

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Youngstown Area Jewish Project

Personal Experiences

O.H. 1128

LILLIAN NAFTALI

Interviewed on

October 22, 1987

By

Pnina Rabinowitz

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY  
ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM  
Youngstown Area Jewish Project  
O.H. 1128

Interviewee: LILLIAN NAFTALI  
Interviewer: Pnina Rabinowitz  
Subject: Youngstown Area Jewish Project  
Date: October 22, 1987

PR: [This is an Oral History for the YSU Oral History Department and the Jewish Federation Archives of Mrs. Lillian Naftali, conducted on October 22, 1987 at Heritage Manor by Mrs. Pnina Rabinowitz.] I'm going to read this. "This is a declaration from the General Assembly of the State of Ohio, Ohio Senate, in memory of Bill Hammerman."

LN: He used to be... our cousin was a Senator. He was a Democrat. Now he's in the Senate, he's a Republican now.

PR: Right. "On Behalf of the members of the 115<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of Ohio, I offer my sincere condolences to the family and friends of Bill Hammerman in your bereavement. A kind, generous man, who was always willing to help others wherever he found a need, Bill Hammerman was loved and respected by many in the Youngstown community. The genuine warmth of his personality made a lasting impression on everyone around him and his work on behalf of such organizations as El Emeth Temple, B'nai B'rith, the Mason, and the Multiple Sclerosis Organization distinguished him as a truly selfless individual. Bill Hammerson refused to let his handicap or any personal adversities bar him from enjoying life to the fullest. He was an ardent sports enthusiast, who introduced many other people to professional sports by organizing excursions to Cleveland and Pittsburgh for baseball games and by operating a ticket agency at Lustig's. He also served as a sideline announcer for Youngstown College football games for several years. Following World War II, Bill Hammerman went to work on the

Mahoning County Engineering staff. He brought to his role as a public servant the same energy and dedication which characterized all of his efforts. The void which his death has created can never be filled, but the legacy of concernment and commitment which he established will certainly live on in the memories of everyone who knew him.”

LN: He sent that to me here. You know that sister you talked to? She just came back from Europe. You know where she stayed? My sister's in Montreal. I have this here I want to show you.

PR: Just a second. Let me turn this off. Now say that again...

LN: We just lost him three years ago. We have Yahrtzeit for him. Then I have one more brother here. There's three of us girls and one brother. So from the six, you know it always becomes less. I miss Bill. He used to come over all the time.

PR: Did you go to games?

LN: Did I go to games? I went to everything! I had a wonderful sister-in-law. We went to New York with them. I even saw South Pacific. All those different things. Now I can't go. I have problems here. I stick to my room a lot. My sister was in Monday. She just came back from New York. She came here to see me and we went out to eat. I can't eat anything now except through a straw. Everything is blended. All I can eat is potatoes and eggs. You get tired of that, you know? But if that's all you can eat, that's all you have to eat. So this is the youngest one. She buys all my things. She gets salad. She's a very busy lady. She don't sit home. She teaches exercise in the Temple on Monday and Thursday mornings. She loves it. She's lovely. Not only lovely but good. I'm the bad one. I'm always complaining.

PR: What can you tell me about Bill Hammerman? Was he married? Did he have a family, children?

LN: He did a lot of work before he was married. He was married. They never had any children.

PR: He wasn't- She wasn't Jewish?

LN: She wasn't Jewish.

PR: Oh!

LN: But those things happen, don't they? She was the most wonderful girl you could meet. She was good to everyone. When you sit here and I don't feel like reading, I think of the old times.

PR: So how did her organize the ....

LN: He sold Ice capades. He used to be in Lustig's Shoe Store, in the basement, sell tickets there. I would help him. And we had ice show tickets and we had them because my sister-in-law worked. If anybody don't know me, if I say I'm Bill Hammerson's sister, they know me. You know how those things are. Where do your children go to school?

PR: One goes to Akiva Academy, my son, at the Jewish Center. My daughter, they don't have a grade for her, so she goes to the public school. She goes to Hebrew School.

LN: Are you keeping Jewish at home too?

PR: I'm trying to.

LN: Its not easy. I always used to keep Jewish. For me to buy a tray of meat was a hell of a job. You know. Today there's very few people. Most of the them. Its whatever way you start out. What you do away from home, you do. Kosher and the Center which is good for Jewish people.

PR: Yes, its good that we have the Center. So, people from the community- would it be the Jewish community or everybody?- would come to Lustig's and buy tickets for the...

LN: You didn't hear so much about the Jewish.

PR: Oh, it was mainly non-Jewish people.

LN: No this was a different thing. Ball games, football games, ice shows. We used to have excursion to New York. You used to sleep on the train. You'd go all around the river. It really was... Everybody knew Bill. Not because he's my brother. Maybe your husband would, I don't know. You're doing social work then?

PR: Volunteer work.

LN: Oh, you don't get paid for it?

PR: No.

LN: Do you enjoy it?

PR: You're my first interview.

LN: And you make friends. How long have you been here?

PR: Eleven years.

LN: Oh, have you? You know, Sometimes there's sociable people and sometimes you meet the other kind. But you need everything in life. And you learn to deal with it. Sometimes you get mad at yourself, you know. But at least I can walk a little bit. I can talk. I can think. Thank God I have my sense. When you don't have that...

PR: Then you're in trouble. I want to ask you these questions.

LN: Where does all this stuff go?

PR: They're compiling archives. They'll file it and then in the future, when historians or young people want to know how they evolved, where they came from, they'll be able to consult it.  
When did your family arrive in the United States?

LN: That I really don't know.

PR: Do you know when they arrived in Youngstown?

LN: I don't know that. I was born here but I travelled on the ocean. My mother was here three months. Bill was about three years old and I was a citizen. I didn't have to become one.

PR: Where did they come from?

LN: Hungry. Somewhere but I can't tell you.

PR: Do you know why they came here?

LN: Her whole family was here. She was the only one there. But he was an only son. And they wanted them to leave Bill there. But my mother wouldn't leave him there. She only had one child, only had the one son. Bill always said he would be awful mad if they left him. Would a mother leave her son? Even for her own parents? When you have a child, you don't want to leave. You don't know when you'll see it. Her brother, I think, brought the family. My father was a *mashgiach*. He didn't have a trade when he came. It wasn't so easy. Worse then than now, I guess.

PR: Do you remember other stories about Hungry? About your arrive in the US? Your arrival in Youngstown?

LN: I always try to trace some of them after they were here a while. When they came here, they were lucky. They used to send money but it never got there. Whether they had the right address or what. Things are more...

PR: Organized.

LN: Yeah, they're organized now.

PR: What part of Youngstown did your family settle in?

LN: We settled in a lot of little places but the one we lived in the longest was on Ohio Avenue. It was nice.

PR: Where there trades for immigrants? Did they work for local people or other immigrants? I guess your father worked for local people.

LN: My father was in butcher shops. In the meat markets.

PR: What was the social life like?

LN: I couldn't tell you. We were kids. Wasn't like now. They didn't stay at the Parkline. People aren't millionaires but they go, they go to places. Everyday, they get a toothbrush there and different things. It must be beautiful. I've been to New York. We used to stay at the Taft downtown. It was years ago. I don't imagine it's so nice now, but it's still a decent place. And the rooms, some of my friends stayed there. They went last week, a group. I know a lot of people in Youngstown. I was raised here.

PR: What temple affiliations, prayer meetings, minyans [did you attend]?

LN: We used to belong to El Emeth. I used to do a lot of telephoning and different things. We went to Oliveonson's. We went to plays. It was nice. You did what you could afford.

PR: Did you belong to youth groups?

LN: No, I was the oldest one. I helped a lot. The younger one, she went everywhere. She's a lovely girl, not because she's my sister. Pearl Greenberger? She lives in West Middlesex but belongs to everything here- to the senate, to all the things. And they want you to give more all the time. If they wanted it so bad, they wouldn't be so good.

PR: Service organizations, like did you belong to B'nai B'rith?

LN: I belonged to B'nai B'rith and so did my husband. My sister belonged to ? B'nai B'rith. This one in Montreal is the President of B'nai B'rith. And the one in Sharon was the hazzan. They used to telephone back and forth about speeches. They were clever. They liked it.

PR: What can you remember about transportation?

LN: We never had a car when I was younger. And my brother, Bill, he spent most of his life in the hospital. He was in a cast. He fell down among the... He had trouble with his leg. It would open and close. He was in a cast in the hospital more than he was anywhere. He a lot of places. They used to take these kids in the hospitals come Halloween and different things. And he fell down the steps at one of the homes, like a Gentile place... I forget the name of it. So he was cripple his whole life. He was in and out of hospitals. And he rode on a running board to go to the University. Somebody used to take him because he couldn't get inside the car on account of the cast. This wasn't all at one time.

PR: And he worked for the Mahoning County Engineering Department?

LN: Yes, down at the courthouse. He did a lot of things. For anyone in his shape, he really did a lot.

PR: What can you remember about merchants?



LN: I worked a lot of department stores. This was in later years. I used to like to sell. I was good saleslady. I was never a card player.

PR: What do you remember about shopping?

LN: For clothes? I used to love to go with my mother after I was married. She had good taste. She would feel the material. They'd come in "Hello Mrs. Hanneman." She knew merchandise and she liked people. And they liked her. They always treated her so nice. I went downtown one day and she had I forget how many teeth pulled. We'd go down for a soda or something. I loved my mother. Who doesn't?

PR: So you took care of her for a long time?

LN: She was quite sick. We had a woman that took care of her when I was at home. Then she had to go to the hospital. I had to go in the room to look at her and I couldn't go. I was very much attached to her because I was home more than the other ones. The one in Montreal was a school teacher here. At that time, you couldn't get married and work. She's the middle one. And the one in West Middlesex is the youngest one. So you feel bad if someone else can get married and you can't. Where are you originally from, New York?

PR: Yes. What do you remember about health care?

LN: There was no Medicare then. My mother had high blood pressure quite a bit. And I inherited a lot of that. I had two surgeries but they were both on the same thing. And he didn't do it right because its not like it should be. I have a lot of dissention in the back too, besides this thing. Drive you nuts some days. You don't even want to go out. But you gotta get out of here every once in a while. I get tired, now more than ever. Its four years the 29<sup>th</sup> of next month that I've been here. It's a beautiful place, isn't it? And I have a beautiful room. Of course, you pay what kind of thing you have. There's double rooms and everything. My sister had all these things fixed for me when I came here.

PR: What do you remember about schools?

LN: I didn't go far in school. I went to high school. I have another brother who left here. He's going to be 81 years old next Sunday. We were all like 3 year apart. But Bill had typhoid fever when he was a child. That leave you very thin. The other one, Sid, he used to be able to fight everybody. He was a tough guy. But Bill was frail. I had scarlet fever. In those days, they didn't let you in the homes for the doctor. They kept their hat on. I was six years old. But Bill was always left.

PR: What do you remember about politics?

LN: I was a Counting Judge. At the end of next week, they sent an absentee ballot. I vote here. But I was sick last year in the hospital, so I didn't vote. Now, I was a counting judge. In those days, they didn't have a machine. You used to get paid for it. I'd have to get the books back. That was my job for the money. I think you got \$10. But Roosevelt was running then and we would work so long. I was a Democrat. I like anything political. And you?

PR: I'm starting to. I'm starting to get interested. I'm going to the League of Women Voters Tuesday night.

LN: You got enough to do without going to school, huh?

PR: I went to school. I have a master's degree from Columbia Journalism School. I worked in Journalism. What can you remember about...

LN: We have a lot of social workers. Did you ever meet any of them?

PR: I know Marilyn.

LN: Marilyn is for here. I mean that people go and interview people when they need help.

PR: What prominent citizens do you remember, Jewish or Christian?

LN: I recognize people when I see them here. Then I recognize their names. Sometimes its been 40 or 50 years. They don't know who I am.

PR: Did you find or hear of anti-Semitism?

LN: I never paid much attention. Do you? They ain't no different than where we are. They think we killed their Jesus. They never forgive you for that.

PR: Did the Jewish people you knew divide into groups like German, Hungarian, Russian?

LN: We never with any Russians. My people came from Hungry and they could talk Slovak but they never... We had a young girl who just graduated from High school who used to clean my apartment. After my mother was sick and I was married. I lived cattycorner from my mother in a house that was made into apartments. And she even brought me a cross stitch thing with Shalom on it. She was here not too long ago. They're from Campbell. She's crazy about my mother. You don't find people working like that anymore. It was more homelike, if you could get good help.

PR: Who were your role models? People who you wanted to be like? Anyone you admired?

LN: [silence]

PR: What were your parents' ambitions for you?

LN: Wanted to see all of us kids get married to the right one. It isn't always a Shuman. You can't complain though. None of us married millionaires. My sister, the young one, she married a fellow from Sharon. She had a lot of admirers. Her husband died 23 years ago. She can remarry but she won't. She does what she wants to do. She's not a millionaire but she does anything she wants to do. And she has 7 grandchildren so she's busy with them. A couple live in New York. One goes to Ithaca. She wants to be horse doctor. Its her third year. He has different kinds of

stores, her father, in Sharon and Butler and all over. So they both have their own cars. He works hard. The boy that goes to Ithaca, he's interested in movies. He wants to make movies. And he's going to go for school for that next year.

PR: What are your memories of your mother's activities? Your grandmother's?

LN: My grandmother was a Tramb. That's the uncle that brought us to America. He had a butcher shop in Homestead [PA]. Its near McKeesport and those places. And one lived in Duquesne which is close by. And those uncles had butcher shops. Business men would see one in Homestead and they'd say, how you'd get here so fast? It was the tram, you know. A long time ago. I would have been there- 55 years. That's a long time to remember. Thank God I have a pretty good memory.

PR: Do you remember shared experiences of the family? Describe some special occasions you remember.

LN: We used to have wonderful Passovers. My mother made everything. And when my mother passed away, I did the same thing for my father. I was cattycorner. And I lost my mother, I couldn't leave my father alone. I never had any children so I moved in there. And Bill was so wonderful. We used to go to Cleveland, to a ball game on a Sunday. He would buy meat for the whole week. He brought me a mangle and a washing machine. My parents were real religious. My father wouldn't eat anything out. My mother would have ice cream or something like that. Bill could call up a bakery on the phone in Cleveland and they would send him stuff on the bus. They knew him so well, from buying stuff.

PR: What was Bill professionally?

LN: Just a ticket man. And a cripple. He had a lot trouble with his leg. It would open and close. He was in Cleveland a long time. When he was ready to come home, we thought he was perfect. He was in a whole plaster cast. A whole one! He couldn't get in the car.

PR: How did you share any growing up problems with your parents? Mother, father or both?

LN: We never did. We never did anything. If we wanted to do something, we'd always ask our parents first. And this Sid, he used to go with Bill, he was the one who get around easy. And believe me, he worked a lot for the family. My family were poor people.

PR: Have you met discrimination as a woman or as a Jew?

LN: Never let myself get involved. I didn't say anything. I would walk away.

PR: Did you receive religious schooling?

LN: No, I didn't. This one who's a teacher, she taught me all the psalms years ago. She could teach Hebrew. I couldn't read Hebrew.

PR: Have your feelings about being a Jew changed from childhood to adulthood?

LN: I guess like anyone would. Is your family religious?

PR: My mother was more than my father.

LN: Do you have sisters and brothers?

PR: I have four sisters and brothers. Are you concerned about the survival of Israel?

LN: I always thought I'd see it but I didn't. The one from Sharon, she saw it twice and they were going to go again. The other one who's a teacher was going to go but he was sick a lot.

PR: Will there a be Jewish community in the United States 100 years from now?

LN: Who can worry about that? I won't be here.

RP: How would you define what it is to be a Jew? Is it a religious commitment, cultural, intellectual, ethnic, a set of values, commitment to Israel, philanthropy...

LN: I think it's intellectual and cultural- something you're interested in and you were brought up in.

PR: I think that's it.

LN: I'm glad you came. I enjoyed this.