

**Transcript of Interview with Elaine Malyn  
Small Town Jewish History Project  
Call Number:**

**Rauh Jewish Archives  
Library and Archives Division  
Senator John Heinz History Center  
Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania  
1212 Smallman Street  
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Pre-interview Notes:

Transcribers Notes:

Words not known will be marked [unclear]

The two unidentified speakers who enter the conversation on page six are Morton and Rosalie Opall.

Transcription:

**Eric Lidji:** Today is July 24, 2015. This is the Small Towns Project. I'm Eric Lidji and I'm talking to Elaine Malyn, and we are still in the Opall's home in Uniontown. We're going to be talking about Uniontown. So could you start by telling me how your family got to Uniontown?

**Elaine Malyn:** My dad's brothers had a store, various stores in Pittsburgh, army and navy type stores and they had one in Uniontown and they needed somebody to run the Uniontown store and his brothers didn't want to leave Pittsburgh. So they, my dad was one of the younger ones so they sent him to Uniontown to run the store.

EL: Do you know how your family got to Pittsburgh?

EM: My dad was born in Pittsburgh. My mother was born in part of Russia, and they emigrated, and they lived in Monessen, and she and my dad met at Conneaut Lake one summer. And they got married and lived in Pittsburgh, had two children in Pittsburgh. And then this was 1930 they moved to Uniontown to run the store in Uniontown.

EL: What were their names?

EM: Rose and Dave Turner. T-E-R-N-E-R.

EL: Okay.

EM: And so they were here since 1930. I was born in Uniontown, my brother and sister were born in Pittsburgh. And I guess except for college and like five years afterwards, after I got married I lived in New Kensington, but majority of my life I've been in Uniontown.

EL: What do you remember of Uniontown from growing up?

EM: Well there were a lot of Jewish people. I remember going to Sunday school and Hebrew school. Morty's a couple years younger than I am so we weren't in the same class, but we all went to things together. And it was a booming town, by the time I was here, my brother's six years older than I am and he had a lot of Jewish kids in his class, but in my class we were down to about five or six Jewish kids. So it was already starting to dwindle way back then and, but...

EL: Where did your family live?

EM: When I was a baby they lived near the synagogue on Murray Avenue and then they moved to the other end of town I think when I was five years old.

EL: There's a Murray Avenue here in Uniontown?

EM: Uh huh.

EL: Okay.

EM: And there were a lot of Jewish families there because it was walking distance to the synagogue. But then they moved to the nicer area near the Jewish Community Center.

EL: Yup. Did a lot of Jews make that migration?

EM: Yes.

EL: Okay.

EM: What else?

EL: What do you remember of the synagogue?

EM: Men and women sat separately, I remember, there were a lot of people. It was full, kids lots of times ended up in the balcony or in the back of the synagogue and it was just a lot going on at that time. And even when our kids were growing up we used to do holidays, luncheons for the holidays, and we would prepare for eighty to a hundred people.

EL: Wow.

EM: There must have been at least eighty, seventy or eighty kids in the Sunday school and the adults that helped, the teachers and everything. It was, it was a good community, and it's just gone.

EL: Tell me about your father's store.

EM: He had an Army and Navy store. And it was right on Main Street, and it was a big. I think they closed that in 1986 or '87, around in there. My mother would help out on Saturdays, the rest of the time she didn't work. And I would sometimes go down on Saturdays and help write hunting licenses and things like that, I never did too much with selling, but a little bit if they were busy on the weekends.

EL: So the family owned stores in several towns?

EM: Yeah, they weren't connected though.

EL: Oh, okay.

EM: This was just my dad's store. And they would go into Pittsburgh, he would go into Pittsburgh almost every Sunday to get merchandise and things when I was young.

EL: From Fifth Avenue?

EM: Yeah. And he still had a lot of family in Pittsburgh so we did go to Pittsburgh fairly frequently. And there again, they said it's easier for us to go to Pittsburgh than for the Pittsburgh group to come to Uniontown. But I remember my parents had a big Fourth of July party several years and a lot of the relatives did come up from Pittsburgh and things that, we spent a lot of time in Pittsburgh.

EL: Was your family religious at all?

EM: Fairly so, I would say. My parents kept kosher and went to services frequently. I don't think we were really Orthodox, but it was, it was a big part of their lives.

EL: What do you remember about the Jewish Community Center?

EM: There were a lot of activities going on, there were a lot of people there. After I first got married I was gone for about five years and a lot of the activities had already started dropping off by the time I came back, but I think I came back in 1964.

EL: So even by the sixties you started to notice that there was a change.

EM: Definitely. But they still had New Year's Eve parties, and they had different activities going on that even then they used to put on plays and things. But there was a lot, a lot going back in the sixties. More people got older and retired and either died or moved, and the kids didn't come back, and they just sort of really dropped off population wise.

EL: Do you know why the kids didn't come back?

EM: There wasn't any job opportunities and by that time there weren't that many Jewish people for them to date when they got to that age. But it seemed like all the kids went away to college and that was it. I think there's only two, two young, so-called young people that are living in Uniontown now and they're in their fifties.

EL: Huh. Were you involved in BBYO when you were younger?

EM: Somewhat, not as much as they were. But I went to BBG when I did go to Pittsburgh for a few occasions.

EL: How did you meet other Jews?

EM: Not, I didn't too much. But then I went away to college.

EL: Where did you go?

EM: I went to the University of Michigan for a year and a half and didn't know what to major in and I finally picked education and thought I didn't need to be certified in the state of Michigan so I came back and went to Pitt.

EL: How did you end up in Michigan in the first place?

EM: My brother had gone there to Ann Arbor so I had gone to visit him one time and thought it was a nice place to go. But it was probably too big for me, I was very quiet, and it was sort of overwhelming.

EL: So you came back to Pitt?

EM: Yeah.

EL: To Pitt.

EM: And graduated from Pitt, majored in education. And then I got married and we lived in New Kensington for about five years because my husband's family was from New Kensington.

EL: What was his name?

EM: Milton Malyn.

EL: What was New Kensington like?

EM: It was a busy community, too. They had, we went to services regularly and there was, there was a lot going on there. Played mahj they taught me to play mahj at that time. And two of my kids were born there. And then my husband decided to come back and work in the store with my dad, which probably was a mistake, but we moved back to Uniontown in '64, and been here ever since.

EL: You were involved with Hadassah?

EM: Yes.

EL: Tell me about some of the things you did with Hadassah.

EM: I was treasurer for a number of years and attended all the meetings and was just busy between Hadassah, and we had Sisterhood meetings. Everybody was involved. So, and I had three kids and they're all living in Virginia now.

EL: Did they have a different upbringing than you did in Uniontown?

EM: Well there were so many fewer Jewish kids for them to associate with. But they went with, the Opalls and our family were very good about attending Sukkah services and all the services at the synagogue and then we kept the kids out in the morning, took them to services and then sent the kids to school in the afternoon. Which most of the other families in town didn't...

EL: Yeah.

EM: ...do that. But we did.

EL: What was your impetus to do that?

EM: Rosalie. She influences me!

**Rosalie Opall:** Well when they were in grade school they stayed out the whole day, but we, as a concession to them when they hit junior high school, we compromised that they went to shul in the morning and school in the afternoon.

**Morton Opall:** What'd you ever do with that contract?

RO: Barbara took it.

MO: Oh.

EM: But our kids are the same age pretty much. Our daughter is a year younger, or six months younger than Barbara, but a great difference in school [unclear]. Our sons were the same age and I think Laura is a year younger than my youngest son, so they were all pretty much the same age and we did a lot together when they were kids.

EL: Were you involved in merger conversations at all?

EM: I wasn't on the merger committee, but I was certainly interested in it and as I said, I remember when I lived in New Kensington that my sister told me, "Oh, they're talking about merger and we're," she belonged to the temple, the Reform, so she said, "Well we're only interested in merging if we use the Reform prayer book and we have a Reform rabbi." And something else that was strictly Reform.

RO: They didn't want to wear yarmulkes.

EM: Yeah, this is, "But we're very interested in merging." And when I came back then, two or three times we heard that we're very, very close to it going through and then got screwed up at the last minute.

EL: Mostly because of trust issues, or some small detail?

EM: There was a few on the Conservative side and a few on the Reform side that didn't want to budge and they couldn't agree to anything. Or they agreed then they disagreed.

MO: I'll never forget one guy, he stood up in a meeting and says, "I fought in World War II for the right not to wear a yarmulke!" [unclear]

EL: So by that time Tree of Life was closer to Conservative than to Orthodox?

EM: Oh yes.

MO: Oh yeah.

EM: When I came to town it was definitely Conservative.

MO: I think it changed in 1957, formally, from Orthodox to Conservative.

EL: So the theological differences weren't even that great necessarily between the two.

EM: They were because the temple were Orthodox Reform, would you say?

RO: Ultra, not Ortho.

EM: Ultra.

RO: Ultra-Reform.

EM: That's what I meant.

RO: Ultra-Reform.

EL: Oh, okay.

EM: The old, the German originations of Reform Judaism.

MO: No, I would say two-thirds of the people from the temple and two-thirds of the people from the synagogue were, would agree. It was the fringe on both sides that kept us apart. Because you know, they rallied for this, and they rallied for that and even though you didn't really support it, they're your people so you agreed with them. And it just fell apart. It was never a way we could get everybody together.

EM: And these fringe people were you know, active, and you know, very influential.

MO: They were the workers.

EM: The workers, and they influenced the...

RO: The majority of the people wanted the merger, but it just never happened.

MO: Yeah. They weren't the ones that actually did the work. I mean the, Silvermans and people like that on the other side and the [unclear] and people on our side, they were the ones that worked and they wanted what they wanted.

EL: And you said the conversations began as early as the sixties.

EM: Yeah.

EL: So there was already a sense then that the community was shrinking.

EM: Right. Thinking that it would probably be the best to merge and then you'd have a nice-sized congregation.

RO: May I interject there? We did merge our educational system. The Sunday school merged. We had two different Sunday schools and they got down to a nucleus of what, fifty kids? They merged. We were both very active in the Sunday schools. So there at the education merge, but not the worship.

EL: When did that happen?

Unidentified woman: I'm a little foggy on that.

EM: I don't remember.

RO: Probably in the seventies.

EL: Well is there anything else you can think of?

EM: Not right now.

EL: Okay, well thank you very much!

END OF TRANSCRIPTION