

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Jewish Senior Citizens Project

Jewish Culture

O. H. 294

HILDA COLLINS

Interviewed

by

Karlyn Bennehoof

on

January 29, 1984

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

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Jewish Senior Citizens Project

INTERVIEWEE: HILDA COLLINS

INTERVIEWER: Karlyn Bennehoof

SUBJECT: Jewish Culture, synagogues, Depression era

DATE: January 29, 1984

B: This is an interview with Hilda Collins for the Youngstown State University Oral History Project Heritage Manor. This interview is being conducted at Heritage Manor on January 29, 1984, at approximately 10:00 a.m.

Mrs. Collins, let me start out with some basic information. When and where were you born?

C: Youngstown.

B: What year were you born?

C: 1902.

B: Can you tell me something about your early education?

C: Well, I went to Market Street School and South High School and graduated there. That's all the education I have.

B: Did you have any religious education as a child?

C: I went to the temple, what's the name of it?

B: Rodef Sholom?

C: No, the other one, the El-Emeth. I went through there and was confirmed there. That's about all the education I had.

B: Is that an Orthodox temple?

C: Yes.

B: Can you give me some idea of what a typical day was like when you were a child?

C: I don't know, just the same as it is now.

B: What was Youngstown like in the early 1900's? It was different than today.

C: Yes, much different. I don't remember much about it.

B: Do you remember the trollies? They used to have trollies.

C: Yes, yes.

B: Were those electric, did they run from the wires overhead?

C: Yes.

B: Do you remember any of the businesses that were downtown?

C: There were the same as today. There was Strouss, McKelvey, the same. Of course, there aren't those now, but that's what they were then.

B: Let's see what some questions are that I have here. What sort of organizations have you belonged to in the past?

C: Everything is on the edge of my tongue and I can't say them. Hadassah.

B: Do you remember the Great Depression?

C: Yes.

B: What can you tell me about that?

C: Well, we had hardly anything, just like it is now. Of course, we live here, and things are taken care of. In those days it was pretty tough.

B: What did your father do for a living?

C: He had a grocery store.

B: Was that affected by the Depression?

C: Well, not too much, but it was a little.

B: When did you get married?

C: In 19 . . . it's on the edge of my tongue and I can't say it.

B: Do you remember how old you were?

C: Twenty-six.

B: Twenty-six, okay. So that would have been about 1928.

C: Yes.

B: Right before the Depression?

C: Yes, right before.

B: What did your husband do for a living?

C: He had a drug store. When that all came, he stopped that and finally he went to work for the city.

B: Doing what?

C: Working in the municipal court.

B: Did you have children?

C: One son.

B: What's his name?

C: Ivan.

B: Do you remember what it was like when World War II hit?

C: I don't remember much about it. It was tough.

B: Were you involved in anything that, maybe, contributed to the war effort, anything like that?

C: I don't remember anything.

B: Do you remember what the religious institutions were when you were a child?

C: What do you mean, the area's . . .

B: The synagogues, do you remember what synagogues were around then?

- C: Yes. The Jewish and the Christian, same as there are today.
- B: The synagogue that you spoke of earlier, that you belonged to, what was the name of it?
- C: It's the . . .
- B: Something Emeth.
- C: The El-Emeth.
- B: Is the El-Emeth, did that come about from the two synagogues that joined?
- C: Yes, the El-Emeth and the . . . I can't think of the second. The names are on the tip of my tongue and I can't say them.
- B: That's okay. Did you do any traveling when you were young?
- C: Oh, just to Detroit, and to Cleveland, places like that. Not much.
- B: What was the mode of travel?
- C: Train.
- B: Oh, there were trains running then?
- C: Yes.
- B: How long, let's say, if you went to Detroit, what would the average length of the trip be, between here and Detroit?
- C: Well, we went by plane then. Oh, it didn't take long.
- B: What were the trains like, did they have dining cars and sleeping cars and that kind of thing that you see in the movies?
- C: Yes.
- B: Were there a lot of cars around when you were a child?
- C: Machines, yes, quite a few.
- B: Was that the typical, did typical families own cars like they do today?
- C: Yes, as far as I can remember they did.

- B: When you got married you stayed in Youngstown, when you got married, right?
- C: No, we went to Farrell.
- B: Pennsylvania?
- C: Yes.
- B: Was that because of your husband's business?
- C: His business was there.
- B: What brought you back here?
- C: Well, he closed up my store, and we didn't have anything so we came here to stay with my folks. He got started in Youngstown.
- B: In the same business?
- C: Yes.
- B: During World War II, was the Jewish community in Youngstown aware of what was going on in Europe?
- C: Oh yes, they were, I'm sure they were.
- B: Did you hear anything, that you recall?
- C: No.
- B: Do you remember any of the organizations that were here, having to do with World War II? I think one of them that I heard of was the Jewish-American Fund. I think it had something to do with establishing Palestine.
- C: I don't know of any.
- B: Did you work?
- C: No, I didn't do any work, anything like that.
- B: Did you ever run into any problems with anti-Semitism?
- C: No.
- B: What was the Jewish-Gentile relation like?
- C: Well, it wasn't bad then.
- B: How does that compare to now?

- C: Now, I don't know. I don't think it is as good as it was then.
- B: Do you have any idea why that would be? Most people think about problems of that kind as being someplace in the past, you know, a long time ago or something. Whenever people hear the term anti-Semitism it's usually connected with the turn of the century in Russia.
- C: Mostly, something like that. Russian, and all of that.
- B: Have you run into problems recently, with anti-Semitism? Is that why you're . . .
- C: No, I haven't run into anything like that.
- B: You say you remembered that you worked here for a few years?
- C: Yes.
- B: What did you do here?
- C: The telephones, and so on.
- B: At the front desk?
- C: Yes.
- B: How old were you when you did that?
- C: Oh, I don't remember. I'm 81 now, I must have been about 70.
- B: Oh, it wasn't that long ago. What other kinds of things did you do, did you do other volunteer work? What did you do for the Hadassah, what did that involve?
- C: The what?
- B: The Hadassah. You said you were a member of the Hadassah.
- C: No.
- B: Okay, I must be thinking of something else then. Did you belong to the sisterhood?
- C: Sisterhood?
- B: Yes.

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C: That was a temple. I did, yes.

B: That's what I mean. What kind of organization is that?

C: Well, they take care of different things. I don't know. I don't remember those things because I haven't been at it for a long time.

B: I was thinking of another question a moment ago. It slipped my mind. Thank you.

C: I hope it was okay.

B: Why?

C: I forgot a lot of things.

END OF INTERVIEW