

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Jewish Project

Youngstown Area

O. H. 535

LOUIS ROSENBLUM

Interviewed

by

Irving Ozer

on

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YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

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INTERVIEWEE: LOUIS ROSENBLUM
INTERVIEWER: Irving Ozer
SUBJECT: Jewish synagogues, Jewish organizations, anti-Semitism
DATE: February 3, 1985

O: This is an interview with Louis Rosenblum for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program on the Youngstown Area Jewish Project. The date is February 3, 1985.

When were you born?

R: 1918.

O: Where?

R: In Youngstown on Prospect Street on the east side.

O: How long did you live there?

R: Probably for about two years. Then my parents moved to Albert Street where my brother was born three years after I was. Then we moved onto Oak Street and kept going further east. We lived there for probably another four or five years. We finally moved to Truesdale Avenue at Oak Street and lived there until 1956. My mom sold the house about then and remarried. All of my years up until the time I was about twenty-three were spent in that area.

O: Which schools did you go to?

R: I started at Lincoln School for kindergarten through sixth grade and then I went to East High School and went from junior high to graduation.

O: What kind of neighborhood was Albert Street?

R: Albert Street was pretty much a predominantly white, residential area.

O: Were there many Jews there?

R: I don't remember whether there were Jews right on Albert Street there, but I know there were quite a few Jewish people on the east side of Youngstown.

O: What percentage of the population in Youngstown?

R: I would estimate a hundred families scattered on the east side starting on Hine Street and Prospect. Prospect probably had a greater concentration than any other particular street. This was about 1918 to about 1925.

O: Did it go out to the Sharon line?

R: There were a few out in Sharon.

O: Were there temples on the east side?

R: The two I remember were Share Torah on Himrod Avenue.

O: Did they have a big congregation?

R: Yes, probably 70 to 80 families at that time.

O: The other one?

R: The other one was a big house on Hine Street.

O: Was there an ethnic difference between the two congregations?

R: Not particularly.

O: What about your Jewish education?

R: That was a hit and skip thing. It originally started out with my parents sending me to a melamed.[Hebrew teacher].

O: Give me your definition of that.

R: That to me is a man who would teach children, boys particularly, how to read Hebrew, how to doven. It was really inadequate because you really didn't know what you were reading. There was no interpretation.

O: In my recollection that wasn't a professional, trained teacher, right?

R: Not that I recall. I also went through a period where we had Hebrew school at the shul on Himrod Avenue. Then I

also went to the Jewish Hebrew school on Lincoln Avenue.

O: That's the Youngstown Hebrew Institute.

R: That's right. I went there for a couple of years. The education there far surpassed anything I had at any of the other places. Unfortunately, I didn't go there long enough to really learn enough about it.

O: What do you remember learning?

R: I remember learning Yiddish. I remember writing vowels in script. We had some training in how to read and write Yiddish. We also had the usual courses of history, and more dovening.

O: Who was the main teacher?

R: I can't remember. By the time I was ready for Bar Mitzvah I wasn't going there anymore.

O: Do you remember any of the rabbis?

R: Other than Gottesman, no.

O: Were you going to Emmanuel at this time?

R: Yes. The Himrod Avenue shul, by virtue of the fact that a lot of the Jewish people on the east side were continually moving off of the east side, became just a handful of people. They got together with Temple Emmanuel and at that time Himrod Avenue shul had a cemetery in Coitsville, and Temple Emmanuel didn't have any. A deal was struck that Temple Emmanuel would take over all the paraphernalia and so on and also transfer the cemetery over to Temple Emmanuel; the people that were left in the Share Torah on Himrod Avenue became members of Temple Emmanuel.

O: When did this happen, do you have a rough idea?

R: I would say that was in the early 1930's. The members who came over from the Himrod Avenue shul were given life membership seats at Temple Emmanuel.

O: Who were some of them?

R: Lackey's, Goldberg's, Glassberg's, Cohn's, Sniderman's. The Himrod Avenue shul was really a converted building. I can't tell you what year the Jews took it over. Originally it was a Christian church.

O: As you were growing up did you ever get involved in tag day, pushkas?

R: No.

O: Were you aware of any anti-Semitism personally or otherwise?

R: Yes. In our neighborhood where we lived we used to take a lot of abuse like at Halloween time.

O: You knew it was anti-Semitism?

R: I had reason to think so because there were people around who would refer to us as kike. I got into some fights I remember.

O: What was the basis for the anti-Semitism?

R: Primarily, I think, because we were different; we were Jews. I'm sure a lot of it got carried over from their church teachings. On the other hand, my mother had very good non-Jewish friends in the neighborhood.

O: Were they mostly Catholics in that area?

R: A lot of Catholics in that area.

O: When you were getting into your teens is when this business started, right?

R: Yes.

O: Were you aware of what was going on? Did your family talk about it? How did they react? What do you know of as being done in Youngstown to do something about it?

R: I know that my father particularly talked of his brothers and sisters and wrote them in Europe to get them to come here. This was in the early 1920's. Only one of his sisters came; the rest of them didn't want to come.

O: When did he come?

R: He came because he had two cousins in New York that he was close to. They used to write back and forth quite a bit. The situation in Europe was that he would have had to have gone into the Army.

O: Where did he come from?

R: Hungary. After the First World War it became known as Czechoslovakia. He had the feeling that he would have a better life in the United States than what he had in Europe. I think his cousins encouraged him.

O: It wasn't due to the pogroms?

- R: No. They weren't really affected by that. My mother, who also comes from Hungary, her father was like the village constable; he was like the policeman in that village. They got along pretty well.
- O: When you left high school where did you go to college?
- R: I went to work at the store first, Strouss. I had just turned eighteen; it was 1936. In 1937 I started to go to Youngstown College. I went to night school. The teachers I had were for the most part people that had their own businesses during the day. I took Commercial Law, Accounting.
- O: What was the population of Youngstown College at the time?
- R: About 1500 people all told. They used a couple of buildings on Wick Avenue for classes.
- O: The old Rayen High School.
- R: Yes, that's right.
- O: Did you go to Youngstown after the war or before the war?
- R: That was before the war. I went two years but then I got more and more involved with the store. I was beginning to take on responsibilities. I was doing correspondence course work and I didn't continue on with the college thing. At the time I felt that the more time I spent on the job I was on would further me a lot. I was encouraged by the management of Strouss at that time.
- O: Who did you deal with?
- R: C. J. Strouss was the president of the company.
- O: Did you get to know him personally at all?
- R: Yes.
- O: Can you describe him?
- R: C. J. was an impressive man. You had the feeling when you came into his office that you were coming into a place where there was a lot of power. He was the kind of person that warmed up to you very quickly.
- O: Was he very formal? That is the impression I had.
- R: I didn't talk to him that much, but the times that I did talk to him were informal.
- O: Can you tell me about Hirschberg?

R: I can remember seeing him on the floor of the store when I was a little kid and I came in.

O: Was he just a friend of Strouss'?

R: No, they had a partnership when they started the business in 1875 or so. Isaac Strouss and Bernard Hirschberg were the founders of the store. When the store started it was about 300,000 square feet total and then when they got through with it it was close to 500,000 square feet.

O: Can you tell me some more about C. J. Strouss, personal insights, his family?

R: My period of time when I came to the store started in 1936. I was a \$9 a week stockboy, and as such I wasn't talking to the president of the company very often.

O: Was he always immaculate?

R: Yes. He had on whatever was the latest thing in clothing. A couple of years after I had started I was in somewhat of a training program. At that time when you were in a training program you got invited to the Friday morning meetings of buyers and so on. Usually C. J. Strouss was the one who talked at that meeting. He was a real showman. I'll never forget this one meeting we had; he was trying to demonstrate the frustration that the customer had when we were out of stock. He went through this whole bit of using the customer's words and the salesperson's words. His point was how important it was to the buyers and people involved that you had to be in stock all of the time. When a customer came in, if she wanted an oddball size, you should have it. He would do this like show business. I can remember times too when things didn't please him. He would sound off pretty well and everybody got the message. He had a lot of respect in the store.

O: When he got the message across, did he do it by yelling?

R: He would make sure, one way or another, that you got the point of what he was talking about.

O: What were you and your friends thinking about Europe about the war?

R: Probably a lot that I experienced at that time might have been through my involvement with AZA. We were really well aware of Hitler at that time, although we didn't know just exactly how big the situation was. In the store we began to see people who had come from Germany, emigrated, Jewish people. Germany had become a very dangerous place to be and these were people who were getting out. By

the time I left for the service there were probably a couple of dozen people from Europe who were working in the store. I'm sure C. J. Strauss was instrumental in getting them to come there to work. Various agencies, I'm sure, would contact him.

O: How did you react to the whole situation in the other countries like Poland, Germany, and France, and other countries?

R: I think what even affected us more was when suddenly there was a draft. There was a lot of emotional feeling about what was happening.

O: Did you follow the Olympics?

R: I knew about it. I'm sure everybody felt uneasy about what was going on. I don't remember any major thing that anybody did about it.

O: When you went into the Army did you go in with the feeling that this was a Jewish problem and you wanted to help straighten it out?

R: I wasn't happy about going. From my family I knew communication was becoming less and less. There was a lot of apprehension on the part of my parents when Germany moved into areas where they were.

O: Did you go into the Army feeling you had a mission to defeat Hitler because of what he was doing to the Jews?

R: Probably. I think in my mind I'd have felt very uncomfortable if I wasn't in the service. By the same token I felt that this was the way it had to be.

O: As a Jew or as an American?

R: As both.

END OF INTERVIEW