

Transcript of Interview with Alan and Beverly Rudberg Nathan
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Transcription:

Eric Lidji: Today is May 27, 2015. This is the Small Town Oral History Project. My name is Eric Lidji, and I'm talking to Alan and Beverly Nathan, and we are in their home in Hermitage. We're going to be talking about Sharon and Farrell. So if you guys could begin by telling me how your families got, respectively, to Sharon and to Farrell.

Alan Nathan: My grandfather came from Hungary. My grandfather came here from Hungary, and that would have been in late 1890s, I suppose.

EL: He came directly to Farrell?

AN: I don't know.

Beverly Nathan: Probably not.

AN: He came through Ellis Island. I supposed he came here shortly after he got to this country. I don't know.

BN: My grandfather came from Russia when he was a young man. And he was basically a peddler. He had cousins in Youngstown, so he came to Youngstown, and my grandmother also came from Russia but they met here. And my grandfather eventually started a furniture business, which he worked at for a number of years. Then in his eighties, I guess, he opened a women's clothing store. During the Depression, he sort of branched out into other things because he traded, if people didn't have money he traded furniture for something else. So they had a clothing store as well as a furniture store.

EL: What were the names of the stores?

BN: Bolotin's. Bolotin's Furniture, his name was Bolotin. And you interviewed my aunts and uncle. And...

EL: What was his first name?

BN: Simon.

EL: Simon Bolotin.

BN: Mhm.

EL: And Alan what was your grandfather's name?

AN: My grandfather's name was Jacob Nathan. And now that I think about it, he came from Lithuania. And my grandmother, his wife, Eva Nathan, her maiden name was Hyman, H-Y-M-A-N.

EL: What was her first name?

AN: Eva. E-V-A. And she came from the Austro-Hungarian Empire. And he was a, he had a farm and was a butcher.

EL: In Farrell?

AN: In Farrell, mhm.

EL: What did he farm?

AN: I think cattle, I think he raised cattle. The farm is still there, it's still in the family.

EL: Really?

AN: Mhm.

BN: Doesn't operate.

AN: No it's just...

BN: Land.

AN: Land, but the farm is still there. I still pay taxes on it.

EL: Did they meet in Farrell?

AN: I don't think so. I think they were married when they came here.

EL: How many children did they have?

AN: There were three boys and three girls. One boy, Benjamin, died in childhood. He was about a year or two. My father was the oldest living child, his name was William. The next oldest child was Moses, his brother. And he just died last month at age 101.

EL: Wow.

AN: And he was in pretty good health until he died. The oldest girl was Lilyan, L-I-L-Y-A-N. And her married name was Selzer, S-E-L-Z-E-R. The next child was Rosa, R-O-S-A, and her married name is Ornstein. She is deceased.

BN: So is Lil.

AN: So is Lil. And the only living child is Tilly. Matilda. I guess her name was Matilda, but she goes by Lee, and her married name is Fanwick, F-A-N-W-I-C-K. And she lives in Stanford, Connecticut. She's the only living sibling of my father, and she is

fourteen years older than I am. So I'm closer in age to my father's youngest sibling than she was to my father.

BN: You forgot Julius.

AN: Oh, that's right, I'm sorry. There were seven children. Let me see, after Moses was Julius Nathan, and he died of Parkinson's disease in 19... oh, it must have been about 1945 or '46. He never married, he was sickly and died in his early twenties.

EL: Did your father or any of his siblings work for your grandfather?

AN: Yes, the two boys, William and Moses ran a grocery store. My father also slaughtered cattle, and they had a grocery store in Farrell on Idaho Street. It was called High Grade Market. And, during the war, Moses was a soldier, he went overseas.

EL: World War II?

AN: World War II. And my father worked in the grocery store slaughtering cattle and at the Westinghouse. There was a Westinghouse plant here in Sharon. And then after the war, my father and his brother, Moses, opened a wholesale company. They originally sold candy and tobacco and notions, and then they branched out into paper products and then janitorial supplies. They dropped the candy and the notions, and then they also picked up restaurant supplies. The name of the business was Nathan Brothers Company. It was located first on Market Street in Farrell and then for most of its existence on Spearman Avenue. And they started that in 1945. My uncle left the business in 1958 and moved to Canada with his family. My father died in 1986. I came into the business in 197...

BN: Three maybe?

AN: 1973. And I sold it in 1996.

EL: Do you remember the early buildings?

AN: Yes.

EL: What do you remember?

AN: Well, the building on Market Street was a big old building, you know run down area. It was a bottling company I think at first. There were apartments above it. All of the neighbors were African Americans, the people who lived in the apartments upstairs, and all the neighbors were African American. Then in, let's see, in the early fifties they moved to a large brick building on Spearman Avenue. It was a nicer location. It was a big building that had been a Studebaker, Studebaker car dealership. It was Studebaker and something. Anyway, they expanded the building several times. There were two apartments above the office area. And, in 1956, one of the apartments had a fire and the

whole building was destroyed, but they rebuilt on the same location. The building is still there, it's another business now.

EL: Did you work at the company as a child?

AN: I did. Let me see, I was born in '42, so I would work summers in the Spearman Avenue building.

EL: Doing what?

AN: Stocking shelves and sweeping. And one time they bought a huge quantity of dishes from somewhere, and all summer I washed dishes. When I was in college, I think I had a few, I did have a few accounts that I would call on as a salesman. I remember when I was a teenager my uncle paid me five dollars a week, I got paid a dollar a day, and I thought that was really terrific.

EL: How did the business operate? Where did they get their inventory from and who were their customers?

AN: We purchased from manufacturers. Scott Paper Company, Kimberly Clark.

BN: Libby.

AN: Libby Glass. Various manufacturers, we were a wholesaler. And what was the question again?

EL: And who did you, who were your customers?

AN: Oh, our customers, well, at the beginning when we were into notions and small items, we sold to retail stores. And then when we went into the paper, restaurant supply, janitorial business, we sold to industries, schools, hospitals, restaurants. During the war they used to sell Golden Dawn, Golden Dawn or Golden H, Golden H beverages. And I remember going to a local army camp, Camp Reynolds in Transfer, Pennsylvania, and my father would deliver soda to the soldiers. I remember going out there with him. So they must, they must have been distributing soda before they went into the notions. My uncle still would have been in the service, so it must have been during the war when they had the grocery business. They must have been selling soda also.

EL: How did your parents meet?

AN: Well my father was from Farrell, and my mother was from Youngstown, Ohio.

EL: What was her name?

AN: Mildred Gefsky, G-E-F-S-K-Y.

EL: She was from Youngstown.

AN: She was from Youngstown. And I guess they met socially. I guess men from Farrell, Jewish men from Farrell would go to Jewish socials in Youngstown and they met.

EL: Huh. How many children did they have?

AN: My parents?

EL: Yeah.

AN: Three. I'm the oldest. I have a brother, Sanford, known as Sandy, and my sister, Joan.

EL: What was the level of observance in your home growing up?

AN: We were Orthodox.

EL: What did that mean?

AN: Well, it meant that we had a kosher home. I went to shul every Saturday morning, Hebrew school, Sunday school, as did my siblings. We belonged to an Orthodox synagogue in Farrell, B'nai Zion synagogue. We'd walk to services when there were High Holiday services. I was kept out of school for two days of Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Succos, Simchas Torah, Shavuot, Shemini Atzeret. The first, every year the first six weeks of school we missed about two weeks for Jewish holidays. And the teachers could never understand that. There were eight Jewish students in my graduating class from Farrell High School of a class of 168. We were less than five percent of the class population.

EL: How big was the Jewish community in Farrell?

AN: It was quite large. We had a synagogue, and there were hundreds of members. Farrell was a very large Jewish community. It was an Orthodox shul so the women sat upstairs and the men downstairs. We always had a fulltime rabbi. We went to Hebrew school in the weekdays, and then we went to Sunday school on Sunday. Went to shul on Saturday morning.

EL: Where was the building?

AN: It was on Spearman Avenue in Farrell.

EL: So it was on the same street as the business.

AN: Yes, it was two blocks away.

EL: Was there a rabbi?

AN: Oh yes, we had a fulltime rabbi.

EL: What was his name?

AN: It was like a revolving door. We had lots of rabbis.

BN: You had a Rabbi Krasch.

AN: There was a Rabbi Krasch, a rabbi... can't think of them now. So there were often these Orthodox rabbis who would come through town looking for a meal and a place to stay, not that they were our rabbis but they were often there at services. Rabbi... I don't know, a rabbi would last for two or three years and move on. They weren't paid well, it wasn't an exciting area. We did have a mikveh.

EL: Really? Just in a little house or a little building?

AN: It was a little building behind the rabbi's residence. The synagogue was on the, let's see, the south, the southeast corner. And on the northeast corner was the rabbi's house and the mikveh with the street running between them.

EL: Was your family involved in creating the congregation?

AN: I don't think so.

EL: Because 1890 seems like there was probably not a congregation when your grandfather got there.

AN: I don't know, my grandfather was very observant, but I never heard anything about my grandfather being involved with establishing the congregation. My grandfather died in 1945, he was killed in a farming accident. He fell off the hayloft. He was a relatively young man. I think he was in his fifties.

EL: Do you have any memories of him?

AN: No. I remember his funeral very well because I had to stay at the house and I got scolded. I had a scar for many years. That I remember.

EL: Were there a lot of Jewish businesses in Farrell?

AN: Oh yes.

EL: Can you remember any of them?

AN: There was Streiber's Menswear, and Louis Levine Clothing.

BN: The hardware store.

AN: Oh yeah, what was it, People's Hardware, which was owned by Barry Meislick and Herskowitz, Martin Herskowitz. There was a White Cross Drugstore that was owned by Breyer, Charles Breyer. What was his wife's family's name?

BN: Colma, oh I don't know.

AN: Colma Breyer was her married name, but her family had a drugstore. There was Jimmy's Department Store, which was Gelber, Jimmy Gelber.

BN: And Hartsteins.

AN: Hartsteins had a grocery store. Hartsteins had High Grade Market, which was originally my grandfather's.

BN: (unclear) Schwellings.

AN: Oh Schwellings, they had, they had a men's store, Schwelling's Men's Store. The Lincoln Hotel was Lobels.

BN: (unclear) had the movie theater, too?

AN: They weren't Jewish.

BN: Oh.

AN: Buella and Adolf Lowbell had Lincoln Hotel which was a bar and a hotel. Bostocky, Bostocky, Sy Bostocky had a restaurant equipment company.

BN: Leonard Rosenberg.

AN: Yeah, Leonard Rosenberg had Shenango Provisions, which was a wholesale meat company. Berger's Shoes.

BN: Oh, and the bottling company.

AN: Oh, Coca Cola Bottling Company was Arnie Heiman and Dick Ackerman. That was in Sharon, though, Coca Cola.

BN: Oh.

AN: Strike that.

EL: Did you guys, did you leave Farrell a lot growing up to go to Youngstown or Pittsburgh?

AN: No. We would, we would go to New York to visit my father's sisters. They all married and moved to the New York City area.

BN: You went to Youngstown because your grandparents were there.

AN: Oh yeah, that's right. I forgot, my mother's parents were in Youngstown. Yes, we would go to Youngstown often. Frequently. And we would go to Pittsburgh, my mother's family was from Pittsburgh. My grandfather, my maternal grandfather's family was from Pittsburgh.

EL: Your maternal grandfather.

AN: And his family was all in Pittsburgh. Their name was Gefsky.

EL: Was your social world primarily Jewish?

AN: Yes.

EL: What were some of the, were there organizations?

AN: BBG, AZA. When I was growing up there was a Young Judaea. There was a Jewish Community Center in Sharon in an area called the Flats. Do you remember that?

EL: What would go on there?

AN: I don't remember much, I just remember we used to sing Hatikvah there. That's all I remember.

EL: Did the Jews and the non-Jews get along in Farrell?

AN: Oh yeah. Farrell was a very ethnic community. There were, there were social clubs in Farrell.

BN: There still are.

AN: Yeah, there still are some, not too many left. But there was an Italian home, and a Slovak home, and a German home, and a Greek home, and a Croatian home. Every ethnic group had a home in Farrell, a social home, a fraternal home. Farrell was a steel mill town and there were different races, religions, nationalities. It wasn't like the other towns in the Shenango Valley, they were more closed, Anglo-Saxon. But the ethnic people were from Farrell, they still are.

EL: So let's go to Sharon for a little bit.

BN: Okay.

EL: So Simon Bolotin, who was his wife?

BN: Her name is Ida Rubenstein.

EL: Ida Rubenstein, where was she from?

BN: She was from Russia.

EL: Did they marry over there?

BN: No, they married here. And she, as a young woman, had a problem with her, she touched the stove and didn't feel it and burned her hand so they found there was something, the nerves, and they did surgery in Canada. And either, I never got the real story, either they cut something wrong in her spinal column where she got an infection and she was an invalid her entire life from that point on. She didn't have use of her hands. And she could only walk with, she had a big walker, it was like a cage with a seat in the back, not like the walkers that they have now. And she would force her body along and try to get along, but everybody always came to our house to visit her because she didn't get out much.

EL: How many children did they have?

BN: They had four. My mother and three boys, Joseph Bolotin was the oldest. He died last August, he was a hundred. And my mother died last March, she was ninety-eight. Another brother, Nate, Nathan, died when he just was turning eighty, right? Was he eighty? He died of leukemia. And the fourth one is still living here, Leon Bolotin.

EL: What was your mother's name?

BN: Rose.

EL: So how did your parents meet?

BN: Well, my mother was going to college. She went to the University of Wisconsin. And one of her best friends invited her home for Thanksgiving, because it was too far for my mother to come all the way back here, and introduced her to her brother, that was my father.

EL: So they met in Wisconsin, or they...

BN: In Wisconsin.

EL: Was he from Wisconsin?

BN: Mm, he was from Milwaukee.

EL: Okay, and then they married and moved here.

BN: Well, he had gone to law school in Milwaukee and graduated, but my mother was the only girl in the family, and since my grandmother was an invalid, my mother felt she had to come back here to take care of my grandmother, so my father moved here. They married here.

EL: What was his name?

BN: Abe. That was it. It wasn't Abraham, it was Abe. Rudberg, R-U-D-B-E-R-G. And he went into the family business, the furniture business, with the others. The only one who wasn't in the furniture business was Joseph, he was a doctor. The other brothers were in the business.

EL: How many children were there in your family?

BN: Just two, my sister and me. Carol, her married name is Brillman, B-R-I-L-L-M-A-N.

EL: What was the observance like in your home?

BN: Well, we were Reform. My grandfather was, was, he was self-educated and constantly reading and he became an agnostic, I would say. And he just, he wrote a book about superstition and, what was it called? But he didn't believe any of this religious stuff. He went along with the Reform practice, but he always insisted that when we had a seder we always had to sing the national anthem of the United States, not just the Hebrew songs. He was anti-Zionist.

AN: And yet every one of his children married a Jew.

EL: Huh.

AN: When we were married my father referred to it as a mixed marriage between Beverly and me because I was Orthodox and she was Reformed. Little did he know that would be the only Jewish marriage he'd get out of his children.

BN: And then I became president of the temple, which made it pretty good, too.

EL: So the level of observance was pretty light.

BN: Yeah. We observed the holidays, we went to Sunday school. We belonged to the Jewish organizations. We didn't have a Sabbath ritual at home at all.

EL: No kosher?

BN: No.

EL: Were there, there was, how many synagogues were there in Sharon at that time? Just the one?

BN: Just one.

EL: Okay.

BN: Eventually when the Farrell synagogue closed they merged, and we had a chapel that had an Orthodox service in it.

EL: Right.

BN: But and then we just only had the Reform.

EL: What do you remember of the synagogue when you were growing up?

BN: Well, we used to fill the sanctuary. And we used to add seats in the back on the High Holidays, but that certainly didn't last. We had big dinners, and we had a very active Sisterhood that catered, and the kitchen was kept kosher in the temple out of respect for the more traditional people. And we had tons of dishes of all kinds, milchig and fleishig dishes, and everything had to be kept separate.

AN: We were married in the Reform temple, but we had our aufruf in the Orthodox synagogue.

EL: In Farrell?

AN: In Farrell.

EL: When did the merger happen?

AN: 1972. '71 or '72. We were living overseas at the time so we weren't here. But it was during the time we were gone.

EL: When did you get married?

AN: '69.

EL: '69.

AN: Oh, and my sister, Joan's, married name is...

BN: McGarry.

AN: McGarry. M-C-G-A-R-R-Y.

EL: Did you guys both go to college?

AN: Yes.

EL: Where?

AN: I did my undergraduate work at Penn State and my graduate work at Columbia.

BN: And I did my undergraduate at Syracuse and my graduate at Wisconsin.

EL: How did you meet?

BN: Just...

AN: We were, we grew up together, I mean...

BN: Our families knew each other, and the Jewish kids had parties together, and he was two years ahead of me, but it was at the same parties.

EL: Was there a lot of mixing between Sharon and Farrell?

AN: No, well I...

BN: Other than Anne.

AN: There really wasn't. There was a large Jewish community in Farrell and I think they pretty much kept to themselves. People in Sharon...

BN: But interestingly, I dated you, and Ross dated Dale, and Hannah dated Melvin. That's two of my girlfriends dated two of the boys, his friends.

AN: Two of my friends.

BN: So we did mix. And Carol dated Barry.

AN: But I think the adults though were pretty separate communities. The Jewish community in Farrell was not affluent as the Jewish community in Sharon, and I think that was part of it.

EL: Did the two communities have reputations in the eyes of the other?

AN: I don't think so.

BN: Not that I'm aware of.

AN: I think they were just two separate, two separate worlds, and I think a lot of that had to do with financial considerations.

EL: So when did you guys come back to Sharon?

AN: 19...

BN: '73, '74.

AN: '70...

BN: Brad was born in '74.

AN: '69 to '71...

BN: Must have been '73.

AN: So '72, '73, 1973.

EL: So it was right after the merger.

AN: Yes.

EL: Do you have any sense about how that went? Whether it was a smooth process or difficult?

AN: I think it was very smooth.

EL: Yeah. How come? Or why do you think it?

AN: Out of necessity. I don't think they could continue to maintain a congregation in Farrell, and Sharon probably needed the resources.

BN: And basically the Orthodox met on Saturday morning, and the Reform met on Friday night, and there was usually an Orthodox minyan. Did they have them every day or just on Fridays? Probably originally had it every day.

AN: Probably originally every day, but...

BN: And the only time there was an issue, and it was just a teasing, but on the High Holidays the Orthodox started earlier than the Reform so there was no place for the Reform people to park. Because we had no parking lot at the temple, so we had to park

blocks away. And then also the Reform service ended sooner, and we made too much noise walking out, and the Orthodox didn't like the noise.

AN: In Farrell everyone walked to the synagogue.

BN: But once they had to come to Sharon they couldn't, it was too far.

AN: It was too far, and the people were older.

EL: So the Farrell contingency had a, they had services downstairs.

AN: Yes.

BN: Mhm.

EL: And then the Sharon contingency had...

BN: Upstairs.

AN: The main sanctuary.

EL: And how long did that arrangement last?

AN: It just ended a few years ago.

BN: When the last ones died.

AN: When the last Orthodox Jew died. It started out after the merger. The High Holiday services were held in the social hall, which was a very large room and was usually filled. As that congregation contracted, it moved to a meeting room called the Freiman Room, and then that was filled, but it was a much smaller room. When the congregation even contracted further, then it went from the Freiman Room to the Chapel, which was just a small little chapel. And then it stopped totally.

BN: And towards the end when they needed a minyan, they would call people who didn't normally come and say please, you know we need somebody. And then when they were having trouble getting enough men, they would count the eternal light. Count to torah.

AN: But never a woman.

BN: No. And we had a, we had a female student rabbi who wound up staying here longer, and she would go to the Orthodox minyan and they would let her comment on the Torah portion, but they didn't count her for the minyan because she was a woman.

AN: They would call me about once a month to come on Friday evening for minyan.

BN: And they had a list of people that they would call.

AN: Eventually it was diluted so there were a few Orthodox, but more Reform, just to make up the minyan. So at that end there was probably one or maybe two Orthodox men and the rest were Reform people who were called to come to have the minyan. So it, when the last one died, and that was Leonard Rosenberg, we had two Leonard Rosenbergs, they were both Leonard J. Rosenberg.

BN: They were cousins.

AN: They were cousins. They were both named after the same man. So one was an insurance agent, and one was, had Shenango Provisions, which was a wholesale meat distributor, so they became known as Meat Leonard and Insurance Leonard. So Insurance Leonard would call people to come to the minyan.

BN: Because the bigger one was the younger one, so you couldn't say Big Leonard and Little Leonard because you wouldn't know.

EL: Going back to your youth, what were some of the Jewish businesses that you remember from Sharon?

BN: Okay, well now Szabo's was always in Sharon, we had Szabo's Jewelers. Garrick's Clothing Store, Routman's Clothing Store.

AN: Silverman's Shoe Store.

BN: Silverman's Shoes, then later Reyer's. Reyer's which is still going. Bolitin's Furniture. Oh you didn't mention Myer Frank Furniture.

AN: Oh yeah, there was a Myer Frank Furniture Store in Farrell, that's right. That was a large business.

BN: There was Lessig's Shoes. And Warehouse Sales, Greenbergers. Dr. Sinoway was an optometrist. Who else...

EL: The pharmacy?

BN: Well yeah, Phil Ellovich. I always thought, I thought his name was Mr. Fellelevich, but it was Phil Ellovich. The Golden Dawn, of course.

AN: Yeah. Bernie Alpern... Cohen's store.

BN: Cohen's Dress Store. Wasn't there another jeweler besides Szabo's?

AN: Gerson's.

BN: Gerson's. That's right. I'm trying to think of my friends and what their families did.

AN: On Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, downtown Farrell and downtown Sharon closed. There were very few stores open.

BN: I never thought about that.

EL: Were you involved at all in the family business?

BN: I used to work there during the summers. I worked at the furniture store, just behind the counter, taking payments and things. And I worked at the dress store, mostly behind the counter, but sometimes waiting on people.

EL: Was, do you get the sense that growing up in a small, growing up Jewish in a small town was markedly different than it would have been had you been in Pittsburgh?

BN: Oh yeah.

AN: Absolutely. Even if we had been in Youngstown.

EL: How so?

AN: Well, because in Youngstown there was not only a much larger Jewish population, they had much more active youth groups and BBYO organizations. Oh, in Farrell we had a kosher butcher shop. In fact, I think we had two of them at one time.

BN: There was a fish market, too.

AN: Well fish is kosher.

BN: No, but that wasn't a Jewish...

AN: No, that's right, Newman's Fish Market, that's right. That was on Idaho Street.

BN: But we were always a little bit different, you know. We didn't have a big Jewish group, and I remember, well later on when our children were little, we took them to Youngstown to the Jewish Center to a puppet show or something, and our son walked in and he said, "Are all these people Jewish?" He just couldn't believe it. And I remember too, when I was a teenager, I went on a teenage tour that started in New York City and went through southern Canada and down the West Coast and around the South and up, and I was the only one who was not from the New York City area. And they were just so different from me. And I, I just, it wasn't bad, I was just a little bit intimidated because they all knew each other, and they all were more familiar with Jewish things than I was.

EL: What kinds of Jewish things, religiously or culturally?

BN: Culturally, more some of the foods and they went to Jewish day schools some of them.

AN: Even though we had very few Jewish peers when we were growing up, our children had even fewer than that.

BN: Yeah.

EL: Was there ever a question about coming back to Sharon, in your minds?

AN: At, from what point?

EL: Well you were away and then you come back in 1973, was there ever a thought of going to a bigger city or...

AN: Yes.

BN: When we first got married, we talked about going somewhere else.

EL: What was the appeal of Sharon?

AN: The family. The family business and family.

BN: And we still, I mean most of our family is gone, but it's home.

AN: It was a nice place to grow up and to raise children.

EL: When did the size of the community start to decline?

AN: Probably in the late fifties, when our generation left. Almost everyone we grew up with is gone from here.

EL: They all left?

BN: Yeah, I mean they're, they're, everybody who went away to college, there was nothing to employ them back here. In Alan's case, he had a family business, but in everybody else had to go, including our children, they needed to find someplace where they could do what they wanted to do.

AN: Of all the people that we grew up with who were Jewish, Beverly and I are here, there's an attorney in town that was in my graduating class, and a girl from Beverly's graduating class. There's no one else here is there?

BN: [negative sound]

EL: So even in your generation there weren't enough opportunities to bring people back.

AN: No.

BN: Well, Penny is still here.

EL: Who?

BN: Her name is Meislick, a girl from Sharon who married a boy from Farrell, and he has since passed away, but she's still living here.

AN: But of all the people...

BN: Oh, and Fayette, I just thought of somebody else.

AN: Of all the people our age who are here, they all have come from someplace else.

EL: So when the two of you came back and you were in Sharon, were the other congregants all much older than you?

BN: Mostly.

AN: Well there were people here who came, they were doctors...

BN: And from Penn State.

AN: Penn State, Penn State local campus, there were professors.

BN: And some of those who've stayed. But mostly, mostly we're considered the young people.

EL: When did it, when did conversations begin about the merger?

BN: In Youngstown?

EL: Yeah.

AN: Very fast.

BN: When Rabbi Roberts was here.

AN: Yeah. We just, we just did not have the people to get involved in congregational life.

BN: We had the, the woman who had been a student rabbi and stayed on as sort of the lay leader. She was conducting services and Rabbi Daniel Roberts, who was originally from Youngstown but had been serving in Cleveland as a rabbi, he retired and he came to Sharon once or twice a month. And this female rabbi, Margot, she conducted services in

between, and then Margot and her family moved to the Netherlands, and so when Rabbi Roberts wasn't here different members of the Board of Directors conducted the services. And there was basically no religious school. There were a couple, maybe five or six kids, other than the Kunkels, who else was in the religious school? Some of them went to Youngstown for religious school. And then you know, it was just a skeleton. We would conduct a service on Friday night and sometimes there were more non-Jews than Jews in the congregation. The people would just, people would show up and want to know what went on in the temple and...

EL: Oh not even spouses, just...

BN: No, just people off the street.

AN: Just random people. For some reason, we had a lot of non-Jewish people who would come to services on a regular basis.

BN: Yeah it was very interesting.

EL: Did that change the tenor of the service at all?

BN: No, we still did the same thing, and they would ask questions and sometimes they would come when the rabbi was here and he could answer the questions better than we could.

AN: And these people would come periodically, not just once or twice, but they would...

BN: And some of them actually joined the temple. Became members even though they were not interested in becoming Jewish.

AN: We had, we had several non-Jewish members. Some of them even went to Rodef Shalom with us.

EL: In Youngstown?

AN: Mhm.

EL: That's fascinating.

BN: And they worked for the temple, you know, they'd take part in things. And we had a black woman who was very interested in Judaism, and she spoke Hebrew and read Hebrew. She actually taught Hebrew for a while, and she's buried in our cemetery because she was indigent. She used to just hang out at the temple all the time.

AN: She converted.

BN: Oh did she convert?

AN: Yeah.

BN: Oh that's right.

AN: Yeah she converted. She was an African American woman who became fluent in Hebrew and she was indigent so we buried her in our cemetery.

EL: Wow.

BN: Yeah, it was very interesting. But now that, now that we belong to the Youngstown temple there's so much going on, it's like, overwhelming almost sometimes, we're just not used to all that.

EL: What, like classes and things?

AN: Programs. Events

BN: Programs and speakers and dinners and special Sabbaths and all kinds of things. So it's exciting for us and we wind up taxing the few elderly people who would like to go. We bring them with us because they can't get there.

AN: This is a part of Jewish life that we've missed for the last twenty years. The activities and the programs.

EL: Did there used to be activities and programs in Sharon?

BN: Oh sure.

EL: What kinds of things?

BN: Well...

AN: Organizations, speakers.

BN: And we used to have a kallah weekend, where we would go to, I don't remember where it was, somewhere out in the woods somewhere and spend all day with activities.

AN: Music programs, terrific music programs.

BN: Yeah.

AN: And lectures.

BN: And we had picnics in the park in the summer, and yeah, Purim carnivals and Hanukah dinners and you know, all the typical things.

AN: Things that we couldn't do anymore because we just did not have the...

BN: Just not enough people.

AN: People.

BN: And I'm not sure who initiated working with Rodef Shalom, but once it started it was nice because we would have a program here and they would come and do it in our temple and then we would go there. And we got to know each other.

AN: They're a much larger congregation, but they're declining also, and they really needed us as much as we needed them, so it was good for both.

BN: Sometimes when we'd go on Friday night, there are as many people from Sharon as from Youngstown in the congregation which is, it blows my mind, because they have so many members, but they're not active.

AN: Sometimes we outnumber them on occasion.

EL: Wow. Is there anything in this that you'd like to go through on tape, anything that would jog memories?

AN: This is a record of people buried in the cemetery.

EL: Is there a Jewish cemetery or is it a Jewish section of...

BN: Oh it's a Jewish cemetery.

AN: We have a Jewish cemetery. That's one thing that the two congregations cooperated with over the years. There's one Jewish cemetery. It's, it's only Jewish. There's, it's not part of a larger one. And it's divided into half, and there's a path down the middle, the right hand is Reform, the right side is Reform and the left side is Orthodox. Although now in recent years it's sort of merging around the edges, but it's traditionally Orthodox and Reform. At one time it was the Temple Beth Israel cemetery and the B'nai Zion cemetery, but even so it was one cemetery. But this book is, it goes back fifty years I guess, it varies.

BN: It's obviously not up to date.

AN: It's not up to date. Same with this one, it shows different burials, '54, '52, '56. I just took these out of the temple office when it was being closed. These are members and their dues from 1949, 1943, these are just old dues books. This is a book of Sisterhood minutes.

BN: You said the date was wrong.

AN: Well this one says Monday, October 14, 1922, but it must be '82.

BN: I think it was '82.

AN: These are mainly from the eighties.

BN: Because there were people he found, names that would not have been in there in '22.

AN: They would have been born in 1922.

EL: Yeah, that document looks pretty young.

AN: And these are some pictures of confirmation classes.

BN: Consecration.

AN: Consecration, consecration. And these are some film, there are, I don't know if you have the ability to develop any of these, but these would be very interesting.

EL: All right, well thank you so much!

BN: You're welcome.

END OF TRANSCRIPT