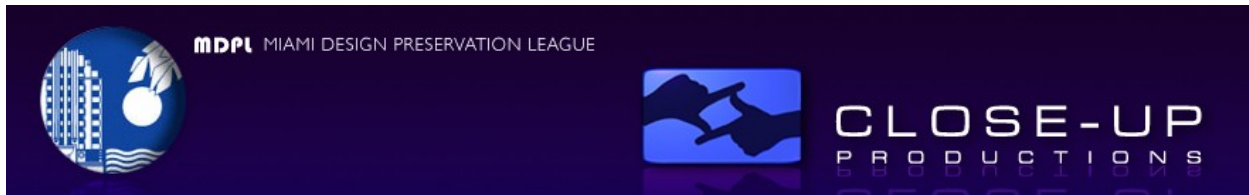
Kathy Hersh: What were some of the places that you missed? The things you used to do, that you missed.

Michael Orovitz: Probably, we had cabanas back in those days. You missed going to the cabana and doing what one does at a cabana, and the movies, the socializing. Just having that whole network that was cut off for those two years. Frankly, the people I'd met -- the school was called Graham-Ekes -- in the city of Palm Beach on N. County Rd. I didn't meet a lot of friends. There are a couple of people who I subsequently reunited with that went to the school. But none of us were really close. It was mainly out-of-state, foreign students. It was a whole different experience for me and I must've done okay because I graduated Beach High. Kathy Hersh: So then, what did you do after that?

Michael Orovitz: That's when I went to the University of Miami.

Kathy Hersh: Did you have a summer job?

Michael Orovitz: I had a summer job. One summer job was working for Eagle Army Navy Stores working in the warehouse. My banking actually started where I worked at City National Bank in the summer photographing. I remember photographing canceled checks from customers. All the checks had to be photographed and I hope today they don't look for



any of those checks because I'm not sure they were in order after they finished with me. I got married before I actually graduated from the University of Miami. Started a family so I now have three daughters and 6 grandchildren.

Kathy Hersh: Do they live on the beach?

Michael Orovitz: No, my 3 daughters lived on the beach area, but moved: one lives in Plantation, one lives in Weston and my oldest daughter is in New Jersey. My daughter in New Jersey has 4 children and each of my other two daughters have one child.

Kathy Hersh: So your family legacy to Miami Beach, sum it up for us?

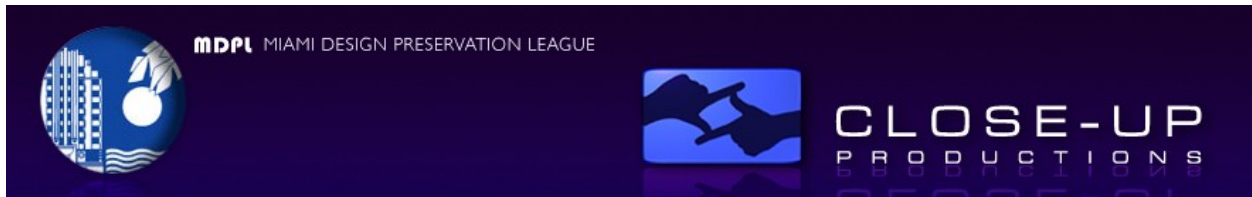
Michael Orovitz: I think the primary legacy, which stands up and is the most prominent is Mount Sinai. Because of, obviously, what my father had accomplished. When Mount Sinai, existing hospital was being built, my wife and I toured during construction and I'll never forget that my wife asked my father, "what is your involvement might with Mount Sinai. You must get tremendous benefits and medical benefits because of what we've done in the hospital." And my father's answer, which carries on for all of us, is again, that you can't expect to get something you can afford where others cannot afford. And you never want to take something for free that someone else can benefit from. And, certainly, in those days he never had any selfish reasons nor the rest of us. So our most prominent memory and accomplishment really is Mt. Sinai. Again, because of my father, my brother being chairman, myself being a life trustee, all of our children are founders of the hospital. We stay involved in the hospital. It's a permanent structure.

Kathy Hersh: Did you know Rabbi Lehrman well?

Michael Orovitz: Well, no. My father was closer to him, getting back to the story during the war. We attended Temple Israel in Miami. Temple Emanu-El is more of a conservative synagogue so we didn't interconnect in that degree. Obviously, we would go to various services or undertakings at Temple Emanu-El, but not friendly with him. Unfortunately, he officiated at my mother's funeral at that time... I'm sorry; it was my father's funeral. But we did not have the relationship with Rabbi Lehrman that my father and mother had. Even my sister, I don't think, had a direct relationship with him.

Kathy Hersh: If you were to describe a favorite boyhood memory what would that be?

Michael Orovitz: A favorite boyhood memory. It's a good question. It's been a while since I've been a boy. I think when I moved to N. Bay Rd. at that time met and today have a very close relationship with a friend of mine, his



name is Buddy Owen. Went to Beach High. He was a year ahead of me. Playing basketball, the Louis Wolfson family you may know that name. Steve Wolfson was the oldest son and they lived directly next door to us and as kids we used to all play ball together. So those were probably the memories.

Kathy Hersh: Did you go to the beach?

Michael Orovitz: When I was older we moved to North Bay. We had a pool but we did have a cabana when I was much younger at the Roney Plaza before it is the Roney Plaza it is today. And we actually had a cabana at the Fontainebleau for several years after it opened up and my mediate family, my wife and kids we had a cabana at the Americana, back in those days. And today we have a cabana actually at the Seaview which is in Bal Harbour.

Kathy Hersh: So, I've heard about these cabanas, but I didn't grow up next to the ocean. So what do you do there? What was the big attraction for families?

Michael Orovitz: Probably the beach and the sand and the swimming pool, frankly. The parents of the children would play cards. I think that was primarily what they did and the kids really hung out on the beach making castles digging holes and, as I say, enjoying the pool. In those days of course neither the beachfront nor the cabanas were as elaborate as they are today. It was much more simplistic.

Kathy Hersh: So, you were right next to the water?

Michael Orovitz: Right next to the water.

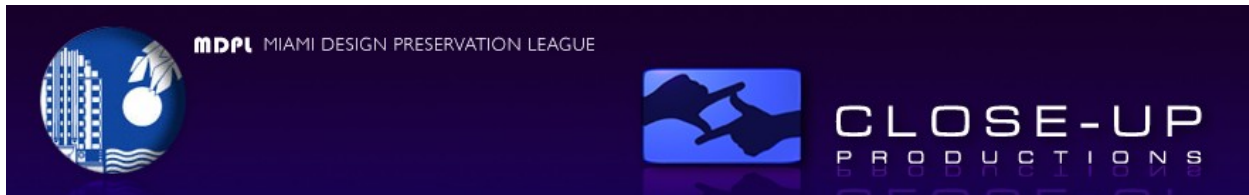
Kathy Hersh: It must have been very relaxing?

Michael Orovitz: It was wonderful. Even today my wife and I, we go, as I say, to the Seaview and its like being on vacation. You could be in Hawaii, you could be anywhere in the world, and yet you could do the same thing in Miami Beach and get the same pleasures.

Kathy Hersh: And you socialize with other people?

Michael Orovitz: Yes absolutely. That's the nice thing, wherever you go you have the opportunity to meet people and we... Living in Miami Beach we do a lot of cruising and we've had wonderful opportunities to meet a lot of people through that experience, as well. I have to say it's been a wonderful place to live.

Kathy Hersh: If you could describe it in one word how would you describe it?



Michael Orovitz: Wonderful, clean, fun, at least that was my growing up experience.

Kathy Hersh: When you talked about the creation of Mt Sinai hospital you said, "a place for Jewish doctors to practice." Why was that necessary?

Michael Orovitz: I don't know what the law was, specifically, in those days but evidently but if, in those years, into the 50s even, Jews were not allowed to just go where they wanted to go. Whether it be residential or, evidently, the practice of medicine, I assume it must've been St. Francis. I don't know what other major hospital would've been on the Beach, in those days. But evidently, again, I was very young, Jewish doctors could not practice. I guess they had to go into the city maybe they had to go to Jackson. There were not that many hospitals. I personally was born at Jackson Memorial because that's where we lived at the time, in the city. But it's hard to believe how times have changed but growing up -- segregation; my wife and I we go on the train you past the train stations in Florida with black and white water fountains and restrooms. I grew up on the Beach where if you didn't work directly on the Beach and live in the premise on the Beach, you needed to be off the Beach and you needed a work permit to work on the Beach. But many of the people had to take jitneys in those days which were elaborate, larger taxis to go back into Miami, to the mainland because you're not allowed to stay on Miami Beach after sunset. So whether it was racial or religious there was separate but not certainly not equal.

Kathy Hersh: In your family did you have household help?

Michael Orovitz: Yes.

Kathy Hersh: And were they white or black?

Michael Orovitz: Primarily black, and to the best of my knowledge, there was never an issue for any of the people that worked with us in terms of being made uncomfortable at all. And the fact that they were able to live at the residence then there was not the issue of having to be off of the Beach.

Kathy Hersh: So they didn't have to go back and forth?

Michael Orovitz: As long as you live within residence.

Kathy Hersh: But their children couldn't be with him?

Michael Orovitz: They really didn't have children, the ones that I'm specifically thinking of. But yes that would've been the case. Or if you had a day worker you might've had a laundress who then, of course, had to be off of Miami Beach. It's hard to believe. I remember, as I said, we used to take buses from Miami Beach High School meet it on Lincoln Road



going up to the North Bay Area. Blacks had to sit at the back of the bus. It was natural. I didn't know any different because that's I was born into this. But, of course, you look back and wonder how could this have happened.

Kathy Hersh: How it was tolerated?

Michael Orovitz: But it still exists in many areas of the country.

Kathy Hersh: Were your parents active in any civil rights organizations?

Michael Orovitz: Not directly. My temple was very much involved in social justice, always had been. One of our earliest rabbis was Rabbi Joseph Narot and we did whatever we could do for social justice through the Temple. And, of course, my parents would've been part of that as well as myself and my wife. So we seem to be involved in an approach where we wanted to speak out.

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