

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY
ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Rabbi Sidney Berkowitz Project

Personal Experience

O.H. 1580

SR. CONSOLATA KLINE

Interviewed

by

Matthew T. Butts

on

June 21, 1992

SISTER CONSOLATA KLINE

Sister Consolata Kline was born on October 8, 1916, in the city of Cleveland, Ohio, the daughter of John and Catherine Ryan Kline. She spent part of her school years in Canton, Ohio, attending a boarding school, Mount Marie Academy, for her secondary education. She returned to Cleveland to finish high school a short time later, where she attended Cleveland Lincoln High School, graduating in 1935.

Sister Consolata worked at various jobs until deciding to enter into religious work in 1943. Being Roman Catholic, Sister Consolata joined the Sisters of the Humility of Mary. She arrived in Youngstown, Ohio in 1945, as business office manager at St. Elizabeth Hospital. She became one of the chief administrators of the hospital after completing both undergraduate and graduate studies in hospital administration at St. Louis University, during the mid-1950s. Sister Consolata continued in her administrative roles until her election as president of the total religious community in 1981. In 1990, Sister Consolata joined the staff of the Youngstown Diocese, serving as director of the local Catholic Charities. Along with her employment responsibilities, Sister Consolata has also been an active member of the Youngstown community. She has served as a member of the local chapter of the United Way and various other local, state, and national organizations in the health care field.

Presently, Sister Consolata continues to work with Catholic

Charities of the Youngstown Diocese. She resides at the Villa Maria Community Center, located in Villa Maria, Pennsylvania. She continues to be an active member of the Youngstown community. She enjoys dedicating her free time to working for people who are in need.

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INTERVIEWEE: SR. CONSOLATA KLINE

INTERVIEWER: Matthew T. Butts

SUBJECT: Youngstown community, Rabbi Berkowitz's
impact on the development of the local
Jewish community, Rodef Sholom, St. Elizabeth
Hospital

DATE: June 21, 1992

B: This is an interview with Sr. Consolata Kline for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, on the Rabbi Berkowitz project, including the Youngstown Community and the Youngstown Jewish Community, by Matthew Butts, at the Youngstown Catholic Diocese, 225 Elm Street, Youngstown, Ohio, on June 21, 1992, at 1:20 p.m.

Okay. What we do is we start off with some real brief biographical questions. Have you ever done an oral history before at the university?

K: No. Not at the university, the interviewer came here one other time.

B: Okay. Could you tell me a little bit about your childhood [such as] where you grew up?

K: I grew up in Cleveland, and I was one of seven children. I went to school in Cleveland and to a boarding school in Canton, Ohio for three years. I worked at a Title and Trust company after I finished high school. Then, I entered the Sisters of the Humility of Mary in 1943. They're located at Villa Maria, Pennsylvania. I

came to the Youngstown area in assignment to St. Elizabeth's Hospital in 1945. I was there in various capacities in administration until 1955, when I went to St. Louis University. Prior to that, I attended Youngstown State University on a part-time basis. I finished two years of college work, and then, I went to St. Louis University for the completion of my college work and for graduate school. I did a residency in hospital administration, as part of the graduate work, at St. Vincent's Hospital, New York, in Greenwich Village. I returned to St. Elizabeth's Hospital and continued my work there. In 1961, I was appointed the administrator of the hospital, and I remained in administration either as the administrator or the executive director, until 1981. In 1981, I was elected president of our religious community, and I stayed in that role until 1989. In the following months, for about nine months, I went to Notre Dame University in South Bend, Indiana for some postgraduate work. At the conclusion of that, I came to the diocese of Youngstown as the Vicar for Social Concerns in the Catholic Charities Department; and that's where I am currently.

B: What were some of your duties as president of the local--is this the Catholic community?

K: Of the hospital?

B: Yes.

K: Well, as far as the duties, I started out in the office, and as I progressed, I became an assistant administrator and had charge of various departments within the hospital. Then, when I became the administrator of the hospital, we went into several building programs, as well as the administration. The west extension and the south extension of the hospital were built during that time. There was a real expansion of the total hospital facilities because of the circumstances we had prior to that. We needed beds. We needed services. There were a lot of different types of educational programs that we developed throughout the hospital during those 20 years. When you say responsibilities, you are the president of the hospital, its top person. You work with the board of Trustees and with many departments. It was a very large hospital, so you have the responsibilities of administration: providing adequate staff, seeking excellent physicians and [other] employees. When I left, we had about 3,100 employees. [We had] any number of kinds of programs. During that time, I was very active at the state level of both the Ohio Hospital Association and the Catholic Hospital Association. Also, I was on the board of the Ohio Hospital [Association], and I was chairperson of both the Catholic Conference of Ohio Health Affairs and

also chairman of the Board for Ohio Hospital Association during that time. Then, I was on the board of the National Catholic Health Association in St. Louis. There are a variety of other types of things I did during that period of time. In 1978, I was elected to the Women's Hall of Fame in Columbus. I had that opportunity to represent the health field. I worked a lot with the board and physicians with the initiation of the medical school, in Rootstown. I was the chairperson of the hospital section of the committee that we developed for the various hospitals that belong to the original group. That was a very interesting time, the development of the medical school. It was three universities that came together to form the medical school: Youngstown State, Akron University, and Kent State University. Are there any particular things, during that time, you think I should mention? I don't know what may be of interest.

B: I have a couple things about Youngstown. When you arrived here, this city, what was it like?

K: I came at a time when it was the end of World War II. It was a very active city. The mills were going strong. The sky was lit up with the red reflection of the open hearth steel mills. There was a tremendous bustling atmosphere, as far as the type of community. The schools were bulging because a lot of people came here to work. The hospital was very busy. With the termination of the war, a lot of the doctors that had been away, came back. And so, their services started up again. New programs started up. Many of our residency programs were enlarged, and it was just a very, very active time. Polio was one of the diseases that was prevalent in the late 1940s, and it wasn't until the Salk vaccine came that it was arrested. We took polio patients that came to the hospital, both St. Elizabeth's and Youngstown Hospital Association, from a wide geographic area. It extended all the way down the section, almost as far as Stubenville then branched out to the West for many miles. Patients were sent to the two Youngstown Hospitals because we had the iron lungs, the medical facilities, and the physicians who were able to treat them. That was one of the things we were glad to see (the salk vaccine), because during certain years, we had a great, as high as 200-300 people who were afflicted at one time, throughout Youngstown and beyond. They would come not only from Youngstown City, but they would come from the surrounding areas. Interesting, Boardman was not very large at the time of the war, but it just seemed to mushroom right around [the] 1940s. The hospital, St. Elizabeth's, prospered and did very well during those years. So, that was one of the recollections I have of when I first came to Youngstown.

B: Physically, what did the city look like, like the downtown area, across to the North Side around St. E's [St. Elizabeth's]?

K: Well, the downtown was much busier than it is now. There were several department stores: McKelvey's, Strouss', Livingston's, just to name a few. The shopping was done in the downtown area. At that time, when I started at Youngstown State, they still had the remnants of quonset buildings that were put up during the war. As a matter of fact, I had a couple of classes in some of them. Then, they started a building program, right around that time, so Youngstown University was very close to the heart of the downtown part of the city. The bus service was good. You could get downtown easily, and that lasted, I would say, from 1945 to probably 1955. And then, malls started to develop, and the people moved out. But prior to that, the downtown area was the hub of activity. We still had the movie theaters downtown. It was during the 1960s that the Powers Auditorium was opened. It was a former theater. It was the Palace Theater. That was completely refurbished, a gorgeous place.

B: How about the area around St. E's? What was it like? Was it still primarily residential?

K: It was very much residential. When we did our first expansion in the late 1940s, a street was vacated in order for us to extend westward, where the west building now stands. That street was all residential, and any people that we had to displace, we found them a like or better residence. And it didn't have to be too far away, because there was all the residential areas around. Park Avenue had many homes on it. Today, there are very few on it. North Avenue still had homes. There were neighborhood stores. In fact, there were two neighborhood stores that were very close to the hospital, diagonally across from it. Our emergency [entrance] has been in different places, but when the emergency [entrance] was off of Park Avenue, there was a little store that was right across the street from it.

The [housing] projects were rather new. I don't know what year they were built, but Chester Amedia was very active in the management of the projects. It was not an area that you would be hesitant to go down and walk through. There were still houses on Belmont Avenue. Two houses were next to the hospital, to the north. There was an apartment, going still further north, but there was a beautiful home on the corner, Parmalee and Belmont. Those were all private homes. Now, they're all buildings that have been converted into other uses.

Across the street from the hospital, going south on Belmont Avenue, there were neighborhood homes. You can see the remnants of some of the homes still. They were very well kept up. It wasn't until about the late 1950s that the homes were not kept up well. The houses started to deteriorate, but I would say that, around the nursing school, there were very nice neighborhood homes. A lot of people would keep up their property, and it was a typical neighborhood. The North Side was developed, and it was a very nice place to live. If you'd walk or ride down any of those streets, you can see many of those houses. Fifth Avenue had gorgeous homes. It began to have some buildings put up there, but they never detracted from the area. There was a doctor's office put up, and the library was put up on Fifth Avenue, but it was in the decor that matched the surrounding homes in the areas. It was recognized [that] they wanted to keep that in a very nice setting. Wick Park was always kept up very well. I think that preserved that section of that neighborhood for many years. If you go west on Park Avenue, across from Wick Park, there was the Renner home that was beautiful. I know there's still some very large homes on Park Avenue. Subsequently, they were taken over by fraternities from Youngstown State, but at that time in the 1940s and 1950s, it was a very nice section.

B: You mentioned the Westlake Terrace Projects. Were the residents predominately African-Americans, or was there a mix?

K: As I recall, they were predominately African-Americans, although there was a significant number of whites. We got a lot of patients from that area. Covington School is there. I think that's known as Martin Luther King, now.

B: Right. That's across from the expressway there. If you could, describe for me the religious order you belong to [and] how it's changed over the last. . . ?

K: I belong to a religious community that's known as the Sisters of the Humility of Mary. Originally, it came from France. We were part of the Cleveland Diocese. It was a Cleveland diocesan priest who went to France and asked for women who would teach immigrants. That was how we came to this country in 1864. We located right over the border from the Pennsylvania line, right outside of the Youngstown area. When the sisters arrived, the property that they expected to get in the Cleveland area was not available to them, as it was too expensive. The present site was property that had belonged to the bishop of Pittsburgh. He offered that, if the sisters would buy the house that it was located

on, they could have the property in Western Pennsylvania one mile from the Ohio line. That was why we came to this area. Our sisters primarily were in education, teaching. The parish schools always had some sisters teaching in them. They also taught in secondary schools. St. Elizabeth's was a major ministry of the sisters. It opened in 1911. We were asked in 1909, by the people of the Youngstown area, to consider staffing a Catholic hospital. Interested Catholic people wanted to bring one to the Youngstown area, so St. Elizabeth Hospital was opened in 1911. Through the years, we've always had sisters who have been either in administration or they have been part of St. Elizabeth's Hospital staff in the Youngstown area. We were in education in parishes at St. Edward's and St. Brenden's, some of the schools in the area. We had a high school, Villa Maria High School, on our mother house grounds at Villa Maria, PA. We also had sisters that worked in many other areas in the northeast part of Ohio as well as in the Cleveland area.

Starting in about the mid 1960s, a variety of types of work was opened for the sisters. As early as the 1930s, our sisters sent a group to an sisters to teach in an Indian reservation, in South Dakota. They stayed there for about 10 years. Then in the 1960s, we sent a group of sisters to Chile as a mission, and they were there for about 10 years. We still have some sisters in El Salvador. Two sisters are there, now. The kinds of work--education, health and social services--that the sisters have gotten into since the late 1960s are so varied. For example, we are still in education, but a variety of forms of education. We have what we call a program, Center for Learning, where we publish books that are written by teachers for their work in the classrooms. It's a form of education, but we also have other types that they've branched out, working in colleges and adult education in different places. We've had a sister for many years, who had worked at Youngstown State University [and] a lot of parish type works. That is an extension of education, but it's working more with adults in parishes. Also, that stems out of their educational background, and there are many sisters who are now doing that kind of work. We also, at the mother house, have opened a retreat center, so people come from all over. People of all faiths can come there. If they want a day of recollection, or a week at a time, they are welcome. We have had summer camps for underprivileged children there. Also at the Villa, we built an apartment for elderly men and women. The nursing sisters have developed many other types of health care. It isn't just strictly nursing. The sisters are in speech and hearing therapy and home

visiting. They're in social work and a lot of different types of work. It's really an exciting time for us, because there's a variety of things that the sisters are doing.

The sisters in our community always wore a traditional habit, as we called our garb or dress, until 1967, when there was a choice. Some chose to stay in the traditional habit. There was an opportunity to wear contemporary clothes if a sister chose to do so. That was because there had been changes throughout the total Catholic church, as far as looking at that type of thing, following the Vatican council that was held in Rome in the early 1960s.

Some of the regulations or the structure of the community were changed. There was much more activity outside the convent. The government of the sisters wasn't centered in a tightly held group at the top. In addition, the sisters had an opportunity to choose the type of work that they wanted. It wasn't done on an assignment basis. The sisters have discussed with the organization the kind of work they would like to do. So, there's been changes in the government structure in that respect. You don't have somebody telling you what to do, but you work with them in choosing your work.

There's still a dedication and the willingness to be of service to others. That's the whole purpose of our life. The way in which it's done may have changed, but not the basic intent or why women decide to enter a community. I think those would be major changes that have taken place. The basics of dedication are still exactly the same.

We take three vows. One is a vow of poverty, and that doesn't mean that we live in destitution, but rather any funds that we have, we do not dispose of them on our own. We work in conjunction with the religious organization. For instance, if we earn a salary, the salary is for the total group of sisters. It's not for us as individuals. We are all single women. We do not marry, so that has not changed. We take the vow of chastity. We live in a chaste, celibate life. We also take a vow of obedience. Obedience doesn't mean that someone is telling you what to do, but you're willing to stay with a group and see how, together, we can work things out. So, the basics of our religion have not changed. The manner in which we carry it out might be manifested differently in the contemporary world that we live in. When I first came into religious life, you didn't go out alone unless it was an emergency. You had some other sister go with you. But, in the late 1940s, it was not possible, because time was precious and you couldn't take another person just to go as a

partner. When I started at Youngstown State, shortly after I arrived in Youngstown, I never had to have a partner. Probably 10 years prior to that, you would have had to do so. Those are some of the changes that have taken place.

I think there's more opportunity for us to not feel in any way inhibited to go into the homes of people and help people. Ordinarily, we don't go into the homes to be there only on a social basis, but rather visit homes where we can be of assistance to them. In the early foundation of the community, the sisters went into the homes to take care of the sick. That was sort of how the experience enabled our hospital work to come into existence. Well, now there are sisters who do do home health visiting. Those are changes that came about in our religious way of life.

B: How about the religious background of Youngstown? What was the religious atmosphere in Youngstown?

K: Well, I think, Youngstown was made up of a varied ethnic group of people. There were many people from Europe who settled here. I wouldn't say it was predominantly Roman Catholic. A lot of them were Orthodox Catholic. For example, the people that would come to work in the mills would be Slovak, Italian, and many of them would be Roman Catholic. But, then there would be groups from Europe also, who would be of Orthodox Rites. Youngstown always had a significant number of Jewish people that were very active in the Youngstown area. Many of our doctors at St. Elizabeth's were Jewish doctors. I think it had what I would call an ecumenical flavor, because I don't know whether there was any one particular religion that predominated. I think probably 50 percent of our patients might be Catholic, and 40 percent might be from various Protestant denominations; and you always had Jewish patients. We had a lot of Jewish doctors, some of our best doctors. It's only within the last couple years that we've had Asian patients. We did have the Philippine doctors come in. I would say they came in about the early 1960s. They came here for the residency programs in medicine, and some families settled here. Then, the Indian doctors, they too settled here. I think now there's a bigger proportion of Indian population in Youngstown, but it started with the professional group. Asians of other countries came in the 1960s or 1970s. So, I would say it started with the ethnic population, and it began with the Irish, Germans, and Italians. They settled, and there usually was a native priest that would come with them and start their parish. And, other denominations started out the same. One of the things that has always been, which I think is a healthy mix, is to have people from different religions in

Youngstown. It's never been a problem. In some areas, now like Campbell, the numbers of different kinds would be limited to two or three. But, Youngstown itself was a big mixture of different kinds of people from different places, and they brought with them their religion. They pretty much kept to their own ethnic group.

B: Okay. Do you recall the first time you had the opportunity to meet Rabbi Berkowitz?

K: No. I couldn't say I remember the first time, but I knew him well in the 1960s. He was a frequent visitor to St. Elizabeth's, in probably the 1950s and 1960s. I was on many local committees, working for the betterment of the community in a variety of ways, and he always seemed to be on some of those committees. That's how I got to know him. He was also at Rodef Sholom for many years, and whenever St. Elizabeth's had any kind of event, whether it was a ground breaking or whatever, he was always one of the rabbis that would be invited, because he seemed to be closer to us in the varieties of things that we did. During the 1960s, he was one of the first--and I don't know the exact title, but it was Brotherhood Week or Brotherhood Time. He would invite us to the temple. We were still wearing long habits and all. He invited a group of sisters to the temple for their service, in which he would point out that he had invited us and welcomed us. On one or two occasions, he would have me stand up there with him in the temple to welcome the people. At the time of a circumcision of a male baby, we provided a room for the rabbi to perform the ceremony. He always appreciated and would remark that we made arrangements for the rabbi to come. It would not only be himself. It would be rabbis from the other synagogues, too. He also would comment that we provided kosher meals at the hospital for people that would want to observe the kosher laws when they were patients. He appreciated that, and he always went out of his way to let us know he did.

I was on more than one committee with him in the city. He would be a vital part of civic activities.

B: Do you remember what the names of these committees were?

K: One of the ones was the Mayor's Human Relations. Rabbi Berkowitz was on that. He was active in Red Cross. He was also active in what we called Community Chest, which would be the forerunner of the United Way. We used to have meetings with that, and he was active in that. In the Red Cross, he would go to the meetings.

I remember the Red Cross [and] the Mayor's Human Relations Committee. Whenever there was a community endeavor, he was always the prime mover in getting things going. But, those would be the main kinds of things, anything that would be connected with the city. I think he was one of the men that was looked up to in getting things done. If there was something that was being considered, whether it was a particular problem they were looking into, they would include him on that committee. Youngstown looked to him for his advice, expertise. He was probably one of the best accepted people. He was able to get along well with any number of types of people. I think the demonstration of his inviting us to the Brotherhood service in the temple was an example of that. Several of [the] people that were on St. Elizabeth's board at the time, belonged to his temple. It was another way that we had contact with him. I think he was on Rotary, although women weren't on Rotary at the time, so I did not attend. But, I know he would always be ready to respond to invitations to serve. When Youngstown had any kind of an activity, like when they started the Canfield Fair and things like that, he would be instrumental in making sure that it went well. If there was a drive for the benefit of the boy scouts or anything like that, when they were trying to develop Stambaugh, camps for boys, Dr. Berkowitz was instrumental in its success. He motivated people to want to be of help. He explained to me one time that his church was a congregational type activity and that was the way that he felt he was expected to let the people see [it]. If he was going to be their rabbi, he was going to work with them, because it was the congregation that backed him up on these things. Of all of the people I have known, he was one of the best loved and known.

B: I have a couple of physical questions to ask you. What did he look like physically?

K: He was, I would say, about 5 foot 6-7 [inches]. He, by nature, was stocky. He was not heavy set, but he was a stocky built man. He walked with a purpose. He did not give any indication of pride (he was not arrogant in his stance), but I would say he had a purposeful walk. Very kindly in his appearance. He would radiate his welcome. He was not standoffish, although he was a very learned man; [he] could relate to people of all types, as I remember him. I would just categorize him as a good man. He was a very good friend of Bishop Malone. Bishop Malone thought very highly of him. I think they had a lot in common, intellectually, because both were learned persons. Dr. Berkowitz kept himself abreast of the times, but never gave the impression of arrogance or that he was too busy to talk to the ordinary folk.

- B: How about the temple Rodef Sholom? What does it look like being non-Jewish? What strikes you about it?
- K: As I remember it--it's been years since I've been in it--it was on Fifth Avenue at the time. I think it's still there. I'm not sure. But, the exterior had many of the Hebrew symbols. While it was built close to the sidewalk, it was always kept in very good order. It has never looked run down or, even when the area was not as well kept up. I always remembered, the temple was in an area that, whatever greenery was at hand, it was kept in good condition. When you went into the [temple], it had comfortable seats. They were not pews, as we have in our church. There were comfortable seats. It was arranged so that, wherever you sat, you would see the center, which would be similar to the sanctuary. They would bring in the rolls of the Torah. For one particular [service] that I went in, no matter where you would sit, the view of the center was not obstructed in any way. It was almost in a semicircle. I don't remember whether their chairs were elevated, you know, as you go up, but my recollection of it was that no matter where you sat, you would have an easy view of what was going on. It was plain, but not austere. It didn't have a lot of internal furnishings, but all that it had was in very good taste. It seemed to me that red was the color that was used. Going to services in the temple was very limited for me, but that would be my recollection of it.
- B: A lot of people mentioned Dr. Berkowitz's ability to give a great oration, [that] he had a great speaking style. What made his great speaking style unique to you?
- K: I think you knew he was a learned man and that he was a well read person because he could take his text and make it meaningful. He didn't give a prepared presentation that often, in places that I did hear him. He had a mastery of the English language. His choice of words were very accurate. He had the right word for trying to say what he wanted to say. He did not have any hesitancy in speaking. He spoke clearly. My impression is that, being a well read person, he invited you to be part of his appreciation of what he was talking about. He didn't talk down to people. In anything that I've heard him give, he enabled you and I to enjoy the particular information that he was sharing. I think that's a real gift.
- B: How would you describe his role within the Youngstown community?

K: I think he was one of the leaders of the Youngstown community. I think that would be accurate. I didn't know him in a social way. I would know about him probably more than I would know him on a personal level. Any time that there was anything at all, whether it was a community endeavor, whether it was a gathering of leaders of the community, like a drive or campaign for any type of thing, he would be among the leaders of the community. I regarded him as a major figure in Youngstown. He assumed a major leadership role in the community, and carried it off very well. He was looked at with great respect. He seemed not to alienate people. I don't know of instances where he would engage in any controversy that would alienate people. He was dedicated to his own people, his own temple. While we called him Dr. Berkowitz, he never lost sight of the fact that he was a religious person. He dressed in businessmen type suits and all, but he had the aura of a well respected business person; and at the same time, you didn't lose sight that he was a God-fearing man. That's my impression of him.

B: Was there anything we haven't touched that you think we need to add?

K: Well, I would just say that when he died, it was a great loss to the community. He was kind, understanding, and I thought, a gentlemen. Again, I would say I did not know him in a social way, nor did I have any occasion to, but our paths crossed so many times. He was never a person that would pass you by. He seemed to have a magnificent recall of names. He was able to retain a great many. I've seen him in situations where he seemed to know people who came from many walks of life. As far as anything I knew about him, I knew him in a business way or because of my work at the hospital. My involvement at the hospital brought me into a lot of civic things, and that's where I had encounters with him, not that I would know him other than that. But, I appreciated having known him.

B: Okay. Well, thank you very much.

K: You're welcome.

END OF INTERVIEW