

**Transcript of Interview with Clarisse Katz
Homestead Hebrew Congregation Oral History Project
Call Number: CSS #4**

**Rauh Jewish Archives
Library and Archives Division
Senator John Heinz History Center
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Name of Interviewer: Ann Sheckter Powell

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Pre-interview Notes:

Transcribers Notes:

Word that are unclear are marked [unclear]

Incomplete sentences are marked

Robert Katz joins the conversation on page 22.

Transcription:

Ann Sheckter Powell: Okay, try saying it this time.

Clarisse Katz: I'm Clarisse Mandell Katz. Born and raised in the Homestead area.

AP: Are you willing to say when you were born?

CK: I was born in 1932.

AP: In 1932. Were you born in the Homestead hospital?

CK: No, I was born at Montefiore Hospital.

AP: Almost no one seems to be born in Homestead Hospital.

CK: Well, at that time I don't know, you know, what the facilities were like. The doctors that delivered were at those hospitals.

AP: So your parents lived here already when you were born.

CK: Yes, my parents were married in the Homestead synagogue in 1930, I believe it was, and stayed in the Homestead area. My mother had come to this country in 1920 and her brother was already established in the Homestead area, and she lived here until she met my father and then they established themselves here in this community, too.

AP: Your father, was he in Homestead also?

CK: No, he was in the city. He was in Squirrel Hill at the time. Oakland and Squirrel Hill.

AP: So he decided to come live in this area.

CK: Yes. Mhm, they opened a small family grocery store and they worked there. My father worked for Westinghouse until the Depression hit, then he was laid off and then was called back in 1936 and continued working there. But my parents ran this little, little, little grocery store until 1940 when they moved out of there.

AP: They owned a grocery store while he was working for Westinghouse?

CK: Right. My mother ran the store and my father worked. And there was a lot of money being made in those days so if you didn't have the job, the grocery store certainly wasn't going to do it and the job, it didn't make you rich either, but that was the lifestyle.

AP: What was he doing for Westinghouse?

CK: He was a sheet metal worker.

AP: That's interesting! So he had a skill with his hands.

CK: Right.

AP: And where was Westinghouse?

CK: East Pittsburgh.

AP: In East Pittsburgh. So he commuted to East Pittsburgh.

CK: Mhm.

AP: And your mother was working at the grocery store.

CK: Took care of the store, mhm.

AP: And raising children.

CK: Well I was the only one at, in the store period. My sister was born when they moved right out of the store then.

AP: So they had the store for a relatively brief...

CK: Ten years.

AP: So not that brief period of time. Where was the store?

CK: On Thirteenth Avenue and Homestead.

AP: And they sold candy and...

CK: Candy and meats and groceries. Just a small mom and pop grocery store.

AP: Were both your parents immigrants?

CK: Yes, they both came from Poland.

AP: And did they speak Yiddish at home?

CK: They didn't because they wanted to be American. When my grandmother was living, that was in my very young age because she died when I was two and a half, they spoke Yiddish because my grandmother hadn't become Americanized. But truly the

people that came, my experience with the people that came at that period of time, they wanted to become Americans as fast as possible and so they learned English and spoke English. And amongst themselves they would sometimes speak the Yiddish, but not, you know, not when everybody was around necessarily.

AP: Do you know why your uncle, your mother's brother, came to Homestead?

CK: Because his uncle was established here. His uncle had come in I don't know what year, he came and was established here in Homestead. And you know, each family brought the rest of their family over. He came in, I don't know what year he came, and he got himself established and then he brought his wife, they weren't even married at that point, but she came to this country and they got married. And then they brought, my uncle brought his mother and two sisters over. And that's how they, and they stayed here.

AP: And your mother was, no, your father was Mandel.

CK: Right.

AP: And your mother's name was?

CK: My mother's maiden name was Stahlberg.

AP: So you're related to Florence.

CK: Yes. Florence's father and my mother were sister and brothers.

AP: Is that the, is that the brother who was here when your mother came?

CK: Mhm, yeah.

AP: So that's, oh I see.

CK: Yeah.

AP: So where did you leave, you lived up on Thirteenth Street?

CK: I lived on Thirteenth Avenue then we moved down to Tenth Avenue a few doors from the shul. And then we moved to Margaret Street. I stayed 'til we moved here.

AP: So you were in Homestead...

CK: Always. Homestead and Munhall.

AP: ...all that time.

CK: Mhm.

AP: Which, which of those was Munhall?

CK: When we moved to Margaret Street.

AP: Oh, Margaret Street is over in Munhall.

CK: Mhm.

AP: So when you went to school as a little girl you were going to school in Homestead.

CK: Yes, I went to the Homestead public school.

AP: What was your experience in the school? Was it, I mean, being a Jewish child in a largely non-Jewish school.

CK: I never had a problem. I guess there was one, but I don't think I was bright enough to see it. It wasn't, you know, it wasn't something that stuck out. There were a few times where I would take off for holidays and there was always a little bit of controversy because I took off for all the Jewish holidays. And a lot of people only observed a three day holiday. And they sometimes would call me into the office and want to know why I had to have all these days off and no one else did. And my only answer, my comeback was always, you know, everyone does what they please and this is the way I am raised and this is what I am doing.

Even though our rabbis every year would send letters to the school saying that the holidays fall on such and such days and if children are absent on those days, please excuse them as religious holidays, and I always had that as a backup. I mean if I ran into a problem I would be in touch with a rabbi at that time and have that excuse. Then there were teachers that were Jewish, and of course you don't take off for all the holidays necessarily, and so then they would say well Miss So-And-So didn't take off, why did you have to take off? And I said, "Well, I don't know." I was too young to know, you know, that when you're earning a living sometimes you have to do things that may not be the way that you want to do them. I just, all I know is it is my holiday and I don't go to school. So they did, sometimes, there was I'm sure some bitterness there or anti-Semitism. I didn't know what anti-Semitism was.

AP: So you weren't feeling it yourself.

CK: Not necessarily, no. No one said anything or called me names or anything like that. In fact, when I graduated from school there were maybe fifty percent of my class didn't know I was Jewish.

AP: This was Munhall?

CK: Munhall, mhm. I never made an issue of it. It was not something, today, and it probably is better today, people speak of their religion and it's an open subject and everybody knows that certain people are Jewish and certain people are Catholic and whatever they may be. I just, you know, it never bothered me, and I didn't feel it was necessary to announce it to anyone. And we didn't talk about it. My friends were non-Jewish, but we didn't, we didn't discuss it.

AP: That wasn't one of the issues.

CK: No.

AP: What did you do when you were in high school about dating?

CK: I never went out with a non-Jewish person. I had, there were five Jewish people in my class and we weren't real close, but they were there. I went to the prom with a Jewish boy that was in my class.

AP: Oh.

CK: And I went into the city, I started going into the city at an early age, like twelve years old or so and had Jewish friends outside of the Homestead area.

AP: So you went to the city for...

CK: For everything. I went to the 'Y' for their clubs and dances. I belonged to B'nai B'rith Girls, at that time we had a B'nai B'rith Girls called Homestead B'nai B'rith Girls, but basically they were made up of people that lived in Oakland and Squirrel Hill, and Braddock, and we sort of had a combination. These were original families from the Homestead area and we had our own.

AP: So even though some of these people had moved to the city they were still sending their children.

CK: Just for certain things. I mean we got together for our meetings and B'nai B'rith, AZA dances, things like that that we had.

AP: Going back to the shul, did you go to Hebrew school?

CK: I went to Hebrew school, and I went to Sunday school.

AP: Were there many girls in Hebrew school or were you...?

CK: There were a few, not many I don't say, probably five or six in my age group.

AP: Less than were in Sunday school.

CK: No, there were more in Sunday school.

AP: That's what I meant, there were less girls in Hebrew school than there were in Sunday school.

CK: Oh yes, yes. Less people used the Hebrew schools, yeah.

AP: Did you have classes in Hebrew school or was it just one...?

CK: It was one group, yeah.

AP: And the rabbi? Was there a rabbi who taught?

CK: And rabbis, mhm.

AP: Who was the rabbi?

CK: Well there was Rabbi Pinkas, then we had a Dr. Teitz and then we had I think Rabbi Weiss, I can't recall, there probably were a few other rabbis in between that were here for just a short period of time. But Rabbi Pinkas was rabbi in Homestead for the longest period of time, in my early days. I don't know when he came, maybe in '35 or so, so he was here probably 'til '44 or something like that. I don't remember exactly.

AP: Did having these rabbis as your teacher give you a closer kind of relationship with them?

CK: No. They instilled fear in children. They taught differently in those days. And I was, I believed everything that was told and said and I shivered. So I can't say that I had a close bonding, that I could sit down and talk to one of them as a, one a one-to-one basis, you know. The rabbi said to do this, then I had to do this. But then, too, schooling was all together different then. You had respect for teachers and rabbis and elders, where today this is a bygone thing.

AP: And it was a [unclear].

CK: Right. You didn't, you didn't contradict them and you didn't say that they are bad or that they did this. So if you went home your parents said he's the rabbi, if that's what he told you to do, that's what you do. So you did it.

AP: You were talking about the synagogue and the fact that it was so, it had so many members.

CK: Mhm.

AP: And the children, there wasn't room for children.

CK: That's right. When it came holiday time you couldn't, you could walk in and say hello to your parents, but you couldn't necessarily go in and sit at services. They would have special services for children downstairs there so, but there wasn't room in the synagogue for them.

AP: So when you were a little girl, you were not going to services.

CK: Not necessarily, no.

AP: Hm, so somebody would come downstairs and have children's services.

CK: Yeah they would have a, they would have someone to conduct services, you know so that, like the larger synagogue do today.

AP: When were you old enough to be a [unclear]?

CK: Well, the big exodus from Homestead came at wartime so I was old enough then because people started moving out of Homestead and it became a much smaller congregation.

AP: Oh I see. So the first loss was when the people went to the army and...

CK: Well, and when the mills took over the Homestead area and all those people that lived down below Eighth Avenue, all the Jewish people from that area had to move, and most of them moved out of Homestead. Some of them moved up on the hill but most of them moved out of Homestead at that time.

AP: Oh, I see.

CK: So that was when there was plenty of room, you know, in the synagogue. It was still a thriving congregation at that time, but it was nothing like what it was up until 1940.

AP: Oh so that was a very precipitous exodus.

CK: Oh yes, oh yes.

AP: Do you know, I mean I realize you were really too young to be involved in it, where that thing was about whether they, when they were accepting people for membership, what did they have to do to be accepted?

CK: Well, I think they had to prove that they were Jewish. And I don't know, I really don't know, somewhere there are the bylaws and probably there were questions that were asked, and I don't know. I don't know what they did. I suppose it was like any other organization that takes in members, and you want to make sure you have a member in good standing.

AP: You usually don't just [unclear].

CK: Well today they do. But I think that time if they felt that a person couldn't pay the dues and couldn't be a member in good standing they didn't, they didn't want to take them. That's my feeling. I don't know. I would really have to read up on it and see.

AP: So you have no idea what happened to people who were really poor?

CK: If they were really poor then they, I think they were able to. But there were people who probably weren't really poor, but probably didn't put the synagogue first in line for payment, and maybe just didn't want to pay up on their dues and so on. And they really didn't, they could be a little independent at that time. They had other people that wanted to be members and wanted to pay the dues so they, they let it go. And I think also, the thing that was unique about the Homestead congregation, is they always, when you became a member at the Homestead congregation you also were entitled to two plots on a cemetery, which to me, sounded gruesome at the time, but I think a lot of people had that in mind. As long as they pay their dues, they will be buried on the Homestead cemetery and they don't have to buy grounds and they don't, you know, have to do anything else about it. It's an automatic thing. And that's how this congregation maintained a lot of their members as the years went on and these people moved to California and New York and Chicago or where ever and they maintained membership here. Why? Because they were entitled to burial rights and they wanted to be buried on the Homestead cemetery and that's why they stayed as members or other members of their family were buried here and they wanted to be on the cemetery.

AP: So did they not pay for a plot in addition to that?

CK: If you're a member? No. If you want a specific plot then you pay, but if you're a member, no. They always had, and I don't know that they maintain this now either, but they had, one row was a member row and they one behind it was a nonmember row. And it went all the way up the cemetery as it went along, there was a member row and a nonmember row. People that were members would be buried in member rows and those that weren't members and paid for their grounds, any, paid for grounds as long as they didn't specify particular areas, were buried in nonmember rows. So that, in fact, up until the end, and even at this particular point, the people that are paid up members are entitled to the burial grounds. And that's why they have an active interest, besides the fact that everybody has family buried on the cemetery at this point, that's why they have an active interest in what's going on in the cemetery because they feel that this is what they're entitled to.

AP: Mhm. So that keeps the connection going in a way that otherwise might not exist.

CK: That's right.

AP: You were talking before about how you didn't really need organizations because so much happened...

CK: Well this was my conception of the people in that period. This was their home away from home. They worked all day and they went home and they had dinner and then they would get together, they'd have a board meeting, or they would have a special meeting for this, or they'd have a Seat Committee meeting, or it was always something, but it was always the shul. That was the hub. There wasn't television. You didn't go home and watch television. And you know, you read your newspaper or you listened to radio, but there was always something going on at the synagogue. You'd go to services for evening services and you'd stay and you'd discuss something that is coming up and try to solve a problem or whatever. It was always, I felt that was there, they'd have an annual dinner. The Sisterhood always had an annual dinner and that was like a big exciting thing every year because you worked very hard, you'd raise a lot of money, put out an ad book, and you had a, it was a lot of work. And you prepared the food, shopped, and prepared, and served, and you cleaned up, and it was all, you know, part of the group and you worked together, everybody worked together. And it was no big deal to get down and clean up the kitchen floor or to take the dishes out of the cupboard and clean out the closet and wash the dishes and put them back. You know, you did that there as well as you, maybe better than what you did at home.

AP: That was your mother as well, are you describing your mother's experience?

CK: Mine basically, but my mother had, the fact that my mother was in the store for all the time, she really was not active in the Sisterhood. I mean she belonged but she was not real active. And then she died at such an early age that the days she could be active she was not well enough and she didn't live long enough to really be an active member. She had a few years where she would go to the meetings and do certain things you know, but not too many.

AP: Did she die in 1949?

CK: Mhm.

AP: So you were seventeen?

CK: Right.

AP: And you had younger siblings.

CK: I had a sister. Just one sister.

AP: Who was how much younger than you?

CK: Eight years younger.

AP: Eight years younger than you.

CK: Yeah.

AP: So she was really young.

CK: Yeah.

AP: And your father was then your, taking care...

CK: Mhm, took care of us. [phone rings]

AP: You were still in high school when your mother died?

CK: Yeah.

AP: Did you sort of become in place of your mother for your younger sister?

CK: Right, right. So... yeah.

AP: Did they, I mean I guess that changed things in your home, did this, was there another time, you were saying the synagogue was so much of a community, that you had a sense of that when your mother died?

CK: Oh yeah. I always had a closeness to the synagogue. I mean I always felt that it was an important part of my life. And I enjoyed going to the synagogue as I grew older and doing things. My children grew up there. I mean they didn't realize it, all they knew was that you eat when you go to the synagogue. "Are we going to eat?" And then when we would go in for services, when they were very little I'd take them for services, and they wanted to know, "Are we going to go downstairs and eat?" Because I always took them with me when we were cooking and baking and whatever we were doing.

AP: So they really thought of it as [unclear].

CK: Yes. There's a place upstairs you know, and they have all these things there, but you go downstairs and you eat. But they enjoyed it. They have fond memories of it really.

AP: Yeah, I think that's probably part of what makes [unclear].

CK: Well I think so, I think so. See because it wasn't a massive group of people that you were just a little nobody, I mean anybody that wanted to could participate and really be a part of the community and you felt like you were part of the community because you did these things together. And, but it was very nice.

AP: Now you talked about, after you got married, your father wanted, you know when you talked about when you moved.

CK: Right.

AP: And the decisions you made. I would really like to catch that.

CK: Yes, because, well because at that point already you could see the community was beginning to dwindle. There were no families with young children moving into the community. What was here was here at that time. And my son, well my children both, I took both of them out and took them to Hebrew Institute when they were, my daughter was I guess about nine, ten years old. Because it was down to three or four children here, and it was really not an education and I felt that they needed it. And she got a very good education, I mean basic Hebrew, she learned a lot and she liked it and she did very well with it. And then I took my son there, and he too has a good background, but we brought him back for bar mitzvah to Homestead because I wanted it in the Homestead shul. And Rabbi Deutsch worked with him on a one-on-one basis. So the last year before bar mitzvah he went to Hebrew Institute I think two days a week and then he came to Homestead two days a week to work with Rabbi Deutsch and prepare.

AP: But you were saying you actually considered moving to Squirrel Hill.

CK: Well sure, because I felt that it was difficult to make Jewish friends here for the children. My part it didn't matter because my friends were here or there, it really wouldn't make any difference at this point, but I thought it might be easier for them. But the fact that they didn't go to school there and just went to Hebrew school there, was not always the best idea because it was hard for them to make their friends. These kids went to school together and they, you know, they came to Hebrew school and they knew one another, it wasn't like they had to meet them then. But they both did fine. There was no, that was no problem.

AP: Now the schools here, this is the Munhall school system?

CK: My children went to Munhall school. That was the one thing I wanted. Because I said, if they were to go to city schools then I'm going to live in the city. I was not going to have them dragged from here, the children here that live in the back part of the city go to Lincoln Place for grade school, but they go to Allerdice for high school. And that's quite a drag even at this particular time, I mean they have buses, they pick up PAT buses on the main road and that's fine, but if, I felt if they were going to have to do that then I'd want to live in the city. You know, those days you could live close to school.

AP: Right.

CK: But now it doesn't matter where you live, you can go to school anywhere at all. But at that time it was, they would go to this school, so we stayed here.

AP: Were satisfied with their experiences going to school in Munhall?

CK: Yes I think so. I don't think either one of them had any real problems because they, they just didn't, I don't know why. I mean there were a few things, a few issues, because they really were loners as far as Jewish children go. When Anne was in school there

were maybe five or six Jewish children besides her. And with Mark I don't think there were any. I mean he was really the only Jewish person. But that didn't bother him. I mean, you know, when the holidays came my kids stayed home for holidays and they were, they didn't have any problem with it.

I think that the community, when my children went, were more experienced and knew more about Jewish people than they did when I went. Many times they would say to me as I was growing up, "I never knew a Jewish person." "I never met a Jewish person." "The only person I know that's Jewish is Dr. So-And-So." That was the kind of rapport they had with Jewish people. And even though our B'nai B'rith Women, in the earlier days, they were very active. They went into the schools, they went into the schools every year, they gave every teacher a date book and it was, all the Jewish holidays were listed in there plus little things about the holidays and so on. And they also had a Brotherhood program every year and they also brought Dolls for Democracy around to all the schools and did all these things. And it was known, B'nai B'rith Women. It still did not make people know who Jewish people are. It was, it was a hard, the community even at this point, now I really don't even, wouldn't even try or do I care, no one bothers me and I don't bother them as far as the fact that I'm Jewish. But they still don't. I mean most of these people on the street think that maybe, maybe I do something that's different than other people do, you know? It just, but it doesn't, I don't worry about it, I just...

AP: Are you friends with your neighbors?

CK: Other than hello and how are you, my next door neighbor I am, and my neighbor across the street. Everybody today, you work and you come home and you stay in your house. It's not, when you have children then they kind of make you friends with your neighbors because they're playing with the children, you get to know the neighbors better at that point. Once the children grew up and were out of the house I didn't have, and I was working, so I didn't have time, I really don't, I mean if I see them we say, "Hello. How are you?" and that's the extent of our relationship.

AP: Do you work in this area?

CK: I work in Oakland.

AP: Oh, so you're out of the community.

CK: I leave right away, right.

[cut in tape]

AP: Okay thank you, this has been Ann Shekter Powell interviewing Clarisse and Bob Katz for the Homestead Hebrew Congregation Oral History Project at the Western Pennsylvania Jewish Archives at the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania, in their home in Homestead Park in July of 1993.

END OF FIRST RECORDING

BEGIN SECOND RECORDING

AP: [cuts in] What did they do about dating?

CK: Pretty much the same. I won't say that they didn't, I don't think Anne went out with any non-Jewish people when she was in high school. I mean she, there were a group of them, and they stayed together. There were three, three or four fellows and she and another girl and they were buddies. And they did everything together, they would go to a movie together, they would go bowling together, they would do their work together. They would sit here 'til two, three o'clock in the morning doing their homework or she would be at one of their homes, and that was the extent of it. Neither one of my children went to proms, and Mark, much the same. He didn't really date anybody in the community. Once they got out of the community and were at college that was a different story.

AP: But did it, did they belong, did they have other kinds of Jewish associations when they were in high school?

CK: Anne was very active in Young Judea. She belonged to Young Judea and she led groups in Young Judea. And she liked it, she had a very good time while she was doing that, went to camp. They both went to camp, JCC Camp. Mark loved camp, day camp then he went away to Emma Kaufmann and he had, he worked at the JCC you know, and helped out in the health club or in the swimming room. He liked to swim so he would be down there and help them swimming and things like that.

AP: So I assume then that the children used the city [unclear].

CK: Absolutely. I went back and forth to Squirrel Hill maybe five times a day. I picked them up, I used to go do my shopping maybe in the morning, I'd take them to school and I'd run to Squirrel Hill and do my shopping and then I'd pick them up after school and take them to Hebrew School and they went at different times. One went at four, one went at six, so I would drop one off at four, I'd come back home, pick up one at six, pick the other one up, bring them home, go back and get 'em. I mean it was nothing. My garage door, they, I said people probably talk about it because my garage door went up and down all the time, it was going up and down. But I didn't think much of it, I mean that was the way of life and I did it. I spent hours and hours at the library in Squirrel Hill when they built that, that was my life saving because I could go to the library while they were at Hebrew school or SAJS, they went to SAJS. And Mark went for a short time, but Anne finished at SAJS. So she went Sundays and one or two nights a week because she was in the Hebrew program. And they did very thorough teaching at that. And then so she would go to SAJS at six thirty and Mark would be done at Hebrew school at six o'clock, and then I'd go back and get her. And then Sunday morning they went. But I could not hold a job at that particular time.

AP: I think you were holding a job.

CK: Well, but I mean I couldn't be on the outside working and do this. That would be, I wouldn't have been able to get them back and forth because I had no one else to do it and that was the only way it could be done. I did go to work when Mark was about, just before his bar mitzvah, I went to work, but I worked at that time for a man who was very nice and he allowed me to leave. I would go home at three o'clock, pick him up at school, bring him to Hebrew school, then go back to work until it was time to go pick him up from Hebrew school.

AP: What were you doing?

CK: I worked for a printer and I was doing bookkeeping. So he understood and he was very nice and let me take off and go pick him up and take him.

AP: And how did they feel about all of this?

CK: My children? I guess they were able to, and they did, I don't know that they were the happiest about it. I think they would have preferred living in Squirrel Hill, going to school with these kids and being a part of the Squirrel Hill school system and growing up there. I sometimes feel badly that they didn't have that. It's like two factions, there are many things that they're happy that they didn't have to do because of things they see that Squirrel Hill children, people do that they aren't particularly fond of. On the other hand, they would have liked to have been a part of some of that. And it was difficult. As much as I tried and ran back and forth and tried, no matter what they had to do, they had a party or somebody wanted to come for an evening I'd say fine, I'd manage to get them there and get them back. But it wasn't the same as being a part, a complete part of the program.

AP: Now when you grew up were most of your friends Jewish or non-Jewish or...

CK: Most of, most of the people that I associated with on a regular basis were non-Jewish because they're the people I went to school with. And I mean we didn't commute back and forth as much as I did with my children growing up, although I did, my father would make sure I got over to Squirrel Hill and if I had to take a bus he'd meet me at the bus stop you know. I never walked by myself or anything like that. But as I was growing up it was a little difficult, it wasn't the same. You had to go, you had to go outside of the community to really make young Jewish friends. The people that were established here, the couples or the older people, they were here and it was fine, they had their, their life around them, but it was different when we were growing.

AP: So you too, even when you were growing, had to go to Squirrel Hill.

CK: Right, or to Oakland. Yeah.

AP: So you sort of had these two, these two worlds you lived in, as your children did.

CK: Exactly.

AP: I'm curious about something else. When you were, when you were a young girl, but do you remember Israel? When Israel came into being? Was there any sense of that in this community, in the Jewish community and in the synagogue?

CK: There may have been more than I realized. I don't know. I don't remember a lot of it other than the fact, see I don't remember working to establish the community, establish Israel. I'm sure that there were drives and there were people that were soliciting and raising money in this community at the time. I don't remember that. I remember it coming and being.

AP: So you don't remember any kind of discussions in Hebrew school, well they wouldn't have been in Hebrew school, in Sunday school, for example, no celebrations or anything?

CK: No, well I was out of there already too because Israel came into being '48, I was...

AP: Sixteen?

CK: Eighteen, sixteen. I was finished with Sunday school. That doesn't matter, I mean our background in Sunday school, Sunday school was like a waste. It was not the way that you would accomplish any great things. It was, but that was part of my upbringing, you were to go to Sunday school and be confirmed, so I did. And the history that you learned was such ancient history that it really, the time that was spent learning what we learned could have, should have been cut down to maybe a fifth of what we learned about ancient history. Instead of learning what was going on at the particular time and bringing us up to the present day, we were going back into the Bible and it just wasn't taught in a manner that you wanted to learn. You did it because you had to do it. And you read and it was boring as could be. It was not well presented, so I don't know whether it's better today or not. I do hear controversy about that, that it's still not real good.

AP: Were you confirmed?

CK: Yes.

AP: There was confirmation?

CK: Yes. I wasn't bas mitzvahed, I was confirmed. When I went to school they didn't have girls being bas mitzvahed. And so we didn't have a bas mitzvah.

AP: How did your father take care of the family after your mother died?

CK: It just did. It just did. I can never figure out how he did it or what he did, he was there and we just did. Everything just, we just stayed together and helped one another and we did get by.

AP: He managed to get the food.

CK: He got the food and we cooked and we did our things and that was, and we survived it. We brought in Pesach and we brought in the holidays and whatever. I often think about it today because you hear such terrible, terrible stories of families that riffs and, or if a parents dies, and how things just fall apart. Somehow it just did. I don't know that he, maybe it was just his nature that kept us together like that, but we just did.

AP: Did you have a lot, you had some relatives that were here.

CK: Oh yes, I had relatives here, sure.

AP: I mean did they...

CK: Yeah, I think they did. I think they did, was like a backbone for us and you know for holidays we would get together and do certain things and at other times. But I don't remember, like every day we took care of ourselves and we learned to, my father did laundry and I learned to do the laundry and we did the cooking and we did the shopping. And I remember koshering the meat and doing all these little things you know.

AP: Where did you get the meat? Was it here?

CK: Where did we get the meat? No. Well, when I was old enough to do this we no longer had a kosher butcher here in Homestead. When I was growing up we had a kosher butcher in Homestead. People by the name of Kramer had a butcher shop on Dixon Street and that was the kosher butcher in Homestead and we had a kosher bakery in Homestead on the corner of Dixon and Eighth Avenue was Cohen's Bakery. So we had basic little things.

AP: Was that the part that was torn down? Was Dixon ...

CK: Dixon Street? Probably. It wasn't torn down at that time where this butcher shop was, but it went. Because there weren't the demands. Transportation became easier too as the years went on. Everyone owned a car, it was no effort to go to Squirrel Hill. So once they became freer they would say, oh I can get better meat in Squirrel Hill or I can get this there, and it just sort of dwindled. And I don't remember when they closed the butcher shop. The people moved from the butcher shop, they moved to New York and no one else took over.

AP: Oh, so they left the community altogether.

CK: Yes, they left. They left. And there was another place that sold kosher meat, but he also had a grocery store and sold other kinds of meat and sometimes people would say well, I'm not sure that it's kosher so I won't buy it there. Once we left the butcher shop in Homestead, I'm sure we went to Squirrel Hill. And then we had poultry stores in Homestead, kosher poultry that we went to for many, many years. And we had fish markets. You know, and it was all geared to the Jewish people.

AP: Was that beyond the time there was the kosher butcher?

CK: All in the same time.

AP: Oh, so there was a poultry...

CK: You had poultry, several poultry stores that were kosher and you had a fish market and a bakery and...

AP: And that was all down on Dixon Street.

CK: Dixon Street and Eighth Avenue, parts of Eighth Avenue close to Dixon.

AP: Did [unclear] shop in here also? In Homestead?

CK: I think we did at the time, yes. Yeah I think we did. You know, you had your supermarkets then, too. A&P was in Homestead, we used to shop A&P.

AP: But I mean like in terms of was there a thing about patronizing the other people from the, you know, the businesses...

CK: Oh, the community.

AP: That were in the shul or whatever.

CK: Well, yes or no. I don't know that any of the others had, say, grocery stores. So you didn't, I mean, like as I say, you were limited as far as kosher was concerned so you went to those places.

AP: Things like shoes, clothes, things like that.

CK: No. I mean we shopped in Homestead because we lived here. And as I say, the transportation wasn't as accessible. No one sat down in their car and went to the supermarket necessarily, or went to buy a pair of shoes, we walked. I mean I worked in Homestead when I got out of high school and I used to walk home for lunch, I mean today, I couldn't go half that. But it was seven or eight blocks up the hill. I ran up and get lunch and of course my sister was home and I wanted to make sure that she was okay and I would get her lunch, and I would run back down. You know, in that hour you could do a lot of things.

AP: Where did you work?

CK: I worked for Victor Shoe Store in Homestead.

AP: Oh, speaking of shoe stores.

CK: Uh huh. I did bookkeeping. I started out when I was about twelve or thirteen years old selling shoes and then when I got out of high school the woman who was the bookkeeper there was leaving and so I just took her job. And I stayed there until after we, until I became pregnant with my daughter.

AP: And that was Little's?

CK: Little's, uh huh. It was a part of Little's.

AP: Now was he a part of the congregation also?

CK: Probably, but I won't say for sure. I can't, because at that time I didn't, I didn't know who all the members were and who they weren't.

AP: Some people you must have recognized from...

CK: Oh yeah. Well they, people that lived in the community and that were active in the community, sure.

AP: And you said you were absent from school for even the minor holidays.

CK: Mhm.

AP: I guess they're really not that minor.

CK: Well, they're not the three day holiday that everybody is aware of. Everybody knew about Yom Kippur and Rosh Hashanah. That was easy. But when it came to Succos and Shavuos and Pesach it was another story.

AP: Mhm. That's why I took back the thing about it being minor, they're major. But I take it that means your parents were observant.

CK: To a degree. To the degree that they could be. My father had to work, so he went to work on those holidays. Shabbos, the store was open so they were working on Shabbos, but during the major holidays they did close the store and they didn't go to work. But the others, he needed to work and so he did. Once he retired he still drove on the Sabbath but he made sure he went to shul all the time. He enjoyed that, he liked the kind of life. And so he did attend and he was a, he was a big part of the shul. Not that he was that active and did that much, but he was there and they could count on him for a minyan and he sort

of knew what was going on and would help you know as far as what needed to be said or didn't have to be said, and so on.

AP: And your father, did he work for Westinghouse until he...?

CK: Until he retired at 65.

AP: Yeah, I was trying to think what retirement was at that point.

CK: 65.

AP: But there always was some things. So he stayed and he was a sheet metal worker all that time?

CK: Yeah.

AP: That's a lot of...

CK: A lot of time.

AP: [unclear] doesn't it?

CK: I don't know, we just took it for granted. It just was something that he did, I don't know. You know, got up every day, went to work every day and that was it.

AP: So you were involved with the shul all the way until its end, its end.

CK: End, sure.

AP: So it must have been a real...

CK: But it was something that I knew had to happen because they could not survive it anymore. They survived as long as they could and that was pulling hard, very hard because there was just no, there was no reason to keep it going when you couldn't have a minyan on the holidays. That was the reason they didn't have services the last couple years because you couldn't get a minyan together. So you know, what are you struggling to keep this open and putting out all this money for. It's not gonna make a sudden comeback. You hold onto something if you feel you may be able to do something to make it come back. There was no point in it so I knew that it had to happen. Naturally I didn't like to see it happening, but that's the way life goes on.

AP: Your husband said you sat, when we talked about the change in the seating, he said you always sat in...

CK: Sat in the back because the people that I sat with were back there. And, of course, our last couple years of services were very poor services. It was just sort of thrown

together, makeshift type of thing. And we went because we belonged and they counted on him for minyan and we didn't have somewhere else to go at the time so we went. But you know, my children left, they couldn't handle it anymore and went to Beth Shalom. And of course Mark was away at school most of those years and he just stayed at school and went to services where he was and but they couldn't handle it. It was almost a mockery. I mean it was so bad that how could you, you couldn't invite, I would be ashamed to invite someone to come to our service, that type of thing. I mean to come to our synagogue, yes, it was beautiful, and come and see it and be a part, but our service, it lacked a lot. And you couldn't afford to do better so you know, I didn't complain because I knew that that's all this community could afford at the time. They couldn't put out thousands of dollars to bring a cantor in and rabbi to lead this community, there wasn't enough community to lead. So I think the best thing that happened was what happened. So that it ended and not be destroyed.

AP: Yeah.

CK: I didn't see destruction take place. It ended on a good note. We were able to take what we needed to take from there and have it intact and the building remained, there were no broken windows and doors written on and things that happen to all these other communities. Many, many people have said, different ones, the people in Duquesne said, oh I wish we would have done that, see what happens to our place. I haven't been in Duquesne for years, I don't know, but they did not have such good memories and they had a lot of destruction. Even in Braddock they have a lot of destruction. And we didn't have to see that and I'm glad because we're living in a non-Jewish community where there were a lot of people who were very anti-Jewish. I won't say they were anti-Semitic necessarily, but I think they were, are. And I think as the years went on more of it developed and more of it would have happened and I'm glad that we're no longer responsible for that, that we don't have to worry about that happening.

AP: Did I understand that you think the anti-Semitism has increased?

CK: Well I don't know, you mean in this community? That I don't know. But I think just in general it has increased and I would think that here as well as anywhere else, especially here if they don't know that many Jewish people they have nothing to compare with, I think it would be very strong if it were to develop. Now I don't know that it's more so now than it was fifteen years ago here, but I would not be surprised. We did find, one day we, they went to services on a Sunday morning and they found papers tacked on the doors for the Ku Klux Klanners and with an address, a post office box and they turned that over to the Homestead Police. But then you worry all the time will they break in? There was, those torahs and the silver and things that were in there were valuable and if somebody broke in and took it or destroyed it that would have really been heartbreaking. The way we did it I felt was good because we were able to take everything out intact.

AP: Yeah it's nice to be in control, or some part in control of some part of your [unclear].

CK: I mean it's like, it's like a family moving from a home is what it amounts to. You move because you want to or have to in some way or other but that's still part of your life and when you're moving, naturally all these things flashback and the same thing was with the synagogue. When we were packing things and looking at things you would go back in your mind and say, "Oh yes, I remember that." "Oh yes I saw that." And it brought it all back to you. But it will be there. It's not going to go away. I mean those memories will stay.

AP: Yeah that's true. And your, and you know where your artifacts are too which is [unclear].

CK: Also, very, very nice.

AP: And the fact that you don't have, as you were saying, that you didn't have to have the "for sale" sign there.

CK: Yes.

AP: That it didn't have to sit in a vacant building.

Robert Katz: They had one sign up.

CK: And we didn't want to see it be destroyed. Where now, whatever it is inside is fine, I'm sure it's very church like inside, and well it should be, it's a church that bought it and shouldn't it be a church. But at least the outside is beautiful. They have cleaned, they have scrubbed, they have fixed it up. It's beautiful on the outside so I feel better seeing that than I would if it had all broken windows and a boarded-up door and it going to be destroyed. I feel this way this building will stay for many, many more years.

AP: You want someone who makes an investment in it [unclear].

CK: Right. But they're fixing it up. Sometimes they buy a building and they just run it down to the ground and that would hurt me more. So this way at least I see it's thriving, the building.

AP: And you've seen it all the way from its heyday to its...

CK: To the demise.

AP: Yeah, in a way. Or into its next life is more like it. So this was, did I miss anything?

CK: I think we pretty well covered a good deal of it. We had the Sunday schools, we had active groups, we had, a lot of people have come through this community. There are very few times where you go anywhere that you don't meet someone that had some affiliation with the Homestead shul. Oh yes, my cousin went there. Oh yes, my aunt was there. I

used to go, I used to teach there. I used to do this. I mean, very seldom that you don't meet someone that has some affiliation with Homestead and the Homestead shul.

AP: It's sort of amazing.

CK: It is. That's right. This small, little community has gone all the way across the country and further.

AP: It's nice that both of you have such nice memories of it.

CK: I'm glad that we do, too, and I think our children also do. They were very moved when all this moving was going on and taking place because they do have good memories. They came and they took pictures and they walked around and checked things out and did whatever they could.

AP: And it was your daughter who wrote [unclear].

CK: Yes, she did that work. And she has nice mementos.

AP: And you had to feel very attached to sit and go through it all, and not only to read it, but to rewrite all those minutes and...

CK: Well then I showed some of the men that had come into the house for one thing or another all these things and they were, they were amazed. They'd sit there and, "Look at this, look at this." You know, "I remember this." They were amazed, they really were. But it was, it was nice.

AP: And so you have two sets of memories, your family memories and your community memories, which is more than a lot of people have.

CK: That's, well probably so, a lot of them don't have affiliations.

AP: Or they're so mobile that they have these little fragments in various places.

CK: Well and I don't think the congregations today, they're all on big scale. Even the smaller congregations are on big scale and you don't have the feelings that we had here. I probably never will because I don't know that I will ever activate myself again to the point that I was when I belonged here. Whether my children will as they grow with a community or not, but that's something else. But I probably will never have it. And I find it very difficult to sit in another service and not make comparisons you know. I walked into the Homestead shul and I knew every nook and cranny and everybody that was there because there weren't that many people and you knew everyone, and everyone knew who you were. Well now you walk into a community, and it's a new community, and you know a few faces or you know a few people and some know you. And some people are friendly, some aren't, and these are adjustments that have to be made as we go along.

AP: And they don't all have that history together.

CK: Right. And you know it's like, oh, it's like a lot of people put together in one area.
A lot of people... [tape cuts out]

END OF SECOND RECORDING

END OF INTERVIEW