

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Youngstown Area Jewish Project

Personal Experience

O. H. 1121

THEODORE KESSELMAN

Interviewed

by

Theodore Kesselman

on

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INTERVIEWEE: THEODORE L. KESSELMAN  
INTERVIEWER: Theodore L. Kesselman  
SUBJECT: Family history, background  
DATE: June 24, 1988

K: This is an interview with Theodore Kesselman for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, on the Youngstown Area Jewish Project, by Theodore Kesselman New York City, NY.

My mother's family, whose name is Brailovsky, left Russia in the early 1920's as a result of the Russian Revolution. My grandfather had been a storekeeper and was imprisoned on several occasions by local communist officials, because of his unwillingness to turn over his storefront to be used as a meeting place by the party. After living in Europe for several years, while trying to get admission to North America, they were finally able to get into Mexico where they settled in the mid 1920's.

My father's family lived in Odessa, Russia and were quite well-to-do. At the time of the Revolution, my father was still a teenager and decided to go against his father's wishes and enlisted in one of the armies, fighting against the communists. Apparently the army that he joined had very little action and after about six months, he left the army and went back to school. In the early 1920's he went to Germany, where he completed a college degree in electrical engineering.

During that period, my grandfather and my step-grandmother left Russia and went to Romania. My father left Germany after completing his college education and also settled in Mexico in the mid 1920's.

My mother and father met in Mexico, got married, had a place of business, and their first child was born, but died in infancy. Partly because of the fear of another child being born in Mexico and not having adequate medical attention, and also partly because my father had a uncle who lived in Youngstown, Ohio, they decided to move to the United States, where they arrived in 1932. A few months thereafter, my mother gave birth to me. My father worked at Ross Radio Company for his Uncle, James Ross. They initially lived in a rooming house on Woodbine Avenue. I can recall living in two places on Tod Lane. The first place the family lived was with an extraordinarily nice family; a brother and sister who had two marvelous names. She was a Mrs. Snow and her brother was a Mr. Hale.

In 1944, the family moved into the first home that it owned at 168 Lauderdale. My mother and father belonged to Anshe Emeth Temple. My mother was very involved with the sisterhood and the B'nai B'rith. My father was involved with B'nai B'rith and he was a member of the Zionist Organization of America.

Recreation was largely being with friends. My mother had a particularly large group of friends, probably due to her very outgoing personality. My father happened to make a great number of friends in the late 1930's as a result of his German education. When many German Jews emigrated to Youngstown, my father became a close friend, probably because of his ability to speak German. These people remained friends for their lifetime. As a matter of fact, one young boy who came to Youngstown in advance of his parents was Ernest Rose, who lived with my family for a number of months until his parents came.

The family summered a number of times at Lake Milton, and traveled from time to time. The most adventurous trips were to Mexico, where my mother's family lived and as a matter of fact, still lives. My mother was particularly interested in playing bridge, my father played some poker. Ted was the first child born in 1932, Alex a few years later, and then Irving about sixteen months after Alex. Jeanette was the only daughter in the family born in 1950. All the children went to the same schools in Youngstown. They all went to Harding, Hayes, and Rayen.

Ted went to Harvard College and then Harvard Law School. While in his last year at Harvard College, he

married Shirley Cohen, daughter of Bob and Gussie Cohen, of Youngstown, Ohio. After graduation from Harvard Law School, Ted and Shirley moved to New York City, where they still live. Ted and Shirley have two children, Suzanne and Stuart. Suzanne is married and has two children, Kimberly and Douglas. Stuart is living in San Francisco, California and is a ticket broker.

Alex went to Western Reserve University in Cleveland. Upon graduation, he went to St. Louis University Medical School. He interned in the Youngstown Hospitals, then went into the Navy and has remained in the Navy until retirement in 1990 as a Captain. Alex has been married twice, both times he married daughters of military people. His first marriage resulted in the birth of a child, James, who lives with his mother in California. The second marriage, to Rona. There are two young children from that marriage, Aaron and Leonard. Alex is now in private practice in Plano, Texas. I should mention that Ted retired in 1987 after thirty years of service at Bankers Trust Company in New York, where he became Executive Vice President and the Chief Financial Officer. Ted is currently involved in working with nonprofit organizations, primarily in the field of the various arts; music, theater, and museums.

Irving, after graduation from Rayen, went also to Western Reserve. After finishing college, he went to the Dental School at Western Reserve, where interestingly one of his classmates was Harry Cohen, the brother of Ted's wife. After graduation, he went into the Air Force, later married Barbara Levine from the Sharon-New Castle Area. They have two children, Marc and Kelly. The family lives, and has been living for many years, in Denver, Colorado.

Jeanette, after graduation, went to the Colorado School for Women, for a year, then the University of Wisconsin and completed her undergraduate studies at the University of California at Berkeley. She went into the Peace Corps, serving in Nepal for several years. After her Peace Corps experience, she worked for several Refugee Organizations in Thailand, helping Cambodian Refugees. She then came back to the United States, where she went back to school, completing a master's degree in Public Health at the University of North Carolina. After graduation, she had a few internships with the United Nations and the Ford Foundation and then got a permanent position with UNICEF in New York, ultimately leading to an assignment overseas in Sierra Leone for about two and a half years and two years ago, was transferred to Nepal, where she is particularly happy to be since she finds Southeast Asia to be fascinating and a marvelous place to settle.

My parents both died in the 1960's. My father died in 1964, when he was 60 years of age. He had had diabetes and a heart problem. My mother died four years later in 1968, also at the age of 60. She had had Hodgkins Disease.

Aside from my parents, a number of my teachers had a major impact on my growing up. I can't think of any particular teacher that made a difference, it was really an accumulation of inputs from a number of people.

I chose my present area from which I recently retired about the last possible minute in my last year at Law School, I had decided that I did not want to go into the practice of law but because I was already married and had a family, I needed a job. So I made a point of interviewing with a number of companies that came to school, including industrial companies and financial institutions. A number of New York banks that I talked to were interested in talking further. I went to New York on a trip and decided to call on a number of other institutions while I was there. The final institution was Bankers Trust Company. I was offered a job and I accepted the job.

I really don't think being Jewish had much of an impact on my career. I can remember that there really weren't many Jews in the banking industry but I didn't see myself as a token. I remember I had been working at the bank for about four years and the person I was then working for was the chief operating officer of the bank. I walked in to see him one morning and I mentioned, by the way, that I would not be in for several days at the end of the week because of the Jewish Holidays. He looked at me somewhat surprised because he probably had not realized that I was Jewish and as I was walking out the door, he said, "By the way Ted, in case you're right, would you pray for me too?"

END OF INTERVIEW