

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Youngstown Area Jewish Project

Personal Experience

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MORRIS SLAVIN

Interviewed

by

Irving Ozer

on

June 16, 1987

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INTERVIEWEE: MORRIS SLAVIN

INTERVIEWER: Irving Ozer

SUBJECT: Arbeiter Ring, Verband, the circle, personal history

DATE: June 16, 1987

O: This is an interview with Morris Slavin for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, on Jewish Senior Citizens, by Irving Ozer, at 261 Outlook Avenue, on June 16, 1987.

We are going to approach it from two angles. First of all the biographical sketch of his life and then some of his recollections in connection with the Verband and the circle, and so on. Morris are you a native of Youngstown?

S: Let me begin by saying that these are going to be more in the nature of reminiscences than they are really in the kind of formal autobiographical sketch.

O: Right.

S: So anybody who tries to record this must understand that there will be snatches, and of course gaps as a result of this.

O: They are used to it.

S: So let me begin by saying that I was born in the city of Kiev, in the old Russian empire in 1913. It was still Russia of course, before it became the USSR in 1917. My family were quite well-to-do. My father owned a lumber yard. He in turn had inherited this from his father, who was an owner of forests and so on. He became a dentist by apprenticeship. Like reading

law in the days of Abraham Lincoln, you never had a degree. Except he did do this by studying and practicing under a dentist. Then he went, after I guess he married my mother, to Berlin and studied at the famous Polly-Technic Institute of Berlin.

Now my mother was a dentist by profession. She was a graduate of University of Odessa. After getting her degree, and incidentally she came from an orthodox home, but like so many of the Russian intelligentsia she knew French. She knew it well enough so that she could give lessons in it. The result was that she was able to give lessons and earn her living this way, and was able to finish her degree in dentistry. Then after that she went, some time later, to Berlin and studied for one year at this Polly-Technic Institute of Berlin.

So I remember, of course, during the outbreak of the Russian Revolution where by father and mother opened a dental office. Because, of course, there everyone who had any property, had his property confiscated. So that they earned a living by being dentists. One of the things that enabled them to survive during the famine, shortly following the revolution, was the fact that they were dentists for the Red Army, among other things.

Well anyhow, the point is that my father who had the traditional Hebrew education; he was quite a student of the Thalmud. At one time, without boasting, he told me that he could. . . His rabbi would put his finger on a certain paragraph, say on page seven, and say, "What is the paragraph on page fifteen?" He could recite the thing from memory.

My mother, I know, participated as a member of the Bund. Both my father and my mother were members of the Jewish Socialists Bund. She participated in the revolution of 1905. Just what she did I don't know, but in 1905 she was in Odessa as a coed, a student. Odessa, as most people know, was one of the centers of the revolution of 1905. There was a mutiny in the Black Sea fleet, and so on.

O: Can I interrupt you a minute?

S: Yes, sure.

O: For those who don't know, who might be reading this sometime in the future, what was the Bund?

S: The Bund was the Socialist Party of the Jewish workers, and middle classes, of course, as well as intelligentsia. In fact, their Socialist Party preceded the official Social Democratic Party of Russia. There were

many Jews, of course, that belonged to the Russian Social Democracy, which included all intellectuals and workers. This was, more or less, a Russian Jewish organization that was very active in the so-called Russian pale, where the Jewish population was concentrated, in what is now Poland, White Russia, Ukraine, and so on.

O: Thank you.

S: The point is that my father, of course, disagreed with the Bolsheviks. In fact he was violently opposed to the Jewish section of the Communist Party once the Bolsheviks seized power, of trying to eradicate the religious background of the Jewish population. They were, of course, officially atheist. But more than that there was an emphasis on secular studies. Or perhaps you would say a de-emphasis of Hebrew. So this is one of the reasons why my father decided, and my mother. . . Both of them decided they had to leave Russia. So 1923 we left and came to Youngstown, Ohio.

The reason we came to Youngstown is because my mother's two sisters were here. One was here in Youngstown, the other was in Warren.

O: Who were they?

S: The Hansburg Furniture Store that everyone perhaps who knows the old Youngstown remembers. These were two of the sons of the older sister. She was married to Bolotin. Bolotin was also an owner of a furniture store. It was her second marriage. My mother's maiden name was Hansburg. My aunt, who lived in Warren, her name was Jurow. Again her husband was also in the furniture business.

So the point is that we came here . . . I was age ten when we came to Youngstown in 1923. Shortly thereafter I was enrolled, by my father, in the Hebrew School. That Hebrew School, as I remember, was still. . . I think for a time it met in the Temple Emmanuel, I believe. Then it met in Wood Street School. Frankly, I didn't particularly care for the Hebrew School. I didn't like the curriculum, and partly perhaps, I was too secularly minded.

My folks were not traditionalists in their observances. They observed the holidays and we went to the synagogue, but they were more secularist, I would say, than they were religious. That is they were Yiddishists. They were strongly Yiddishists in the sense that they accepted Yiddish as a language, as a literature.

O: As a culture?

S: The culture, of course, and the ideals of Yiddish guide and so on. So after being a bad boy in the Hebrew School for some years, my father finally realized that I really disliked it immensely, and I was transferred then to the Workman's Circle School, on Walnut Street. Which at that time was on the corner of Rayen and Walnut Street, north Walnut Street. It was a fairly small building. There was a hall, and there was a kitchen as I recall. All the learning that went on was in Yiddish. The history of the Jewish people was in Yiddish, the literature was Yiddish. We read Bialik and others. We wrote Yiddish and we heard lectures in Yiddish.

So one of the unfortunate things that happened to me personally was that in the acquisition of Yiddish as my language at home, both my father and my mother neglected to keep up my knowledge of Russian. Which at one time I knew very well. I read Tolstoy in the original, and I memorized some of the poetry of Pushkin. Then shortly thereafter it became simply a foreign language, a foreign tongue. Once in a while I still try to read it, but though I can read and I can pronounce the Russian language, it's a foreign tongue to me now because I haven't heard it for so many, many years. So, in other words, the language at home was Yiddish. I could have been trilingual, but it didn't work out that way.

O: How big a movement was the Socialists?

S: That is you mean the Arbeiter Ring?

O: The Arbeiter Ring?

S: Practically all the large towns in the 1920's and early 1930's still had Arbeiter Ring schools. I know that Cleveland had a rather large school, or several schools. I don't remember how many students we had, but we must have had about 100 children from the earliest ages right on through.

O: Who were some of the families that were involved?

S: Well, this is difficult to remember, but I am sure that those that know the old Jewish families in Youngstown would remember some of them that come from the eastern part of Europe. Sarwitz was one, his whole family attended. There was a Charles Strouss whose girls and one boy attended. There were the Rudiks. There was Stern, who had a gas station. I believe it was on Walnut Street.

O: Adolf?

S: Who?

O: Adolf Stern.

S: His name was. . . I don't know. I remember he had a son my age whose name was Hymen, and his daughter is now Kahotas, right?

O: Ray Kahotas.

S: Yes, Ray Kahotas. She was a descendant of Stern's.

O: Did someone in his family get into radio or publishing?

S: Whose family?

O: Stern's.

S: That I don't know. I remember also there was a Mr. Camens. His son Sam Camens was active as one of the staff members of the steel workers union. Mr. Camens was active in this movement. There was a fellow by the name of Barron, who was the leader. Whom I did not really know but he was one of the leaders of this Arbeiter Ring (workman's circle). These were the people that I remember, there were many others of course. Block I think was one of the people who . . .

O: Sukolic?

S: Right the Sukolics were active in this.

O: Being a member of the Bund didn't necessarily mean they weren't religious Jews, right?

S: Not necessarily. Some of them attended, like my father for example who certainly kept the holidays. We went to Temple, on Yom Kippur, and Rosh Hashana, and of course we kept Passover at home. I stayed out of school, which is of course a wonderful excuse, on the Jewish holidays. At the same time the orientation was humanistic and secular, I would say. When I say socialist it is in a broad sense socialistic, idealistic perhaps more than anything else. We were not really active in any kind of a socialist movement as far as I know.

There was one fellow I remember, Finesilver, at one time he was a supporter of the Socialist Party. He was active in the circle. But as I say they weren't active politically.

O: They brought speakers in, didn't they?

S: They brought in speakers, yes, and they subscribed to various journals which had a philosophically speaking socialist outlook. My father did not subscribe to the Forward which was, of course, the newspaper that was subscribed to by most people who were members of the Arbeiter Ring. He subscribed to The Day, Der Tog which he felt was more objective and non-party. He didn't want to align himself politically.

O: What kind of activity did they have, community wide activity? What kind of speakers did they bring in?

S: Well, I remember as a teenager hearing Haim Greenburg, the famous philosopher from Israel. Who spoke in Yiddish, and spoke of all things, on Spinoza. Yet I had no difficulty in following him and understanding him. Evidently my Yiddish must have been fairly good at that time. It is a little raw now.

Then, later, I heard a person by the name of Rudolf Rocker, who was a German by ancestry, and who edited the Yiddish Anarchist Paper in London at the turn of the century called the Arbeiter Ring, a Workman's Friend. I heard him give several lectures. One was on literature. "Six characters of World Literature" was his famous one, and he wrote a book which is translated into English. I read that some time ago, an excellent book. Then, during the Spanish Civil War, he came here and spoke on the situation, the political situation, of Spain. Later on, incidentally, I met his son in London many years later.

Then the circle would bring actors from New York. Quite often not a troop, but maybe one or two individuals, who would perform in various halls. One time I remember I was drafted to appear on the stage, to help in a skit by one of these actors. Then I remember having heard Haim Grade, a famous Yiddish novelist. Many of his works have been translated. He stayed at our home. I heard him several times. So these people you see were those who were active in literature, and drama, and politics, and philosophy, and so on.

O: Was there any kind of Yiddish dramatic group?

S: No, but I think I remember that a number of my fellow students sang Yiddish songs. There were picnics, and songs.

O: Where would these picnics be held?

S: I think there was a farm.

O: Nienmarks?

- S: I think it was Nienmark's farm. . . I know there were picnics, and we had a good bit of singing.
- O: Were these picnics in an effort just to recruit?
- S: No, no. They were social affairs, that's all. Really social affairs and recreational affairs. No active recruitment was needed and was attempted. Because those with the Yiddish background from eastern Europe tended to gravitate towards this, unless they were religiously orientated.
- O: So, it was actually an expression of Jewish liberalism.
- S: Yes, well yes. The old Jewish socialist idealism and secularism I would say. I think mostly it was an expression of Yiddish kind. Rather than the attempt to learn Hebrew, it was an attempt to perpetuate the Yiddish language.
- O: By and large in a general sense, how did the members of the circle regard Palestinian aspirations in the Jewish homeland there?
- S: Well, I think most of them were most sympathetic to it, quite sympathetic. Some perhaps were active. I mean I don't think they found any contradiction between the necessity to build a Jewish homeland. My father, for example, always pointed out that one of the reasons why the Jews were so powerless was because they didn't have a homeland. He was in favor, of course, of what became the future Israel. He did live to see the establishment of Israel.
- O: How did those who lived until that time view the decision to go to Hebrew instead of Yiddish?
- S: I know that my father was opposed to this. He felt that this was not only an error, but perhaps worse than that. Almost a crime that Yiddish was not adopted as a language of Israel.
- O: But they looked at it from the standpoint of Yiddishists rather than the feeling that Hebrew was a sacrosanct.
- S: Oh no, no. They never thought it was to be a sacrosanct language at all. It was just the fact that this was. . . You know, the vast literature had grown up. That this language was a very rich language. They always denied this idea that somehow the language was a jargon, a jargon of others. I mean all the languages after all are a conglomerate of many other languages. This is sort of what Yiddish is. Of course, basically,

as we know it is a German language.

O: Were there any hard feelings between the Yiddishists and the classical Zionists?

S: I don't think so. I feel they simply went their different ways. I was much too young to have been aware of these differences if they existed.

O: Now backing up, where was your first home again?

S: On Arlington Street. We lived on Arlington Street with a family by the name of Kaufman.

O: Were there many Jews in that area of town?

S: I don't know. I don't think so.

O: That is relatively close to the cathedral and all that. Did you experience any anti-Semitism?

S: Not actively. I don't recall this at all.

O: In other words as a child you never felt any . . .

S: Oh, yes I felt that. I mean when we lived in Oak Park. Walnut Street, of course, was then called Oak Park. There were some acts of anti-Semitism.

O: What form did it take?

S: When we played baseball or football there would be a kind of a rivalry, but also there would be underneath there would be some of this antagonism.

O: Physically were you ever . . .

S: Not really. I don't think that I ever encountered any kind of physical attack at this part. I did encounter it. Even at Rayen High School, at one point encountered it.

O: Was it overt?

S: Yes, it was overt. Sure.

O: Did you ever have the feeling that maybe you were a second-class citizen?

S: No, that I never did. As a matter of fact, I remember wrapping my high school books in the Yiddish paper. Just to spite any anti-Semitism that might have existed there.

O: So, where did you first go to school?

S: Well, I first went to school to Elm Street, the old Elm Street School. That is where I started in third, or fourth grade after I learned English.

O: How did you learn English?

S: Well, it comes automatically. Kids pick it up almost by osmosis. It didn't take very long.

O: At that time Elm Street was a rather gentile kind of population. It was a hard . . .

S: I didn't notice that. I noted the teachers were very helpful. I had friends among the students. The usual conflicts. Later on I went to Madison School and I had, you know, a fairly good experience.

O: Madison was more of a wealthy club wasn't it?

S: Yes, I think so.

O: Did they have a steamer class there when you went?

S: Steamer?

O: The immigrants, Chinese?

S: No. No, I was enrolled in a regular classroom and learned.

O: Did the Froomkin's have a store across the street? They had a small grocery store and sell candy.

S: Where?

O: On Madison, right across the street from the school.

S: This is not Madison Avenue remember. Madison School was on McGuffey wasn't it?

O: Well, they call it McGuffey.

S: I guess it was called Madison in those days. Maybe you are right.

O: Well, this is your story, not mine.

S: No, that's all right. I just don't remember. I am sure I had my share of ice cream and chewing gum.

O: When did you graduate from Rayen?

S: Well, I went to Rayen . . . For my junior high years I went to East High. Because see what happened was first we started going to Central Junior High. Which is now

the board of education building. It was the old Rayen right then. Then we transferred to East High, when East High was built. Then for my high school years, that was from nine through the twelfth, I went to Rayen High School.

O: You were living where then?

S: I was living in Oak Park then. I must say that I appreciate Rayen High School. It gave me a wonderful foundation for my college work later on.

O: When did you say you graduated?

S: I graduated in 1933. We were still graduating then in the middle of the year. So I graduated in January of 1933. Then, of course, it was in the depth of the Depression. So, I was going part time to Youngstown College in the evening and I was working at the City Street Department. We did all kind of things. I was laboring in the City Street Department, cleaning streets.

O: Jones Hall was in existence at that time?

S: What is now Jones Hall was in existence at that time.

O: Go back to where you were.

S: Well, what happened was I got a job finally, after some time, working in the City Street Department. We worked two weeks on, two weeks off.

O: How old were you?

S: Well, I graduated from Rayen about. . . I was about eighteen I guess. I was about nineteen. . . So I worked for about three years and then finally saved a few hundred dollars and was able to. . . I received full credit for freshman year, and then went as a sophomore then to Ohio State, 1935. I majored in history, and English and graduated in 1938.

O: I presume you were independent?

S: Independent in the sense that I had some money, but the NYA (National Youth Administration) came in. So I was able to work, and earn a little bit of money. And of course my folks . . .

O: What were some of the places you worked in?

S: Well, I worked at first in the Ohio State Museum on several projects. Then when I did some work on my master's, I worked for one of the professors. I did

start my master's there, and came back. Then it took about three years to get a teaching job. It was very difficult to get jobs then. On top of that there was still some discrimination. Quite a bit of discrimination, I guess, against Jewish young people in the rural areas where many of the more non-Jewish graduates could get their years of experience. So since I didn't have that it was very difficult to get into the Youngstown schools.

O: How did it manifest itself? Just wouldn't take your application?

S: They wanted people to teach in their Sunday schools and so on. Between the time that I graduated from Ohio State and the time that I got a job at Wilson High School, I worked in several steel mills. I worked for the Youngstown Steel Company in Niles, and then I worked with the GF in Youngstown. I worked for a while in Kline's Department Store. I worked in a shoe store. All kinds of things of that sort. Nothing steady, of course.

Finally in 1941. . . What happened was I was called to substitute for a couple of weeks. The principal liked me and was impressed with my teaching, and then asked for me again. Then when a position opened up, one of the teachers got married, I was asked to come in the middle of the year.

O: Did it psyche you up a little bit?

S: Yes, sure.

O: You spoke of majoring in English Literature and history. What threw you from one to the other, what made you finally decide on history?

S: Well, of course I always liked history and I took more history classes than English Literature. Since I had to have two majors. . . I think there was a question there of getting one major and two minors. I decided it would be easier to simply have taken . . . I always liked literature. Did a lot of reading and novels, and poetry, and so on. I had some very good years.

O: Did you ever consider at any time going in to literature?

S: No. I did consider at one time going into journalism, but I was disabused very quickly. Realized it was not a question of writing, but it was a question of being aggressive and being thick skinned. I found out this was not for me. So anyhow the point is that I worked on and off for at least three years. Finally I was

given a position at Wilson High School for the magnificent sum of \$1,150 a year. Which even then was very, very meager.

Well, by 1942, of course, I was in the Army. So after about a year and a half at Wilson High School I left for the Army. I stayed in the Army until about. . .

O: What branch?

S: I was in field artillery, but I never got overseas. After being discharged from the Army I came back to Wilson High School. Youngstown College then became a Youngstown University and I met the chairman of the history department. His name was Dr. Clarence Gould and he asked me if I wanted to teach part time. Of course I did. That is when I really learned history. I taught American History from 1948 to 1961. I was teaching at that time at Wilson High School. That was my daytime job. In the evening twice a week I taught American History at the college. I had large classes because the veterans had come back and enrolled.

O: What year was this?

S: This was from 1948. The same time I went on to get my master's at the University of Pittsburgh. Which I completed in 1952 by going in summer, summers only. I wrote the dissertation on the Paris Commune of 1790 through 1794. By that time I was pretty sure that I was interested in French history, especially in the French Revolution. After that I transferred to Western Reserve University and began to work on my PhD. I learned by then that there was a very fine library at Western Reserve University in Cleveland, where they have many primary sources, and many secondary sources of the French Revolution. So then I took my time, unfortunately perhaps I took too much time, but one of the problems was that they were paying so little on the college level. So, when I finished my PhD, which was in 1961, then I left the high school and went full time at Youngstown State University. Well, Youngstown University first, I should say.

Then I was asked to go to State University of New York at Stonybrook for a year as a visiting professor. Which I did 1966-1967. I was offered a job at Iowa State and Youngstown University by then became Youngstown State University. For the first time they were able to meet my financial requests. Because I was working every summer and I felt this was at the expense of my scholarship.

For the first time I was able to go abroad then in 1970. Well, I was able to do research in the archives.

Yes, in the French National Archives, and in the National Library that holds various great depositories of documents and primary sources in Paris. I went back in the summer of 1971 and then I got a leave of absence, a sabbatical, for a quarter in the winter of 1971-1972 and then went back again in the summer of 1972 and finished my research.

As a result of that I was able to, some time later, publish a book. It was published by Princeton University Press, called the French Revolution in Miniature and then shortly after that, of course, I had retired. I retired in 1981 after twenty years of teaching full time. I taught for thirty-three years at Youngstown College, Youngstown University, and Youngstown State University. At twenty years full time. After that I had enough time so that I could publish. The result was that in 1981 I published, together with a colleague of mine, a festschrift honoring a professor under whom we had studied at Western Reserve. It was published by a Canadian university press called the Wilfrid Laurier University Press. It was called Bourgeois, Sans-Culottes, and other Frenchman and then in a few years later my Princeton book came out in 1984 called The French Revolution in Miniature 1789-1795. It was a study of one of the sections of Paris where I lived one summer incidentally. Then shortly after that in November of 1986 Harvard published my third book called The Making of an Insurrection: Parisian Sections and the Gironde. I was published in a number of journals before that, various historical journals; I reviewed books, etc.

O: The one you mentioned just now, the last one?

S: The last one. . . By Harvard you mean, or the one that came out since Harvard.

O: The one that came out since Harvard.

S: Since then we have had a number of conferences on the campus of Youngstown State University called the "History of Politics and Socialism". Socialism broadly considered, socialism and ethics, socialism, anarchism, syndicalism, all the rest of that. We have had scholars from our sister universities in Ohio, and as a result of that Humanities Press International published a book just a few weeks ago called The Crucible of Socialism. In which I have a rather long essay on Trotsky called "Leon Trotsky from Petrograd to Prinkipo."

O: And your latest?

S: Well, my latest is that I have been invited for two

terms to go to the famous Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton. I have this appointment from September 1987 to April 1988.

O: Is it a scholar business?

S: Yes, they have various categories and obvious research scholars, no teaching. The conferences would mostly be research and writing, which is what I hope to do.

O: You must feel pretty good about the culmination of your career.

S: Yes. That is, of course, very satisfactory. I feel that I have accomplished some things. I know some things . . . It is only two years away from celebrating the bicentennial of the French Revolution. I am planning to have a gathering, conference, seminar, and what have you here on our campus around that theme.

O: Going back into your personal life, where did you meet Sophie? Who was she?

S: I haven't the slightest idea. I think we met at Milton Dam, if I am not mistaken, where we had our two weeks vacation. I think I met Sophie there.

O: What was her maiden name?

S: Her maiden name was Lockshin.

O: Which Lockshin family was that?

S: Well, of course, there are so many Lockshin's. She is a first cousin to Morris Lockshin. Her family lived in Youngstown. She had an older brother in California, she had one in Cleveland, and two sisters here; Mrs. Briskin and Mrs. Lewis.

O: Which Lewis?

S: Here in Youngstown.

O: Which Lewis?

S: She has died since then.

O: If I can ask another personal question, who were some of the girls you dated as you were growing up?

S: I don't think that's worth discussing.

O: All right let me change that, where did you go when you went on dates? What kind of things did you do? What was there to do in Youngstown?

S: Well, I am not going to tell you everything. I mean the usual thing; we would go sometimes to a nightclub, sometimes we would go to a movie, sometimes to the park. I was friendly with a number of people my age and so we had sometimes joint dates. We played ball, of course a lot of ball. Everything from baseball to football to basketball and so on. I remember when there was no gym at all for us and we used the Salvation Army gym, where we played basketball until a gym was built at Anshe Emeth.

O: Did you ever play at Greenwood Auditorium?

S: No, we played at Anshe Emeth. Of course, I always felt that the young people today are so lucky to have Jewish community centers. Which we never had, but we managed.

O: How did you get from place to place then?

S: Oh, buses mostly. We had transportation then. I did a lot of walking. You know, a young person can run, walk, that was no problem.

O: But there weren't too many automobiles?

S: Well, some of my friends had. I never did, I never had it. They had automobiles. We somehow managed to get around.

O: Chipped in for gas and that sort of thing?

S: Yes. No big problem.

O: All right, in terms then of the Holocaust, when is your first recollection of the news trickling in about what was going on in Germany?

S: I remember when I was in the Army and I was subscribing to a newspaper by the name of P.M., which was a liberal, left-of-center paper. I remember the headline about 1,500,000 Jews being destroyed. That was one of the first times that I became aware of that.

O: Did you have the feeling that we did enough or that we did anything?

S: Very frankly, I was extremely critical of the Roosevelt administration. I felt that nothing was really being done. I wasn't anywhere near as aware, of course, of what was going on as I became later. But I was critical from that point of view. I remember sending back the refugees who were seeking asylum. There was some anti-Semitism in the Army, but very little. I didn't find very much of that. In fact, one of the most popular soldiers in our battery was a Jewish boy from

Chicago.

- O: Did the Jewish community take any action?
- S: Yes, I remember attending a protest meeting. I believe it was at Anshe Emeth. It might have been Rodef Sholem, when Rabbi Miller spoke. He was very active in Zionist appearance, he wrote an excellent book. The problem was that there was a great deal of anti-Semitism in America as well at that time. There was still a depression and the Jewish community simply wasn't what it is today. It wasn't militant enough. So it never really demonstrated, it never asserted itself.
- O: It wasn't unified.
- S: It wasn't unified.
- O: There was no agreement was there, actually on Zionism at that time?
- S: No, no. None whatsoever. Zionism or anything else for that matter. But of course the war and the Holocaust changed all that.
- O: This has certainly been enlightening. Knowing what the purpose of the archives are, is there anything that you would like to talk about?
- S: Well, I would like to mention the fact, of course, that my younger brother was also active with me. My younger sister attended the Arbeiter Ring longer than I did. In fact, her Yiddish is better than mine, much better, and she teaches it. My mother, I must mention this, published over twenty short stories in Yiddish and had published in the Morgan Journal. I have copies of all that. My folks were very Yiddish minded, Yiddishists.
- O: Did they try to stick to the literary Yiddish?
- S: Yes, literary Yiddish. We spoke at home in literary Yiddish, at least I tried to speak literary Yiddish. I certainly have no problem understanding it.
- O: Who were some of the people either in Youngstown or elsewhere who you feel had the greatest impact on you?
- S: I was fortunate in having some very fine teachers at Rayen High School, but that is to begin with.
- O: Who is that?
- S: Probably the best teacher I ever had was my teacher of German. Her name was Edna Richards. She had a post-graduate degree. I don't know how far . . . She was an

excellent instructor and a wonderful human being. I remember discussing literature with her. I had a Miss Wallace in history, Mr. Pickering in history. They were all very good. They demanded a lot and we gave. I had science, I had physics, I had biology, chemistry, I had math. I wasn't very good in math. I had English, and literature, and some very fine people in that. I remember having Miss Pond, Miss Moody, so there I have a great foundation.

I remember when I went to Ohio State, and during the final exams it was no problem because I had had final exams at Rayen. We used to take off something like three days and do nothing but take final exams for hours at a time. I remember, for example, when I had my exam in physics, we were responsible in June not only for what we had learned that semester, but way back in September. I think I must have memorized every formula in the book. That, I think, laid a good foundation. Then I had some fine professors at Ohio State, and at the University of Pittsburgh, and at Western Reserve as well.

I was always encouraged to do a lot of reading at home in addition to which, of course, I participated in sports. We had a very active life. We had a perfectly normal life in that respect, we loved sports and there was opportunity to play. Though I never made a team in high school. I think I weighed 135 pounds and went out for the freshman football team. The coach sort of looked at me, I wouldn't have made it anyhow. But we had what we called "sandlot ball", a lot of that. I have written a lot of literature, many novels. I was reading everything from the Jesse James stories to Sinclair Lewis and the Russian novelists Tolstoy and Dostoevski at the same time.

O: As far as anybody in public light in Youngstown?

S: No, I don't think so. In 1932 I remember the campaign. I was very much impressed by Norman Thomas, who was the candidate of the Socialist Party. I heard him speak at the Central Auditorium and he made quite an impression on me. So if any public figure had an influence, I would say Norman Thomas had a great influence on me as a young man.

O: Okay, a few words now about what has happened to Youngstown.

S: I have no more insight into this than anybody else. I did write a review, incidentally, of a book that was written by Staughton Lynd here of the fight against the closing of the steel mills. Like all Youngstowners, I am hoping that there will be a revival.

- O: Do you have any idea what form the revival will take?
- S: It's obvious what we need here. We have to have industry of some kind. Here we have a high technical college at the university, which is open to graduate people in high technology and where do they go? They go to California, they go to Boston, they go outside of Youngstown. Youngstown can't absorb them, so we need something. Where on the one hand, just as at one time we had such a fine engineering school. I think our engineering school at the university is still very good, but they could always find jobs here in Youngstown Sheet & Tube, Republic Steel, U.S. Steel, and so on. Now, you know, they have to go outside of Youngstown. So that is the problem, getting industry in here. It's a universal problem. That means, of course, that we have got to begin to put some money into research and into basic industries instead of spending \$300 billion a year on the Pentagon. I think this is one of the problems. We simply have got to come to an agreement with the Russkies if it is at all possible. I think it is possible now because I think Gorbachev realizes his need for building the economy. So I think we ought to take advantage of this and perhaps cut. . . At least do that. I mean surely that is nothing terribly radical, but if we cut say \$100 billion off the defense budget and put it into the education and health industry, building of roads, etc.
- O: What is your assessment of the education industry right now?
- S: As far as the local high schools are concerned, the quality of education?
- O: Yes.
- S: I think it has gone down. There is no question about that.
- O: Is it a threat to our future?
- S: Well, in the sense that you have in America a problem with illiteracy. We are way down on the list in terms of literacy. So many other nations are ahead of us. I would say on the basis of my own experience both in high school and Youngstown State University, we are not doing enough. I think we can demand more than we are.
- O: Who's fault is it that we have collapsed?
- S: I think it is the fault of society. I don't think there is enough emphasis in the home on education. People say that the tv has contributed to the decline of our educational standards. The outside pressures to

give higher grades. I was reading some time ago that the average grade is no longer, in some universities, a "C" but a "B". Which of course is ridiculous. We simply don't demand enough academically and intellectually. We are afraid to flunk people who aren't doing the work, pass them on. I had that experience in Wilson High School. In my day many, many students would have had to repeat the course, there was no such thing as passed on. That's partly it. I think it has to be some kind of a happy compromise between a European system where a tiny percentage go on to a higher education and the rest have to go to some kind of vocational school. In ours, we simply accept everybody. Perhaps there has to be some higher standard and I am sure that our students are no less capable than those of Europe or Japan or anywhere else. It is just a matter of raising our sights and reevaluating our cultural goals.

O: Well, Morris, I certainly appreciate this on behalf of the community, the archives committee, etc. I appreciate your contribution.

S: You're welcome.

END OF INTERVIEW