

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Jewish Senior Citizens Project

Jewish Culture

O. H. 320

EDWARD BLACK

Interviewed

by

Carrie Stanton

on

December 7, 1983

## EDWARD BLACK

Edward Black was born in Canton, Ohio, in 1917, the son of Ben and Anna Black. He resides in Austintown with his wife, Nora. They have three children; Joseph, Camille, and Daniel. He is close with his family and is proud of his children's accomplishments.

Ed attended South High School for one year, he then entered the Marine Corps in 1940 and served until 1946. He married Nora in 1943 while he was still a Marine. He then was employed at Republic Steel as a construction foreman and then as a press operator at Fisher Body in Lordstown until he retired.

He is active with the JCC and is a member of the 1714 Retiree's Union. His hobbies are gardening and traveling. He and his wife have traveled by car to Florida and out West. He commented that you never realize what a beautiful country this is until you have driven across it and have seen all of its wonderful sites.

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INTERVIEWEE: EDWARD BLACK

INTERVIEWER: Carrie Stanton

SUBJECT: Depression, World War II, Marines, Youngstown

DATE: December 7, 1983

S: This is an interview with Edward Black for the Youngstown State University Jewish Senior Citizens Project by Carrie Stanton at the Jewish Community Center on Gypsy Lane in Youngstown, Ohio, on December 7, 1983, at approximately 1:30 p.m.

Maybe you should start with your childhood, where you are from, your parents.

B: I don't remember my younger childhood. I was born in Canton, Ohio. I guess we left there and moved to Youngstown. I do remember parts of my childhood. We had the dishes for the milk and the pots and pans and another cupboard with what they call the meat dishes, the family meat dishes.

S: Why did they do that?

B: The only thing that I could ever get, from what I learned in life, it was just tradition. Tradition, and the meat had to be killed by a person that was authorized to do this. It was a negative if the person that examined the intestines of the sheep, if it didn't look good, forget it; it wasn't kosher. They had their ways of doing things.

S: Who was the person that did this, it wasn't the rabbi, was it?

B: No, not the rabbi. The shiffer, or whatever they call it. I don't know the word, but he's the fellow that slaughters. Now, when you slaughter a sheep, you don't . . . You see, the way they slaughter commercially,

they spun him and hit him in the head. Wherever they had their crop for slaughter, their cattle, they would hang them up on one foot and that's it. They didn't hit the kosher beef, they didn't hit the cattle on the head, they just came down the shute, but he was hanging by one leg. The shiffel, I don't know if I'm saying the word right, . . .

S: We'll find out later.

B: . . . he was authorized to do this, make the kosher food. He would use a long knife, and with one sweep of the knife, you don't go back and forth, one sweep of the knife, they would cut the throat. While it was hanging they would let it bleed out. At that time only the upper half of the cattle was kosher, not the bottom. They would cut the beef in four quarters, they would have two quarters of upper and no hind quarters were at that time. Now, I don't think it has been changed over here, but they tell me lately in Israel it has been changed because of the prices and the lack of food. I'm not sure, but that's what I understand. With the high cost of living the way it is today, when they kill a beef for kosher the whole thing is cut.

Another thing that I can remember when I was small, we lived on the south side of Youngstown. Before I went to school, my mother had a fish market in Youngstown down by the public market, a couple of doors down from the square. There was a big market, it had bread in the window, they sold meat, they sold fish, groceries, and way in the back, we had a little fish market. In those days, the fish used to come in and was delivered by railroad express. It either came from Boston or Buffalo. Depending on the fish you're buying, you can get nice, great, ocean fish. They iced it. They had no refrigeration at that time. They had ice. On the way down from Buffalo or from Boston, every time they stopped to pick up passengers, they were making sure there was ice. That's the way my mother used to get us fish. She used to buy fish for three cents a pound, sell it for five cents a pound. She was scrounging out then. When she would come home, she would have to chop it up fine and get it around the fish and keep them fresh. She knew how to do her fish fixing.

S: Was she the support of the family?

B: Yes, I would say, yes, my mother was. Papa, though, he was a, how do you put it, a drinker. He was a drinker. He would make a sale and after that, not too long, when he would have enough in his hand, he would go to the bootlegger. They had a place where you could go get a shot. You would sit there long enough and they would

clean you. They would take your pockets inside out.

My mother went down one day to the store and it was padlocked. She couldn't understand it. She knew many other people that had--there was a fellow by the name of Moskavich--rented this storeroom. For the fish she paid so much, for the groceries another fellow paid so much, everybody shared the rent, but he wasn't paying the rent, evidently.

I can remember that vaguely because after I got a little older and started to go to school, I still went downtown to sell newspapers. That's the way a kid made a coin, or whatever, and helped with the house. That's the way it was. You didn't say, "Hey, ma, give me a quarter." You brought the quarter for mom. You lived as a family.

She rented from a doctor and his two daughters. His two sisters were schoolteachers. They owned this property. She went to the store, around the corner from where the storeroom was, and the maid wouldn't let her see the sisters or the doctor, the brother, to see about opening up a store. But, she didn't know that Dollar Bank handled all that. If she would have known that, she would have gone to the Dollar Bank and said, "Hey, give me the store, I'll open it. Let me do the business." She didn't know exactly where to go, to the banks, the realtors. But, she had a head on her shoulders, I will say that, very keen. Anyhow, after that deal, she bought a grocery store.

S: Not in Briar Hill?

B: No, it's down in what they called the Monkey's Nest. There were bakeries there, every corner had a store.

S: Really?

B: On Rayen Avenue, if you go up West Lake Crossing, you bear left. You go down on West Rayen Avenue and back in there it's called the Monkey's Nest.

S: There are no houses back in there?

B: Not now, but there were a lot of homes.

S: What kind of neighborhood was it, ethnic?

B: Ethnic. There were Slovaks, Pollacks, colored; not too many colored because Campbell didn't bring them up to Youngstown yet. It was an ethnic neighborhood.

S: I never heard anybody talk about that.

B: Belcon Bakery was in there. What they call Upper Mill, U. S. Steel, that was in there, which was later taken over by a bigger manufacturer. They made Chrysler bodies here in the late 1950's, Briggs Manufacturing.

She had a grocery store, but she moved out. She piled all her groceries up--we lived on Wabash on the south side--and put them up in the attic. She was going to look for a place downtown. So, she moved downtown, she opened up the fish and fruit market.

I used to ride a little kitty cart with the wooden wheels. I remember that really well. I remember one day she sent us for fish, back through the back, and I was on North Watt Street. Anyhow, I went and took the fish. I forget what she gave me, nothing much, maybe a salami. I got to the back door, I remember to this day a big guy with a bald head, and I do remember he had a big moustache. I looked at him and I turned. I remember running underneath the food stand where I slept. They said, "What's the matter, what's the matter?" He scared the devil out of me. You know what I mean? Like a big Turk, he scared the devil out of me.

I don't remember back that much. My mother bought a house from her sister.

S: She was the real breadwinner in the family then?

B: Oh, yes.

S: How many were there?

B: My brother, myself, and three sisters. I was the youngest.

S: Do you remember the Depression?

B: Oh, definitely, definitely, I remember the Depression.

S: What was it like then?

B: Well, as a youngster still going to school, there was always somebody else home. My mother always had somebody else. The house she had bought was a four-family home.

S: Did she have a hard time moving in?

B: No, she managed, some way, some how, from the rent. She was a saver. I remember the Depression, but to say we were hit, like some families . . . I remember a lady would come crying, "They're taking our house."

Then the neighbor would come over, don't cry Mrs. so and so, don't cry. How can you help a woman losing her house. Then the next week the one that said don't cry, she was crying because her house was gone. If you couldn't make the payments, no paying interest . . . Today you go get a loan and they hold you up with a pen. In those days it was cruel.

S: Who did people blame, did they blame Hoover or Coolidge?

B: They blamed Hoover. They didn't know. It took from the turn of the century, people were working, people were working and had money. My dad, when he went in the mill to work, had to work twelve hours a day and he was getting nine dollars a week. That was pretty good at that time. My dad pulled my mother to Chicago, from Chicago--this was before I was born--to Montana. I wish he would have gone south. I wish he would have went to Florida or California, but I guess they never got there. They came back to Youngstown.

S: Did they come from the old country?

B: My mother came from the old country, from Hungary. I'll say Hungary because after World War I they divided that up into Czechoslovakia. She used to tell me stories, one week it belonged to Hungary, the next week it belonged to Austria. It was either Hungary or Austria that was fighting, every month, every week, I don't know. It seemed that way. After World War I they divided it up, they got Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia. All of that was cut up.

S: Why did they come over here, were they pilgrims, or did they just want a better life?

B: My mother told me, in the Jewish faith the father made a deal. Another father got paid, "Your son is going to marry my daughter," or vice-versa. It's done on a handshake, that's the way it goes. She found out that her father had promised her to a man with a long, white beard, an elderly man. Her brother was over here. But she said to her brother, "Send me the money, send me a ticket and you can have my dowry." In those days a girl . . . Even today I think with the Jewish faith, I don't know, I'll have to find out myself whether there's a dowry that comes with the girl. She said, "Send me a ticket and I'll give you my dowry." The dowry was whatever the children were getting from the property, what they had. Her parents had the property and the farm. I guess over there they were pretty well-to-do compared to others. She said, "Send me a ticket," and she said good-bye to her mother. How many

days she cried just thinking of her father. She couldn't say good-bye to him because she knew he wouldn't let her come. In Italian they call it masha, in Jewish it's matchmaking. She came over here, and her sister was in McKeesport, Pennsylvania. She went there and worked in a cigar factory.

S: There must have been a large Jewish population in Pittsburgh. I've had more people tell me that they went to Pittsburgh from there.

B: They branched out.

S: They didn't work in the steel mills, did they?

B: No, no, business. There was a lady and a gentleman that came on the same ship as my mother from the same town. They landed in McKeesport. I'll tell you about that as time goes on. She went to Philadelphia. I don't know who was in Philadelphia. That's where she met my dad. My dad comes from Romania, he was a Romanian Jew. They met and . . .

S: Why did he come?

B: He had to flee. If you don't get out of there, then you go into the service. After you're twelve years old, you automatically have to go into the service in Romania. Hungary had the same. They were all the same, there are a lot of them. That's the way they came over here, somebody sending them a ticket. I don't know where. Some left with nothing.

S: You didn't have to have sponsors then?

B: No, if you had a ticket, you had transportation, you could come. They met and they married there in Philadelphia. My mother used to say, "Every time I got pregnant, your father would hit me in the head with the potatoes." The women didn't know how to protect themselves. He would pick up a potato and hit her in the head with it. I have three sisters and a brother. I think I was about seven or eight when my parents split up. My mother remarried; she didn't marry a Jewish fellow, she remarried a Greek fellow.

As far as our family, I remember as a youngster, before I went to school, my mother had a whole barn full of chickens and geese. Every so many days she would put corn in a washtub and let it soak so it would swell up. I remember, I had to go out and catch a goose, bring it in on the porch, and open the goose's mouth and put the corn in, then take the corn and pull it down its throat. That was fattening the goose. They were all



in the barn and they didn't run around. People would come and buy the geese. They had to take the goose to the shiffel, or whoever did the killing, to make sure it was fat enough. They would come up and they would feel the goose wherever they thought there was fat. That's what they cooked in, chicken or goose, or duck fat. They call it shamalts. That's what they would cook with, bake with. You didn't use the lard, no way, because that's the only thing they had in those days. There was no oil that you get now in the jar. It was from the fat. You would use shamalts, that's what they cooked with. You could make soup and do anything. You could fry eggs with it too, it didn't make any difference. I remember that.

I remember one day when my mother had enough money she bought my dad a horse and wagon. Down on the east end of Youngstown, on Federal Street, I can remember that there used to be what they called a livery stable. Now every Jew that was on a horse and wagon, some owned them, some didn't. You could go down and rent them for the day. It cost you so much, whatever the price was I don't remember. They go to the market, whatever they do, rags or iron. They used to run around the street, "Rags and iron." They would give a kid three cents for a bag of rags, maybe so much for a piece of copper. Do you know the rag men sent their children to college from that? My mother tells me, I forget his name, he did the same thing my dad did, haul rags and iron. He bought a case of bottles. Instead of taking them back to where he was supposed to take it, he washed them out and put the juice in himself, and that's how he started the Golden Age Bottling Company, from what I understand, from a case of bottles.

S: You don't know what his name was?

B: Darsky was his name. His first shop was up on Myrtle Avenue.

S: I'm thinking of Dunning, but that was R. C.

B: Dunning, they come from coal company. Dunning and Crum, that was a coal company down there by the South High School.

B: That's how they started a coal company?

S: Yes, that Dunning and Crum Coal. They went into bottling when coal went to oil. They used to just sell ice and make ice up there where they're bottling. It used to be up on Indianola Avenue. The ice man used to go up there and buy ice. He was up there on Indianola before Youngstown Building Materials. There were only two of

them. Then Isaly's made ice cream, too. Isaly's made ice and these ice men used to go around the neighborhood selling ice, because they didn't have any refrigeration.

S: Did they use a horse, the men on the horses?

B: Oh sure. Where I lived on Wabash, across the street, there were the Sitting Brother's Coal Company. On the corner of Wabash and Myrtle they had a barn of eight horses. The guys used to fill the wagon up. You had to shovel the coal in and then shovel it out. The horses used to pull the wagons. The first trucks they came out with had solid wheels. They would break up the street. When they started having trucks--I remember the trucks, autocars they had--little by little the horses went goodbye.

S: What was your first car?

B: I had a Ford, Model A. I didn't get it when I was sixteen, I must have gotten it when I was eighteen. I don't remember whether I had to have a driver's license or not. You just get in the car and go. That car cost me about \$12. In those days--we were just coming out of the Depression--they were advertising Dodge, Chevrolet, \$595, Chryslers, all that. You figure you have to look at it in perspective. You made \$1300 working in the mills, you did pretty good. Over \$1100, you had to start paying income tax. You figure it took a half of a year to buy a car. It's the same difference today. That's why your cars are going up.

S: You were sort of from a mixed family then, with your father not Jewish?

B: My father was Jewish.

S: Oh. I thought you said . . .

B: No, my mother remarried, but not a Jewish fellow.

S: That's what I mean.

B: My sisters married Italians, my brother married a Ukranian girl, and I married an Italian girl. Here I am, I'm trying to pick up, in a sense, where I came from and what it is all about. I didn't know, myself. I was in the service. I had been to Pearl Harbor December 7, 1941. What are you going to do, you happened to be there. Like they say today, to get ahead you have to be in the right place at the right time. Well, I wasn't trying to get ahead, and I was in the right place at the wrong time.

S: Everyone was quite surprised.

B: Oh, yes.

S: Why weren't they expecting anything?

B: They never did. Roosevelt said Pearl Harbor was impregnable so they showed him different. That's the way I look at it. Everybody was sleeping, let's put it that way. When they would come to wave the olive branch . . .

Anyway, I was aboard ship there on the U.S.S. Phoenix, and when we came out of there we figured we were going to bump against the whole Japanese fleet. I feel if they would have brought a landing force, they would have taken us. Through my time in the service, I couldn't get off the ship. I spent three years aboard ship, you were only supposed to spend two and two on land, but the war broke out and there I was. We were out through Australia escorting and got into the battle in Guadal Canal.

From when I was a kid I used to be called Jew Boy. I told the fellows in the service that I was stationed with, that if they ever come to Youngstown and want to look me up they will never find me. If you go up around South Avenue and hit around the Peacock Gardens and ask for Hitler or Jew Boy, then they'll tell you where I am.

The upskirt didn't bother me. When I went in the service and got stuck up on the ship, which was no fault of anybody's, things happen. We had this big, Polish fellow come aboard ship as a second lieutenant. He got stuck aboard ship. There was a little fellow they called feather merchant, he was a second lieutenant. Finally, they got the major and the captain merchant, he came from V. M. I. I was a pfc [private first class]. They said they were going to make three corporals, written and oral. It came time to take the exam, I took the written and oral and I came in second.

S: Good.

B: I was going to make corporal, a few more bucks, but they made the first one and the third one. All the fellows said, "You should have been made corporal." But the major didn't want to make me. Six months later they had one vacancy for corporal. They were going to make the first one corporal. We took the exam and it came out that I was first, but they made the second one corporal.

S: Oh, no.

B: About that time I said to the sergeant, "Sergeant, I want to see the first sergeant." "First sergeant, I want to see the major." "What about?" "It's personal." I finally got up to see him; he was shaving. I stepped into his quarters aboard ship. "Private first class Black would like to talk to the major." He said, "At ease. Go ahead, speak up." I went on to explain all the examinations and then I said, "Major, it wouldn't be because I am Jewish?" He said, "Get out, get out, get out." He chased me out. Anyhow, after awhile, in four or three weeks, we came back to the states and went down through Panama Canal and came into Philadelphia Navyard. The sergeant said, "He's gone already, he went right away." I said, "Let's go up and see the feather merchant, the captain." He had made major in the meantime, too. "Let's go see the major, maybe he can switch me into corporal rank." I went up to see him and he said, "I'll let you know." Dampkee was this major's name. He was off the ship at eight o'clock and by twelve o'clock I had the corporal's rate. My wife said, "Do you think . . . ?" I said, "What does it look like?" What could you say? Because I'm Jewish it's holding me back.

Then I came out of the service and I got married to the sweetheart I was waiting for in 1943. I took her down to Qwanico, Virginia, and we had a nice place down there. One day I was instructing, rifles and pistols. I liked it down there. Suddenly I heard scuttlebut, what they call scuttlebut, that the butcher was thrown in the brig because he left out the pork loins he was supposed to cut up and stew, and the meat spoiled. He got thirty days bread and water. I went to the first sergeant and said, "Hey, I hear you need a butcher." "Yes, do you know how . . ." I said, "I watched the guy at home at the butcher shop." He said, "Come on with me, come on with me." I went with him and he took me into this major's office and told the major that I wanted to change. In the Marine Corps you either had staff, which was office, cooks, bakers, what have you, and then you had line duty. I decided I was going to be a butcher. They didn't send me to a school or anything, what I learned I learned right there. I had a little bit of experience cooking before I went in the service, but I never put that down.

I got the job. The major said, "That's what we want, somebody wanting to do this. We don't want to make from a butcher a truck driver, or from a truck driver to a butcher." He said, "Do you know how to butcher?" I said, "Major, butchers weren't born." I'll tell you, it was something. The first cook came in and was going to show me how to butcher. No hurry, I sliced the loin, layed it over and chopped it off. After I

got it all cut up then I chipped the corner. They were all about a half inch thick. The fellow came out, the first cook and said, "Do it this way." He put the loin on the block and he went wham with the cleaver. He had them two inches thick, tissue paper thin, and a half inch, an inch, three-quarters. I said, "How about when the cooks get this? You're the first cook now, when your cooks get this how are they going to separate these sizes. You will get burnt pork chops, raw pork chops and you will get some done. How are you going to feed the troops?" I said, "I just came off the line. I appreciate it, but I'll do it the way I started to." "It's up to you, I was just trying to help you out." "Okay." I did very well there in Qwanico, Virginia.

S: Good.

B: I could picture if you get one thick and one thin, how are you going to cook them? All they do is put them in pans and put them in the ovens. How are you going to cook them? I'll tell you this, when government bought, during the war they bought meat or anything, it was prime, it was the best. They always bought the best. There was no getting around it, always the best.

I came home and had my heart for California, but didn't get there. My wife didn't want to leave. We have three children, all out of college.

S: What religion did they follow?

B: They followed their mother's, Catholic. I went to church with her, sure I did.

When I landed in Philadelphia, when my mother wrote me, she said there was a cousin that had come from Europe in 1940. In 1940 I was in California, that's when I joined the service. There's a cousin in Philadelphia, he didn't have any address or anything. She said he worked as a waiter in a Jewish restaurant. I went up to the Jewish neighborhood and I found him. That's why I came here, that's why I joined the Jewish Center.

You asked me about this cousin, Benny, I remember meeting Benny. I figured nobody had an address, he didn't, nobody had it. I thought, let me try the Jewish Center. I came up here and I talked to Mr. Engle. The teletype started working, they have connections all over the country, in fact, all over the world.

S: Here?

B: Here, for all of the Jewish Center. Where there's a Jewish Center, they're tied into the computer, all of them.

In a couple of hours they couldn't locate him. Either he moved out of the area or he passed away. They couldn't locate him. I saw what they had here, and I've been in Youngstown all my life outside of the service. I used to pass this center for years and years. When I came to see about this cousin, my wife and I, we saw what was here. We like it enough, so I joined the Jewish Center.

S: Did you ever go to a temple?

B: I went to the temple when I was a youngster. I learned Basa, Ba, and that's all. My father said he would teach me, but he didn't. The first time I was in a synagogue was when they put up the sickets, is it? Now I'm finding where I come from, that's why I go to the meetings. I remember things, words, and sentences where people are talking. I'm starting to pick up the words. My wife's Italian so we're both learning. It's never too late.

S: Yes.

B: I enjoy the people here. I saw what they had and the way people are treated.

I retired from Fisher Body, General Motors. I was out there six months and they asked me if I wanted to be a foreman. When I went out there in 1970, December 3rd, there were opportunities galore for young people. They wanted to get into management, it was up to them. Oh, who wants to be a foreman? They asked me, and I told them if I don't somebody else will. They hired me when I was 55. What can I do? Show my appreciation for them hiring me, yes, okay. I stood on as foreman for about two and a half years and then I gave it back because I was able to come back to production. I carried my seniority with the union.

It has been 42 years, I can't forget because that was the first time I cried as a young man in the service, and the last time. These kids were just caught. I don't know if you've ever been out to Hawaii.

S: No.

B: All they had was one hotel, and with all the service men's folks coming in, they didn't have the facilities. You had to be back aboard ship at one o'clock, the streets were clean of servicemen. Some of these youngsters

were in on a minority cruise. A minority cruise is you go in when you're seventeen, you're parents have to sign the day you're 21 and you're discharged. A few beers, they were sick. They weren't drunk, they were sick, heaving all over the place. You didn't have to get up on Sunday, there was no getting up. The only ones that had to be up there were when the colors went. When colors went, that's when they let it go; eight o'clock down there, here I think it was twelve o'clock. You can't forget.

I have always told my wife, and I'll tell everybody else, the Japanese didn't lose the war, they beat us, economy wise, right now. The way this country is, we used to be a producing country, we're not going to be a producing country. They're going to have two classes here. I'm not a politician, either you're going to have the money or you're going to be poor. They're going to hold you just where they want you. Whoever is doing it, I don't know, but I don't think I'll be here to find out, really.

Well, I appreciate your interview.

S: Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW