

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Jewish Project

Youngstown Area

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RUTH KRAUSS

Interviewed

by

Irving Ozer

on

February 5, 1986

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

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INTERVIEWEE: RUTH KRAUSS

INTERVIEWER: Irving Ozer

SUBJECT: Family Life, Education, Travels, Anti-Semitism
Rabbis, Temple Emanuel, Rodef Sholom

DATE: February 5, 1986

O: The date is February 5, 1986 and I'm sitting here with Ruth Krauss who is going to share some of her memories. The interview is for Youngstown State University Oral History Program on the Youngstown Area Jewish Project.

Ruth, where were you born?

K: I was born in Youngstown on Scott Street on January 20, 1909.

O: Were you east or west of Wick Avenue?

K: I was west of Wick Avenue. There were a lot of Jewish people in that area at that time.

O: Do you remember any of the families that lived there?

K: My dad's twin brother, Isadore Klivans, lived on Custer.

O: What other Jewish families can you remember?

K: Offhand I was so young that I can't remember. We left there when I was about three years old and we moved to Florencedale. Again, there were Jewish people there at that time.

O: Who were the Jewish kids you played with?

K: There were no Jewish children my age. My sister was a year and a half older and my brother was three years older. My uncle again moved when we did; he moved up to Ohio Avenue. There were Jewish people right on Ohio. There were Jewish people all over the area.

O: Was it predominantly Jewish?

K: No. We were there. The Rodef Sholom Temple was there not too far from us. The conservative temple had not been built yet.

O: When did Rodef Sholom move into there?

K: It must have been fairly close because that was when we all went to the Rodef Sholom. None of us, as far as I know, went to the old Rodef Sholom. In those days, I think my parents also belonged to the Orthodox Temple Emanuel that was on Rayen Avenue. My uncle, Abe Klivans, was either the second or third president of Temple Emanuel. My father was very tolerant and belonged to all the temples that there were in the city.

O: Did they ever talk about why they left Emanuel in going to Rodef Sholom?

K: No. My father came from an Orthodox family and my grandparents lived on Walnut Street up until 1919 so that my grandfather could go twice daily to the temple. My mother came from an Orthodox family.

O: Where did your parents come from?

K: My mother was born in this country in Detroit, Michigan. My maternal grandparents came to this country very early in the 1870's. They came from somewhere in Russia. My father came from near Riga, Lithuania; he was a Litvak. His family lived on a farm that belonged to an absentee German baron. On Wednesdays they would take the produce to Riga to be sold. My grandfather was a Talmudist, and my grandmother did all of the work in the dairy. He did nothing but study the Talmud. Everybody knew him and they put his wagon in the middle of the caravan so that the horse could follow the others and he could sit there and do his studying.

O: Why did your father's family leave Russia and come to the United States?

K: They came one by one, the children. Of the twelve children that my grandmother had, seven reached adulthood. I don't think my father ever knew those who had died either in childhood or in early childhood diseases. Abraham, the oldest, was the first to leave. They simply left when they reached the military age. He sent back money.

O: What motivated them?

K: To escape from military service.

O: They hadn't been victimized particularly by any of the pogroms?

K: No. They never told us that, but they were afraid in those days that when they joined the military service, which was for 25 years, they could not observe the mandatory Jewish ritual laws.

How my uncle arrived in Toledo, Ohio, we never asked.

O: They came under Czarist Russia, correct?

K: Oh yes. But they left from Germany. They smuggled out of Russia and my father's naturalization papers state that he was a citizen owing allegiance to the kaiser. He left from Bremen, Germany. My uncle Abe came first to Toledo and then my dad's twin brother, who according to my grandmother was born ten minutes earlier than my father.

O: Which one was he?

K: Izzy or Isadore. He was the one who came next and joined his brother. When they got enough money, then they sent for my father, who left and went to Toledo also.

O: Where were they married, Toledo or Youngstown?

K: My uncle Abe married a Jewish girl in Toledo. My uncle Iz married a girl from Toledo, but my mother's whole family is from Detroit. She was born in Detroit. Her first cousin married my uncle Abe in Toledo. She came to visit, met my father. He was only seventeen and she was about the same age. He would write to her and she would correct his English. I still have all the letters my father wrote to my mother from 1897 to two days before their wedding in 1903. We grew up reading those. I loved those letters. I don't know if those letters should be given to a historical society in Toledo or not, because it is full of the life of the young Jewish people, young Jewish men and women. At that time they had a club; they met every Saturday night. It tells the things that they did. Of course, there are a lot of family things in there too. They were very active with interests in Jewish affairs because my father used to write about the theatre that he went to, the things that he did at that time. But still, he tells when they brought my grandparents with the last two children over to Toledo. He talks about that and what amused us as children. By his third letter he says that they bought my grandmother a cow so that she could have her own cow. I couldn't understand how you could have a cow within the limits of a city, but I realize now that the cities were different then.

Why did he pick Youngstown? I have never asked, but I think

they heard that the mills had been started, that business was good, and I think they came down and looked it over and decided to make a break there.

O: They came here about 1905?

K: 1907 is the first that I have. I checked in the directory down at the Historical Society some time ago and I found them listed in the 1907 directory, but not before that.

O: Their first home was on Scott Street?

K: Right.

O: Where did you go to school?

K: First I went to McKinley, then to the old Parmalee when we moved to Crandall Avenue. My teacher in seventh grade in Parmalee, Miss Evans, was made the first principal of the new Harding School. Crandall was not included in the Harding district. We lived on Crandall but Miss Evans asked if they would permit me to go to Harding because she would like some students whom she knew, whom she could have in the office doing things. I was permitted to go there and I was in the first graduating class of Harding School.

O: How did you get there every day?

K: Walked. We walked wherever we went in those days.

O: Then after you finished Harding?

K: I went to Rayen.

O: There was no such thing as Hayes at that time?

K: No, not yet. Not until I came out of college.

O: When did you graduate from Rayen?

K: In 1926.

O: Going back to McKinley, were there many Jewish kids in your school?

K: I was either in the third or fourth grade when I left there. I do not recall.

O: Parmalee?

K: Yes. The other members of the Fish family lived on the corner of Fairgreen and Ford. Helen Fish was my age and was at school with me. Lawrence Berger was in my class at Parmalee.

I remember those because Lawrence was one that was within the Harding district so that he went there.

O: Were you aware of being different from the bulk of the kids?

K: Never.

O: You weren't sensitive about your Jewishness at all?

K: No. There was only one occasion in Youngstown that I recall with somebody in school at Parmalee where someone made an anti-Semitic remark to me. All I know is that she said something to me. We were out on the playground and all the others gathered around me. I remember her first name was Julia.

O: That others supported you?

K: They all supported me.

O: You grew up with a pretty good feeling about Judaism then?

K: Oh yes, because I was in a very Jewish home.

O: What about your Hebrew education?

K: I went to Rodef Sholom.

O: How many times a week?

K: Only on Sundays. They never had anything else.

O: What did you learn?

K: The history of Judaism. The Jewish holidays and that was the atmosphere in my own home. My parents both came from Orthodox families. My grandmother lived with us, when my grandfather died, for ten years. She was a bit of the old country; she never changed. We have spoken about this, that we realize we were brought up in a very tolerant family and also that we were not ashamed of my grandmother. She only wore her wig when she went to shule on Saturdays, and she walked from Crandall Avenue down to Rayen to the Emanuel and walked back. She was eighty-nine years old when she died, but she did that. Rain or shine, she would not let anybody aid her; my brother tried to pick her up in our car when the weather was bad, but no. My mother had special clothing made for her, the kind she had worn all her life. She knew where all of the Jewish people lived on Crandall Avenue and she went to their homes and collected money from them so that she could take it to her poor friends on Walnut Street. She was a marvelous woman.

- O: You didn't feel any different, that you were being looked down upon?
- K: Socially we knew that we weren't accepted into those things. If there were parties the Jewish boys dated the Jewish girls and the Gentile boys dated the Gentile girls.
- O: I didn't mean that, I meant the Germans and the East European Jews.
- K: We knew about it, but in my world it never bothered me. I was very much at home and I was very proud of everything that was going on in my own life. I never left that.
- O: Within the city of Youngstown was there any evidence of bigotry or anti-Semitism outside of the schools?
- K: Not that I was aware of. There probably was, but I was never aware of it.
- O: Did you go to college after graduating from Rayen?
- K: I went to Radcliffe, yes.
- O: Did you have any difficulties adjusting at Radcliffe?
- K: No, my sister went there also. We went there because we had made one of our usual summer vacation trips. The whole family used to go in the car. My father always looked up people and he said that he thought he had cousins in Boston. He wasn't sure, but he looked them up and we found them. The cousins we looked up. Her husband was a Harvard graduate, this cousin Pauline; we fell in love with her, the whole family, and she said there was no reason we shouldn't try to get into Radcliffe. First Gertrude applied. Because Rayen High School at that time had such a terrific reputation we both were able, because we were honor graduates at Rayen, to be admitted without college board examinations. My sister was in her junior year when I came there as a freshman.
- O: Were you known in Radcliffe as a Jew?
- K: There was a distinct difference. It was a social difference; it was not when we were in the dormitory. There was no dating with the Gentile students at Harvard and the Jewish female students at Radcliffe. It never entered into our minds.
- O: There wasn't this waspish attitude on their part?
- K: There may have been a couple of them. You made your friends, and if they were friends you didn't notice it. I personally didn't notice it that much. Neither Gertrude or I were what you would call terribly social. We weren't the heavy daters

at the place. There were many more rules at that time than there are today.

O: What did you study?

K: I was an English and history major, both.

O: When did you graduate?

K: In 1930. I came back to Youngstown and it was the Depression. Gertrude had come back and had been accepted as a teacher at the new Hayes Junior High, which was catty-corner from our home. When I came home there were no jobs available. As it happened, Gertrude took off on a vacation going to Japan and China. She then decided not to come home with the whole group across the Pacific again, but she went on the Trans-Siberian Railroad to Russia with three members of that group. Since she sent back word that she was asking for a leave of absence at Hayes, I went over there and interviewed and I got her job. I was there from 1930 until the summer of 1933. I taught history.

O: Who else taught history?

K: Sylvia Frankle Levine, and she taught English also. Gertrude taught English. I taught history and English.

Then my sister returned in 1932. She had spent two years in Russia in Moscow and she trained a group of sixty Russian college graduates who had been accepted at universities in the United States.

O: This happened in Russia?

K: Yes. This was at the time that the United States recognized Russia, the Soviet regime. She got her job back at Hayes and I continued there. She taught for two years. Her sixty students went all over the United States getting post-grad degrees. In 1933 she had decided she would go back and marry one of them, and she did.

In the meantime, it was my summer vacation also and I was trying to decide what to do with the vacation. One summer I had traveled out west with Sylvia Levine. She had a car and we went for three months throughout the United States to California. We covered almost all the parks. During the time that my sister came back we had been friendly with the young conservative rabbi in Youngstown, Rabbi Charry. There were five of us: my sister and myself, Sylvia Levine, Elsie Hodes Williamson, and Isabel Ozersky. We formed a little club which we called the Coterie of Emancipated Souls. We studied Walter Lippmann with Rabbir Charry who was a magnificent teacher. Elsie and Isabel had previously spent their summer

vacation in Europe. This particular summer when we were trying to decide what to do my sister was going back to Russia to marry one of her Russian students who had received his Master's degree from Purdue University. Elsie was returning to England to marry the head of Bernard McFadden Publications in Europe, who was also McFadden's brother-in-law. Isabel and I spoke about where we could go and not be in their way. It was Rabbi Charry who told us to take a Mediterranean cruise and possibly stop and see Palestine. Another girl who had just moved here with her family from Detroit, Freda Shevitz, asked if we would mind if she would tag along. The three of us left on this Mediterranean cruise intending to return in September, to go back to teaching. On board our boat we met some fascinating people. We met Maurice Samuels, the author and lecturer. The head of the German Zionist party was on board the boat. For college graduates, I would say we were very ignorant of what was going on in Europe.

O: What year was this?

K: The summer of 1933. We learned on the boat. We had a one-week visa for Palestine and the people on board said that wasn't enough time to learn anything about what was going on. They said it was really something that we would love and we should give it more time, to get to know it. They told us to disappear into the country, so we did.

O: Was your family Zionist?

K: Yes, but we had never belonged to Young Judea or any of those organizations.

When traveling we did not like Tel Aviv, but we fell in love with Jerusalem. I ended up staying there four years--in Kibbutz Afikim.

O: When you came back it was 1936?

K: 1937.

O: What did you do then?

K: Not much.

O: Your family was Zionistically inclined?

K: Yes. My dad was active in temple affairs and other civic affairs. My mother belonged to all the Jewish organizations. My mother was on the complaint committee of every one of the Jewish organizations because they knew her disposition; she knew how to treat people and would make things easy for

them.

O: Your dad was in the jewelry business on West Federal Street?

K: First on East Federal and then he moved.

O: What was the impact of the Depression on him?

K: I don't remember it hurting us at all. We were not wealthy, but we never suffered. His business was a credit business, mainly with the steelworkers here in the area.

O: As a teenager growing up you dated.

K: Yes, but not a lot. They thought I had a heart condition when I was a child. I was excused all my life from any sport, which meant that I was an outsider more or less. I couldn't go swimming, skating, or biking or any of the things that the group I grew up with did.

O: Was there recognition here in Youngstown that something was wrong when you came back from your trip?

K: Yes, definitely. By that time I knew quite a bit about it.

O: When you got back to the United States did you have a sense of irritation that the people here didn't appreciate what was going on?

K: I went down to the Jewish Center and I knew that they were bringing people over already. I met some of the refugees who had come over; that is how I married one of them.

O: None of these people had experienced the concentration camps though?

K: No. Some of them lost their parents though.

O: What was being done here in Youngstown in reaction to what Hitler was . . .

K: Politically, I don't think it was the city. It was all through the center that things were being done.

O: There was no organized political action here?

K: To my knowledge, no. I know that we were friendly.

O: What were your emotional feelings at that time as Hitler invaded Austria and France and Poland and places?

K: You have a feeling of despair but you can't believe how bad it was. I don't think we knew at that time how bad it was.

Details like we know today were not known then.

- O: When the United States got into the war was there a feeling on the part of your Jewish friends that this was a Jewish war?
- K: I don't think so. They were more interested in it because they were Jews, but not that it was a Jewish war, no. In fact, on the day of Pearl Harbor, Max and I decided to get married. We were married three weeks later on December 28th. He was earning very little. He and Fred Weilly had been working for a company in Canton, a fluorescent light company. Max was placed in charge of the company. I was only seeing him occasionally. He roomed in a one room apartment and after a month or two I joined him there. Then we found a little apartment. The company did not keep the business up though, and he came back here and he and Fred Weilly decided to open their own fluorescent place, which they did.
- O: How many rabbis do you know at Rodef Sholom?
- K: I knew Rabbi Philo. He married me. It was hard to get close to him. I admired him as an English scholar.
- O: Was he an ordained rabbi?
- K: I would imagine so. He was a magnificent speaker. When I was at Rayen my English teachers used to say that they wanted their classes to go Friday night to hear Rabbi Philo who was either giving a book review or a play review. At times it was mandatory; the class was told they had to bring back references, that is the reputation he had. He didn't give us Yiddishkeit.
- O: Did you see him as a community leader?
- K: He was respected in the community as a speaker.
- O: Was he a mover, a motivator?
- K: He was a cultural intellectual.
- O: Was he a Zionist?
- K: I couldn't tell you. I do not think he was active in Zionism.
- O: I've heard that while he held the pulpit at Rodef Sholom he also preached at the Unitarian church.
- K: I have no recollection.

My brothers and sisters and I were all confirmed at the Rodef

Sholom. Our home was kosher. Every member of my mother's family had a kosher home, but they did not speak Yiddish. Her entire family was born here.

Rabbi Charry came to the Anshe Emeth the year I came back from college. He was a marvelous person, warm, intelligent. Through him we said we would like to have a study group. He was rather anxious to have something like that.

O: Was he young then?

K: Very young. We had a wonderful time with him. He had a great influence on Isabel and myself going on our trip.

O: He was a Zionist?

K: Oh yes.

O: Let's move on to Rabbi Berkowitz. Were you close to him at all?

K: Not too close.

O: How would you describe him?

K: I thought he was a good publicity man. I didn't have the same feeling about him as I did about Charry.

O: How did you regard him as a speaker?

K: Just fair. He was very popular and he was also a very good businessman. I think maybe that is something I did not associate with rabbis.

O: A scholar?

K: Yes, I think so.

O: A teacher?

K: I started to take a class with him in Jewish history, but he never excited me enough to want to study things with him.

O: How do you regard him as a representative of the Jewish community in general?

K: They loved him because he was into everything here. He was a good publicity man.

O: What can you tell me about C. J. Strouss?

K: He was quite a community leader; he was a great person. He helped Max a great deal when Max came here.

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O: How would you describe him?

K: He was a warm human being, very interested in people.

O: Thank you very much.

END OF INTERVIEW