

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Jewish Community

Youngstown Area

O. H. 627

GOLDYE JACOBY

Interviewed

by

Irving Ozer

on

June 30, 1986

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

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INTERVIEWER: GOLDYE JACOBY

INTERVIEWEE: Irving Ozer

SUBJECT: synagogues, Jewish customs, school days

DATE: June 30, 1986

O: This is an interview with Goldye Jacoby for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program on the Jewish Community of Youngstown, by Irving Ozer, on June 30, 1986.

Where were you born?

J: I was born in Youngstown, Ohio.

O: Can I ask you when?

J: July 21, 1911.

O: You've seen a lot happen in Youngstown then. Where were you born in Youngstown then?

J: The name of the street was Emerald Street, which happened to be in an area where a lot of Jewish people were living. It is off of Andrews Avenue. We only lived there until I was five years old. After that we moved to 28 North Bruce Street, which is on the east side off of Himrod. I got married in 1933 when I was 21 years old, and then my folks moved to the south side.

O: When did you get married?

J: I got married in 1933. My father's first business was on Center Street.

O: What kind of business was it?

J: It was a grocery business. He had a nice, big store there. I used to go every Saturday to help him.

O: Was there a big Jewish community there?

J: Not on Center Street. It was definitely foreign, but not Jewish. It was right near the bridge and Schwebel Bakery was just around the corner from it. There were Jewish merchants; I know the Wagman's had a place of business. There was a grocery store run by a man by the name of Pinky Diamondstein. This was on Center Street. The only business off of Center Street was Schwebel Bakery, and that was on a small street off of Center. I can remember as a child being sent to the bakery by my dad to pick up certain things that he needed in the store.

O: What was your maiden name?

J: Polonsky. My father's name was Emmanuel, but everybody in town, regardless of color, age, or creed, called him Mendel. That is how he was known throughout all of his life.

My mother's name was Bessie. I also have a sister Lillian. I was told I also had a brother who had passed away before I was two years old; but I don't recall that at all.

O: When did your parents come over?

J: My mother and dad left Russia when they were married and had a baby, my brother, in 1909. They came and landed in Montreal. My parents did not like the atmosphere of Montreal. My father went to work for \$2.50 a week as a hod carrier. That disturbed both of them because as I understand both of them came over with money. My father was a tanner and had his own business when he left Russia.

O: Where did they live in Russia?

J: The name of the city was Novazipkov. My father, evidently, was very successful in whatever he did. He was a very learned man, but he was not a devout man.

My mother lost her mother when she was born, so she was raised by an older sister. When my mother was thirteen she was sent to live with an aunt and uncle who happened to be my father's parents, so they were related. There was a lot of consternation about that. At that time they didn't feel that cousins should marry. I always said that if I could have a marriage like my mother and dad had that I would be extremely and ecstatically happy, because it was ideal. I never saw my father come home on a Friday night without bringing my mother flowers.

O: What brought them to Youngstown?

- J: I have never been able to find out. Every time I would ask, for some reason or another, the subject would change.
- O: What kind of work did he do when he hit Youngstown?
- J: My dad got a job at the Ohio Leather Company in Girard. I felt that he was following his profession, but evidently it didn't last too long. My knowledge of my father when I was aware of the fact that he was working to make a living was when he was in the grocery store.
- O: How did he get into the grocery business?
- J: I don't have any idea. My dad was very reluctant about discussing it. Of course, if my father wouldn't tell me my mother wouldn't either. I know that he worked very hard. I was indoctrinated at a very early age. He felt that since there were no boys in the family that everything that he had to teach a son or an older daughter that it was taught to me. He taught me everything he would have taught a son, even with working in the yard or a car. He taught me business, and maybe that was God's way of letting him know that I might have to have that information later on.
- O: When you were a child on the east side was there a Jewish enclave there?
- J: Where I was born on Emerald Street there were a lot of Jewish people. I had the pleasure of playing with a lot of children that lived in that area; those were the Itskovitzes, Grobstein's, Shensa's, Malkin's, Chevlen's,
- O: Where did more of the families come from that were there? Were they all from the same part of Europe?
- J: I don't think they all were, but a good many of them were. My dad and mother knew all of them and they were friendly with all of them.
- O: Did you have a kosher home?
- J: We did for many years.
- O: What about Sabbath?
- J: My dad always worked on Saturday.
- O: Was it a special day in any way?
- J: Friday night was strictly a Sabbath meal. We never sat down at the table without my dad being there, regardless of whether it was 4:00 in the afternoon or 10:00 at night.

We were never served dinner until my dad was there, so we always ate together. He was a very wonderful father because he was very understanding. Everything that he did and every place that he ever took us had to be an educational trip.

O: What about your Hebrew education?

J: I always wanted to go to Hebrew school, but he just never pushed it because he was never devout. He had so much of it that he didn't feel it was necessary.

O: You didn't go to Sunday school?

J: I did. I decided to go to Sunday school because I was missing out on meeting a lot of the Jewish children that I wanted to know. I took two busses to go to Anshe Emeth. That was not the only temple that had Sunday school on the east side. We belonged to the Temple Emmanuel on Rayen, but at that time they had no Sunday school. If I wanted to go to the Sunday school I had to go to the Anshe Emeth. They permitted it and my father must have paid a certain amount of money. When I finished there I taught Sunday school for awhile. Rabbi Sherry was there; he is the only one who I remember.

O: Where did you go to regular school?

J: I went to Lincoln from the time I was in first grade. My kindergarten grade was Madison Avenue because that was close to where we lived on Emerald Street. We moved right after that, so my first grade was at Lincoln School. I graduated there in the ninth grade with honors. From there we went to East High, which opened up that year. I was in the first class as sophomores, because that school only had the three grades: Sophomores, juniors, and seniors. I graduated June 10, 1929. I was a member of National Honor Society and I was second highest in my class when I graduated.

O: What was the composition of the student population?

J: Mostly foreign. There were quite a few Jewish children because at that time there were a lot of Jewish people living on the east side. The Stein's lived there, the Malkoff's. I had a marvelous childhood.

O: Did you experience any anti-Semitism?

J: Not all the time I was in school at all. I didn't experience any anti-Semitism until I was married. After high school I went to Ohio State University and there was always a big, Jewish group there. When I first went

to Ohio State, Herman Ipp was there and we had played together as children. He introduced me to the man I later married. They were roommates in school. Herman was studying medicine and my husband was studying to be an accountant.

O: Was he from Youngstown?

J: No, he was from Lorain, Ohio.

O: Were you married as soon as you got out of college?

J: No.

O: You had a long distance romance then?

J: Yes. It was at the heart of the Depression and I had to leave school after the first year. My dad could not afford to send me. He said if I would not insist on going back to Ohio State that he would subsidize me if I would go to Kent to finish, which I did. I went to Kent and lived with a Jewish family and got my teaching degree. I went all through the summer and everything so I could get through quickly. I taught at the same school that I had gone to, and that was Lincoln. I taught about a year and a half as a full teacher. I did my practice teaching in Kent, Ohio at the professional school which they used to teach us. That was a marvelous experience. The only thing I do regret is that I did not get my life certificate; at that time you had to teach three years before you could get it.

O: I can't ask you about dating in Youngstown then when you were very young?

J: I dated several young men.

O: How did you date? Where did you go?

J: The first date I had I was probably fourteen. We used to go to Mill Creek Park at that time. At that time Lake Glacier was open; we used to go swimming and have picnics out there. We were always in a group. We were never really just twosomes.

O: Did you go dancing?

J: Yes.

O: Where?

J: Idora Park, and on the picnics; they had Jewish picnics.

O: Where were they?

J: Neimark's Farm was one of them.

O: I have recollections of guys from Youngstown going to New Castle and Sharon and Warren, and guys from those places coming in to date Youngstown girls. Were you ever involved in that?

J: That didn't happen when I was a kid. We stayed totally in Youngstown. First of all, don't forget, we didn't have the transportation.

O: How did you get to these places?

J: Our families usually took us.

O: There was a pretty good system of buses and streetcars, wasn't there?

J: Yes, there was. A lot of times if we wanted to get anyplace we went that way or we didn't go. We never expected to get places any other way. Our parents couldn't always take us; a lot of people at that time did not have cars. If the bus didn't go that direction and you had to walk part of the way that was never a problem either, we walked.

O: Did Jewish kids go different places than Gentiles?

J: Yes. I had a great rapport with all the kids that I went to school with, both elementary and high school. We never really went to each other's homes to socialize, but it was a particular place that we would go to where it was a restaurant and maybe we would sit and have a soda and talk.

O: Like downtown?

J: Right.

O: What places do you remember downtown?

J: Petrakis', Burts, the ice cream parlor, Friedman's, Raver's. Then there was a fish house, and Ole's Market. For a while my dad gave up his business and went to work as a meat cutter at Ole's Market.

O: Can you give me some of your recollections of downtown Youngstown?

J: The one thing I remember is my mother would complain about the dirt, the soot and stuff that would come in through the windows. She was always cleaning. At that time there were all kinds of businesses. All through

high school I worked in Strouss' in the advertising department. A lady by the name of Mrs. Anderson was in charge of the department. I worked on Saturdays and all through the summer when I was in high school.

I also was a reporter for the Youngstown Vindicator all through high school.

O: What did you report on?

J: All the things that happened at school. I was a school reporter for the Vindicator. Every year they had this program where the kids became the city officials. I was the Board of Health Commissioner and was in his office.

O: The stores, which ones do you remember downtown?

J: All of them, Strouss', McKelvey's, Hartzell's, Lustig's, East Federal Street with all the grocery stores, Solomon's, Cohen's, the Dollar Bank, Hoffman's Delicatessen, the furniture stores such as Drabkin's. Leonard Siegel had a furniture store.

O: Do you remember the Central Store downtown?

J: Yes. I have a cousin that worked there; she was cashier. When she graduated from high school she got a very big job in the store.

O: When did you first become aware of Zionism?

J: My father was Zionist. I joined Junior Hadassah and worked my way up to becoming president; that's when I started to develop my organizational acumen. While I did that I formed the Hadassah Business and Professional Group.

O: What sort of things did you do at that time?

J: Once you join a national organization like that you're given a quota which you have to try to meet. We would have little affairs, fund raising affairs.

O: Did you ever become a militant Zionist, in other words, agitating . . .

J: I'm not that type of a person. I'm an organizer. I was more in the background and liked to organize things and delegate.

O: Did kids your age at that time understand what the issues were?



J: We were very much aware of what was going on in Israel and all the problems of not having a state. We hoped that something would materialize. We felt that by what little bit we were doing that it was a step in the right direction.

While I was in high school there was this house on the corner of Lincoln and Elm. This was something that belonged to Temple Emmanuel. They opened this home hoping for a place for us as young Jewish people to go to. It was very sadly needed. We all worked very hard to make that place a success, and I think it was. We had wonderful times there.

O: What sort of things did you do there?

J: We had lectures; we tried to have a little bit of everything. We had non-Jewish people come in for lectures on different facets of life.

O: What sort of things did you do there?

J: We used to go on hayrides.

O: Were there any such things as dances there?

J: Yes, they were right there. Whatever food was served we had to bring in at the time. There were adults around who helped.

O: Who do you remember from the Jewish Center?

J: There was Morris Lockshin, Sidney Davidow, Harry Post, Bernie Leaf, Sammy Malkoff, Sam Epstein.

O: Who were the authority figures?

J: Malvina Klein. I knew most of the families associated with Temple Emmanuel; we were very close-knit. I can't remember the names of the rabbis that were there.

O: How old are you?

J: I'll be 75 next month.

O: When you taught at Lincoln for those two years did you have any Jewish students?

J: Sure, a lot of them.

O: Like who?

J: The two Malkoff boys, Abe and Saul, Mootzie Stein, there

were a lot of them.

O: You didn't belong to any of the east side temples?

J: No.

O: Do you remember them?

J: Yes. There was one near Prospect Street on Himrod; I think it was Shaere Torah. At that time there was also a temple on Summit Avenue.

O: When did you leave Youngstown?

J: I left in 1929 to go to school.

O: What recollections do you have of the Depression?

J: That's when I had to come home from Ohio State.

O: What were your emotions?

J: I was very upset naturally. It may be selfish, but I was upset because I couldn't finish what I had started out to do, which was to become a teacher.

O: Tell me a little bit more of the impact of the Depression on you and your husband?

J: When my husband got a job for \$25 a week we thought we were tremendously wealthy. If we had \$1 or \$2 left at the end of the week we had a lot of fun spending it.

O: Tell me again where your father's store was?

J: It was at 1302 East Indianola Avenue on the center of Indianola and Taft.

O: Tell us about the customers coming in.

J: It was a brand new area and my father was like the leader of the people because he was the only one in the area that had a phone in the store. When the people needed help they would come to my dad. We had four apartments on top of the store and when they needed a doctor . . . My dad persuaded one of the Jewish men who was just coming into town to open his office upstairs, which he did. Then there was a dentist; then there was an attorney; and then there was an accountant. It was very interesting because everything that they wanted to do or didn't know they would come to my dad for questions. On top of that, my dad would have classes after hours in the store for anybody that wanted to come in; he would teach them civics.

He would teach them how to become a United States citizen. When he would have a group of ten people ready he would call one of the judges and say he wanted to bring these people down, and this is what happened. He would take them down and they would become citizens. They respected him very highly.

O: Where did he eat his lunch?

J: My mother, who was very concerned about my dad's welfare, would come to the store and she would cook his lunch in the back room of the store. The aroma was very tempting and tantalizing and the ladies would ask how she made things. My mother would give them the recipes of all the Jewish cooking with the schmaltz and everything that went with it. If they didn't know what it was she would always give it to them because my father always had at least six or eight quarts of it in his cooler.

O: Did she make gribbin (Yiddish popcorn)?

J: Yes. The people would show their appreciation to my mother by brining her things made of lace, crocheted or knitted.

O: What is your most pleasant memory of those days?

J: We graduated from Lincoln School, which was on the corner of Bruce And Charlotte, and all the kids that came from Prospect and Garland had to pass our house to go to school. We all walked together. My mother would tell me to have my friends stop in after school. One day it was one, the next day it was three, and the next day it was five. There were never any problems. My father would come home and roll up the carpet so we could dance. We had a lot of fun. We never spent any money because no one had any at that time. We never went anyplace alone; it was always a group.

O: What do you remember of the Depression?

J: I don't remember anything that marred the time for me.

O: What was the first car in your family?

J: My father had a Ford. It was a Model T. He then went to Chevrolets and then Buick and from then on he had all Buicks. My dad taught me how to drive when I was twelve years old.

O: What are your feelings when you look at Youngstown today as compared to what you grew up with?

J: I feel very bad. I'm very sad over the situation, especially about what has happened to the downtown district. It was sad when the Palace Theater was taken down.

O: What restaurants do you remember downtown?

J: Raver's was one that we used to go to. We used to go to Strouss' lunch room, McKelvey's lunch room, the Tod Hotel that had a nice restaurant. In the Ohio Hotel there was the Mural Room; we used to love to go there.

O: Thank you, Goldye.

END OF INTERVIEW