

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY
ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Youngstown Area Jewish Project

Personal Experience

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MORRIS S. ROSENBLUM

Interviewed

by

Harry Alter

on

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YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY
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INTERVIEWEE: MORRIS S. ROSENBLUM
INTERVIEWER: Harry Alter
SUBJECT: Youngstown Area Jewish Project, Rodef Sholom
DATE: March 25, 1988

A: This is an interview with Dr. Morris Rosenblum for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, on Jewish senior citizens, by Harry Alter, on March 25, 1988.

Let's talk about the beginning of Rodef Sholom and your recollections. Were you president at the time?

R: Yes, I was looking that up because I knew these fellows, members of the congregation, were going to give me a hard time. They tell me what they did. Rodef Sholom started in--I believe it was--1965. At 5 West Federal Street, at the quarter block, they organized and they rented a place on the quarter block. [It was on] the second or third floor.

A: Here's a question that has often come up: was it Reformed at the time or were they still Orthodox?

R: They were Reformed, and they had officers. The first one was David Theobald, who had a large department store on Federal Street. They had a vice president and a treasurer. When they organized, each one of the officers was installed except the treasurer. He wasn't bonded. They met and then, not a little while longer. . . . One had a sheep store, and one had a liquor store down there, and it looked good. Next, they moved towards where the First Federal Bank is. At

that time, Ed Spiegel had a store. He was really the first Jewish person that came this way. Spiegel's moved to . . . what block is that where--you said near Hartzell's there?

A: On the opposite side of the street?

R: There was a Jewish person who had that block.

A: Yes, I don't remember the name.

R: If you go up the stairs--now it's boarded up, but I did go up the stairs. Exactly what I had heard about it is [that] to the left were two stairs, and that was where they had their tour and everything there. On the other side was the progress room, who let the synagogue use that for a Sunday school. Also, they went by a clock. The clock was from the Catholic church. That was the means, if they didn't come to a Friday night service or Saturday or Sunday, they had to pay 50 cents for not coming. After that, after that was here, they moved to the corner of Lincoln Avenue and Fifth Avenue.

There were two butcher shops here in Youngstown. I thought they were kosher butcher shops because the members of the congregation were there.

A: They were Observant?

R: Yes. So when I heard that, I said, "I had better call up and look in the newspapers down there and see if they really have kosher food." They did have kosher food in a section of it, because they also advertised for salt pork. So I knew that they had kosher food. The first rabbi was a Leadland, that's Leadland's grandfather. He was about 30 years old.

They just destroyed this house on Lincoln. They made a parking lot out of it. I was upstairs. A couple of us went upstairs.

A: I remember when that building was torn down. Bert Firestone still had his office across the street at that time.

R: Right, exactly right. So Ed Brody and I went up to check the place out, and it was exactly. . . .

A: Yes, it was a church for many years.

R: It was a church until about 1914. Then they moved it and built it on Whipline and Elm Street.

A: You did all this research while you were president of Rodef Sholom?

R: Well, I knew I was going to be the president, but I just wanted to know.

A: What years were you president of Rodef Sholom?

R: I think it was 1960 to 1963. I may have it someplace at home. I was the first president.

A: You were president from 1958 to 1961?

R: Right, but I held offices before then. Theobald was a Democrat. He ran for representative from here to Columbus, but he lost because most of them were . . . but he was a democrat. The rest of Rodef Sholom you know, right?

A: Right.

R: Okay. Go ahead.

A: We talked about the history of Rodef Sholom. Let's go back to get your background. What part of Youngstown did you grow up in?

R: Well, I was born in Brooklyn, New York. I came here when I was six years old.

A: Where did you live?

R: Do you know where Maple Avenue was, East Scott Street?

A: Yes.

R: All right, the other friends of ours were the Malkopf's, and they lived on that street. I remember Coleman Malkopf used to take us for a ride. He would give us a ride. We were the two Jewish families there. My father died when I was 10 years old. I was 10, my sister was 11, one was five, and one was three years old. My mother opened a grocery store on Adams Street.

A: What were the names of your parents, your father's name and your mother's name?

R: My father was Harry, and my mother was Bessie.

A: You say she opened a store? Where?

R: On Adams Street, 215 Adams Street, right off of Walnut Street. The store would open when you got up in the morning, and it closed at night when you go to sleep.

A: You went to school at Wood Street School?

R: I graduated from Wood Street School. For a while, I went to Elm Street School when we lived on Maple Avenue because we just cut across the nursery school. My mother died seven years later with cancer.

A: Then you went to Rayen?

R: I went to Rayen, but I really didn't graduate because my mother died during the Christmas holidays, so I never went back. Mr. Miller, who was the principal at Rayen if you remember, he called me and said, "Look, you have got excellence. You want to join to finish up. You will need a diploma." I said, "Mr. Miller, I appreciate it but the work I am doing, I won't need a diploma."

A: What were you doing?

R: I worked at Truscon Steel Company for 36 cents an hour. First of all, they wanted to separate us. They wanted the two younger children to go to the orphanage in Cleveland. My sister and I said, "No, we are going to live together." That created a problem with our family, because my aunt and uncle thought what we should do. We said, "We just don't want to separate," and we didn't. So I worked there.

A: You worked there as a teenager?

R: Seventeen.

A: They hired you at 17?

R: Hired me, yes.

A: How long did you work there?

R: Two years. Mr. Miller called me up and he said, "You come down to the tutor where you are going to get your diploma." I got it and threw it away.

A: How did you enter Ohio State, then?

R: First of all, I worked there. We moved from Adams Street to someplace on the South Side. I only cashed one pay check for two years. My sister got married, and she and my brother-in-law both said to me, "Look, you ought to go to college." So I did. I had 48 dollars, but I went to Ohio State.

A: How old were you then?

R: I was 19, almost 20.

A: Did you make up your mind then to get into medicine?

R: Well, I always wanted to be [in medicine]. For awhile, I thought I never would be.

A: What year did you get your degree?

R: 1932.

A: That's when you got your medical degree?

R: Right.

A: Where did you intern?

R: Youngstown Hospital.

A: And you stayed here?

R: Yes.

A: When did you get married?

R: Two weeks after I graduated.

A: What was the date?

R: June 15.

A: Your wife's maiden name is?

R: Maritzer.

A: Tillie?

R: Tillie [is her first name].

A: You went into practice immediately when you came back to Youngstown after you passed your boards?

R: Yes.

A: You have been in the Home Savings and Loan building for a lot of years. When you first went into practice, did you come here or where were you?

R: I was here.

A: In the Home Savings?

R: Yes.

A: All these years in the Home Savings and Loan building, you never moved?

R: I didn't have this building. They moved me around. When I wanted air conditioning, and they had a room with air conditioning, they moved me there.

A: Are you their oldest tenant, as far as being here? Probably are, aren't you. They ought to give you a plaque for that.

R: They did, downstairs.

A: That's right, it's in the . . .

R: Well, that plaque . . . Till did that. Seventeen of us went to the Army. We came back and, do you know, they never even moved our furniture for free. Three years. So really Till--whatever is written there--did that. She wanted to present it to them, because a lot left right away, which really I don't think was right.

A: When you were in the service, what were you in? What part of the service?

R: Air Force.

A: Where did you serve?

R: Well, we went to the air base down in Virginia. You know where our other president used to fly down there?

A: It wasn't Langley was it?

R: No, it wasn't Langley. I was there for one month, and they asked me if I would give a couple lectures on certain diseases, which I did. One day the colonel called me in, on Sunday, and he had my portfolio in front of him. He said, "You know, we need clinical pathologists, and I see that you have that. Would you do it?" I said, "Anything you want is okay with me." He said, "All right." That was Thanksgiving and he said, "Do you want to go to the University of Minnesota or do you want to go to Columbia, New York?" I said, "My wife likes to be in New York." So he said, "January 1st you are going to go to New York," which I did.

I came back in the spring, and I was in Florida for awhile. Our unit was going west. The colonel who was down in Florida called up. They said he wanted me to stay there. The colonel said to him, "Listen, he is not invalid and we can't keep him in the United States. We just can't." So he took me out of this other thing . . . I was like a man without a company. So I said to Till, and Dick was only about two years old, "Let's go up to Robbins Field, Georgia and find out what they are doing." The colonel wasn't there, but the doctor in charge said to me, "I wish he was sending

me where he was sending you. He didn't want to let you go." I ended up in Puerto Rico for two and a half years in the Air Force.

You do a job. It wasn't that I was that good, I think they were so bad. They were grumbling all the time. I never thought I was going to be there. Even when you were there, they start breaking some of these guys, you know, in Puerto Rico. I have seen them try to finish a fifth [of whiskey]. Only a goy would do that.

A: Yes, I know. When were you discharged?

R: In October of 1945.

A: You came back and went back into practice?

R: Well, I did practice, but I just felt I didn't have it. I practiced for awhile. Then I went to the Graduate School of Medicine at the University of Pennsylvania for a whole school year. The thing is this, about half the previous school years that I was playing handball, I ran into the front wall. So I called up Bert Cass and he says, "Who is the patient?" I said, "You're talking to him." So he picked me up, gave me 12 sutures there, x-rayed my skull, and guess what they said. "There's nothing there." [Laughter]

So my father-in-law said I was going to take off a whole year. I did take off a whole year. I stayed at the YMCA there, for 8 dollars a week. I don't know what the heck it was. It was in walking distance. I had a patient who wanted me to stay there, but I didn't want to. So when I told my father, he said, "You should have your head examined." I said, "I did, and they said there was nothing there."

A: Abe had a grocery store, didn't he, in Brownlee Woods?

R: Yes. The funny part about it is that I didn't know how to drive a car until I was a senior in medical school because we never had one. But anyhow, they lived in Brownlee Woods, and he said, "Look, Ruth is married and your sister lives in Cincinnati. Stay with us." So we stayed with them. Every time we wanted to rent a place they said, "Wait till you buy a place." When we wanted to buy a place they said, "Wait till you can build what you want." So we bought two lots. And within 30 days . . . we started building and they started building next door to us. So we lived together for five years and next door for 25 years.

A: Where was this? What part of town?

R: Mistletoe Avenue. The nicest house on the street.

A: Back in those days, Mistletoe had very few houses?

R: Very few houses.

A: Off in the country almost, wasn't it?

R: Yes, it made a difference to me.

A: When did you begin your affiliation with Rodef Sholom? When you became active?

R: Later I was certified in internal medicine, and that's what I wanted.

A: You have a certificate? Yes.

R: That's what I did. I was certified in 1951.

A: You have had a specialty, haven't you?

R: Internal medicine.

A: Besides that, in blood pressure and cardiac?

R: Mostly, I got a lot of diabetes in.

A: I know you have been active in setting up the cardiac program down at the YMCA.

R: Well, even before that we had a co-chairman on Market Street. We had a psychiatrist talk to them, examine them. That's how they started having people come in for complete exams. But the complete exam today is a whole lot different than it was when it first came out. They do the exercise tolerance test, which I think sometimes is not good. You could take any bad heart and put them on exercise, that's going to blow. You can tell with an EKG what they have, but a lot of them like to do it.

A: I recall something about the time you set up the program at the YMCA. You brought in somebody from Cleveland to talk to the doctors here before you set that up. The heart man from up in Cleveland, were you instrumental in doing that?

R: I used to go to Cleveland. The chief of cardiology at the University Hospital is Jewish.

A: Yes, that's the man I was thinking of.

R: We would go up there Tuesday morning. If a patient died, they would take their heart out and show them exactly what happened. He has a son-in-law now who is

the chief, and he is really something. He is really something! He is into Zionism . . . you name it.

A: Talk about the YMCA. How many years have you been affiliated with the YMCA?

R: We used to have recess. Louie Ezerski was the one. He would just pick us up by the pants off the pile. [He was a] big guy.

So I joined the YMCA when I was 10 years old. The other thing is, there were only two high schools; South High and Rayen. They had basketball teams. Now, Hale, I think, was the YMCA. The BMD Club was . . . I was one of the BMD Club when we started there.

A: Were you a charter member in 1917 with Phil Levy?

R: Yes. So they had that. He is the one who started it because then we had a basketball team of our own. We could go to the church and play. That was for the YMCA. He started for us. We went out to New Middletown, right in that area there, we went to play there. Gaslights, first time I ever saw them in my life. New Springfield out there, see. Whenever we would go out to Campbell, we'd get killed.

So you take your blood pressure apparatus. . . . Well, it was really a health program where we wanted to say everybody could come and join. That is fine at first, [but] we don't want them to drop dead on us. Even now if you go in the malls and they want to take your blood pressure. I looked down at one of these guys because he was holding his hand like that. . . . You can't take a blood pressure like that. You can't take it. The first one says, "Yes, you're fine." It isn't worth anything. I felt real bad because I told one of them that was doing this, "People feel real excited about something and their pressure goes up, that doesn't say you're abnormal."

A: You were the one who pushed that program in the YMCA.

R: I pushed that for the Heart Association, too. I pushed it then. Hugh Philip and I were the ones that were doing the work and Hugh never showed up half the time.

A: You have been going down to the YMCA at noon for how many years? I remember back in the 1930s you used to come down Federal Street and pick up Milt and go down to the Y.

R: It is very fine for me. I did, I won half the ball championships, but also that's how I won at the Jewish Center, too. I didn't know who I was going to play

until I came there. The boys wanted me out. I said, "Get me a partner." So he got me this guy, a fellow from Sharon, and we won the title. I never saw him before until we got dressed up for the play. Now he is dead. He had a heart attack.

A: Your education was at Temple Emanuel, wasn't it?

R: Right.

A: You were barmitzvahed there?

R: Oh yes, everything.

A: After you were married, you joined Rodef Sholom? Did you become active immediately? Did you work your way up to president?

R: Yes, I had won office's all the way, brotherhood first. The thing is this, I was the president of the temple while Till was the president of the sisterhood at the same time.

A: That's interesting.

R: It is the second time in the history. I felt as if I wanted to. . . . And really, with the Rabbi from before, not Berkowitz. . . .

A: Philo?

R: Philo. We just didn't get along. It was out of this world as far as I was concerned. The only reason I joined was because Till's father didn't join anything, and I had to work it out that way. My father was president of a Congregation in Brooklyn, New York in 1909. I have a medal that was given to me. I was a president here. Jerry, in Philadelphia, just finished up a two year presidency.

A: Getting to your children, I see on your wall plaques from Ohio State. You have been quite active at Ohio State.

R: Very active.

A: Do you want to talk some about that, what you have done there?

R: Well, I was very thankful to Ohio State for giving me an education. I represented the college of medicine on the advisory board for nine years. My term was up, and one day the president of the university. . . . On this board is 12 people, one doctor and one dentist and the rest of them.

A: You were on their advisory board of medical school?

R: Yes, Ohio State University Advisory Board, which included the college of medicine.

A: You had a lot of traveling down to Columbus in those years?

R: Usually once a month. (Rosenblum is rummaging through some papers now, looking for something.) I'll show you. . . . So I know what's going on, this came in the mail today. In the mail is what went on last week. Everything is there for me.

A: I see a thank you for the Ohio State University Development Fund. You were active in that, too?

R: Oh yes. Anyhow, I got a centennial award for the first hundred years. Anyhow, I'm having a good time. And since I'm the only physician on that board, that's what I do. When we meet, we bring up different things, you know. I go there the night before. I stay there Wednesday night, down on campus there.

They say that the YMCA, what they did, they really did. The other thing is when I became a member of the board, I said, "If you get yourself to make an invocation with Jesus Christ, I am going to walk out." They tried it once and I walked out on them. There was no reason why they had to do it.

A: Since then they have dropped a lot of their religious. . . .

R: First of all, the Catholics didn't belong there for awhile. Even the medical schools from Youngstown. . . . They are nice people. I don't ask anything from them. If I mix up in the finances, how should they do it, that's no good for me.

A: Right.

R: Yes. I had a good time.

A: Let's go back to your family. How many children do you have?

R: We have two, Richard and Jerry. Jerry is a lawyer.

A: Where?

R: Philadelphia.

A: And he is the president of. . . ?

R: The congregation. Yes, he just finished his two years, but he's there all the time now anyhow. Do you know how Orthodox they are? You cannot bring any food in there from outside.

A: In his synagogue?

R: We spoke to him on the phone the other night. Our oldest grandson is a sophomore in medical school. Jerry said, "I commend him, but the representative can't come because he's busy there." Till is going to have a birthday soon. We don't want to go there because Dick is here with Toby and everything.

A: What does Dick do?

R: Dick sells real estate. The thing is that Jerry comes across that way.

A: You grew up in an Orthodox atmosphere.

R: He goes around and talks for the Defamation week, Jerry does.

A: Antidefamation week?

R: Yes. Jerry is out in various places for him.

A: You were telling me before when we didn't have this on about when you were studying for your barmitzvah. Do you want to repeat that? Who was your teacher for your barmitzvah?

R: Mr. Altzeler.

A: That is Oscar's father?

R: Oscar's father, yes.

A: Where did you take your lessons?

R: At that time he was sitting with his daughter at their home. I sang in the choir because it was 10 dollars for the whole year. He gave us a piece of candy. To sweeten the voice, he thought it was for. We didn't know what the heck it was for, [it was just] candy. I do remember also where Saturday evenings they would have, for the youth group, dancing on the lower level. The cookies were all homemade.

A: You went to Rayen? The BMD group was formed from South students and Rayen students.

R: Yes, both South and Rayen.

A: The story Phil Levy told me once was the reason that Hale started the group was that the Jewish boys couldn't get into the High Y.

R: That's right.

A: He thought the Jewish boys should have. . . .

R: That is exactly right. He's right. A goy will do something for you. There are a few good ones. We had our meetings downstairs.

A: What did the club do at that time?

R: Most of the time it just played basketball.

A: Who were some of the other members?

R: Dave Bender.

A: David or Bill, the older one.

R: Who is the older one?

A: The lawyer was Bill.

R: Not him, the next one.

A: I know who you mean.

R: He is heavy set. The thing is this, not only did we have the BMD, but. . . . Who was it that had the meat place down here? His son now is in the meat business?

A: It wasn't Unger?

R: Not Unger.

A: Hollander?

R: Hollander. Well, Hollander had a brother. This was his uncle. Do you know who he was? So he wanted to have us buy green pants, shirt, whatever it was at the Front Street Market. So we were also at the Front Street Market. Then we had one we called Dove. That is where we got our uniforms. We had uniforms. We had to make our own, but we had a good time.

A: At the time that you went into practice, there were quite a few Jewish doctors at that time and all of the offices were downtown.

R: Right.

A: How many are downtown now?

R: Probably two.

A: I mean all together, Jewish and not Jewish.

R: About two or three.

A: Have you ever felt that you should move?

R: Well sure, in Columbus, they say, "Well, I would rather go here and move out of here." Really, my patients come here and the only thing that they don't like is having to park, but they come.

A: Is there anything else you recollect from the time you have been downtown on Federal Street? The change in Federal Street, any little stories?

R: You know that we can't control everything. These men want to make a finer place, but with all the various other places that they had, they would have to come downtown. Should I aggravate myself because of that? Heck no. Whenever anybody aggravates themselves, it is not the other person who is going to feel bad. You are the one who is going to feel bad.

A: We're trying to get a map of the downtown over the years. Someday when we get it sketched out, you will probably be able to fill in some of the stores, all these years you used to walk up and down Federal Street past all these stores.

R: Yes. The little bag that was here was my clothes that I wear playing handball.

A: You still play handball?

R: I play racquetball today.

A: One more thing. This will finish it. Murph. How did you get the name Murph? Let's have that story.

R: When I worked at the Truscon Steel Company and they put me down in certain part, see, they're all Irish. Tom McLaughlin was the foreman, and he said, "Look, we can't call you Rosenblum with all the Irish here." So he named me Murphy. I was 17 then. I worked there two years at 36 cents an hour. Ten hours during the day or 13 at night. He named me Murphy. So after I worked there for two years, I went away to school and thought maybe I would get a job during the summertime. At 17 years old what kind of job are you going to get. So he said to me, "You have been here for two years. You know the blueprints, you know where everything is in the plant. We're making steel buildings. There are

shortages on these buildings. You work my turn and you make up the shortages. One person can do it. I will give you the bonus the same as the packers get." So I made myself about 3 dollars more a night. As much as I hated to work there, still it ends up that I had a job.

A: And all these years the name Murph stuck to you?

R: Yes.

A: At that time when you worked there, was Truscon still own by the Kahns?

R: Yes. That is a big story, too.

A: That is a story in itself, and that is something that has to be researched.

I'll tell you this first president, Theobald, was really something from everything I read about him. They would meet when somebody had a child die. They would meet, and they told him it would cost him so much. They would bury him and get nothing for it. Up in Brier Hill they had a cemetery.

A: Did you write all of that on that history of Rodef Sholom, what you are telling me now?

R: I think I have got it someplace. Not only that, we had problems with the cemetery when we moved over here.

A: Have you got any of those old papers of Rodef Sholom? Anything that you would want to turn over to the archives that the temple doesn't have? The temple has a lot of stuff.

R: I guess they do. We had a lot of trouble with that cemetery, a lot of trouble. I forgot the fellow who was giving us a hard time.

So Dave says to me, "I'll be on you committee." [Laughter] He had this brother who got married to a Jewish girl.

A: I didn't know that.

R: They're divorced now. Dave told me he was a really nice guy. But we are Jews. You want to aggravate yourself, go ahead.

A: Okay, thanks.

R: You're welcome.

END OF INTERVIEW