

Collection #
DVD 2142

**GERALD KRAFT
ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW, 27 JUNE 2019**

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COLLECTION INFORMATION

**VOLUME OF
COLLECTION:** 1 DVD

**COLLECTION
DATES:** 27 June 2019

PROVENANCE: Gerald Kraft, Indianapolis, Indiana, October, 2019

RESTRICTIONS: None

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Collection

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

The son of Romanian Jewish immigrants, Gerald Kraft was born on the south side of Indianapolis in 1931. He attended Shortridge High School and graduated from Indiana University in 1953.

From childhood, Kraft assisted his father in his bakery business and ran the operation for a time when his father became ill in the early 1950s. It was also during this time that Kraft enlisted in the United States Airforce and served for two years at Lackland Air Force Base where helped found and served as president of a Jewish Guild Group.

When his father retired, Gerald decided to leave the bakery business to his brother-in-law, and he became a real estate developer alongside Mel Simon and two others in property development. Kraft's role in the early operations was to acquire property under the term of real estate consultant, which include the newly founded K-Marts in Indianapolis by the Kresge Corporation. In 1966, he was named Executive Vice-President of Melvin Simon & Associates. Kraft remained an executive in the Simon Corporation until his retirement in 1990.

Kraft took a four-year leave of absence from Simon from 1982–1986 to serve as International President of B'nai B'rith. During this time, he was instrumental in the initial airlift of Ethiopian Jew refugees in the Sudan to Israel. Kraft was also one of the founders of the Indiana Jewish Historical Society in 1972.

Sources:

Information in Collection

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

This interview was conducted by Wendy Soltz of the Indiana Jewish Historical Society with Gerald Kraft, honored as a Hoosier Jewish Legend in 2019. It took place on 27 June 2019 in Indianapolis and lasts approximately one hour and five minutes.

Subjects covered in the interview include growing up on the south side of Indianapolis and his involvement in Jewish youth organizations, attending Shortridge High School, working in his father's bakery from an early age. He also talks about attending the University of Michigan and transferring to Indiana University when his father became ill and he was needed to help with the family bakery. Other topics include his time in the U.S. Air Force and being stationed at Lackland Air Force Base where he was instrumental in establishing a Jewish Guild for servicemen and their families; his leaving the family bakery and starting his career as a realtor; his teaming with Mel Simon and others in forming a group that started shopping malls and K-Marts in Indianapolis, and his career as a partner in the early days of Melvin Simon & Associates.

A significant part of the interview deals with Kraft's involvement in the Jewish Community and B'nai B'rith including his two terms as International President of the organization. He goes into detail regarding his involvement in the rescuing of Ethiopian Jews from Sudan and their relocating in Israel.

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