

Transcript of Interview with Ruth Love
Small Towns Jewish History Project
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Transcription:

Eric Lidji: Today is May 27, 2015. This is the Small Towns Oral History Project. My name is Eric Lidji, and I'm speaking to Ruth Love and we're in the library of Temple Hadar. So why don't you start by telling me how your family got to New Castle.

Ruth Love: My family got to New Castle because I was a Pittsburgher and I married a boy from New Castle. And I came here as a bride.

EL: What's your maiden name?

RL: Ruth Gomberg.

EL: Gomberg. Tell me a little bit about the Gomberg family.

RL: The Gomberg family consisted of my mother and father and two brothers. I had a brother Clarence who's known as Code, and my younger brother was Bernie. There was another, an older brother, who died as a child. He died when he was four years old, of course I never knew him. But Clarence and Bernie were the two brothers I was raised with.

EL: How did you meet your husband?

RL: My husband went to Pitt and I worked at Rodef Shalom Temple in Pittsburgh and I had a very good friend there who had an aunt in New Castle who was a good friend of my, of the woman who became my mother-in-law. And she introduced me to Howard Love, and we became an item.

EL: Who was the friend who had the aunt?

RL: June, she was June Shillet.

EL: And the aunt's name?

RL: Mabel, I can't remember Mabel's last name.

EL: So you met your husband in Pittsburgh.

RL: I did.

EL: Did you get married in Pittsburgh?

RL: Yes.

EL: And then you moved up to New Castle.

RL: Right, I came here as a bride in 1950.

EL: 1950. And what did your husband do?

RL: At that time my husband had graduated from Pitt the year before and he sold insurance with Jack Schwartz, who was a New Castle native.

EL: What was the name of the business?

RL: I don't know. I don't even know if there was a name of the business.

EL: Okay. With Jack Schwartz.

RL: Yes.

EL: So, which of, which of the congregations were you involved in?

RL: We were involved in Temple Israel.

EL: Okay.

RL: Even though his parents belonged to both congregations.

EL: Was that common?

RL: Uh, I don't know if that was common, but that was my father-in-law. He, he was on all fronts. And the shul at that time, as we referred to it, was in the south side. The temple was up on the north side which was where most of the Jewish, well I shouldn't say most of the Jewish people, but a lot of the Jewish people lived on the north side and the Loves lived on the north side. And I guess he wanted his children to belong to the temple, although he participated in both. He was a very religious man, and very modern and very smart man, but he was religious, travelled the world and kept kosher. But he belonged to the shul and the temple both. And, but I think his family belonged to the temple.

EL: What was the level of observance in your house?

RL: In my home in Pittsburgh? Or you mean as a bride here in New Castle?

EL: Well now that you mention it, your home in Pittsburgh, and then once you started a family here.

RL: Well my family in Pittsburgh were religious, and then I came from a kosher home, and because I wanted my parents to be able to eat in our home, and because it was important to Howard, as well, as a bride I kept a kosher home.

EL: And did you guys go to services every week?

RL: I don't know if we went every week, but we went fairly often. And then even after we had children, we took the children to temple and went often.

EL: If you were at that level of religious, what was it about Temple Israel that was attractive to you as opposed to Tifereth Israel?

RL: You know, I can't even remember who the rabbi was at the shul at that time. But we had Rabbi Gruen at Temple Israel, and we just kind of grew up with him. In fact, to this day I'm friends with his daughter who is in Pittsburgh. But I don't know, it was just more modern, it was, I mean you could be religious and be Reform just as you could be religious in a Conservative shul. But I don't know, we belonged to the temple and we just came here.

EL: What do you remember of Rabbi Gruen?

RL: Rabbi Gruen was a very brilliant man and he, his, he was a good teacher and the kids you know, they did their tricks on him and played games with him. But he was a brilliant man and his sermons were very interesting, and you could learn a lot from him.

EL: Was there a feeling that the congregation was lucky to be a small town that had a rabbi of his stature?

RL: You know, I didn't know that at the time, but as I grew older and was, became more worldly, I learned to appreciate him better. And heard only recently, I don't even know if I should be saying this, but I'm going to say it anyhow, that I understand that if this man did not have the heavy German accent that he had, that he could have risen much higher than he did.

EL: I heard that, too.

RL: Have you heard that?

EL: Yeah.

RL: Okay, I believe it too.

EL: Just because of his level of scholarship?

RL: Yes, and I worked at Rodef Shalom at one time when Solomon Freehof was the rabbi there and that was a lesson in life, because he was really brilliant. But he couldn't get on your level, he was just so...

EL: Rabbi Freehof?

RL: Yeah, he was just so high above you, you know. But they also had assistant rabbis and they were you know, you could deal with them more easily than you could with Freehof.

EL: Was it an adjustment to come from Pittsburgh to New Castle?

RL: Not really. You know it was okay. It was fine. I adapted. We had a tiny little three room apartment when we were first married, we had friends. Life was good.

EL: What was the social life like at the time?

RL: I don't know, we didn't have any money so we couldn't do anything lavish, you know and going out for dinner in those years you didn't do that like you do that today. But we went to movies and we played cards, you know we had a bridge club and I worked.

EL: Where did you work?

RL: I was very lucky to get a job at the draft board. As a new bride, my in-laws' next door neighbor didn't know me at all, but she called, she saw there was this young new bride there and she called me up and she asked if I was interested in working. And I said oh yes I was, because we, believe me we were poor as church mice. And she asked me if I wanted a job and I said I did and she said well she worked at the local draft board and that they were in need of help there, would I be interested in coming for an interview and I said I was. So I went for this interview and I was interviewed by the draft board people and learned that there were two boards, a city board and a county board and the gentleman who was the clerk of the county board was retiring, and I got his job. I was twenty-one years old and I became the clerk of the Lawrence County draft board.

EL: What were your responsibilities?

RL: To send men to Pittsburgh to be examined, and then to send men to be drafted. It was during the Korean War, and I was the clerk at the county board at age twenty-one.

EL: Wow. How long did you do that for?

RL: I worked there until I, almost, well I was pregnant and I had to leave before I had the baby, I was among all young men and boys, and it was not nice to be pregnant around all those males at that time. So I left, my son was born in February and I must have worked maybe 'til the first of the year.

EL: People were disrespectful?

RL: No, they weren't disrespectful, it just wasn't nice to be pregnant around all those young men and boys.

EL: Today with things like maternity leave do you think you would have stayed longer?

RL: Possibly.

EL: Yeah.

RL: I don't think I would have worked after the baby was born, but I would have worked up closer to the time of his birth than I did at that time. But that was quite a job for a twenty-one year old, I wasn't twenty-one anymore because I worked there for a couple of years.

EL: Yeah. When did you have your first child?

RL: In 1953.

EL: Okay, so you were there for a couple years.

RL: Yes.

EL: How many children did you have?

RL: I have three sons.

EL: Three sons. What were their childhoods like?

RL: Very, very nice. They went to school, and they were all bright and good students and had lots of friends. Just normal childhood.

EL: Were there a lot of differences between the way that you were raised and the way you raised your children?

RL: I would have to say yes because my parents were foreign born and were of a different makeup than I was. But we, we raised them well and they were good kids and they were smart and they got a good education and that was, we didn't have any serious problems, thank God.

EL: Were they bar mitzvahed?

RL: Oh yes, all three were bar mitzvahed and confirmed at Temple Israel.

EL: Was that common?

RL: Yes.

EL: Okay. Did they stay in New Castle?

RL: No, they went away to school and nobody ever came back. Nobody ever returned here to live.

EL: Was that common, among that generation?

RL: Yeah, well if you went into family businesses, and those few kids came back, but most kids went away to school and never returned here to live.

EL: Why do you think that is?

RL: Because they got used to being in a city where there were just many more advantages and they outgrew New Castle I guess.

EL: Was there a steady decline in attendance at Temple Israel?

RL: Not noticeably really, until many years later. But when we were young it was pretty steady you know, there wasn't that much of a decline in people of our generation. The kids went away to school and didn't come back, but then new people came.

EL: Really?

RL: Yeah, yeah because there were mills and factories and businesses that employed people who came here from, and one big surge was the luggage factory which was owned by Jewish people from Pittsburgh located in what was called West Pittsburgh, that sounds like its near Pittsburgh, it wasn't, it was near New Castle, but that brought quite a few Jewish families here.

EL: When was that?

RL: In the early fifties.

EL: Huh.

RL: The Weiner family mainly owned that business. And they were Pittsburghers and they brought quite a few families here.

EL: Did you remain involved with the congregation after your children grew up?

RL: Oh yes, very much so.

EL: Were you involved with the merger at all?

RL: I was on the board and they tried for many years to merge and it just couldn't happen and I think I was already gone by the time the merger did happen.

EL: What were the complicating factors?

RL: They just couldn't seem to get together, and I have to say this, the shul people looked at us like we were a church, they were not tolerant of Reform Jews, the people from the shul. It was like, very two-sided. The shul people were the shul people and the temple people were the temple people, and some people looked at us like we were really not Jewish.

EL: Huh. Once the merger happened were you still involved in the congregation?

RL: I wasn't, I don't think I was here anymore.

EL: You had moved back to Pittsburgh by that point.

RL: Right.

EL: How much do you know of your husband's family's history?

RL: Quite a bit.

EL: How did they get to New Castle?

RL: Uh, I'm really not sure about that because my father-in-law came from Wales, which was kind of weird, but anyhow, their first child was born in Niles, Ohio, and how or when they came to New Castle I don't know, but they landed here somehow. And my father-in-law had quite a few brothers, and he was the only one that came to New Castle. The others were Cincinnati, Pittsburgh, different places, but my father-in-law, I think my father-in-law might have come here initially to work for Fisher Brothers which was a Jewish company, a company owned by a couple of Jewish men and I think he came here to work for them initially and then maybe started his coal and ice business.

EL: Coal and ice?

RL: Coal and ice, many, many years ago.

EL: How, what did coal and ice have to do with one another?

RL: I don't know. But there's a connections. I know they sold coal and I know they did ice because even when my kids were little my kids did ice in the summer. But after the war was over and my husband and his brother returned from the service, my husband

went to Pitt, but my brother-in-law went into business with his father and then it became heating and cooling, it was no longer coal and ice.

EL: Oh, I see how they're connected now.

RL: Okay.

EL: When you say your children did ice, what does that mean?

RL: They sold ice in the summer, they delivered ice, they worked on the trucks, they worked at the coal yard. That was big stuff in the summer for my three boys, boy they loved to go work for grandpa.

EL: Did he have an ice house?

RL: Yeah, I guess there was an ice house.

EL: So where did he get the ice from?

RL: From wherever you get ice, I don't know.

EL: So there were just big blocks of it?

RL: Yes.

EL: And then they would just pack them up and take them...

RL: They had customers, I guess that they delivered it to.

EL: When did it become heating and cooling?

RL: After my brother-in-law came back from the service, and he was the one that learned about air conditioning and it became heating and cooling. But I must tell you that before it became heating and cooling when it was just Love Coal Company, their phrase was "Let Love keep you warm".

EL: That's very clever.

RL: That was good.

EL: Why did your husband choose insurance instead of the family business?

RL: Well I don't think he chose insurance, it was just a job after he graduated from college he needed employment and Jack Schwartz was selling insurance and he joined Jack Schwartz. But we were slowly starving to death in the insurance business, so friends of ours had opened a children's shop in New Castle and the fellow was a New

Castle guy who married a girl who lived around the corner from me in Pittsburgh, so as couples we were very friendly. And this guy's father was a car dealer and he worked for his father for a while, but somehow or other he and his wife decided to open a children's shop, which they did. And they, this guy was really not for indoor work, because he was a mover and a shaker and I think he quickly outgrew the children's shop, and we bought it from him.

EL: What was the name of it?

RL: It was the Youth Center, but after we bought it, it became Love's Youth Center.

EL: And where was it?

RL: It was on the main street of New Castle which was Washington Street. It was part of the, oh God, it was a hotel, the Leslie Hotel building. And it was just a small storeroom and several years later the First Federal Bank built a new building which had two stores in the front and we moved into one of those stores.

EL: About what year did he buy the business?

RL: I think it was about 1953.

EL: Okay, so right about the time your children were born.

RL: Mhm.

EL: And so then you moved into...

RL: Into the First Federal.

EL: How long was the building, was the business around for?

RL: Until, after, 'til my husband passed away in 1985.

EL: Oh, okay. What do you remember of the store?

RL: Oh I remember a lot. I used to go on buying trips with my husband, and I worked in the store part-time.

EL: Doing what?

RL: Selling. Buying, selling, everything.

EL: Where would you go on buying trips?

RL: To New York, and to Pittsburgh. There were children's shows in Pittsburgh and we would come into the, we knew most of the salespeople and we had lines that we were used to buying and we would supplement in Pittsburgh, but our big buying was done in New York. We belonged to a buying office and we used to go to New York about four times a year.

EL: Were there any Fifth Avenue wholesalers that you dealt with?

RL: There was one that you know if we needed a coat in a certain size and we were out of it, we would come into, there was a place on Fifth Avenue, a wholesaler that we would buy from.

EL: Was business steady until the eighties, or did it go up and down?

RL: Well it was fairly steady, but then my husband, then they built a mall in downtown New Castle and my husband decided he needed to open another store, which I didn't think was such a wonderful idea because mall stores are open seven days and seven nights a week and I knew that he would be involved a lot. And he did open a men's and boy's store in the mall and that took a lot of his time. And then one time he came to me and said I'm going to take the temple presidency, so I will also not be available on Friday nights because I have to go to temple every Friday night and so, so he worked a lot of nights and I wasn't too happy about that, but that was business.

EL: Huh. What were his responsibilities as temple president?

RL: I don't know. Whatever temple presidents do, he did.

EL: When did you leave New Castle?

RL: I personally left New Castle in 1994.

EL: So you stayed for a while after he died.

RL: Yes, because I worked, I worked for twenty-one years at the mental health and mental retardation office.

EL: That's a public office?

RL: It's a state, well it's state and county both.

EL: How did you become involved in that?

RL: There was a job available, and I applied for it and I became the secretary to the administrator.

EL: Was it something you were particularly interested in?

RL: Yes, yes I was. Although I didn't have any background in it. But I was very interested and one of the things I liked most about it is I used to go to the mental health hearings and represent our county there, and so I dealt with the psychiatrists and the lawyers and the legal part of it and I was very much interested and I did that for twenty-one years.

EL: It seems like that and your other job both have a similar level of organization required for them.

RL: Maybe.

EL: Yeah. So then after you retired you moved back to Pittsburgh.

RL: Right.

EL: Was there ever a thought of staying in New Castle?

RL: Uh, I did stay nine years, well 'cause I continued to work, but when I retired from working I thought well two of my kids live in Pittsburgh, and that's my hometown and I still had a few friends in Pittsburgh and I thought well, that's the place I need to go. So I retired to Pittsburgh. And my brother was here.

EL: Do you maintain any contact with the New Castle community now?

RL: Absolutely.

EL: In what form?

RL: Well I see people and talk to people and have a few friends here.

EL: So you still come up to New Castle occasionally.

RL: Not too often because I don't drive anymore. And you know for someone to have to bring me is a pain in the neck, but as long as I was driving I would come here quite often.

EL: But there's New Castle people in Pittsburgh and you see them.

RL: Oh, right.

EL: Are there a lot?

RL: No, not a lot, but some. And I still am friendly with quite a few people here. I don't see them as often as I would like, but we're in touch you know, we email or we talk on the phone, you know, I still have friends here.

EL: What do you think the future of this community will be?

RL: Sad. I think it's very sad. And it's true of all the small towns where there are few Jews left and few of the synagogues getting, you know where they can't maintain them anymore because there aren't enough people.

EL: Yes. All right, well thank you so much for your thoughts and your memories.

RL: Well you're very welcome.

END OF INTERVIEW