

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Youngstown Area Jewish Project

Personal Experience

O. H. 1125

REGINA KLINE

Interviewed

by

Irving E. Ozer

on

July 20, 1987

REGINA KLINE

I had three sisters and three brothers; two of my brothers, Max and Harry, were in the taxi-cab business. Yellow Cabs, with offices on West Commerce Street. They had a fleet of cabs. My oldest sister, Belle, was married to Ruby Cohen. They had two children. Howard and Martha; and my other sister, Laura, was married to Harry Krause. I also had a sister, Helen and a brother, Bert. They both worked downtown as clerk-salesmen in the different stores.

And then I had a cousin, Rose Bernstein. I don't know if she was born here or in Europe, but she was in Youngstown as a very young child. She had a son, Sam, who was born in 1878.

There was a Rice family in Youngstown- Louis Rice. He had five sisters. Their names were: Fanny, Emma, Sally, Mary, and Clara. Fanny married a fellow from Pittsburgh by the name of Hirsch. And the other ones were at home. Mary was an artist. The Rice family was in the country a long time. They were Reform Jews and belonged to Rodef Sholom. There was another Mr. Rice who belonged to the Children of Israel in the late 1800's. They were distantly related. None of the girls ever married. They used to collect antiques at home. They were very talented. Their father was a cabinet maker. They did needlepoint, embroidery and that sort of thing. I think they lived on Illinois Avenue. They came to Youngstown before my parents- in the late 1870's. That would mean they were here in the late 1860's. None of these people are alive now. But since they have nobody here now to speak for them, I thought I would mention them. My brother Bert

had one son, Henry, who moved to California. He worked at
Strauss' for a while.

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INTERVIEWEE: REGINA KLINE
INTERVIEWER: Irving E. Ozer
SUBJECT: Downtown Youngstown in the early 1900's, The
Depression
DATE: July 20, 1987

O: This is an interview with Regina Kline for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program on The Youngstown Area Jewish Project by Irving Ozer at 3002 Greenacres, on July 20, 1987.

Regina is going to recount some of her experiences and share some of her memories with us this morning. Regina, where were you born?

K: In Youngstown, Ohio.

O: You were born in Youngstown?

K: Yes.

O: How long ago?

K: August 28, 1893.

O: And that makes you how old now?

K: I'll be 98 years old on August 28 of this year.

O: Oh, wonderful. Tell me Regina, when did your parents come to Youngstown?

K: Well, I figure they must have come here in the late

1870's because my father's citizen papers are dated 1885.

- O: Where did he get a citizenship, in Youngstown?
- K: In Youngstown.
- O: Do you have these papers?
- K: Yes, I have them.
- O: Would you share them with us? Could we take pictures of them?
- K: Surely.
- O: Oh, that's wonderful. Where did they come from?
- K: From Hungary.
- O: I see. Where were they living when you were born?
- K: On 27 South Watt Street.
- O: Watt Street?
- K: Yes.
- O: That was residential?
- K: That's where everybody lived at that time around Watt Street, Boardman Street, Federal Street, Summit Avenue, all around that section.
- O: I see. Did you belong to a Temple then?
- K: Yes, The Children of Israel. My father was a Charter Member.
- O: Oh, the Children of Israel.
- K: The Children of Israel Temple was built then. I remember when I was about six or seven years old when my mother used to bake cakes and take them to the meetings. If she didn't go we used to carry the cake there. Everybody had to bring a cake.
- O: Where did you go to school?
- K: I went to Front Street school up until I was in the second grade and from there, I went to the South Avenue School, which was a four room schoolhouse We really learned there. You talk about the four room schoolhouses.

O: How many grades were in that?

K: Including the fifth grade. When I got to the sixth grade I had to go to the Market Street School and finish up there. By the time I finished the fifth grade at the South Avenue School, that was a four room schoolhouse, I knew as much as they did up to the seventh grade at the Market Street School.

O: I see. Did you go to high school?

K: No, I didn't.

O: Tell me this. What did the downtown area look like from your earliest memories?

K: They were all just small storerooms. People lived above the storerooms. There were apartments above them and the houses were all small, five and six room houses.

O: How did you get around from one place to the other?

K: We walked and by horse and buggy.

O: Did your folks have a horse and buggy?

K: Well, not at first. My father used to huckster at that time. He was originally a carpenter, but at that time he was huckstering. He had a wagon and we had a friend that lived out in the country. On Sunday, we would put boards around the wagon and we all sat on those boards and went for a ride. Later on he bought a surrey and we went out on that.

O: So he started out as a carpenter in Youngstown?

K: Yes, and then he was injured and he couldn't do that anymore.

O: Then he became a huckster.

K: Yes.

O: And then what?

K: Then he picked up scrap iron, and then he went to peddling fruit. Well, when I was born my birth certificate calls for him being a carpenter. As I remember him, he was a huckster, selling fruit and he would buy it by the carload and he would sell it to some of the other hucksters that came along to help them out.

O: Did he ever open up a store?

K: Never.

O: Just worked out of the wagon?

K: Just worked out of the wagon. But a lot of the newcomers, as they came in, he got them started.

O: Did you ever ride on the wagon when he went out to huckster?

K: No, I never did. The only thing I remember as a child I would sit on the wall in front of the house where we lived and he would pick me up and take me to the barn, and then carry me into the house. I'd sit and wait for that. And when he would go to pay his taxes, he used to take me. I remember going to the courthouse with him to pay his taxes.

O: Where was the courthouse then?

K: On the corner of Wood and Wick.

O: You remember Etta Rand, don't you?

K: Oh Yes.

O: She told a story about a big hole where the courthouse is now. Do you remember that?

K: The library was there, as I remembered.

O: What happened to it?

K: They tore it down. Put the courthouse there... I don't know what happened, why they moved the library from there.

O: Were there street cars at that time?

K: Yes.

O: Were they horse drawn?

K: No. I only remember one horse drawn and they had taken that off when I was a small child. It went up to Idora Park.

O: All right, how were the streets? What were they like downtown?

K: Well, they were paved and they had watering troughs for the horses right at the square, and one at the spring common was a watering trough where the horses stopped. The stores were small. Grocery stores were on Federal Street. It seemed they used East Federal Street at

that time more than they did West Federal Street. West Federal Street was to be developed later.

O: I see. What were some of the stores you remember from your youth?

K: Well, there was McCambridge and Riggenbaugh, that was a grocery store and the drug store was McBride's. Everybody went to McBride's Drug Store. If they were sick, they didn't call a doctor, they went to Dr. McBride.

O: Did they have a soda fountain there?

K: No, they had no soda fountain there.

O: What were some of the other stores?

K: Then Charlie Livingston opened a store on the corner of Walnut Street and the Goldsteins had a little department store at the corner of E. Federal and Champion. Well then there was J. N. Ewers & Sons and McKelvey's. On W. Federal, George L. Farbice. They were the big department stores that had opened up that I remember as I got older. I don't know whether they were there and I didn't go up West Federal Street because we were down at the lower end. And then there were two streetcar companies here, the Park & Falls and I forget what the local one was called. Was it called Mahoning Valley? So when we wanted to go on the South Side, and we'd take the Park & Falls, we had to pay an extra nickel fare for that.

O: Were they electric then, the ones you're talking about?

K: They ran on trolleys.

O: They were still horse...

K: Yes, they were electric. No, no horse power.

O: Tell me a little bit about your home life when you were a youngster.

K: Well, we were a very close family.

O: A big family?

K: No, there were seven of us. Four girls and three boys and my mother was very outgoing. My father was very quiet.

O: Incidentally, where were your mother and father married?

K: In Hungary. Everybody seemed to come to my mother's

house. One time, when my father was very sick, my mother took in "mealers".

O: They didn't stay there, they just ate?

K: No, they didn't stay there but she gave them meals. She said they helped support the family while he was sick.

O: Was she a good cook?

K: Excellent.

O: All Hungarian food?

K: No, any kind. She had a wonderful memory. She never wrote a recipe down but she could ask anybody how they made anything and she could always carry that recipe in her mind and make it.

O: That's wonderful.

K: And she had a good ear for languages.

O: How many languages did your mother and father speak?

K: My father spoke Slovak, Hungarian, and German. My mother spoke a little bit of everything. She just seemed to have an ear that she could pick it up. She would pick enough up to be understood. She spoke German, Slovak, Hungarian fluently, also English. Everyone thought she was born here. She wasn't educated.

O: I never asked you what your father's name was.

K: Kline. Jacob Kline. His name was Hyham but when he came here he was called "Jake" so he remained with Jacob.

O: Did he have a company name, or did he always go by Jacob Kline?

K: He always went by Jacob Kline.

O: You had a close knit family, they got along well together?

K: Yes, we did.

O: Can you remember some of the names of your friends, neighbors?

K: Oh, yes. We had a family next door to us. It was a Jewish family by the name of Farkus and she ran the

Mikvah. I can remember that so well. It was in a little alley which ran off of Boardman Street.

O: Was that where the Temple was?

K: No, the Temple was on Summit Avenue but they had this Mikvah down there. After the women left there, this neighbor, she would let my sister and me go into the Mikvah to bathe on Friday. So that's why I remember it so well. As children, it was like a swimming pool to us.

O: Was your father active in the Temple?

K: Yes, he went to Temple meeting every Sunday afternoon. I remember your family. I think it was your grandfather that had the bakery on Boardman Street.

O: That was my father.

K: Your father on Boardman Street?

O: Yes.

K: And then they moved to King Street. Wasn't it? One of the streets up on the South Side?

O: South Side to Franklin Avenue. So you grew up then on Watt Street. You never moved from there?

K: Oh, yes. From there we moved to Poland Avenue. That was an Irish neighborhood. Completely Irish.

O: Was there any particular reason why you moved there?

K: Yes. They sold the house that we lived in so we had to move. The funny part of it is that they wanted my mother to buy it. She didn't want to buy it because she said that she didn't want to raise her children near a saloon.

O: Your father had already died?

K: No he was still living. So we moved there. Well, naturally, Poland Avenue was an Irish neighborhood so it was full of Saloons. We always laughed about that. There was a saloon on every corner.

O: So you rented the house on Watt Street?

K: On Poland Avenue. Then we bought it. Then my father died in 1907. Then around the early 1900's, there were quite a few Jewish people came down to Poland Avenue. It became quite a Jewish neighborhood then. The Brown's came down there.

O: Brown's?

K: Yes. The White family, a family by the name of Shier.

O: That's all right. that is good. We're now getting close to the First World War.

K: Yes, that's right.

O: What are your memories from that.

K: Well, I had a brother that went. My other two brother's didn't go. My one brother tried to enlist but he couldn't. He had worked on the railroad and he had his foot injured and they wouldn't accept him.

O: What do you remember as... How old were you then? You must have been about twenty.

K: About twenty-four, twenty-three.

O: What are your memories about how we got into the war? How you felt when we got into the war, how your family felt when we got into the war?

K: I, myself, felt that it was a good thing.

O: You felt the United States should get in the war.

K: Yes, that we should get into it. My brother felt the same way. He traveled all over and tried to enlist. He wanted to go very badly.

O: And when we won the war, what happened here, in the United States?

K: Everybody just went wild. We paraded up and down Federal Street, singing and yelling. It was just a glorious thing.

O: The next thing I would like to ask you about is the Depression. Can you give me some memories about that?

K: Oh, yes. That gets very bad.

O: What happened to your family?

K: Well fortunately, at that time, I was working at the Courthouse so I was getting my salary right along--well, it was cut but we were still getting paid.

O: Where were you working at the time?

K: At the Recorder's office. So, I was bringing money home. So that kept the family going. Of course, the

banks closed. We had a warning of it, that everybody seemed to know, but some how or other, I just didn't draw money out. I didn't believe it. It was very hard on most people. They had nothing. When you went down and seen these here lines of people at the soup kitchen, it was terrible. They were waiting there to get their food. With me working at the courthouse, we had people coming in there, begging and they said that was the only place they had to go because they had to go to people that were working. So we always would get together and try to give them a few pennies to go out and buy some bread or something to eat.

O: How long did that go on? When did you begin to realize things were getting a little better?

K: I think it was about four or five years.

O: Four or five years it was bad.

K: Very bad.

O: What was downtown Youngstown like at that time? What were some of the stores, the movies, the restaurants?

K: I don't think any of the stores really closed or went bankrupt. I can't recall that. But the banks did.

O: Do you remember the names of some of the stores, the banks, and the theaters?

K: Yes, there was a Bijou, there was a Nickelodeon.

O: Where was the Bijou?

K: Right near the square. The Palace Theater was nice then. I don't know whether the Warner Theater was opened at that time or not. I can't remember.

O: Where was this Nickelodeon that you talked about?

K: That was right around the corner at Central Square. That was the first movie that came into Youngstown. It was called a Nickelodeon.

O: Was that Warner's?

K: No, I don't know who owned that.

O: Did you know the Warner Brothers when they lived in Youngstown?

K: Yes.

O: Which ones did you know?

K: All of them. I was friends with Sadie and went to the house often.

O: Did you ever go out with any of the boys?

K: No, but I went there. I had a cousin that came here from New York that sang. He came to visit and he stayed here. Rose Warner used to play the piano. There was a movie that the Warner's owned, I think, on Champion Street and Rose played the piano there and he sang. And often he went up to their home to practice and I went along.

O: By that time, of course, they had a lot of streetcars in Youngstown?

K: Yes.

O: Where did one go when one wanted to have a good time.

K: The Sallo Restaurant was there. Then they opened the Todd House, Idora Park. At Idora, they always had a stock company. Even when I was a small child, I remember going there every Saturday. My sister used to take us, put us in the theater, and then she went to the dance hall.

O: Any famous actors come here?

K: Yes, they all came here.

O: I think I saw a program with Lillian Gish, or something. Do you remember her?

K: Oh, yes. If you wanted them, all the big ones came here and went to the theater on East Federal Street. What's it called? It was the Park Theater- managed by the Shagrins.

O: Park?

K: Yes, The Park. They all came there.

O: Very nice. Let's move on a little bit to the start of trouble in Europe, Hitler. When did you first hear about Hitler?

K: My brother-in-law had family in Hungary and they started saying about trouble. They wanted to come to America and then they started to come and we started reading about it. Gradually, a few of them came out and then others wouldn't come out because they said they were having it too good, that they didn't believe it.

O: Did we believe it over here? Did your family believe

it?

K: No, a lot of them didn't. They couldn't see it.

O: When did you suddenly realize that it was true? Do you remember how?

K: I don't know. My brother-in-law had this nephew here that he left and he tried to get his sister out, his mother out. I said to him one day, "If you're going to fool around, it's going to be too late." He said, "That's what I know. I don't know why they are fooling around." And then it was a mother could get her visa to come out here and then the sister couldn't get it. And they kept fooling around and none of them came out.

O: None of them came out?

K: Yes, but it seemed most people didn't believe it was true.

O: Why did they think these stories were coming out? Did they think people were telling lies about it or what? Or that they were just exaggerating? What did they think?

K: I don't know. I really couldn't answer that question and you know, and answer it right, about how people felt.

O: Then, of course came the war. How did you feel about that?

K: That was terrible.

O: It didn't feel the same as the First World War?

K: Oh, no. We all knew then it was trouble. I can remember we were downtown at the theater and when we came home, we had heard it. They announced it on the radio that we were at war. It was an awful feeling because I had a nephew that was already in the service. We were quite upset. We knew it was going to be a long war. It was going to be bad.

O: How did you feel when you started hearing the news about Hitler conquering France and Poland and everywhere he went he was winning. How did you feel?

K: We were all pretty upset. We just didn't think it was going to be possible, but we had to win.

O: Did you look at it, at that time, as a Jewish problem or not particularly Jewish?

K: No, I didn't think it was a Jewish problem. I couldn't imagine anybody would be doing things like that. At that time, I was working at Republic Steel. And of course, a lot of men from the mill were going into the war and were following it up all the time. And seeing the progress and talking about it. Our boys were trapped there. They weren't prepared for war and they had to go in. And we were really upset about that.

O: Then the war ended, and everybody was deliriously happy again, I imagine.

K: The bad problem was this inflation all started. Everybody kept thinking, "Well, it's going to end sometime. The bubble has got to burst." But this has been going on for how many years? Thirty years?

O: Yes, Forty years. What did you think of President Roosevelt?

K: I don't know. I thought people worshiped him. I didn't care for him. I didn't vote for him. But I think people were influenced by him. He had a...

O: Hypnotic... Charismatic...

K: Yes. He had a wonderful personality and he just drew people in.

O: Do you think he saved the country? Do you think he made it worse?

K: Yes, I do.

O: Let's back up now. Were you and your family Zionists? When did you become Zionists?

K: I think after the war.

O: After the war.

K: Because we believed at that time, when the Zionists first started, that Zionists' were communists and we did believe that until later on when we found out the difference. And I think a great many people thought that way.

O: Do you remember the partition vote in the United Nations?

K: No. I wasn't that much of a politician.

O: Was your father, or your family... were they active in community life, federation, general community?

K: Yes, my father was. He belonged to all the Jewish lodges, every one of them. And to the others, there was Macabe Lodge that he belonged to and the Forrester's of America. That's the only thing they did.

O: How about you?

K: No, I worked and I wasn't active in anything. I didn't have the time for it.

O: You spoke of working for a President of a Federation?

K: Yes.

O: Who was that?

K: M. U. Guggenheim. Remember when he was President? You wouldn't remember.

O: What was his first name?

K: Michael.

O: Oh, Michael Guggenheim. Tell me a little about him.

K: He was a very nice person, very active. And he was very sympathetic.

O: What business was he in?

K: He was in the insurance business. They couldn't afford a social worker. They would have one come in and work maybe work two or three months in his office and then they would leave because he couldn't afford to pay them. He would write up a letter the end of every month or something, you know, and send in his report.

O: Where was the federation located then?

K: I don't know. I know one time they tried to have an office on Bryson Street, but that didn't last very long. I don't know where they had a place at that time, but he was President of it, I know.

O: Do you have any stories to tell about him? Any anecdotes?

K: No, I don't.

O: Who were some of the outstanding people you met in growing up in Youngstown, Jewish and nonJewish? Outstanding personalities, influential people, interesting people? O.K., we'll come back to that later. Did you experience any anti-Semitism as you were growing up?

K: Not very much. A little bit, but not a lot of it. I know some people did experience a lot. But once in a while, like I said we lived in this Irish neighborhood, and we went through a certain district and once in a while, they would yell, "Jew", or something like that, but not very often.

O: You didn't feel anything in your relationship with other kids?

K: No.

O: How about when you went to look for a job. Was there any problem?

K: No.

O: Where all did you work?

K: I worked for Klivan's Brothers on East Federal Street at one time, as a bookkeeper, and then I worked at the Courthouse in the auditor's office and recorder's. And then I worked at Republic Steel. I worked for M. U. Guggenheim for a couple years.

O: How did you happen to start with the Gold and Silver Club?

K: Through Birdie Idleman. I lost my sister and Birdie was a neighbor who lived catty-corner across the street.

O: How long have you been living on Elm Street?

K: About fifty years. Yes, since 1921. My mother died in 1921 and we moved to Thornton Avenue. I had two single brothers at home and another sister and myself. The four of us. My older sister had died and left two children. So after their father died in 1925, well then before that, my sister wanted us to come and live with them. They had this big house. So we went over there and joined them.

O: Where was that?

K: On Elm Street. And then I had a brother Harvey that died in 1925. And then my brother-in-law who had the two children. He died in 1927, so, then, we took the two children and brought them up to my brother-in-law's house and we reared them.

O: What was his name?

K: Cohen. Ruby Cohen. Did you ever hear of Ruby Cohen? You must have.

O: Yes. And the children's names were?

K: Howard and Martha.

O: What was your sister's name?

K: Belle. She died in 1921 so you wouldn't remember her. Mrs. Ruby Cohen and my sister, Laura, was Mrs. Krauss. Harry Krauss, you've heard of them.

O: Yes.

K: And you've heard of Howard, that was our nephew, Howard. He took the name of Krauss, Dr. Howard Krauss. Martha, Mrs. Fodor, she lives in New York.

O: I used to deliver Matzo. Remember our Delicatessen on Elm Street?

K: Yes.

O: I used to deliver Matzo to you when I was a youngster.

K: Is that right.

O: Where did you live in relation to Mrs. Brown? She lived near you, didn't she?

K: Yes. That was on Poland Avenue.

O: No, no, on Elm Street, I thought. Katie Brown?

K: Katie Brown?

O: Maybe I'm mixed up. Let's forget that.

K: She was married to Max Brown.

O: Yes.

K: They kept a grocery store on Poland Avenue. We lived a couple doors down the street.

O: Now, have you thought of any outstanding personalities that you remember in Youngstown?

K: No, I haven't.

O: Who was the most remarkable person you ever met in Youngstown?

K: I don't know. I never thought of anybody that seriously.

O: Let me go back. During the time you were growing up,

there was the Children of Israel and there was Rodef Sholom. Did you associate with each other?

K: No. At the beginning, at one time, we did go to Sunday School at Rodef Sholom. They allowed us to go there even though we were not members. Well, then, when there were so many of the people coming into this country, around 1900, and they started to get more children going there, they announced that you had to belong to the Rodef Sholom Temple if you wanted to go to the Sunday School. So we stopped going. I had a cousin that belonged to Rodef Sholom and she wanted my mother to belong, but my parent's would not belong. They were just too religious. So we quit going.

O: Socially, did you mix with each other?

K: Yes, they were very nice to us when we went there. They had dances and so forth.

O: Did you feel different than they?

K: No, not while we were going. We didn't feel any different.

O: After you stopped going there, did Children of Israel have its own Sunday School?

K: They tried to make one, but they never could get one. I think that Rabbi Davidson came here at that time, and he even had us go to his home and try to get something going, but they couldn't. I know they tried to have a Hebrew school. We had a Rabbi, I think they brought him from Pittsburgh and he was the meanest thing there ever was. I don't know whether you heard about him.

O: What was his name?

K: I can't think of what his name is, but the older boys sat on that side, and the younger children on this side. And the fellow that taught us younger children, we went to the Hebrew School, he was just an ordinary man that just knew how to read Hebrew. He was not a teacher. So he only called on the children that knew Hebrew and the rest of us sat there and he never called on us to teach us anything. This Rabbi that really knew, he would grab the boys by the arm and he had a stick and he would hit them and all we heard was "(swearing in Yiddish)". So naturally, we all complained and by the time we got home, my father said to us, "What did you learn?" So we told him that this man never called on us. So he told us, "You tell him that I said he is supposed to teach you." So my sister told him that. He slapped her and pushed her out of this room. So then afterward, the others complained and

they got rid of him. But oh, he was an awful person.

O: That's too bad. Shall we do some more another time or do you think you've told us just about everything? Do you have more stories?

K: I think I can tell you some about them.

O: Well, for now though, let's call it quits so that you can go have your lunch. O.K., fine. Thank you very much.

END OF INTERVIEW