

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Jewish Senior Citizens Project

Jewish Culture

O. H. 305

ROSE FELMAN

Interviewed

by

Karlyn Bennehoof

on

February 12, 1984

ROSE FELMAN

Rose Felman is 74 years old. She had lived at Heritage Manor since 1983. She came here from Chicago to be near her family and to receive proper nursing care. She was born in Brooklyn, New York, the daughter of Israel and Bessie Lockson. She attended grammar school and high school in Youngstown, graduating in 1929.

In 1937, she went to Chicago to marry Julius Felman, who worked in a shoe factory. They never had any children, but she had great pleasure interacting with her cousin's children. In 1961 Mr. Felman died.

Rose worked as an optical lens inspector for 22 years, retiring in 1963. After her retirement, she was active with her friends, Hadassah, and a charity for retarded children. She enjoys the safety, security, activity, and socialization Heritage Manor provides.

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INTERVIEWEE: ROSE FELMAN

INTERVIEWER: Karlyn Bennehoof

SUBJECT: Youngstown in the 1920's, Chicago, World War II

DATE: February 12, 1984

B: This is an interview with Rose Felman for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program on the Jewish Senior Citizens. This interview is being conducted at Heritage Manor on February 12, 1984, at approximately 1:50 p.m.

Let's start with some basic information, when and where where were you born?

F: I was born in Brooklyn, New York, on February 16, 1910. I don't remember how old I was, about seven or six, when we came to Youngstown. I graduated from Rayen School in 1929. Then I worked at Malkoff's Grocery on Oak Street. Then I got married in 1937 and I went to Chicago and I got married there. My husband died in 1961, March, and I've been on my own. I worked with Simpson Optical, it was connected with Bell & Howell. I kept falling down with one accident after another and the doctor got ahold of my brother and told him that he should do something, whether I should go in a home there or here. He figured here would be better and here I am.

B: When did you come to Heritage Manor?

F: I came on December first, last year will be two years. I didn't come here, I went to a nursing home in Mineral Ridge. I was there about six or four months and came here after Easter. It will be a year next month, March, that I think I am in this place. I like it very much.

B: Yes, it's a nice place.

- F: Yes. I'm getting accustomed to my life like this. I never dreamt that I would have to be living like I am living. I belonged to quite a few organizations in Chicago. I love it very much over there, but I couldn't stay anymore myself.
- B: What organizations did you belong to?
- F: I belonged to the Senior Hadassah there and I was a life member for the retarded children, the School for Retarded Children. I liked being with them there. I lived in the senior citizen's building and they had different things going on there that I took in. That's it. Here I'm doing the same thing. I like the art room, arts and crafts. That's my lifesaver; I can't wait till tomorrow to go. The exercise room is open.
- B: Did you have any brothers and sisters?
- F: I have one brother. In fact, he just left before you came in. He's here in Youngstown. Do you want to know who he is? Maybe not.
- B: Yes, what's his name?
- F: His name is Shy Lockson.
- B: No sisters then?
- F: No, I have no sisters, just one brother.
- B: Were your parents born in this country?
- F: No, my parents were born in Russia. They both came from Russia. In 1905 they came to America. We wandered around quite a bit. We lived in Sedalia, Missouri, and we lived in Kansas City, Missouri. My father was an interpreter for Union Pacific Railroad many, many years ago.
- B: An interpreter?
- F: Yes, with different languages, because he knew quite a few: Russian, Polish, and all that.
- B: That's interesting.
- F: Then he came here and he had a lot of his friends here that he grew up with from Europe. We remained here. This has been my hometown since then. I still like Chicago better; I never liked Youngstown.
- B: I don't blame you. Do you remember anything at all Brooklyn, New York?

- F: No, I don't remember anything.
- B: You were what, seven years old when you moved here?
- F: I hadn't started school. After I came here I started kindergarten. I must have been six or seven or something like that.
- B: That was in the early 1900's?
- F: I graduated from the new Rayen High School in 1929. It must have been in the 1920's, I don't know exactly.
- B: What was Youngstown like in the 1920's as opposed to the way it is now?
- F: To tell you the truth I don't know what is going on here. I haven't gotten around anywhere. The people I grew up with, girls and the fellows I knew, are either grandparents or they're gone. I miss quite a lot of them. In fact, when I came here some of my friends recognized me. I thought they were gone and they were here. I got reacquainted and that's it.
- B: Do you remember the trolley cars that were in Youngstown?
- F: No, I didn't know they had trolley cars.
- B: Yes, I do't know if they still had them in the 1920's or not.
- F: We had streetcars, that I know, but I don't know about trolleys.
- B: I guess that's what I meant then.
- F: We lived on Delaware Avenue at the end of the line, end of Belmont. There were barns there.
- B: To house the cars?
- F: Yes. Before I got married we went away, they were having buses.
- B: I heard the buses ran on the electricity from the streetcars for awhile?
- F: That I don't know.
- B: What was Chicago like, you went to Chicago in the 1930's?
- F: I always wanted to live there. I was there when I graduated in 1929. I graduated in February and I went to see

some relatives and I met my husband there. That was the end of Youngstown for me. It was beautiful and I still say it's a nice, beautiful country. Wherever I lived there, I lived right next to Lake Michigan. My apartment was here and there was Lake Michigan.

B: That must have been nice.

F: I loved it; I still do. It's like every place else, if you don't . . . you have to make up your mind to like it. My mother, when I was going with my husband and we got married my mother said, "I don't want you to marry a Chicago gangster." She thought he was a gangster, well, he wasn't. The fact is that I remember when my husband and I went to the show where Dillinger was killed, the night that he was killed out in front of the theatre. There was a lot of commotion there.

Then there was Capone who was there when I was still in active duty. I remember reading a magazine story and it mentioned streets that I didn't know. I thought it was in Chicago. I asked somebody and they said, "Why don't you read the end of it and see what it says?" I read it and all the places, Boardman, and all the racketeer country was all here in Youngstown.

B: Youngstown had quite a reputation for being a mob city?

F: Yes. I didn't know until I read that article; I thought they were talking about Chicago. They have good and bad in every city.

B: There was a lot of activity with the gangsters in Chicago?

F: Oh yes. A lot of them were killed.

B: Was it like the movies depicted it to be, with a bunch of hit men walking into a restaurant and just machine-gunning someone down?

F: If it was it wasn't around where I lived. It was probably in Halsted Street, that was noted for that. In the Italian neighborhoods there was a lot of that going on.

B: There was?

F: Yes. This Halsted and Belmont, that was known for a lot of killing of politicians. They would find somebody killed every day. It died when Dailey was mayor. When he was in office there wasn't that much killing or anything, it died down. Last year when I was there we had a lady mayor. What was the name? Jane Burns. She

tried to do it, but I don't know who the mayor is now. I don't know if she still is the mayor or not.

B: So there was still mob activity?

F: Yes, there was, but not as much as when I first came there. My husband used to say don't go here and don't go there, "You are liable to get killed." I'd say, "Well, if I get killed I won't die again, I'll die that one time." Anyhow, thank God, nothing happened. That's it, that's the story of my life.

B: What do you remember of the Great Depression?

F: The Great Depression wasn't too good. I know I was working at this Malkoff Grocery. I used to go after school and I worked there for awhile. That was in 1929. I was going to school yet.

B: When the market crashed?

F: I graduated in 1929 and I was going to . . .

B: Was it very difficult for you during the Depression?

F: No, I was working quite a bit. My brother worked too. He is younger than I am. We got along, that's all I know.

B: What about World War II, what was it like during World War II?

F: You mean here or where I was?

B: Where you were.

F: I got a job in a defense factory there in Chicago. I was making lenses for bomb sites for military use. I was a welder at Simpson Optical. I don't think they're in existence anymore, they went to California last time I heard. It was like every place else, everybody was anxious for the war to be over. I don't know if you have ever heard of a ship that seven brothers got killed. Two sisters worked with me, and since that time they don't allow any brothers to be together. These seven boys came from Nebraska and their two sisters worked by our place.

B: They were in the military and their ship was . . .

F: Sunk. There were a lot of boys killed on that ship. That's it.

- B: You were in Chicago at the time, during World War II, was the Jewish community in Chicago aware of what was going on with European Jews?
- F: Yes. That's one thing I could never understand. They had no choice to live or die. They would take them in to those boxcars and all that. I said, "Couldn't you have escaped? You would have been dead anyhow, why not take the chance?" He said, no, he couldn't do that. My husband's whole family got killed and I suppose my mother's and father's families too. I never knew my father's family.
- B: How early was the American population aware of what was going on? Was it as early as 1939 when the war started or was it later?
- F: I think later, I'm not sure. I couldn't say. I really don't know. I think it was a little later when all that Hitler business was going on.
- B: Were there organizations formed to help European Jews at the time?
- F: Yes, there was the Hadassah and the B'nai B'rith. They used to make collections to send over there for the army or something. I don't know if there were any private places. It's so long ago I forgot.
- B: It has been awhile.
- F: A long time ago.
- B: I'm getting all of my information secondhand. I'm very glad I didn't have to live through it. That was really something. That holocaust, they showed pictures of it and they still say that it didn't happen, but it did.
- B: Yes, the revisionist historians now are trying to deny that it happened.
- F: The trouble is that the ones that are dead can't talk if it's real or not real.
- B: I think that any intelligent person looking at the evidence would have to say that it did happen. My concern is that the next generation of children are going to end up reading history books in school.
- F: They're doing it already, I think.
- B: Yes, and they're not going to know. They're not going to know what the facts are.

- F: My little nephew and my brother's grandson, he's not even seven, he asked me if I was in the holocaust. He actually doesn't know what it was all about, but he heard about it. He's a smart little fellow. I said, "Honey, I wasn't in there so I couldn't tell you, but it was pretty gruesome."
- B: I think we covered that about eight or ten years ago when I was in school. It wasn't at all adequate; it was a couple of paragraphs in a chapter on World War II.
- F: They're going to hear about it for many generations, I think. It's a terrible thing to know that. It seemed to me that the American people didn't do enough. Now where there is fighting and things they send money. I'm not saying they shouldn't do it, but take care of your own people first. There are plenty of people here that are starving, children need milk and good stuff. It's a funny world, that's all I know.
- B: Yes, it is. You said you went to Chicago to visit family, how did you travel?
- F: I went with the Erie Railroad.
- B: By rail?
- F: Yes.
- B: Was it common for people to travel by car?
- F: It was quite common then. Whoever had a car would travel, but not as much as now. Here they wouldn't think of taking a plane or a train. The train was out all together. Someone was talking downstairs that they are traveling to Denver, Colorado, and that's quite a trip by car. I told them, "Gee whiz, aren't you afraid it's too much of a ride for you?" He said, "No." They were going with somebody else and they were taking turns driving. Now they talk about five or six hours to go here or there.
- B: It used to take days.
- F: Well, with all these highways, things that they have now, they've made up time.
- B: What was downtown Youngstown like when you got to Youngstown?
- F: I don't know, I haven't been there yet.
- B: You haven't been downtown at all?
- F: No.

FELMAN

8

B: What did your husband do for a living?

F: He was a shoelaster.

B: A shoelaster, what's that?

F: They put the shoe, the leather part on to the shoe.
He worked for Florsheim.

B: Okay, I was just going to ask if he had his own business.

F: He worked many, many years there.

B: Do you have any children?

F: No.

B: Okay, is there anything else that you want to add?

F: No, unless you have something that you want to ask?

B: No, I've asked just about all my questions that I had,
and a couple more.

F: Well, I hope that will help you, whatever you're doing.

B: It was a nice interview, thank you very much.

END OF INTERVIEW