

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Jewish Educational System of Youngstown

Jewish Educational Experience

O. H. 113

SAUL FRIEDMAN

Interviewed

by

Beth A. Kurtzweig

on

May 16, 1980

SAUL FRIEDMAN

Saul Friedman was born on March 8, 1937, the son of Albert Elias and Rebecca Friedman, in Uniontown, Pennsylvania. The Friedman family moved to Cleveland, Ohio early in Saul's life, and he attended school on the West Side. He graduated from Berea High School and proceeded to further his education by attending Kent State University, graduating from that institution with a Bachelor of Arts degree in 1959. Saul Friedman continued his education at Ohio State University where he received his Master's degree in 1962, and later his Ph.D. in 1969.

Dr. Friedman is currently a professor at Youngstown State University where he specializes in Middle Eastern and Jewish History. He is also the Director of the Graduate Program in the History Department. An accomplished author, Dr. Friedman is actively involved in and genuinely concerned with the Jewish community and educational system in the Youngstown area. He is a member of the Youngstown Zionist District, B'nai B'rith, and the American Professors for Peace in the Middle East.

Jeffrey Scott Suchanek

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INTERVIEWEE: SAUL FRIEDMAN
INTERVIEWER: Beth A. Kurtzweig
SUBJECT: Jewish Educational Experience
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K: This is an interview with Dr. Saul Friedman for Youngstown State University, Oral History Program by Beth Kurtzweig at the office of Dr. Friedman on May 16, 1980 at 12:00 p.m.

The first thing that I'd like to ask you, Dr. Friedman, is if you could please tell me just a little bit about your background and your family, like your parents and brothers and your sisters.

F: Okay. I come from a very non-traditional Jewish family. We're non-traditional because in the first place there were ten of us, which is unusual for a Jewish family. Secondly, the family was broken, that is, divorced, which is also highly unusual in Jewish homes, particularly in the 1940s. Thirdly, we lived mainly in Gentile neighborhoods. In other words, in Cleveland, which is really our home, most Jews lived on the East Side. In our case, we lived for about seven or eight years on the East Side, the 105th Street area, but in 1946 we moved out to a housing project in Berea.

There were practically no Jews on the West Side of Cleveland back in that period, right after the war. As a matter of fact, I was the first kid that was Bar Mitzvahed in what supposedly passed for a synagogue on the West Side, nothing more than a little garage on John Avenue near 47th Street,

or something like that. But out in Berea there were no Jews. We were almost a ghetto ourselves in that sense. And if you're talking about Jewish education then, I think that probably did more for educating me than any kind of Sunday school, because when we lived on the East Side of Cleveland we attended Sunday school and I hated it, absolutely abhorred it. Couldn't stomach it. It's a phenomenon that I've seen in kids I've taught, a phenomenon I've seen in my own kids and I don't blame them. It was a totally negative experience. I hated Sunday school and it was the greatest day in my life when my mother finally told me at the age of nine that I didn't have to go anymore. I mean already at the age of nine I hated it.

Out in Berea though, we got a negative education, that is by making contact with people who basically were anti-Semitic. Berea was in part, a heavily Catholic community. Out there the use of the term Jew was synonymous with talking about cheating people. Even in the project there were some problems initially. But in the project there was a kind of a bond among all the people, because the people were poor. The result was, if you were black, or Jewish or Catholic or whatnot, it didn't really matter because there was a bond in view of the fact that the people of Berea referred to the project people as "Project Trash."

What I'm getting at, though, is that we had a good education. It was a negative education. That's what made me aware of being Jewish. It wasn't something that came out of the Jewish institutions on the East Side of Cleveland. Too often, the kids who live in Cleveland Heights or places of that sort, even Liberty, for example, take their Jewishness for granted and it becomes a negative thing in that respect. In our case it was the opposite. We didn't have the Jewishness. The result was we were looking for it.

- K: Okay, what about education as far as home? Did your parents give you any type of Jewish education in the home as far as celebrating the holidays or any type of traditions or customs the Jews might have?

F: My family is a strange one as I've indicated. My mother was first generation American, born in New York City. Her mother came from Romania. Her father came from Lwow or Lemberg in Galicia, Poland. My own father came from Rszeszow, which is also in Poland, which indicates then that basically half of our roots go back to the old country.

Yet, when my grandparents came here, they tried everything to assimilate. The result was, even though my grandfather was an Orthodox Jew and knew how to doven and all this sort of thing, he didn't make any kind of effort along those lines for his own children. He had four children. None of them really were knowledgeable about Jewish rites.

They even went so far as to celebrate Christmas. I mean these were first generation Americans, the immigrant Americans, and they were celebrating Christmas because they thought it was a way by which they could then legitimate giving gifts to their kids once in the year. They never viewed it as some kind of a religious holiday. They did celebrate Passover. They did use matzos, that sort of thing.

When my mother had her own household, it was practically all she could do during the Depression to get food on the table. In our family, you couldn't be that selective. And then bread, if you had bread you didn't throw bread out at Passover. It's as simple as that. It became a necessity just to have food. It didn't matter if it was kosher or not kosher or whatnot.

As a result we did have the holidays. We did celebrate Passover. But as far as I can recall, the first time I ever had a Seder in my own house was when Nancy, my wife, and I had our first Seder with our kids up here in Youngstown in, I think it was 1969 or 1970. That's the first time. We stayed out of school on Passover. We stayed out of school on Yom Kippur, on Rosh Hashanah. But we never celebrated Hanukkah. We never celebrated Purim. We never had any of those other things.

And remember, out where we lived, the closest synagogue, which was not much of a synagogue, was about 45 to 60 minutes away by bus, and some trans-

fers of bus, and that wasn't really handy. All the Jewish traditions, kosher food and everything were all on the other side of town. So it was pretty difficult to have any kind of Jewish identity although my mother did try as much as possible to communicate that. It was for that reason that we stayed home on the holidays, but we never went to synagogue on those holidays.

- K: What about, say for example, history? Did your father ever relay any Jewish history or try to emphasize reading of Jewish history or things like that?
- F: Let me go back to the question made earlier because it's important. I don't want anybody to misunderstand. In terms of giving the kids a Jewish upbringing, it was mandatory, no matter where we lived, that all the boys would be Bar Mitzvahed. That was something that happened. My brother, Kendall, for example, commuted all the way from Berea to about 123rd and Lakeside Avenue on the East Side. It took him over ninety minutes to do this sort of thing. He went by buses, streetcars, and so on, back in the late 1940s. He was Bar Mitzvahed. He was educated, or at least he was given the training, in Bar Mitzvah by an Orthodox rabbi. Was it Rabbi Goldmann? I think it was. As a matter of fact, he was Bar Mitzvahed in this old people's home on the east side of Cleveland.

It was really a strange phenomenon because during the Bar Mitzvah, all the brothers were there. And it's an institutional panic in our family to make an Aliyah, an appearance up on the bema, the platform, during the reading of the scrolls on Saturday. Even today, if there's a Bar Mitzvah in the family, you talk to brothers, uncles and that sort of thing and they say, "Please, please don't have us go up," because they don't want to say an Aliyah. Practically nobody in the family knew how to make an Aliyah, back in 1948. I remember--I was a little boy--they dragged me over, these bearded men with yarmulkes and tallises and so on, they dragged me over and they were pointing out where we were in the service. And I didn't know what the hell they were doing because I couldn't read any Hebrew at that point. I didn't know blah, blah, blah.

Afterwards, all these people were walking up and they were saying things in Yiddish and Hebrew, and I didn't understand any of it. All I kept saying to them was: "It wasn't me. It wasn't me. It wasn't me!" Two years later I was Bar Mitzvahed on the West Side. Three years after, the youngest of the brothers--there were six all told--was Bar Mitzvahed also. Each one of us. It was a mandatory effort to have the kids taught Hebrew. Even though we weren't educated out in the Sunday schools, we were on a one-to-one basis.

In my case, for example, in 1949-1950 the woman who taught me how to go through this whole thing was a Holocaust survivor, Mrs. Levy, who lived in Berea. Her husband was working for NACA, which became NASA. Kids talk about how bad they have it with Sunday school, that sort of nonsense--everyday, when I was in the seventh grade, I walked from the high school into Berea to spend an hour and a half with Mrs. Levy. Everyday during the week, with the exception of Friday. That was from September up till March to get to the point where we could have this sort of thing. It wasn't just something that came out of the air. I found that even in the case of my own kids. On a one-to-one basis, they enjoy that kind of education with Mrs. Shudmak, who they like very much. When Jonathan, my eldest son, was being educated for his Bar Mitzvah a year ago, he was being tutored by Cantor Klein. He loved Cantor Klein. On a one-to-one basis, it was fine. When you get into the kind of institutional framework where you have these kids for two hours and they're screaming and everything, nobody can enjoy it.

Now, that by way of making reference back to the Jewish content in the house. Now about history. You've got to realize one thing. We got very little from Mr. Friedman, as we liked to call him. There was not much shared by this individual. He had a very thick accent to begin with anyhow, a very thick Galician accent. He was interested in history. That I know. But remember, I was very young and so were many of the kids when the divorce took place. In 1944, when the divorce occurred I was 7, Kendall was 9, Rozzie was 6, Shelly was 4, Raquelle was 11, and my brother, Norm, was 13. That's an awful lot of kids. And we're only talking about five or six of the youngest ones. There was

practically no interaction between the youngest ones and my father.

However, in my family, there was an awful lot of discussion. We were a very competitive family. As kids, we were always engaged in intellectual games, Twenty Questions, that kind of nonsense. It was for blood, and still is when we get together. It's a kind of a one-upmanship. My brother, Sheldon, will come into the house. He's forty years old, a doctor. Yet the first thing he'll say to me is not, "How are you?" The first thing he'll say is: "Who played second base for the Chicago Cubs in 1946?" That's the kind of thing I'm talking about. That's the way we grew up. So there was an awful lot of that, plus there was an awful lot of emphasis on history, just reading of history. The urging came more from my eldest sister, [Phyllis,] who was a brilliant woman who couldn't go on to college immediately. She was a good guide, a stimulus. The older kids, too. They guided the kids in a lot of ways.

Bear in mind that was an era when an awful lot of history, crucial history for Jews, was taking place. I grew up in an era where within a matter of a couple of years you had the Holocaust and the foundation of the state of Israel. For kids growing up today Israel has been in existence for thirty years. They don't feel the pride. Holocaust already is thirty years away too, and thirty years for young people is an eternity. But with me, I was living through that period and even though I was a little kid, I was aware. I don't know why, and it angers me about my own children, but I was aware of what was going on as early as 1943, 1944. I knew the Jews were being murdered in Europe. When the pictures of the concentration camps were published, it just brought home my identity all the more. My own sister, the eldest out in California, once asked me why I was so interested in Jewish history and I told her bluntly, "My God, these two things occurred right within a four-year span."

K: What I understand you're saying is really that the education that you had as a child and as growing up really did not come out of an institution of learning. It was really just from living and from experiences that you had and that.

F: That's right.

K: Okay. At one time you were teaching at one of the temples here in Youngstown. I was wondering if you could reflect on some of the things that you thought about of the institution that you were working at, like what was the learning environment like, what were your attitudes about curriculum and things like that?

F: Well, you've got to understand that I started teaching Sunday school temporarily in 1966, temporarily. I gave up teaching in Sunday school in 1978 after thirteen years of temporary work. I was just going to do it for a while. I started down in Columbus at a reform temple, which was the largest temple in Columbus, Temple Israel. The problems are very similar whether they're in Columbus in a large synagogue or in a small synagogue up in Youngstown. When we came to Youngstown I started teaching at Rodef Sholom, which is the largest reform synagogue here. After two years I shifted to your synagogue, Ohev Tzedek, because of a close relationship with the rabbi. It was a much smaller synagogue and for the next several years we worked together until Rabbi Schwartz left.

In 1974 the synagogue school was merged with the school of Temple El-Emeth up on the north side. Even before that time, I'd already begun teaching part-time at Temple El-Emeth for a friend of mine, Shlomo Moskovits. I continued doing that until the fall of 1978. Now there were problems in all the schools. The first major problem was the fact that the kids basically didn't want to be there. I saw it in Columbus. I saw it in Youngstown. I see it in my own kids. They don't want to be there and I don't blame them. Frankly, I don't blame them. In the first place, I don't blame them because in the Jewish school system not only do you have to go to Sunday school, which is a grind if you've had a party or something on Saturday night--nobody in their right mind wants to get up and go to school on Sunday morning--but usually you have two weekly sessions which may last from four till six o'clock. Now you've already put in a long day at regular school, public school, and then to go and have to do this for two additional hours causes real problems. The kids are tired. They're grumpy. They've got homework.

And contributing to it also is the fact that most of the teachers in the schools were not that good. I'm not saying all of them. There were some who were good and some who were a little bit problematical; some who could relate to people well, some who didn't relate well. I'm thinking, for example, of Cantor Klein again. There are people who had Cantor Klein who found him absolutely delightful, others who found him worthless. I think he was a fine teacher. But in the case of controlling ten or fifteen kids, he wasn't so good.

Another problem in the schools was absenteeism. If you had a school that operates three days a week, sometimes you've got kids who will go two out of the three, one out of three, and so on. The result is, you've got kids that are falling behind, kids that are at different levels, and so forth. You're trying to teach them a language. There's no way you can teach a language fifteen minutes a day, three days a week.

Parents would drop off their kids and scoot out, then go and have coffee or brunch. That's even institutionalized at Rodef Sholom. It's very difficult to have a kid come in for two-and-a-half or three hours and sit there, passively, listening to somebody tell them about the Bible, Jewish History, or Jewish ethics. It really is a difficult thing. As long as I was teaching here in Youngstown, Rabbi Schwartz and I tried to emphasize things that would supposedly be a little more interesting. When you, for example, were in our group, we had a number of living Jewish experiences. We went to a funeral home. We went to a hospital. We went to the old people's home, Heritage Manor. We had the coroner in. It was that whole life cycle that we tried to do.

When I taught the last few years, I seized upon slides as one way of keeping my kids alive, awake, to some degree interested. I had slide courses on Jewish History, Holocaust, Zionism, and Israel. They worked out very well, in contrast to some people who couldn't do that. There was something else that became a device, some people would have frowned on it, but because I knew damn well that the kids didn't want to be there--we played a game. That was an informational quiz for about ten, twenty minutes or so.

It killed time, but at the same time it was a way of controlling people so that at least they would behave themselves for forty minutes when I wanted to do something. It was a way also of testing people because we went back and asked how much you really remembered out of the material we had covered. Most kids liked that game. It's a game based on the old Jack Berry, Twenty-one Quiz Game. Even today my own kids like that sort of nonsense.

It's unfortunate because a woman well known to us, Clara Segall, was my son's Sunday school teacher this past year. Mrs. Segall tried to be very straitlaced about her teaching, and the kids hated her, really hated her. And as a matter of fact, she was abused sometimes in the classroom. I talked to her and I said, "You know what you ought to do is you just ought to play a game with them for a few minutes, one way of doing this." She didn't. The result was, the kids actually petitioned Cantor Ehrlich and she was removed. The only student that voted to keep her was Jonathan, my own boy.

So, there are a number of problems. As far as what I've recommended, my recommendations in this community have been generally ignored. They have. I've been a little bit angered about it because on the one hand I think that if people are really interested in quality education, they should have listened more carefully. On the other hand, I question whether or not quality education is really the goal in Youngstown at the present time.

Years ago I suggested the possibility of a merger of the schools. Well they did merge. But what they did was to merge in an improper fashion. They merged part of the schools. One of the reasons I continued teaching was I felt it was a positive thing for my own children to see me physically in the synagogue, in the schools. It would give them a stronger identity but also make Sunday school education, religious school education a more positive thing for them. They'd figure, "My dad is not like other people who drop their kids off and they're in their pajamas and then go and get the Sunday newspaper or something. My dad is actually working here and doing something." And it was a positive thing. But when they agreed to merge the schools, they put me up on the North Side and left my kids down on the South Side, which just angered

the hell out of me.

It really angered me because now I wasn't physically together with them. Not only that--it created a problem, particularly during the wintertime when I would have to zip from the school up here on the North Side down to the South Side in bad weather to pick up the kids. Believe it or not, there was more than one time that I came down to Ohev Tzedek and found my kids standing outside the door of the synagogue. The door was locked and nobody was there. And this was when Jonathan was maybe eight or nine years of age and Molly was maybe five or six. It really angered the hell out of me because it shouldn't have happened that way. Here I was doing the community a service and my own kids were being left without any kind of supervision. That was one thing I resented.

They did merge the schools, but they didn't merge to the extent they should have. Subsequently, when the falloff of attendance or enrollment at Ohev Tzedek was so severe, they merged the entire school. They merged the school with an emphasis, again, upon attendance during the week, on Sunday and so forth. The problem was they arranged to have a bus pick up the South Side kids at school. I spoke out against that also because I said, "It's difficult enough for kids in Boardman to have people know they're Jewish. But to have a bus come along and pick them up directly from the school is going to stigmatize these kids even more." I didn't like the idea.

Plus, there was the fact that Jonathan got out of school so late it was practically impossible for him to attend a school up on the North Side anyhow. The result was they even talked about sending a taxicab to pick him up, that sort of nonsense. I said, "No." There was no way that I was going to do this because I didn't feel that there was going to be any kind of a virtue out of a weekly school anyhow. I've seen it operate too chaotically. It takes a half hour or more for the kids to settle down. And then you have maybe an hour to try to teach, during which time there are always kids that are troublesome.

I'd had contact, for example, down in Columbus with one kid who said bluntly to me, "My father can buy and sell you a dozen times." That's a nice attitude

to have toward his school. Jonathan has indicated that in Rodef Sholom, when they were taken into the sanctuary, the kids grumbled. They didn't want to hear anything about the sanctuary. They didn't want to hear anything about religion. [Their attitude was] they didn't care.

Then this past year the Jews of Youngstown went ahead and authorized a bundle of money for a community school. A community school which is not really a community school because it's nothing more than an overblown, regular, weekly, religious school, with a couple of people who are different from the personnel previously employed. Better paid, more publicity, no more progress than previously. The kids who have been in that school system complain about the lack of education. I talked with one man, Ed Kofsky. He says his own kids have learned nothing in the way of Hebrew. Well, on Sundays Jonathan has learned nothing in the way of Hebrew. He knew more Hebrew four years ago than he does today. No question about it. That isn't because of the community school. It's because of Rodef Sholom. Rodef Sholom's religious school is a failure. As far as I'm concerned, all the schools in this community are failures.

And the only solution to Jewish education in Youngstown, which is your next question, is to take it away from that kind of a process, take it away from the cantors and the other individuals that are involved, and somehow coordinate it with public school education. We will never get a religious school, a day school, in Youngstown, Ohio. That's not to say there shouldn't be one. There is one in Akron. There's one in Dayton. There's one that functions to the eighth grade in Toledo. And none of those communities are much bigger than Youngstown.

The problem with the Youngstown Jewish community-- and I'm not averse to saying this in print or in public--is that it always has thought small. It has always thought small. It is late; it's a symptom of the University. I think the whole town, the University, the whole community was appropriately designated Youngstown because "Y" comes before "Z" practically the end, the last practically. They should have named it Zenobia or something like that. It will never be something that is innovative in education or in thinking.

And we will never get a day school for funds, for lack of a building, for lack of people, and so on and so forth. If people are really concerned I had thrown at me at one of the meetings at Ohev Tzedek. As one man said to me, "Are you really concerned about Jewish education? Are you really concerned about whether your children two generations down the road will be Jews?" Well, big deal. The way we're doing it now is not going to guarantee Jewish education or Jews two generations down the road. What will happen is the same process will take place, in a marriage, the loss of people's identity, Jewish, Hari Krishnas, and all the rest of that garbage because of the negative experience these kids have suffered in religious schools.

What you do is you approach those school systems that have Jewish enrollments--Liberty, Rayen, Boardman. Unfortunately, we're about the only ones out in Austintown so I can't really say that. But it would even be worth it in Austintown. Hell, I could even approach the Austintown School System for this purpose and suggest to them the introduction in the school curriculum of courses on Jewish History, which is not a religious topic; a course on comparative religion, which is supposedly a course which is taught anyhow in the religious schools and is never taught properly; a course on Holocaust or Israel or the Middle East or whatnot; and a course in Hebrew.

What that does is it can supply the kids with a language which everyone is concerned about, the Hebrew Language. It supplies them with the history that everybody is concerned about. The only thing they're not going to get is customs, liturgy, ritual and that is where Sunday school can operate. That's the only thing that a Sunday school should do. The Sunday school should prepare people for Bar Mitzvahs. The Sunday school should tell people how to pray and that sort of thing.

But in terms of these other jobs, there's no reason why it can't be done [in the public schools]. The Jewish community could hire the people, the same people they're paying during the week. Thirty thousand dollars a year. They could go to the public schools. They could say, "You don't have to even pay these people. We'll pay them." I'm not so

certain what the legal ramifications of that would be, but the fact is I don't think any school in this area would say, "No," if they were offered a freebie in terms of personnel.

Then it would be up to the parents to put their money, or their children, where their mouths were. In other words, if the Liberty School District in this area had courses in Jewish History, Holocaust, and Hebrew and nobody signed up for them, the problem would not be with Jewish educators, or even with the rabbis. The problem would be with the parents for not getting their kids to take the courses.

The virtue of that is simple because then, during the regular school hours, the kids would be taking these courses and it would be in the school setting. No stigma. They would not have to go those two damned additional hours. I think the high school kids are now going from six to eight o'clock some nights a week, that sort of crazy thing.

Now you could say, "Well, would they be taking Jewish Studies in lieu of regular history or something like that?" Probably not. But the Poland School District offers about eight or ten different history courses as far as I can see. They've got a course on Fascism, on Totalitarianism, that sort of thing. Well, that's fine too. But if a kid wanted to take Holocaust instead of that, they could take that for a semester and it would serve the purpose. They'd learn more by taking two years of Hebrew in a daily curriculum than they would by taking Hebrew for twelve years in the Sunday schools.

It goes back to what you were laughing at when I was making reference in Spanish to the Limpieza de Sangre in the fall quarter, in the seminar. The fact is, I learned more Spanish in two years of high school than I did German in two years of college, for the simple reason that it was more intensive. It was more intensive because it was daily. If you're going to teach Hebrew, that's the only way you can learn--any language has got to be on a daily basis. You're a language major. You know what I'm talking about. You have a question. You've got to ask the questions.

K: There really isn't much more to ask. The only other question that kind of pops into my mind is that you said that one of the reasons why you went into teaching was the fact that your children could see that you were dedicated to it, that they could actually see you in the Sunday school. But prior to having children what was there? What was the drive to make you go or to desire to go into teaching in a Sunday school or a Hebrew school setting?

F: Well, I'll be honest. There was a combination of different things. One, I felt, and I always did feel, even at the present time, that I had a major contribution to make, that my own experience had been so negative that I knew why kids hated it. And I would try to make it better for them. Better that I should be teaching kids than some dippy-do who didn't know what the Holocaust was. So I had a contribution to make. As a matter of fact, it was that which my friend, Shlomo Moskovits, preyed upon to keep me teaching long after I wanted to stop.

In other words, you have an obligation. I recognize that. Then when I quit, in November 1978, the kids came to me and literally begged me to stay. The other was a reason which was important back in 1966 and disappeared after about 1970--and that was money. I was being paid for doing this. I was being paid peanuts back when I was in Columbus. I had been teaching at Otterbein College and this was a way of supplementing my income. We had a brand new bambino and a little house, and I figured, rather than have Nancy go to work, I would pick up the extra bucks. It wasn't anything large. I think it was maybe ten dollars a week, something like that. But it was enough to make a difference in terms of supplementing the income.

Later on, the money was no factor at all and I stayed on simply because I still had this obligation. Why I stopped teaching is very simple. The community refused to give the service to my son that I was giving to the community. I'm extremely bitter about it. It's still an open wound. It's an open wound and my philosophy was--and some of these people in town refuse to understand it--that if my own son could not get an education in the school where I was teaching then it was insane for me to be teaching there.

I pulled him out of the El-Emeth Conservative School, put him in Rodef Sholom and immediately was pressed by Cantor Ehrlich to teach at Rodef Sholom. I had taught with Cantor Ehrlich ten years ago and there was no way I was going to go back and work with that man. No way. So that's why I stopped teaching.

Even at the present day they're constantly pressing me. For example, the last two years, they've wheedled a couple of lectures out of me on Sunday mornings. Rodef Sholom got five major lectures this past year and they got five the previous year, and they're not going to get five next year. It's as simple as that.

My attitude is that as far as my own kids are concerned, since the days that they were going on a regular basis to Friday night services at Ohev Tzedek since the time when they had this good, warm relationship with Mrs. Shudmak and Cantor Klein, the last three years, have been a total waste for my kids in terms of religious school education. As a matter of fact, my kids now accompany me to Kent where I teach one night a week and they sit in on my classes on Holocaust, Jewish History, and that sort of thing. This is their Jewish education. They're getting it at a college level rather than fooling around. And they enjoy it, coming with me over there.

K: Okay. I only have one other question for you and that deals with the commission itself. Now I understand that a group came down to analyze the situation here in Youngstown and it was found that a joint type of community school would be the best for this type of community, and they're working with curriculum and they're working with various other things. In lieu of all that you've said, do you think this is a step in the right direction or what is your attitude toward the commission itself?

F: Well first of all, you said there was a committee that came down and reviewed what was going on in Youngstown. Periodically, over the past ten years there have been all kinds of specialists in education who are referred to, or refer to themselves as educationists. I dislike people who coin new words, particularly when they're words that supposedly make experts of individuals who are not experts.

We had a survey done about ten years ago that indicated there was a need for some kind of community school in Youngstown, a community school which is not what we're talking about today, a day school where the kids would go from kindergarten to eighth grade and would go as they would go to a parochial school. That was what was emphasized, a complete curriculum through the day, a Jewish Parochial School. It was dismissed. People thought, "No money, no facilities," that sort of nonsense, that's all.

About three years ago, again from the Cleveland College of Jewish Studies, they sent down a ganef-- means a thief or in this case the man is a mental ganef--a man who'd describe himself as an educationist, an Israeli. He spent one morning at El-Emeth on a Sunday and proceeded to insult the entire faculty. He did go into a couple classrooms, but he didn't go into mine. Afterwards there was a meeting with the faculty where he gave his evaluation of what was going on in the school and it was a negative evaluation.

It was a negative evaluation because he said he looked in and he saw in Mrs. Shudmak's Hebrew class there were people who were writing Hebrew on the board. "That's not the only way," he said, "you can teach Hebrew." Well, Mrs. Shudmak has lived in Israel, she is a survivor of the Holocaust and she's a damn fine teacher. But he proceeded to insult her and her method of teaching.

He said he glanced in and saw Rabbi Meyer lecturing to a class and he said, "I don't know if this is the only method that you use"--Meyer wasn't there, incidentally, when he was talking about this--but he said, "the fact is that I don't think you would lecture to a group of deaf students." Now what the hell does that mean?

Then he said, "I peeked through the window and I saw Dr. Friedman showing slides of the Holocaust and I don't think you would show slides to blind people." Well, the fact is, a couple of weeks ago I did precisely that. A teacher from St. Edwards, who is a blind man, invited me down to show slides of the Holocaust to his class, his class of Catholic kids, about a hundred of them. Now a hundred kids were not blind, but this particular individual was

blind and I showed slides and he still listened and understood what I was talking about.

Well, apart from everything else, what I'm getting at is this ganef came down here, spent one Sunday morning, criticized the entire operation of the school system and didn't even come into the classrooms to learn what was going on. And because he's an educationist, he came up with all kinds of fancy ideas: "You should have more social activity, even have a basketball [team], make it attractive for kids to go to Sunday school, and so on and so forth." And then he came up with all kinds of other garbage, which is what it was, pure dribble, recommending all kinds of wonderful ideas for a community school, hiring a commissioner of education and so forth.

So the community bought this. They set up a committee which was involved with community education. I was not asked even to be on that committee, was never consulted on how this thing should go. Never once did anybody ask me my opinion about this whole thing. But they all assumed that I would be part of the community school, teaching Holocaust and Zionism to my entire group of kids. They had no idea that I was not going to be a party to it at all.

So what happened? They went ahead and hired a man from Pittsburgh. He's a nice man. He'll be here about two years and he'll be gone. That's the pattern in Youngstown. If somebody has potential for advancement, they're gone. It's as simple as that. There is not going to be a long range commitment on the part of [Paul] Flexner to Youngstown. There isn't. He'd be a fool to do that sort of thing because he's not going to get the support of the community. Secondly, there are not that many children. And the school is going to go nowhere. It has no future. They can talk all they want about the wonderful plans. This is why I said the future really has to be with some kind of direct contact with the public schools. You're not going to have a day school. The community school is going to float in limbo. They can call it what they want but it's not going to change anything.

So, in any case, I don't look for any major progress in the state of Jewish education in Youngstown, which is why I've taken the education of my own kids into my own hands. If the kids get Hebrew, it will

come from probably tutoring. The history they can get from me. Liturgy they can't get. They can't get because we're foreclosed out of the conservative synagogues, which angers me extremely. And reformed Judaism has no luster, no lure whatsoever for us. Really, it's sad.

K: Okay, I'd like to thank you for your time and the information.

F: Okay.

END OF INTERVIEW