

Transcript of Interview with Harold Newman
Homestead Hebrew Congregation Oral History Project
Call Number: CSS #4

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Transcription:

Interviewer: (tape cuts in) Interviewing...

Harold Newman: Harold Newman.

AP: Okay, about life in Homestead and the Jewish community and the synagogue there. Okay one more time, you can tell us when you were born, if you don't get tired doing this.

HN: Right now?

AP: Yes.

HN: I was born September 14, 1928, in Homestead, in the Homestead Hospital.

AP: Okay. Were your parents immigrants?

HN: Yes. Yes, they were.

AP: Where did they come from?

HN: Czechoslovakia. Both of them.

AP: Did they come directly to Homestead, do you know?

HN: Uh no, well first I think they came to Hazelwood. They lived with my aunt, you know two brothers married two sisters. And then my dad married my mother, and they came to Homestead and opened up a business on Fourth Avenue below the tracks, in Homestead.

AP: What kind of business did they open?

HN: Like a mill store, a men's store.

AP: Oh, like that sold working men's clothes.

HN: Right clothes, and cigarettes, tobacco and all that other stuff that the mill workers normally used.

AP: So they just picked Homestead as a place to open a store?

HN: Yeah, I imagine so.

AP: Well that certainly makes sense, I guess if you were already in Hazelwood. Do you know why they came to Pittsburgh, I mean what, was there already family?

HN: No, no I really don't. Well because my aunt was here first and my uncle, my dad's brother and my mother's sister, they came first. So they just followed them. See they didn't come at the same time. So they came to Pittsburgh, and settled here, and I've been here ever since.

AP: Now were you the first child that they had?

HN: No, I had a brother who was killed in the Second World War. He was about twenty, twenty-one. In forty-five he died. And then I have a younger sister who lived in Pittsburgh, but now she's in New Jersey.

AP: So there was the three of you.

HN: Right.

AP: How much older than you was your brother?

HN: Uh, I think six years. There was six years apart between all three of them.

AP: So they were there for a bit before you were born.

HN: Yeah. Yeah they were.

AP: So did you live on Fourth Avenue? Do you remember living on Fourth Avenue?

HN: Oh yes, yes I certainly do. We had the store there. I never liked it there but that's where we made our living. In fact once we had a fire and I thought, "Oh! We're going." But the landlord fixed the place up, we didn't own the place. And then finally when the government took over down there we had to move. So then we bought a grocery store in West Mifflin in the Homeville section, I don't know if you've ever heard of that.

AP: Mhmm yes I have. It's where the cemetery is.

HN: Right, right. We're not too far, weren't too far away, from the cemetery. And we had a grocery store there from forty-five until, I don't know, I got married in sixty, and I think we kept it because my mother died in sixty-two. And then my dad gave it up and he sold the house, and they moved to Squirrel Hill, my sister and him. And we moved out here, after I married in sixty and I came out here in about sixty-one, sixty-two. And I've been out here ever since.

AP: You said you didn't like it down there on Fourth Avenue.

HN: Uh no, no I didn't.

AP: What was it like?

HN: Well, it was, it wasn't good. First of all there was blacks, there was uh, although there was quite a few Jewish people down there, and, but the living conditions were bad. My mother worked very hard down there, my dad worked, you know hard. And, the school was close, you know what I mean. In fact I stayed with Homestead, in fact I even graduated from Homestead High. But my sister went to Allderdice because we had a choice, they didn't have a high school in West Mifflin then.

AP: Oh I see, so they would pay tuition to send the kids to the city.

HN: Yeah, yeah. And it was, you know, a lot of noise. There was the freight trains, and cinders, and so forth and so on. It wasn't the nicest place to live. But there were enough Jews down there at least to make it, in fact more Jews than probably here.

AP: Out in, this is what Bethel Park?

HN: No, no, this is Scott Township. But I belong to a nice shul out here. I belong to Beth El.

AP: Did you get a sense down when you were there, that there was a large, a substantial Jewish community?

HN: Well yeah. Well the thing is everybody lived within walking distance to the shul and we used to walk to shul all the time. You know on Shabbos. Well we never owned a car down there. I think that's why I didn't like it so much, we were so poor. We didn't have what you call money, or be able to drive a car, or have all the luxuries of life. So that's possibly why, you know, and, and I lived down there until I was almost bar mitzvah, thirteen.

AP: Oh yeah, that's right. So you were there for a while. Was the school nearby?

HN: It was about three, four block down. But it was all level there. We used to go down to the first floored school, I went to.

AP: That's what it was called?

HN: Yeah, it was funny I have a little story to tell you about that. The first day of school the teacher pulled my hair. So I ran home, I went home and told my mother and dad, "I'm not going back to school." And my dad actually dragged me back on his shoulders, and he wanted to find out. So the teacher says, "Well, I thought since he was Jewish he shoulda been smarter." But after that we were like this. You know we were very close, me and the teacher. I'll never forget it.

AP: Now there were, were there many Jewish children in that school?

HN: Well, not the majority of course, but there were quite a few. There was quite a few. And the thing is, some were religious, some weren't. Like I would take off the holidays and there was one child that didn't, you know, I used to take them all off, and I was the wrong one. Why can't he? Well he's coming to school, why not you?

AP: Why can't you.

HN: Right, right. We survived.

AP: Did you have to explain to the teachers why you were absent when the other children were there?

HN: Yeah, oh sure. Yeah we'd have to have a written excuse.

AP: I mean were they understanding when you said, "Well this is our..." I mean, as a little boy did you feel on the defensive about the fact that you were out of school?

HN: Yes. Yes I did, yes I did. It was uh, you know it was different like in Squirrel Hill, it was the majority Jewish kids. But here we were the big minority. So it was tough, it was tough, you know, being the Jew. I've had that all my life. But, we made it. We made it.

AP: Aside from taking off the holidays, did you have other kinds of experiences being a Jewish child in the Homestead school system?

HN: Well, I think, maybe it's even true today, maybe it's a lot of my own making. They sort of made you feel a little inferior, you know what I mean. I'll give you a little, I don't know if you want to print this or not. But Homestead High School was playing Allderdice football. And I was walking down, they were playing it at the Homestead field that's along West Run Road. And I was walking down with a black kid, and I'm sure he could have beaten me time over time, so I mean it wasn't a point that, and he says, "We're gonna play all them Jews." So I says, "What you don't like Jews?" And he says, "No, I don't like Jews." Now this is no joke, this actually happened. And so I says, "You know Jesus Christ was a Jew?" He says, "Oh he's a good Jew!" I says, "You know I'm Jewish?" "You're another good Jew" he says. There's only two good Jews in Homestead, me and...

AP: You and Jesus. You're in good company.

HN: Yeah, but I think that we were, I was always on the defensive all the time. You know they made you feel a little inferior towards all the rest. But yet most of my friends were Gentiles.

AP: Oh they were...

HN: Oh sure! They were Gentiles, they had to be. I had one boy that was in my class that was Jewish, you know. But you know I mean I'm talking about throughout the school there was more Jews, but like in my class there was me and Mark Faigen, his name was. I don't even know what happened to him. So you know, I mean there weren't too many.

AP: So it was, so the kids you were really friendly with...

HN: Oh they were okay, they were okay.

AP: So you didn't have real problems with them. And what did you, like on, did you have problems with like the bible reading and with Easter or Christmas?

HN: And yeah, well you see. And yeah, I did. I guess it's even up until recently, you had to be in the Christmas plays, you had to. That's all, I mean, I just didn't know what to do about it. It's not like today, you go to the press, you tell them "Hey!" Then you couldn't do a thing about it. You, you know, you did it.

AP: Did you feel uncomfortable doing it?

HN: Oh sure.

AP: So it was always something you didn't feel very good about.

HN: Oh of course, of course. Even like you had to say the prayer every morning. I used to just move my lips.

AP: The Lord's Prayer?

HN: Yeah, I wouldn't say it. But I used to like I was pretending, and really I shouldn't have had to. But in those days, you did. You know, you did.

AP: That's just the way things were.

HN: Yeah, yeah.

AP: Now, you said, I guess your parents were religious? Is that what you were saying?

HN: Uh, yeah. Yeah, they were Orthodox, Homstead shul was Orthodox. I think up until my dad got too old to walk, cause when we lived in Homeville it was a nice walk.

AP: Yeah, that's a long walk.

HN: But we walked. We walked. Well at least on Yom Kippur and Rosh Hashanah. Now Yom Kippur, we stayed over at the Stahlbergs, that's Florence's parents. And on

Rosh Hashanah we walked and until he couldn't walk any more, he rode, but my mother wouldn't go to shul.

AP: Rather than walk. Rather than ride.

HN: Yeah, my mother wouldn't go. She used to daven at home. But she wouldn't. But me, I woulda rode right along. But I didn't. Yeah, we used to wear hats to eat with all the time.

AP: In your house?

HN: Oh yeah, cook kosher, and so forth and so on. That was my growing up.

AP: Now, what did they do about Saturdays in terms of the store?

HN: That they kept open. They felt, well you know, they had their priorities and I wasn't arguing with them, you know to tell them they were sort of hypocritical.

AP: Well they weren't really.

HN: No... but they kept open on Saturday. But the High Holidays they closed the store.

AP: Now all of these people closed their stores in spite of the fact that they were earning very little.

HN: Yeah, yeah.

AP: So they must have really felt that when they closed.

HN: Oh sure. Yeah, yeah it was. I had a funny incident on Pesach, at one of the seders, we didn't close for Pesach, but for the seder, cause we used to stay open til eleven o'clock at night you know. And right when Elijah was supposed to come in, somebody's knocking on the door, they needed milk, from the back door. It was funny.

AP: Did you think for a moment, that it might have been Elijah? So you had seders at your home?

HN: Yeah, oh sure.

AP: And what about the other holidays. Was like Hanukkah, Purim, whatever, were they big holidays?

HN: Mmm... not really. I mean we went to shul, you know when we could. And don't forget when I was in cheder and Sunday school, you know they used to have something for us, you know a Purim carnival or Hanukkah. But we used to light the Hanukkah candles every night, you know the eight days or whatever it was. And, but I'll tell you

my parents were such hard working people they didn't have time to really enjoy it the way it's supposed to be enjoyed, but they observed it.

AP: Well was it your memory, like in those days, that Hanukkah was as big a holiday as it is now? Like was there all the gift-giving and whatever?

HN: Uh, no. No. First of all we didn't have to give, you know the gifts to give. And I don't think they pushed that, they started pushing that because of Christmas. That's all. That was, the only thing we used to have was Hanukkah gelt. That was the thing, the rabbi used to play dreidle with me all the time.

AP: Oh he did?

HN: Oh yeah, he used to come over to the house and play dreidle.

AP: Who was the rabbi?

HN: Then it was Rabbi Pinkus.

AP: And he came to your house?

HN: Oh, he was very good friends with my mother and dad, and us. He had a terrific voice and had a very good choir. My brother used to sing in the choir, I couldn't sing for nothing. But he had a good voice, and he was a nice guy. He was a nice guy.

AP: And so you say he came to your house, and he would play games with you.

HN: Yeah, he would play dreidle, and that. In fact we were friends with all the rabbis. I remember Rabbi Pritsker at my mother's funeral, at the eulogy he was actually crying, you know that's how he was sentimental towards my family.

I have good memories of Homestead, you know I mean the shul, going to cheder, and going to Sunday school there. I was president of B'nai Brith at one time. I belonged to the scout group they used to have, Troop Two, I remember.

AP: So that was your social life, was that you had...

HN: Actually that was the social life.

AP: You belonged to the Boy Scouts at the shul.

HN: Oh yeah. I used to go to shul Friday night, late Friday night services, and Saturday morning. And then they'd give us tickets like cards, and when you got ten of them you got a theater ticket to the local theater. I used to be going to the theate, but the only thing I did wrong, I went on Shabbos to the theater.

AP: ---- not what they had in mind.

HN: Well, we walked, though.

AP: So they gave you tickets and whenever you came to services?

HN: Right, that was the way they got us to come to shul. And when you got ten of them, you traded in for one theater ticket.

AP: And who gave it to you, like the rabbi gave you, or somebody from shul?

HN: I think, yeah... I don't remember. I guess it was the rabbi, I don't remember.

AP: So you would get a ticket for coming Friday night and a ticket for coming Saturday morning.

HN: And late Friday night services. So I could get three tickets, and within three weeks, a little over three weeks, I had a theater pass.

AP: Oh, so you would go twice on Friday?

HN: Oh yeah they had late, well the late Friday night services were a little different than they are today. There they used to have just responsive reading and then they would serve tea and cake, and you know cake or cookies afterwards. It wasn't a religious service, it was just a...

AP: Service.

HN: Yeah, yeah. And the early Friday night was a regular Shabbos service. But the late was just a little responsive reading or they would have a speaker or something. Yeah, it was nice. And I used to go every, I guess I went because of the theater ticket, I don't know.

AP: I was going to ask, did you enjoy going?

HN: To shul? Well, I don't know if you'd say enjoy. I think because I had to go, you know what I mean?

AP: Did your father go with you?

HN: Most of the time, yeah. Yeah, he used to go. Of course he was vice-president for a good bit at the shul.

AP: Oh so he was active in his shul.

HN: Oh yeah. Yeah, he was vice-president and I think he might have been on the board for a while, you know. So he was, he was pretty active in the shul. Politics were hot and heavy in the Homestead.

AP: Oh yeah?

HN: Oh yeah.

AP: Oh the shul politics?

HN: Shul politics, oh yeah. When they had an election, I mean, they campaigned worse than Clinton and Bush.

AP: So there were people contesting over...

HN: Oh my goodness, you don't know what went on there. They used to campaign, and I remember on, what is that, when do they sing Dayenu, on Purim? Or Simchas Torah, I think.

AP: Oh I guess, well they might.

HN: Well they used to sing "day dayen Max Mermelstein for president." But they used to be so competitive. I mean, they used to fight to become an officer, to be the president of the shul. It was a real, real active shul, believe me.

AP: Were there bad feelings among the people who lost?

HN: Well there were for a while. It wore off, it wore off. But they did, it was funny. It was funny, they used to go after the job something fearful.

AP: With campaign songs.

HN: Yeah, you'd think it was a paying job or something. It wasn't really.

AP: But the shul was really important in these people's lives.

HN: Yes it was, yes it was. The shul was real important. And the rabbis were very active in the shul, and a lot of people liked them, a lot of people disliked them. You know, that's the same today. That's the same today. But I'll tell you, I hated to see, you know I wasn't, after I got married and came out here, I became a member out here, I sort of left the shul because it was too far to go over there. But, of course, I bought cemetery plots in Homestead for my wife and I. So we'll use their cemetery anyways, and my mother and dad are buried there. So I still have attachments to them.

AP: So you started to say, I guess what you were going to say you were sorry to see...

HN: The shul... and leave. Of course, there's nobody there. There's nobody there anymore. And, oh yeah, did you talk to Milt Wolff?

AP: No, he actually said that he thought he had come there too late.

HN: Well, he was, but he kept it going after, Milt really kept it going, him and Saul Post, when things were deteriorating, they kept it going. Him and Alan Smooke, and Bob Katz, and anytime they needed a minyan, Milt would go, you know, from the store up to the shul for a minyan. He was active there. You know, and I mean in the latter days of the shul, so he does have some ties to it.

AP: We may have to try to convince him that he has something to contribute.

HN: You tell him I said so.

AP: I will. It's sort of reassuring to hear somebody else thinking that you're valuable. I guess we sort of wandered off, or I lost my train of thought. You went to, we'll go all the way back to cheder, you went what four days a week was it? Do you remember how many days you went?

HN: Yeah it was, well four days, Monday through Thursday. And, well then Friday night, twice to shul on Friday, Saturday morning, and then we had Sunday school Sunday morning. I was free Sunday afternoon.

AP: And then there were the Boy Scouts.

HN: Yeah, that was on Tuesday nights. I remember that, I believe our meetings were every Tuesday night. And then when I grew older I belonged to the Homestead B'nai Brith, that wasn't too active, but I did belong. In fact I was more active then than I am today. I can't get close to the shul, don't print that, but uh, maybe because it's not Orthodox, I don't know.

AP: So you think maybe the Orthodox had maybe a kind of, spirit or feeling...

HN: Well for me, for me it did. Because when I joined Beth El, it was leaning toward Orthodox, not that I'm Orthodox anymore, believe I'm not in the least, but then they went like all the other conservative shuls, and I adjusted to it but I never became active. But in Homestead when I was a kid I was more active. Well, because my dad was active in the shul.

AP: And you felt, it sounds like it was a very lively community.

HN: Yeah, yeah. He was active and it was a nice shul. I really liked it. But my dad used to sit over in one corner, and my mother was upstairs in the balcony facing each other.

AP: Uh huh, so she could see him and he could see her.

HN: Yeah they owned the seats. You know, you bought your seats then. And that was it.

AP: Did you go to, well I guess you did, you went to shul on the High Holidays, also.

HN: Oh, yeah, when I was living at home, sure.

AP: Did you stay, all during the service when you were a little boy?

HN: I was the average kid in and out, you know, and walked around the thing. I wasn't the goody-good type.

AP: But I mean you had a seat even though your father, did he have to buy the children seats too?

HN: No, no. We sat anywhere we wanted to.

AP: And your sister went with your mother upstairs?

HN: Sometimes. She used to go with her girlfriends, and I went with my friends, and it was a typical Orthodox shul... utter chaos.

AP: Did you like the chaos?

HN: Have you heard the song "Tradition"? That's what it is. That's what it was. You know, like I have a sister-in-law that belongs to Temple. Rise, you sit down, you know, I can't get used to that, you know. Our shul isn't like that, we have chaos. And we enjoy, we encourage the kids, you know to come into the shul, and so did Homestead, and they put up with it.

AP: So they didn't have separate services for the children?

HN: No, not then. No, everything was together. In those days, I don't know if they still do, but everything had to go by the time. Shabbos starts this time, Shabbos ends this time, and you gotta do it within that time. I know when my dad had to go to shul, he dropped everything and went, no matter what my mother was doing. He went to shul. And that's the way the shul operated, everything was on schedule. And according to the Hoyle, according to Jewish law.

AP: Was the rabbi the teacher in the Hebrew school?

HN: Yeah, well we did, I'll tell you we had some good teachers. The rabbi taught, and we also had a Hebrew teacher from Israel, Mr. Tytes, his name was. And we had a teacher that taught Yiddish, Mr. Shannon.

AP: Oh, you learned, you studied Yiddish?

HN: Yeah, well... we studied. I don't know if we learned it, but we studied it.

AP: They tried to teach it to you.

HN: Yeah, yeah they taught Yiddish there. They taught Hebrew, conversational, and I think the rabbi was the one that taught you how to read.

AP: Oh so you had, did you have two different teachers at the same time?

HN: At one time? Yes, at one time, yes. We were a progressive shul, you know I mean for as small as we were. We had the best choir I think that I've ever heard, all male choir. And they were good, even though I didn't sing in it. No, they were good, they were some good singers. And, what else?

AP: Were there girls in your Hebrew school class?

HN: Uh, yeah there was some girls that went. But I think they were taught separately. Yeah. I know my sister went to Hebrew school, but there were very few, not too many. But she went, and there was a couple others, but they were taught separately.

AP: So you don't ever remember having girls sitting in the class with you.

HN: No, no I don't. In Sunday school I did, in Sunday school I did, but not in Hebrew.

AP: Did you ever go upstairs with your mother when you were a little (tape cuts off)

END SIDE ONE, TAPE ONE

SIDE TWO, TAPE ONE

HN: (tape resumes in middle of sentence) Six different languages: Yiddish, English, Hungarian, Slavish, Polish, Russian... just about anytime they didn't want us to understand they talked a different language. But basically Hungarian, they were Hungarians. That they talked fluently.

AP: I thought they came from Czechoslovakia?

HN: Well, at that time it was under Hungarian rule.

AP: Oh I see, so the language was Hungarian, I see.

HN: Was Hungarian yeah, yeah. In fact Harriet was just over there not too long ago.

AP: That's right, I forgot about that. So you didn't learn Yiddish at home?

HN: Me? I never picked up any language.

AP: Oh even when you went to Hebrew school, and this guy was trying to teach it to you.

HN: I never picked up a language. Never did. I could understand, but I could never, you know choice words, but never speak it.

AP: Did you mind going to Hebrew school, every day after school?

HN: I guess I did. I guess.

AP: I mean did you feel like that separated you from the rest of the kids?

HN: Yeah, well, I'll tell you though, we did used to, we used to play in the alley behind the shul. We used to play with a tin can, football, or bounce a ball against the wall. So I mean there was a little play time also you know during that, so that part was enjoyable. But, of course the routine of right from school going to Hebrew school then coming home and having to do homework, your whole day was consumed with schooling really. So it was a little bit frustrating, you know, and at thirteen I was glad to quit. I went one weekend.

AP: So did you have a bar mitzvah?

HN: Oh yeah, oh yeah I had a bar mitzvah. It was funny, the Rabbi Pinkas, he said, "What do you want for your bar mitzvah?" I says, "Rabbi, I want a siddur." At that time they didn't have, you know with English translation. So he says, "No, I want to get you something not really, you know I want to get something..." I said, "Okay, then get me whatever you want." So I got nothing!

AP: Although you did start with something within his capabilities.

HN: Yeah, well I really wanted that. I wanted it with the English translation that I said I want to know what I was saying. You know, then we only had siddurs in Hebrew, not English. So, it was funny, he got me nothing.

AP: Well it's really unusual for the rabbi to give

HN: Well, like I said he was friends with my parents, and me, he liked me, and my brother. My brother was the star singer in the choir.

AP: Was your bar mitzvah similar to bar mitzvahs now?

HN: I think so. At my bar mitzvah I said my maftif and a speech. We had to memorize our speech we couldn't read it, and then we had like on Sunday, an open house at home with sandwiches and whoever wanted to come came. And it was more or less the same, you know Saturday morning, and that was it.

AP: Was the congregation fairly full on Saturday mornings?

HN: Uh, no. Not really, not really. Same problems that they have today, you know.

AP: So that hasn't really changed.

HN: No, that hasn't changed. And don't forget the smaller the congregation, the harder it is to fill up a shul. But it was, it was filled up on the High Holidays, but the rest of the time it was the same thing, they barely got a minyan for evening services. They used to pull the twelve year olds out and say well you can sit, you can come in to make a minyan. Which wasn't technically legal.

AP: They had to push it a little bit.

HN: Yeah they pushed it a little.

AP: Now, you must have two sets of friends, you had these children from Sunday school and Hebrew school and the Boy Scouts, and then you had the school friends, who were not Jewish.

HN: Right. Right, oh yeah. Yeah, and yet I wasn't sorry to leave. Although, you know, I went to Homestead High School, so a lot of those friends followed me, you know I fell in with them.

AP: You know that's an interesting thing, you said when you moved up to Homeville you had a choice where you would go to school. So you could have gone Allderdice, is that right?

HN: Right. But I didn't want to go. I wanted to stay in Homestead.

AP: So you felt comfortable there.

HN: Yeah, yeah.

AP: Even though, I guess did you know, I guess you knew that Allderdice had a much more Jewish population.

HM: Well I'll tell you another reason and it might be more logical. See whenever I went to Homeville Junior High School, the curriculum was very, very easy and it sort of made you lazy there. Now I knew if I went to Allderdice, I would never survive. Now

Homestead was tough enough, but I knew it would be tougher in Allderdice, so that's why I chose Homestead.

AP: Now when you went to high school, what did you do about a social life in high school?

HN: Well, nothing, not a hell of a lot. I didn't go to my prom. I didn't go to, I did go to a school dance, I think I took Marshall's sister to the school dance, she lived in Munhall, to one of the school dances. But, I had friends I mean, there was three of us, four of us actually, Larry Roth, Kenny Fisher, who died already I heard I'm not sure, Ed Markowitz, and myself. Well, they went to Munhall, which was neighboring, but we used to pal around together, you know the Jewish kids.

AP: But you didn't have a Jewish organization, or did you?

HN: Well yeah, we had the AZA.

AP: Oh you had an AZA?

HN: Oh yeah, I forgot about that, we had AZA, too.

AP: And that was in the Homestead area?

HN: Yeah.

AP: At the shul?

HN: Yeah. Yeah, we had the AZA, we used to play basketball against Braddock and McKeesport and so forth, yeah. And then when we got confirmed we got a free pass to the Y on Bellefield, and that used to be our social life really, the Y.

AP: Oh so you went into the city?

HN: Oh sure, after that one of us had a car by that time. Or we used to go by streetcar. Go into the Y or go into on Murray Avenue to Weinstein's, and that's when we were a little bit older and able to go. So actually, I didn't care about the school, you know the friends, I used to have my Jewish friends and we met out there, and I made a lot of Jewish friends.

AP: So that's the way you were able to meet Jewish girls as well, so you weren't dependent on the schools.

HN: Oh sure, yeah. Even when, even in college, I didn't go, I went to business school but my friends went to Pitt and I used to play poker with all the fraternity boys, in their fraternity. Yeah, I mean so I met a lot of Jewish boys and a lot of girls.

AP: What was the business school?

HN: Robert Morris.

AP: Oh, was...

HN: It wasn't a college then, see it was a business school.

AP: Oh I see, was it in Pittsburgh?

HN: Oh yeah, it was at the uh, William Penn, they had classes. In fact, my wife also went there years before me, I didn't know it.

AP: Oh, so you didn't meet her there.

HN: No, no no no.

AP: And your wife is not from Homestead.

HN: She's from Squirrel Hill. She wasn't born in Squirrel Hill, she was born, I think on Chesterfield Road, Oakland. Oakland. Up in the, her dad had a store up in the Hill, a meat market and so forth.

AP: And when you were a little boy, though, did you or your parents do very much in the city, or did they, did do most of, like when you went shopping or anything like that, or did you have lessons or anything like that in city?

HN: Well no, we had a kosher butcher in Munhall, so we used to buy our meats there so we didn't have to go, don't forget we didn't have a car then. So actually we stayed in Homestead, now Eight Avenue used to be the big shopping, downtown Homestead, that used to be. When you went there you got dressed up, Saturday night shopping you know, that was the big thing then. And if we went downtown once and a while for shopping, because there was no shopping malls then, if you wanted to go to Kaufmann's or where, you had to go downtown, and that was our outings.

AP: But mostly you, they were able to do everything in the Homestead area and they did.

HN: In Homestead, they did, sure, sure. Everything was in Homestead. Everything was surrounding the shul.

AP: Now what about when they would buy Passover orders, did they have to go to the city for that?

HN: The shul sold it. The matzahs we bought, in fact I worked on the truck delivering matzahs to all the homes. You bought them.

AP: Of course.

HN: Yeah, the shul used to sell it and we used to gather it up on the truck and deliver the orders.

AP: Oh so it was even taken, people didn't have to come and carry it home.

HN: Yeah, yeah. We used to do it that way. You're bringing memories back, you know, I didn't even think about that.

AP: Well I'm glad I asked that.

HN: Yeah.

AP: Well let's see if there's anything that gets connected with that that we might stay with before we move on to anything else. I did have a thought and then I sort of lost it while we were talking about how they did their shopping. You said your mother went to Munhall for a kosher butcher.

HN: Yeah well, I don't know if you know, do you know anything about that area?

AP: Oh sure, I'm from West Homestead.

HN: Are you? Well then you know the whole thing. Did you know the Langs?

AP: No, I didn't know any Langs.

HN: Leftowitz lived in West Homestead.

AP: I think he called me actually now that I think about it.

HN: In West Street, right on West Street, right before you get to the hospital.

AP: It was way up there?

HN: Yeah, he had a butcher shop. Denny Mermelstein was his name.

AP: Did they deliver?

HN: Yeah, he used to play pinochle with my dad.

AP: So then he would deliver the things so that your parents didn't have to walk every place.

HN: Yeah. Well he had a car so he was the [unclear].

AP: So now you say you stayed in Homestead until you got married?

HN: Yeah. Until sixty. Then I moved to Squirrel Hill for a year on Hobart, we rented an apartment. And then we came out here and bought this house, and I've been here ever since.

AP: Was this a Jewish neighborhood when you moved out here?

HN: Yeah it was pretty nice, every other house almost on the street almost was Jewish. But you know as soon as they get a little thing, they move to Mount Lebanon or Upper St. Clair, you know. But we stayed. There's a few that stayed, but most of them moved out.

AP: Now I guess I was sort of curious about whether having had that experience in Homestead, you would have moved to a similar kind of a situation, you really did looked for something that more, it was different from the way that you were living.

HN: Well when we moved here, oh yeah, there's Jewish, in fact my sister-in-law lives right around the bend from here. And every other house like I say was, used to be Jewish and there's still a few Jewish people in here you know. But there's enough. It's a little harder on my daughter. But now she's teaching in Squirrel Hill now.

AP: She's moving herself back out. Just to sort of slide back again, you were in Homestead during the war years, and you were a young man already. Do you remember anything at all in terms of what people knew, or concerns about was going on to the Jews in Europe at that time?

HN: Well, I think at that time they were very concerned. And at that time they all thought that President Roosevelt was the Jewish savior, you know, which we know today he wasn't. And of course in my family, the tragedy of my brother being killed, sort of overshadowed what, you know, whatever else happened. But, yeah, they were very concerned. But don't forget there was no t.v. then. All you heard was what was on the radio or if you went to the movies, and they didn't go that often to the movies to see the news. TV didn't come until later. And even when tv did come they didn't cover it the way they do today. You had a couple stations and that was it. So I think what it was that the news was really suppressed, then. I mean you knew something was going on but you didn't know to what degree, 'til after, really 'til after the war.

AP: And people really felt that Roosevelt was doing everything that he could do.

HN: Oh my God, yes.

AP: Was Homestead, was it very, was it a very Democratic town?

HN: All Democrat. In fact he visited Homestead, you know the steel mills, oh they all came out, including my mother she was teary-eyed when he died. And I think all the Jewish population then thought so.

AP: Did they have anything special that happened in the shul?

HN: I don't remember, they probably did, but I really don't remember.

AP: What about when your brother died, I think he's not the only young man I heard about that died from the congregation.

HN: Yeah Milton Jackson, somebody else, who was that... another Newman died, that was no relative.

AP: Oh and I think Helen Kline mentioned, oh I think he wasn't from that congregation though, she had a cousin who died. But I was wondering if the congregation did anything different about that than they did about the other kinds of losses.

HN: Uh no, nothing like that. Of course we, they provided a minyan for the shiva period. But that was it, well they have a plaque in the cemetery you know with the names, of course we never brought our brother back. They wanted to know, and at that time I was thirteen and I said, no I don't want my parents to go through another funeral again, actually is what it would have been. But my uncle, who was a rabbi, went to see the grave.

AP: Where was it?

HN: In France. And my sister was over there, she visited the grave. And that's it.

AP: (a chime in the background) Oh, there's your doorbell. (tape cuts back in) Wanted to ask you about was you mentioned a few rabbis. Do they come and go because the congregation was unhappy with them?

HN: Well, sometimes. Let's see who we had, we had Rabbi Pinkus, Rabbi Weiss, Rabbi Pritzker, then we had one for such a short time, he was a kleptomaniac, no he really was. I forgot his name, he had a terrific voice. But he was staying at a person's home and he was taking things.

AP: Oh my goodness.

HN: Yeah, some of them left for better congregations. Some left because they had arguments with different members, and that was it.

AP: Yeah I figured if your father was active in the congregation he probably came home with the stories about this one's upset or that one is or whatever and you would sort of hear.

HN: Oh yeah, yeah. There was so much politics in that shul, it was amazing, it was amazing. Yeah I mean you didn't move up like they move up in the ranks, the next person in line gets to be president. There you have an actual election, secret ballots and everything.

AP: Well I guess it means that they took it seriously.

HN: Well where did your parents belong if they came from West Homestead?

AP: Well it was just my mother.

HN: Oh, just your mother.

AP: Yeah. So, that's a different kind of situation. So these guys just sort of came and went either for one reason or another, it was sort of hard to put your finger on.

HN: Yeah one reason or another. Some went to bigger congregations like Rabbi Weiss went to B'nai Emunoh, from Homestead. It was a bigger shul, more money, more prestige. Yeah, well it was.

AP: So was it hard for Pittsburgh, for Homestead to keep a rabbi?

HN: Well it wasn't real hard, but don't forget they didn't have the money pay them such a terrific salary, so if they went other places, well it's the same today, money talks. Money talks. And I think like Rabbi Pinkus, he used to play politics, with one or another and finally he couldn't take it anymore, and he left. He left. And I don't remember why Pritzker left, I think he was the last rabbi there though, before they did without a rabbi.

AP: Before things started deteriorating.

HN: Yeah.

AP: Now Pinkus left the area all together I guess.

HN: I think he went to Israel.

AP: Oh, he really left.

HN: Yeah, yeah, I think he went to Israel. In fact I heard he was buried over there anyway. And Pritzker, I don't even know if he's still living, he's probably not even living anymore.

AP: So when you left the congregation though it was still, I mean when you moved, it was still a rather viable area.

HN: Yeah, no it was on the down, it was on the down.

AP: On the decline.

HN: Yeah, even my dad then moved to Squirrel Hill and he started to go for the holidays like to Poale Zedeck, he bought tickets already.

AP: Oh, because he didn't have the store anymore?

HN: No, he gave it up. And he moved to Squirrel Hill with my sister and he was very close to Poale Zedeck, so he, he bought tickets, I don't think he joined the congregation, but he bought tickets for the holidays.

AP: That actually raises a question, your parents had a grocery store for a long time, after the war.

HN: From forty-five to about sixty-two.

AP: Yeah, was that a hard time to have a grocery store?

HN: Well yes and no. They were the type that didn't go any place, didn't do anything, and they worked from six o'clock in the morning 'til eleven, twelve o'clock at night. And they put us all through school. They didn't have that much, but my dad saved every penny he made, and my mother did. Cause my mother worked just as hard if not harder. But then during the war my dad worked at Westinghouse, also.

AP: In East Pittsburgh?

HN: Yeah. He worked the afternoon shift.

AP: What did he do there?

HN: I don't really know, I think he was like a gopher. Cause he was older already.

AP: Yeah, right, they needed people because the young men were gone.

HN: Yeah, right, right. So he worked there during the war, and he socked it away, you know he didn't believe in investing it. Everything went in a safe deposit box, and that's the way he was. They were hard-working people, my mother and him.

AP: Yeah it sounds like it. So when he was working at Westinghouse, she was running the store.

HN: My mother was running the store. Yeah, and we helped. I mean, but you know, as kids are, we didn't help enough, now you realize it.

AP: In retrospect, yeah. Did they require you to work there very much, or did they not want you in the store a whole lot?

HN: Well, no they wanted us, but they didn't require, they didn't force us. They didn't force us. If I was home I watched the store. You know, because don't forget, the store was in front, the living room was right behind it with a tv and we had a bell on the door so when the bell rang we used to take turns to wait on the customers.

AP: How were the customers? Was there, I mean how did they get along with your parents?

HN: Well, I'll tell ya, up there we knew just about everybody that came in. We knew all the customers, all the people living there, and don't forget they spoke their language, that made a big difference. So that took away them being even Jewish, they figured they're, they were, on equal level with them, you know they could speak their language.

AP: So they made a connection.

HN: Sure, sure. So it helped them in the business.

AP: So on the whole, in terms of living there, they really made a home for themselves, and felt relatively comfortable as Jews living in that community.

HN: Yeah, yeah. Oh yeah. Well, see at least we owned that place, we bought it.

AP: The second place.

HN: The second place, we bought it, and it was ours. And it was a nice house, I mean I enjoyed living there better than I did on Fourth Avenue. I mean we had a back yard, I mean it was a livable place, it was a livable place. Just a little different, you know.

AP: Oh you know what? I just realized that we took this off.

HN: No you put it on.

AP: Oh I did put it back on, for a minute I saw it sitting here and thought I'm not getting all this stuff, I'd feel pretty bad about that. So I guess now that was the thing I wanted to ask you now that we've sort of gone over this time period, is as you say, as we're talking little things come back and it's hard to remember everything to ask, so if are there any little incidents or little memories or anything I missed...

HN: About the shul or about my life?

AP: Anything, anything.

HN: Well, let's see... hard to say. I'm trying to think.

AP: Any little anecdotes?

HN: Well, I told you most of them.

AP: Yeah, that's right, but I thought maybe I missed some as I was running along and asking you questions, that if I missed any of those wonderful stories we don't want to lose them.

HN: Well I know my dad and uncle and my cousins every Sunday, they would come over for dinner. Cause their store was closed, they had a store in Hazelwood, but they closed, they had a men's store, and they used to come over every Sunday, and always ended up they'd stay for dinner. They loved, my mother was a terrific cook. Even my aunt, her sister, admitted it. Oh Lana! This is my daughter. (tape cuts out)

AP: (tape cuts back in) But it's always like after the interview is over, a story comes back to you, or a piece of information does, or as I say a question will come to my mind that I wish I had asked you that I didn't think of. But I guess we sort of ran the span of your life in Homestead and the congregation and the shul.

HN: Yeah ever since I was born.

AP: Did you go to a doctor in Homestead too? Did you always use doctors in Homestead?

HN: Uh well no, not the baby doctors were in Oakland, I think Dr. Amshel and Dr. Mays. I think we used, I can't even remember who our regular doctor was, but I think that was in Homestead. Uh, I can visualize his face, but can't remember his name.

AP: His name is gone. Do you think that the Jewish people really did look for Jewish doctors, or was it just that those were the doctors they had confidence in?

HN: Well the two baby doctors were not Jewish.

AP: Oh they were not.

HN: No, no they were specialists. Dr. Mays and Dr. Amshel. No Amshel might have been Jewish, but Mays wasn't, and Mays was the best of them.

AP: Oh I see, so they just went where they thought they could find the best doctor.

HN: Yeah.

AP: And that wasn't something they didn't really think they might find in Homestead.

HN: Well no, not that, we did go. Like the dentist, there was no Jewish dentist in Homestead. I did go to Morty Kreisler for optometrist, I didn't go to an eye doctor, I don't think there was any there. So you know, there just wasn't any unless you went into Squirrel Hill or Pitt or downtown. (tape cuts out)

END OF SIDE TWO, TAPE ONE