

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Rabbi Sidney Berkowitz Project

Personal Experience

O.H. 1516

CHARLES B. CUSHWA

Interviewed

by

Matthew T. Butts

on

July 7, 1992

CHARLES B. CUSHWA

Mr. Charles Cushwa was born on April 4, 1934 in Youngstown, Ohio, the son of Charles B. Cushwa Jr. and Margaret Hall Cushwa. He attended secondary school at Campion Jesuit High School in Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin, graduating in 1952.

Following high school, Cushwa attended the University of Notre Dame, achieving his Bachelor of Arts Degree in 1956. Cushwa then entered the United States Army where he served in the Army MAP Service. Cushwa returned to Notre Dame after his discharge from the Army, achieving his Master of Arts Degree in 1961. With his education complete, Cushwa came back to Youngstown. For the next 28 years, he was employed by Commercial Shearing Incorporated, advancing from the shop floor to Corporate Secretary. He then gained employment with Youngstown State University, serving at the Cushwa Center for Industrial Development.

Throughout his life in Youngstown, Mr. Cushwa remained involved in the local community. He serves as an active member of the Youngstown Rotary Club. He also remains an active member of many other organizations including The United Way, the United Negro College Fund, and various other charitable organizations.

Presently, Mr. Cushwa continues to work at Youngstown State. He resides with his wife Denise at 82 Poland Manor, Poland, Ohio. Mr. Cushwa spends much of his free time traveling, sailing, and playing golf.

Matthew T. Butts

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INTERVIEWEE: CHARLES B. CUSHWA

INTERVIEWER: Matthew T. Butts

SUBJECT: Youngstown community and Rabbi Berkowitz's
impact on the development of the local
Jewish community, religion, Rodef Shalom

DATE: July 7, 1992

B: This is an interview with Charles B. Cushwa for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, on the Rabbi Berkowitz project, including the Youngstown Community and the Youngstown Jewish Community, at his office in Coffelt Hall at Youngstown State University, on July 7, 1992, at 9:20 a.m.

Okay, let's start off with some biographical questions, here. Can you tell me something about yourself, as far as your child [and] your education?

C: I was born and raised in Youngstown. [I was] born at St. Elizabeth Hospital, in 1934. My parents were both college graduates. We had an apartment first, and then, we moved to Madera Avenue. Then, we moved to Coronado. I spent most of my youth on Coronado. I think we moved there when I was 3 [years old]. That's where I grew up. We had an open lot next door, and I played baseball there. I enjoyed baseball as a child, as well as basketball and football. We played all those games in the neighborhood.

It was an interesting neighborhood in that there were a lot of kids from different backgrounds. It was very mixed. There were a lot of Jewish people, a lot of

relatively decent people, some not so decent. Some immigrant people worked their way up. It was obviously a rising middle class neighborhood. Most of the kids went on to school. In fact, all of them went on to college. It was a very ambitious neighborhood.

We played at Crandall Park when we got older. Went to St. Edward's School and then away to high school, to a prep school in Wisconsin, and from there to Notre Dame, [then] from Notre Dame to the Army and back to graduate school. I enjoyed Notre Dame immensely. It was a very broadening experience, much more so than anything else I've ever imagined. The people from all parts of the world gave me a different perspective of things.

In reference to Sidney Berkowitz, my father was involved in Rotary; and I knew Dr. Berkowitz from Rotary. Growing up, Dr. Berkowitz was one of the people who visited the home and was a very entertaining and educated individual. I was always amazed at his capacity. He was one of the few people who was a match for my father. My father was a very quick wit, extremely quick wit, and a very good study. Dr. Berkowitz was one of the people that he enjoyed having discussions with. Although they had differing opinions--Dad was much more conservative than Dr. Berkowitz--they had lively exchanges, which was probably as important to both of them as the ideals expressed.

I think my childhood was fashioned a lot by the fact that we were coming out of the Depression when I was quite young. Things were scarce, and as the war developed, things continued to be quite scarce. Although times--I was told--were hard, as a little kid, I never realized that we did without. To a little kid, a stick is as good a toy as many of the things that we see on the shelves now. All you needed was an appropriate imagination. I enjoyed a very sports oriented childhood. Since my Dad went to Notre Dame, we were all Notre Dame fans, and we spent a lot of time at Ursuline football games and so forth. We had a hoop in the back yard. We also had some rose bushes in the back yard, and that basketball hit the rose bushes nine out of 10 times. [Laughter] All the kids in the neighborhood played. I'm still in communication with a lot of them. It's amazing how few of them moved away. A lot of the kids that I went to first grade with are still here in town, and we still meet on a regular basis, not as any group, but as parts of many other groups.

B: What did Youngstown physically look like when you were growing up?

C: Youngstown? Well, let's see. When my brother was born, my mother was quite ill. She spent a lot of time in the hospital and we went back to her home in Evanston, Illinois to have an operation and to recuperate. I spent a lot of time with my grandmother, my father's parents. They lived on the corner of Market and Dewey in a big, old yellow-brick house, to which they moved before the streetcar tracks were even out there, when the street was still a gravel path, which was very interesting. We spent some time downtown. We would take the bus downtown, and we would shop at the different stores. Downtown was quite crowded, and it was a wonderful place to be. It was very exciting. The two department stores were full of lots of good things, and I remember going to Ole's Market and getting pies and so forth and taking those home, back on the bus and going to the Pyatt Street Market, which was just full of trucks with all kinds of produce, very interesting. Shortly before I arrived that particular summer, my grandmother had just stopped raising chickens, but there was still a chicken coup on the premises, which my grandmother tore down a couple years later. My grandfather drove a number of cars. I guess he was a car nut. His first car, I vaguely remember, was Franklin, which are now real-life, marvelous, a collector's item. I had a love of cars. I had a love of machinery. My grandfather was involved in the steel industry. I remember, as a kid growing up, talking to him about the steel industry. In fact, I knew as much about the steel industry by the time I was 12 as most people will ever know about the steel industry. It's too bad all that knowledge is for nothing. I enjoyed steel jobs. One of the most enjoyable summers of my life was the summer I got to work in the foundry at Commercial Shearing, as a college student. It was just great fun putting the first assembly of the first foundry, and in the second year actually working there, helping to pour hot metal, even working on the degating table with the heavy sledge, or on the cherry red metal castings. I just thoroughly enjoyed that kind of work. I'm sure I couldn't do it today. It was very physically demanding work. But I still have a romance for molten steel, molten metal.

I learned a lot about machinery, for whatever reason, I'm not sure. Both my brother and I, I guess, were blessed with that. I'm not sure that you learn how machinery works so much as you know it intuitively. Bill and I have a great intuition about machinery and structures. Maybe Bill and I were just from a family that had that kind of background, but those were a lot of the things that were fun to us, [that] were very interesting, in addition to football and basketball and all of that. We all read a lot. My dad read a lot as a young boy and as a man, and we had a lot of his

books. We had a lot of our own books. Both Bill and I would read the serial books. Let's see. The one I can remember was The Lucky Terril Flying Stories. Of course, we listened to Jack Armstrong and all about Terry and the Pirates on the radio. We read a lot [about the] Civil War. We had some ancestors involved in the Civil War, so we read a lot of Civil War stories. I think my brother is a real expert on the Civil War. He has an amazing understanding of just the Civil War, and can discourse on it at the drop of a martini. [Laughter] He has an interesting background.

We traveled at least twice a year, if not three or four times a year, back to Evanston. We traveled on the train, which I just thoroughly enjoyed. Riding in the sleeper was just a great thrill. We traveled to New York to visit my uncle and his family. In fact, we're still very close to those cousins, Bill, John, and Mike. We have a family reunion every year with those kids. We thoroughly enjoy each other's company.

B: What was Dr. Berkowitz's role within the Youngstown Rotary Club?

C: Well, at the time my dad joined, there were very few Jewish people. Dad played baseball as a young man. He played a lot of baseball. In fact, he was offered a contract with the Chicago White Sox. His father explained that, if he really wanted to get married, he couldn't spend the rest of his life on the road chasing baseballs. So he never took the contract, but it gave him a wide experience with a lot of people. He was a champion of getting people, all kinds of people, involved. At the time, there were either no Jews or very few Jews as part of Rotary. Well, one of the first people Dad wanted to bring in was Rabbi Berkowitz, and was a sponsor for him. He and a couple of other people sponsored Rabbi Berkowitz, I remember. Eventually a number of other people joined us later, but Rabbi Berkowitz was always very thankful to Dad for that. And I'm thankful, too, because it gave me a model of broader understanding of people. So that growing up, I had a much better understanding of the breadth of people in America, black, white, and whatever. On the street, we had a black doctor, a black lawyer. Although their kids were not of the same age, we did play with them a little bit. But there was age differential all the time. There was a Greek family down the street, and we played with their kids. There was Jewish people and Protestants. Although there were a few--I received a few shocks. As a young person, I liked to sell magazines door to door. I didn't realize that some people didn't buy from me because I was Catholic or because of this, that, or the other damn thing. But that was kind of a shock to find out later.

Other things then happened as a result of some of those discriminatory things, but you know, that irked me; but it never bothered me. It never slowed me down. I was always able--not always, but more often than not--to sell in spite of whatever people thought of my background. It's always fun to get people to accept you for the person that you are. Dr. Berkowitz was the kind of person that would help people overcome some of those thoughts. He was interesting. Even after Dad died, we've always had a great relationship with Dr. Berkowitz. After my divorce, he was always very consolatory. When my new bride-to-be came to town, I introduced them, and they became very fast friends. In fact, although she was Presbyterian, she took to him because of his great breadth in understanding. He was for her a mentor and a great help. It's too bad he died, because I'm certain he would have been part of our wedding service; because he was that important, to her certainly, and to me as well. Dr. Berkowitz through his life has meant a lot. I quite willingly spent time at his temple. At various religious ceremonies, he was a guest to celebrate state occasions. I have a great fond memory of Sidney Berkowitz.

B: Do you remember anything about the way he ran his services at the temple?

C: No. Other than he was a very good speaker, very powerful speaker. I remember him more for his prayer at Rotary, in that he would help to still down some very pointed thoughts, a philosophical, religious thought to a sentence, or perhaps even as little as three or four words. He would just bring you up absolutely short. He would cut through a lot of garbage very quickly with his very pointed intellect.

Dr. Berkowitz was quite liberal, and my family was relatively conservative. I say "relatively" because that doesn't mean that if you're conservative in one thing, you have to be conservative in everything. That was certainly the case at our house. There were conservative things, and then, there were quite liberal things. So we never always agreed with a lot of the things that he did, but we certainly agreed with his basic awareness and his basic goodness.

B: Would you describe him as one of the leaders of the Youngstown community during his tenure here?

C: Oh, yes. Anybody who would transcend his own community is--clearly as easily as Dr. Berkowitz did--obviously a leader of great proportions. The way he fashioned his coalition with Bishop Malone was extremely important, and it just overreached a lot of difficult situations. The fact that he had a lot of access to a lot of people

through Rotary just multiplied his ability to get somebody in and talk to him, or them, and make them understand the wider significance of what they were doing or what he was doing.

B: Were you a member of Rotary when he was president?

C: No. That's before my time.

B: Was that in the 1950s or very early?

C: Something like that, yes. I didn't get into Rotary until the late 1960s, early 1970s.

B: Was he still active then, in Rotary?

C: More or less, yes. He would come when he could. Yes.

B: Are you familiar with any of the other activities he was very active in?

C: Not really. Later in life, when my second wife and I were married, we occasionally went to dinner with them; but that was not very frequently. And we didn't talk about business. We talked about, oh, a zillion other different things, just zillions of things. He married Pauline, who is English, Pauline Anderson. Her brother Godfrey is, of course, still alive and very much a part of the Liberty area. He was very big in real estate. Then, [he] became interested in computers when his son took up the business, and I talk to them occasionally. Godfrey is still a member of Rotary. I see him occasionally down there, although I don't have the same relationship with Godfrey.

I had a brief relationship with David Power, who was the rabbi following Dr. Berkowitz. David and I became good friends. David was equally bright and all encompassing in his intellect. Unfortunately, David was a little brash and upset some of the church fathers and, therefore, was excused of service, which was really too bad. The new replacement is a very nice person, but is not of the capacity, the brilliance. . . .

David Power was a great asset to me when I was running Boy Scouts awhile back. Let's see. Yeah, 1983 or 1984 [was the time]. David was a great help. [It was a] great Boy Scout troop. That was one of the things that was interesting. Rodef Sholom had a very good Boy Scout troop from day one. The rabbis saw to it that was a very good function. We had a number very good Boy Scout leaders who are from the Jewish community, and that has helped broaden the base of Boy Scouts enormously.

- B: You spoke a little bit about Rabbi Berkowitz's wit. Are there any specific occasions that strike out in your mind?
- C: No. Not right off hand. My wife would probably tell you a little more, because they engaged in constant mythology. They heard a story, and they would call each other. My wife would certainly call the Rabbi and tell him a story. They had a very much closer relationship for that short period of time, and she would probably be able to tell you some of those stories. Some of them were very funny. Some of his wit was very good. He was not above telling a pretty good story in private company. He enjoyed those. In fact, he had a great sense of humor about so many things. It was amazing! He was an amazing person.
- B: Okay. Is there anything that we haven't really touched on, dealing with Rabbi Berkowitz, that you think we need to add?
- C: I'm sure there is. It just doesn't come to mind. I haven't had much time to prepare for this. Things have been very busy around here. In fact, the day, the time, that I had planned to prepare myself for this, we got involved in a lay off problem. Not only a lay off problem, but a bumping problem. They want to bump all my people, and I'm not happy. So I really don't--I'm sorry I'm running short of stories.
- B: No. That's okay. This is good.
- C: He was a very influential guy out there for a long time.
- B: Was he involved with Youngstown State at all? Did he arbitrate anything with the university or anything?
- C: I don't know. I was not involved with Youngstown State until four years ago. Although I was involved in the center here, I did not get involved in the politics and the union situation. I had a very full life and really didn't have time to let my mind wander around. So, I don't know.
- B: Well, thank you very much.
- C: You're welcome.

END OF INTERVIEW