

Transcript of Interview with Milton Kronick
Small Town Jewish History Project
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Eric Lidji: Today is July 24, 2015. This is the Small Towns Project. I'm Eric Lidji and I'm here with Milt Kronick, we're in his home in Uniontown. And we're going to begin today by going over some photographs that you have, is that what this is?

Milt Kronick: This is basically a little history of my family.

EL: Okay.

MK: My father was born in Russia.

EL: What was his name?

MK: Jacob Nathan Kronick. And my mother was born in Philadelphia, her parents were from Poland. And my father's father, which would have been my grandfather, in Russia and they were near, they lived in the area near Minsk, in that area of Russia.

EL: What was your mother's name?

MK: My mother's name was Sarah, and her family name was Krongold. And she, her parents, her, I can't remember if her mother was born in the States or not, but her father was from Poland. And the area where my father came from was an area called Luban near Slupsk, which was, and I don't know which was a county or state, but it was near Vilna Gubernia in Russia, so that's where the family started. And he, his father was one of eight brothers.

EL: This was your father's father?

MK: My grandfather, yeah. David, his name was David Kronick. And David and his father was named Borach, David ben Borach, and the fact that he had eight brothers, you can imagine how many relatives we had spread all over the world. And we know where some of them are and some of them aren't, but the interesting thing was that one of them, one of the brothers, or several of the brothers landed in the States and went to a place called, I think it's North Adams, in Massachusetts and that's where they settled down. And in the, there were so many relatives there that they were, the mayor was a Kronick, the township officers were Kronicks, it was the whole mishpocha.

So one of the stories for years I kept hearing it, we have relatives in North Adams, so one of my daughters moved up to, she was living in Massachusetts, near I think it was Burlington, it was Vermont, Burlington, Vermont. And she was working and going to school there and we went up to visit so along the way I said I gotta stop in North Adams to see what this Kronick family is all about. So we went to a family gathering there, they were having dinner on a weekend, I guess, and I talked to these different people and the

first thing the one woman said, "Do you have any deaf children in your family?" And I said, "Yes, my uncle had four, five children, three of them were deaf." And she says, "We have twins who are deaf." She said it was hereditary and that was something we didn't realize. We knew about my uncle's family, they lived in Cleveland. And then when she was explaining about the different people that were with us that night, and she said this part of the family, this is, she told me the name and I have the family tree but it's another story, so she says this part of the family, and I forget what his name was, but she says, when he came over from Russia he became a horse trader. He would buy a horse and then he would go to all of the farms in the Massachusetts area up there and if he found somebody that was interested they would buy the horse and then he would go back and buy another horse and go to another place. She says and then guess what happened, she says they started to sell automobiles. She says and he had to figure out what to do because the horses weren't selling so good so he became an Oldsmobile dealer. So I thought that was an interesting story they told us about. And here's a...

EL: So did David come to the United States or Jacob?

MK: No, no Jacob, my dad. My grandfather, and my father explained it, when he was, he had I guess, they did farming and he was a blacksmith and he took care of horses and did whatever they did, and then he had a mill, a grinding mill or something in Russia. And I guess they ground different kind of cereals or whatever they were, grains. And when he came to the States my father was growing, oh, he went to third grade, and it was a Jewish school, but it wasn't you know, a regular school. So he went to third grade and then when he was about sixteen or seventeen he decided to come to the States and that's when, I have a copy of when he went through Ellis Island, they showed the date and it had his name on it.

Anyway, so he came over, and he had a brother who came over before him and his older brother who happened to be, well I think there were about four brothers, maybe five. And the one that came over first settled in New York, and he helped my father come over. But the first brother that did make it to the States, he tried to come over three times, and he walked from Russia to Germany to get to where there would be a port to get on the ship. And he got caught three times, and they took him back to Russia. He didn't want to get into the service because he knew then he was stuck, so finally the third time he made it and he got to New York and he got some work and became connected with something with the newspapers. And then he helped my dad come over.

And my father was doing an apprenticeship in tailoring in Russia. And at that time, the way they worked it, the family had to pay the tailor to teach my father a trade. So I don't know how long, maybe a year or so, he worked an internship, and then when he came over here he had a relative in Brownsville, Connellsville, who was in the tailoring business and he worked with him for a little while. And he decided Connellsville wasn't going to grow like Uniontown for whatever reason, so he came to Uniontown and he opened his own tailor shop. And when he did that he got it going pretty good. He was down on the Main Street, near Main Street the heart of Uniontown, and at that time the whole Main Street was one Jewish merchant after the other on both sides of the street.

There was Kaufman's Department Store, there was Turner's, they had army navy supplies, there was Cohen's Furniture Store, no, Kaufman's was a department store, Cohen's was a furniture store. There was another shoe store, Freeman's, they had a pretty big chunk of the business on Main Street. And there was another five or six different **Barishes**, had a men's store, **Mundell's** had clothing, and they had drivers who would go out to the coal patches you know and sell clothing and blankets and sheets and things like that, so it was that kind. And then we had a couple Jewish families who were in the food business. There was Monheim's, they were wholesale produce. **Saul Siff** was a wholesale produce, and I think that Susan got some pictures, or you might have even seen them, **Saul Siff's** history about his produce business. He was probably the main one in the Uniontown area. And anyway, all these, all these merchants, eventually their kids went away to school and didn't come back, so they're all over the place. And there's just one or two businesses that are still in Uniontown that are owned by the Jewish families from way back. Let's see what I have here... This, this is a family picture we had. I don't know if you want family pictures or not.

EL: Yeah.

MK: But this is, it's probably down here, if I hold it this way I can tell better. This is my father and this is my mother's brother.

EL: What's his name?

MK: His name was, this one was Jerry Krongold, and his wife, Pearl Krongold, she was a Kramer from Pittsburgh. Her family was Kramers. And this was another brother of my mother's, Saul Krongold, and his wife, Sally, she was a Lisowitz. And this is a brother-in-law, Meyer Goldenberg, and his wife is, she's sitting over here. And this is, this is Harold Krongold, and he was another brother of my mother's, and that's his wife and her name was, anyway the long story about her family was she was related to the **Jakes** who had the grocery business. Her sister was married into that family. So and this is, this is my mother, and this is her sister who was married to Meyer. And then the oldest brother of my mother's was Abe, and this is his wife Ann Lena. And that...

EL: What's the occasion for that?

MK: It was a just a family gathering, yeah a family gathering. I had, I do have names for them, but it's not on this picture. So if I did make a copy of this picture I could give you names for them too. So this is the kind of thing that if you wanted I'll make copies and send them to you. Okay. And these, this picture is some of the stuff I had of my own. When I was in high school I played on the basketball team and the football team. And this is the team that, we had a pretty good team, and I'm trying to think where...

EL: Is this the public school team?

MK: Yeah, South Union, that was before they combined South Union and North Union, and it became Laurel Highlands, and then Uniontown was in the center, it was like a

doughnut, North Union and South Union and Uniontown teams were all from down in the general downtown area. So let's see, I'm number twelve, right here that's me. And no other Jews were on the team at that time. So if you, if that's of interest?

EL: Yeah that's of interest.

MK: Yeah I'll give you a copy of that too. In fact I have, I don't know if these copies are any good or not but I can give you one of these.

EL: Thank you.

MK: Okay, I think that's all, oh, this is the football team.

EL: Were you on the football team as well?

MK: Yeah. Yeah, this was the football team, I don't think I have, I'll have to make a copy of that one. And the thing that sticks in my mind about the football team was, and he's not on this pictures, but I have some pictures, oh here he is. I was, I played right end and next to me was a black guy, and his name was Bob Sprouts, and of course I always called him Brussels. But this is the lineup here. And he and I were best buddies. So whenever, if I had any trouble with anybody else he, he took care of them for me. If any anti-Semitic stuff.

EL: Yeah.

MK: Here's me and here's Brussels. And the story that was an interesting story about his family, he, wait a minute, no that was another African American guy that was going to school with my brother. He was three years ahead of us, he was a terrific basketball player. He was on of these guys they say when he went up in the air he could stay up there, he did things while he was up in the air. I'm trying to remember his name, but the story about him and my brother were good friends. He went to the service and he sent money home because he wanted to come home and go into business. And somebody in the family would put the money in the bank and so forth and when he got home the money was gone. So you hear these stories, and it just makes you how things turn out, it's just, I guess a lot of people had their hard times. So I don't know if, I can make a copy of this one too, if you'd want.

EL: Okay.

MK: And I'll give that, and I'll get it to you.

EL: So about what year did your father come to Uniontown?

MK: He came over, he was about seventeen or so, sixteen or seventeen. And it must have been around 1916 or '17. And he, like I said, he got his shop going downtown and then he decided that tailoring wasn't quite as good of a thing so he went into the dry

cleaning business. And he built a cleaning plant, and I had pictures of that building and then something else, if I find them I'll send them. And he developed it to the point where he had about twelve or fourteen routes of trucks that went out and they did wholesale and retail business they would bring in. And he had the equipment that he invested in, in the building when it was, when they went into a new building, and they would clean these clothes for a lot of the tailor shops in the small towns, Brownsville. And he opened some stores that were in Morgantown and in Pittsburgh and in Fairmont and in Clarksburg and all these areas around here.

EL: Little dry cleaning stores?

MK: No, well they were dry cleaning stores, but they didn't do the cleaning, they just were pick-up stores.

EL: And then everything came back to Uniontown.

MK: Came to Uniontown, in the main plant.

EL: Did he build this plant?

MK: Yeah. And I'll tell you the other story that I never forgot. He was, he somehow got into the business through a guy, a landsman from Russia who came over and their name was Kadonoff. And this guy somehow had started with another partner or two and they had a small building and they had the dry cleaning business. So my dad bought it and then he moved from the tailoring business and concentrated in dry cleaning. And the building was small, and it was about a block away from where this property was that he bought to build the new building, which was eighteen thousand square feet. And he put all modern equipment in it and so forth, but when he went to build it he went to the bank to borrow the money and they said we can give you a loan, I don't remember exactly how much the total loan was, but they said you're gonna need five thousand dollars for a down payment for us to give you the loan to do the building. So he said, well I'll have to come back, so he went across the street to another bank and borrowed the five thousand and then he put the down payment down, so he was working on borrowed time and borrowed money. And that's how he got started. So then he made a success of that and like I said, the building was kind of pretty new and they had the fourteen routes. So in this pictures that I have, which I got to find it somewhere, it had all the fourteen trucks lined up and they were all painted with the name French Cleaners on it.

EL: That's what it was called?

MK: Yeah, French Cleaners. And they were lined up in front of the building, and the picture was you know, a nice-sized pictures so that was, showed what the facility was and then it had a write-up in there about everything. So I wanted to give that to you, but I don't know if I'll find it but if I do I'll send it to you.

EL: How did your dad meet your mom?

MK: She was in Pittsburgh, they lived on Black Street in East Liberty, not too far from the shul there. I forget, is that B'nai Israel or...?

EL: Adath Jeshurun?

MK: No.

EL: There's B'nai Israel over there.

MK: It was, yeah, it was B'nai Israel because...

EL: The big round one?

MK: Yeah, yeah. The building was only a couple blocks away from Black Street where they, where they lived. So I was in there, I remember being in there a number of times for services. And this was a little bit later on, but I think I had a picture of, I have a cousin in Florida who did a family tree and I got, I got all the information about that. But that's another story by itself.

EL: Okay.

MK: So here's the, I don't know if this is, this is one of our nieces found a list from the passengers going through Ellis Island when, when my father went through it, it's mark which one he is. Yeah I don't know if you use anything like that or not, if you want a copy of it I can, oh yeah here it'll tell you, it's explaining...

EL: Yeah.

MK: So I can make a copy of that if you want.

EL: Yeah.

MK: Okay. And this is years later, but my brother was on the board before he moved, he moved to Virginia after we sold one of our, part of our business. And this was in our backyard, we took a pictures, my dad, my brother, and I. Sid was a B24 pilot, and I was in the Navy on the Massachusetts, and I have a picture of the battleship Massachusetts that I was on downstairs, but I can make a copy of that if you want to use something like that.

EL: Yeah.

MK: But the interesting thing is that, we have three daughters, and they are still having reunions every, pretty nearly every summer, so they're going to Massachusetts. They have a place where they're gonna have their get together. And she said, you know that

your battleship is up there, and it's open for public to visit, and we're gonna go visit it. So things tie in unusual, but anyway this, I'll give you, I made this copy for you.

EL: Thank you.

MK: So that...

EL: So you said your mother was from Pittsburgh.

MK: Yeah, she, she, I think she was born in Philadelphia but they moved to Pittsburgh and her father had a store in Millvale. And that's where they started out. And then the...

EL: Millvale?

MK: Yeah in Millvale. They didn't live in Millvale, but he had a store in Millvale.

EL: Do you remember what the store was?

MK: I don't, it might have been Krongold's, I can't say I remember for sure.

EL: Okay. And how did they meet your parents?

MK: My dad was tailoring in Connellsville, and my mother came to visit her, was it her aunt, yeah, it was her aunt, Aunt Lena. And she, he was, she was married to a tailor, and I'm trying to remember their last names, his married name, her married name. Anyway he had this shop in Connellsville, and my dad was working there before he opened up Uniontown, and she visited there and they met. That's how they met in Connellsville, the first time they got together.

EL: What year did they get married?

MK: Well, let's see, it had to be after he came back, I started to tell you about his tailor shop on Morgantown Street. He opened it, and this was before he got into the dry cleaning business, he just run the tailor shop then. And he had a real good business. He was doing pretty good for just one shop. And then the war broke out, so it was 1918, and he had been here maybe a year, a year and a half, from Russia and he got drafted and went to the service. So he went to Europe for the, during World War II, and he was in, in a lot of the areas where it was some heavy-duty stuff. He got gassed, and he had lung problems when he came back. And when he came back after the war, he came to Uniontown. And he had turned his business over, his shop, to a relative, a cousin, and I can't remember which one it was, but when he came to town he went down to look at the store and it had, it was all closed up and it was closed for, the relative had run it into the ground. So he went in, and I guess he still had the lease, so he opened the store. And he said he went in, and they cleaned up and opened and took the sign off the window and put an open for business sign. He said the next day he had his counter was full, his customers all came back.

EL: They were just waiting for him.

MK: Yeah. So that was a story that I remember too. But I think I have some old pictures here of some of the family, let's see if it's anything.

EL: What year were you born?

MK: I was born in '27.

EL: And how many kids were there?

MK: Our family we had four of us, there were two sisters. The oldest one was Marjorie and then Dorothy, and the only interesting thing was that Margie was born on February 24, and two years later Dorothy was born on February 24. They had the same birthday. This is a family picture. This Margie and her husband, Art, he was an attorney in Pittsburgh, Arthur Gatz. And this was Dorothy and her husband Sal Boscov, he was a Pittsburgh guy, too. He became an architect, and that's another story. And this is me and my wife, and Sidney and his wife. And, let's see, oh, yeah that's the whole family. This is just somebody that was at the banquet, she's not part of the family, I don't know who she was.

EL: Okay.

MK: So that was one part of the, part of the picture. And this was a little later. This was when Chari and I were married. And this is, these are almost everyone else that was on the first picture, all the brother-in-laws and a couple of the cousins. This was a cousin from, he was one of the Krongolds from Pittsburgh, he was a dentist and he had, he had his office in Washington, Pa. And this was another cousin that lived in Pittsburgh. But Sandy, there's a story about him, Sandy Krongold.

He was living in, in the area near, I'm trying to remember that section of Pittsburgh, but anyway that's where he was raising his family, he and his wife. And they eventually, I guess, it was up in the Mount Lebanon area, up in that neighborhood there. And his, he had four children, and we would get together with them for, we always had a, a reunion every two years, a big one. And we would have all the cousins together. So he and his wife broke up, and he remarried and he was friendly with, I'm trying to remember the fellow's name, but they were another Pittsburgh Jewish family, or maybe Little Washington. And this friend of his had a plane and they used to fly different places for certain things. And they went to, they flew to New York one weekend for a, to go to a Broadway show, and there were I think three couples in there. And on the way back they were coming into the Pittsburgh airport, the old Bettis Field, and they crashed and they were all, they were all gone. So that was the end of him, but his kids are still in the area and we always spent time with them, but that was a sad story. I remember that when he, when I, my brother and I came out of the service we came back to Pittsburgh, and we were on the G.I. Bill going to Pitt, we were going to the University of Pittsburgh, and I

was a senior and Sandy was just starting college so I remember he came and we were trying explain to him how to get the best classes and which professors to sign up for and all that, so that was where he started.

And the other story was his father was one of four brothers, the Krongolds, and the picture I showed you before, Abe, the oldest, he had a flower, a flower store, a florist shop right behind the William Penn Hotel, and it was called the William Penn Flower Shop. And his three brothers, Saul, Jerry, and Harold, they all worked for Abe, the oldest brother, in the flower shop. And on the weekend they would all take, you know a bunch of flowers and they would go in different places, how they do on the streets, you know, and sell flowers to people driving past or stopped for a red light. So eventually they all went into business for themselves. So Harold became a partner with Lubin and Smalley down in town, I think there's still some Lubin and Smalley flower shops. And, Jerry, oh Jerry, he gave up the, he gave up the flower business and he went to Morgantown and opened an automobile parts store and he opened a branch in Clarksburg and Fairmont. I think he had about three stores. And then that left Meyer. Meyer had a, Meyer was the one with Lubin and Smalley. Harold had Harold's Flower Shop, which he didn't have partners, so all four of them were in different flower shops in the Pittsburgh area. They were competing against each other which was strange for them, too. So they all did well. And Sandy was the son of Meyer and they lived in New Stanton, it was Stanton Heights at the time when he was growing up. So that's how my mother's family worked out. Then her sister, Aunt Fan, married Meyer and they also got into the automobile parts business. And they had their store in Charleroi. So they were spread out around, and that was some of the story that went into where everybody was. This is a picture of my mother and dad, I guess when they were early married. I don't know if you'd want anything like that.

EL: Yeah, that's nice.

MK: I can make a copy of that. 'Cause that's the only one I have. And then this is one of those, this is another one of those reunion pictures from way back, and it has all the Krongolds and the Kronicks and some other parts of the family are in here too that were on that other family picture. I don't know if you want anything like this?

EL: Yeah.

MK: I can make, I can make copies of that. I'll make copies of these, this one and that one. Yeah, I can make copies of those for you. And this is another family picture, it's pretty much a duplication of one of the other ones. This is Sid, Margie, my dad, me, my mother, and Dorothy. So I don't know if you want, if you just have one of the family that'll probably be enough, you won't need another one. Here's one of my pictures, I don't know if you want anything like that or not, that was when I was playing high school ball.

EL: So what are your early memories of Uniontown?

MK: Well, the main thing was, that there were so many Jewish people that it was quite a place to grow up because, you know, we had a lot of Jewish friends. Of course, South Union, North Union high schools didn't have the Jewish kids. Most of the Jewish people lived in the city, and they went to Uniontown. So we didn't even know some of them there were so many Jewish families that like I think maybe if you talked to the Opalls, they probably remember that. We, I think we thought that there were about two hundred families that belonged to the Tree of Life shul. And another couple hundred belonged to the Temple of Israel, which was Reform. And I remember some of the kids my age, I never met them until maybe after we got into high school because we were going to the shul, they were going to the temple, and that's such a big community it's hard to believe that we're down to what we are now.

EL: Yeah. Was your family observant? Religious?

MK: Our Tree of Life congregation was Orthodox to start with. And I'm pretty sure they said it was around 1975 that they switched over to Conservative, and we became a Conservative congregation then. So we didn't, people would start, I know my dad didn't want to drive to shul, he would walk to shul, and we would drive.

EL: So your father was religious.

MK: Yeah he came from a religious family, they were Orthodox in Russia, I guess.

EL: Did he close the business on Saturday?

MK: Not on Saturday, but he didn't work on Saturday, but the business was, we had many employees. I have a picture in with my old file of, one picture when the business was going and it had all the employees and us, the four of us kids sitting in, when we were little kids, in front. And it had, there must have been fifty-some people that were employed at the cleaning plant and on the routes and so forth. So I remember how big of an operation it was, so he didn't have to work on Saturday. He would, you know he wouldn't, he would go to shul then he would come home and let the business stay open. But on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur he would close the business and put an ad in the paper "closed for the Jewish holidays", yeah.

EL: Did you keep kosher at home?

MK: Oh yeah, we were, yeah we had strictly kosher. And I remember Pesach, we had a place, we lived above the business, the French Cleaners. We had an apartment, it was a three-bedroom apartment. And we had a certain closet we had all the Pesachdicha dishes, and I remember what a job it was for us to, I used to climb in there to take them out. Nobody could get in there unless you were small, and I'd climb in there and hand them out to my mother then. She would wash all the dishes for Pesach, the pots, the pans. And I remember that was a routine every Passover we did that. So I knew that we kept, not only had kosher milchig and fleishig dishes for our regular, but we had milchig and fleishig for Pesach, too. So that's lots of stuff there.

EL: Did your mother light candles?

MK: Yeah, oh yeah, she lit candles. This is a picture on our wedding of just my parents and Chari and I. I don't know if you want those kind of pictures. This is a, oh, here's a picture, this is one of my mother's aunts. My mother's family was, I think they were Golds, G-O-L-D. Her mother was a Gold. And there were six sisters. And my niece has the picture of all six sisters. We used to have it up in my mother's kitchen. And this is one of them that moved to South, to North Dakota, that's a real old picture.

EL: Wow.

MK: And her married name was Leffler or Sheffler.

EL: Hefter?

MK: Hefter, yeah, that was her married name. So the picture's not very good so it wouldn't make any point in making a copy of it either. And this is a story right here. My mother's sister, the one who was in Charleroi, they had two sons. One was Barry and one was Dicky, Richard. This is Barry when he was a couple years old, maybe two years old or so, or less. Anyway, he became a muscular dystrophy problem, it took over his life when he was, we didn't realize it, I think he was about eleven, ten or eleven, when we realized that something was wrong but it was never diagnosed. And finally found out that's what it was. So he made it, he lived, I think he hit twenty-one. I don't know if he reached his twenty-second birthday, and he passed away.

So that was the time I was explaining to somebody about the cemetery that he was buried in is Route 51, there's an old Jewish cemetery. I don't know if you remember where **Vesharons** had their, they had some businesses right outside, right before you get into Brentwood, and anyway there's a shul that had a cemetery up the hill off of 51 and I remember when he was buried I was a pallbearer. And we, and my grandparents were buried there too. And I remember when we were taking the casket up to where he was buried, the cemetery is so hemmed in there and so crowded, and on a hill. I guess it was whenever they bought the land they just bought what they had and it was a terrible location, and it was so hilly I couldn't figure out how they could get in and out of there. And anyway, that's, I remember every year before yontef my mother, I would always take her up to visit all the relatives that were buried up there, but he was the last one in the family that got buried there. And I can't remember the, whether it had something to do with B'nai Israel or not because they did belong to B'nai Israel so there must have been some people from B'nai Israel that were buried up there, too.

EL: This is in the city?

MK: It's probably right, if you come out of the tubes and you stay on 51.

EL: I know what you're talking about, that's Beth Abraham?

MK: That might be it. Yeah, so it was if you come out of the tubes and you're going 51 toward Uniontown you get just a few miles down the road and if you go to the right you go to South Park area, and you turn up there and to the left and it's up on a hill by itself.

EL: Right.

MK: So I remember that one well. And I think the reason I was commenting on the situation of that cemetery was that because the Uniontown Tree of Life cemetery in Hopwood, Mort Opall might have told you about it, he's president of the chevra kadisha, and I'm secretary/treasurer, and we keep getting people telling us that this is our cemetery, and Hopwood is probably the best taken care of cemetery in the whole area, the tri-state area. People come to visit us. In fact, in Morgantown there's some people that, they wanted a place to bury their parents, there was a doctor, a woman that's still practicing in Morgantown, and she came to visit somebody in our cemetery, and she bought plots for her parents who had come over from France. And she buried her parents in our cemetery because she said it was such a well kept and so well managed.

And our parents and grandparents did it right when they bought that property. The first thing they did, they put up a good fence around it, and it is so secure that we've never had any problems with vandalism. It's just set in such a way, it was done right. So, and we have lots of space there, we'll never use all the, I think there's nine acres there. And we've probably used maybe a third of it with all our plots that we have sold. And we have a number of people from my generation and maybe in between that bought plots and they live in California, they live in Florida, they live in New England and maybe every other month I get a phone call, somebody's coming home to be buried. So we have a lot of history there.

And I don't know if you ever have the opportunity to get some pictures out there to see how our cemetery has taken, how it's done and what we have. The, on the grounds, we have a little building that originally I guess it was made for the purpose of tahara, to do the washing of the bodies, but it became small, too small to do it and then we would do, our committees would do it at the funeral homes after that. But that originally was built, so while we're selling the shul now, we have all these plaques, over three hundred plaques that were names of everybody that was buried in our cemetery or from our congregation, and we're moving all those old plaques out to this little building and we're installing them there so they won't be lost. And there are people who call and want to know what are happening with the plaques and we tell them. And then I get a few calls and people want some of the plaques sent to them, they want them where they live. In fact there's a guy that called a week or so ago, he's coming up Sunday, and he wants to see the shul before it's taken over by the new owners. And he also wants the plaques from his family that were, of the three hundred and some that are gonna be put up out at the cemetery building. So we get these calls, different things, people want to know what are we doing with this, what are we doing with that. We had torahs, we found homes for four, we had six torahs. We found homes for all the torahs. They're going to be used. One of them, the last one that we promised was to a family who lived here, were good

members, and their daughter, no their granddaughter is now with the Chabad, and they now have the congregation Chabad at the University of James Madison in Virginia and they need a torah. So our last one is going to their Chabad so they don't have a torah and they're gonna have one now.

EL: When you were growing up what was the relationship between the Jews and the Gentiles in Uniontown?

MK: We had some anti-Semitic occasions. It wasn't anything too terrible. I can't remember you know, oh well, the one thing I would say, and this didn't happen when I was rowing up, this happened, I'm trying to remember what year it was, about ten or fifteen years ago, somebody spray painted some stuff on the shul, and they put the Nazi sign and some other words or whatever it was, and it's a brick building. So Myrna, you're gonna talk to Myrna, her husband was a paint contractor and they did lots of big jobs, so right away they sent somebody over and painted over the, whatever was written on the shul. I have pictures somewhere of that, maybe I'll find them, I'll send them to you, what was on the front of the shul.

EL: But growing up you didn't have problems?

MK: We had some. We had some, some people that would give us trouble. I remember when I was going to Hebrew school there were some kids who lived up on the other side of where the shul was located and they would wait for us to come out of Hebrew school and they would pick fights and we had to fight our way home. So we had some of that. But I can't remember any, you know any homes being destroyed or some of the stuff you here nowadays that happens. I remember, and I started explaining Uniontown, most of the Jewish kids went to Uniontown High School, and there was North Union and South Union, and we went to South Union and there was maybe two families going to school there, us and couple of the Platts and one or two other families. So we were kind of secluded from what Uniontown had, they had a pretty big percentage of Jewish kids, but we stood out. I remember in fourth grade there was one teacher who was kind of anti-Semitic, and I remember my brother had some situation where he would have some trouble when he was in that man's classes, and then when I went through I had a few situations, but nothing serious. We worked it out. We didn't have to, families didn't have to get involved. But we stood our ground. But I found that when I got into sports I was okay.

EL: You got along with other teammates?

MK: Yeah, oh yeah that was, that changed things for me.

EL: Talk a little bit about the Jewish basketball team.

MK: We had a team at the YMCA and that was one of the times when I met the temple kids, I didn't know them, you know, and some of them played basketball and we had a pretty good team at the Y. And I can't remember too many titles or anything at the time

when we were playing. But I do remember we were playing against some different church groups and the one that stands out in my mind was the one that had all the Syrians and the Lebanese, and they called, their church was Saint George. And we used to play them, and it was the kind of the thing that when we played them every year we said we were playing for the holy land, whoever wins gets the holy land, so that was something I remember. And we got along with them well, there were some guys in there that were, they really were nice people and they couldn't get along over there but we got along with them over there. That kind of history that I remember.

So these were, and then some of us then had to get out of the church league because if we played with the varsity we couldn't play with the church league anymore. But that wasn't the end of our basketball. When we came home from the service, my brother and I, and we were at Pitt, we had about oh maybe seven or eight of us from Uniontown that were going to Pitt, and we got into a league at the YMHA in Oakland. We called our team the, the Coal Barons, because we came from a coal-mining town. And I remember we didn't have any uniforms so I told the guys, I said, "Bring me a white shirt and I'll dye it black and we'll put our names on them." And so that's how we got our uniforms. And there were, we had had four or five guys that weren't Jewish, but they were from Uniontown, and they played on our team, too. So it was fun, a lot of fun.

And I remember the leagues at the Y were pretty, pretty good competition, and we, we met a lot of Jewish kids you know at that time that were going to Pitt and they were playing for other congregations, they had their teams. So that was, it was interesting stuff. And we were, and we, some of us lived in an off campus home, we rented a couple rooms and three or four of us from Uniontown lived together, and we made our meals together. And then we would be involved with, some of the competition was, they were Jewish fraternities, and they had teams. And we didn't get along with them but that's a whole other story, but anyway we met some guys that way too that we used to have as opponents but they were Jewish, too.

EL: When you were young, what were you involved in, AZA or BBYO? Anything like that?

MK: We didn't have an AZA or BBYO, but we did have an arrangement, it worked almost the same. They used to have a, I don't know if it was every weekend, but pretty nearly every weekend, Brownsville had a get together for the kids at the Brownsville shul. And I know the building is still there, we were there not long ago for another reason in Brownsville and we drove past, and looked and I said here's where the shul was. And it, I don't know if it's a church or what it is now but it had all the Hebrew lettering still up on the building. I don't know if you ever go down you could take a picture of it, it's interesting to see the Hebrew lettering over it. And we had some good friends that lived in Brownsville, and it's where we would meet. But anyhow we would go there on weekends, on Saturday night, I think, it was or Sunday we'd get together. And the kids from Little Washington and from Fredericktown and from all the Charleroi and Brownsville and like all those little towns around there would come and we would meet together. So it was almost like a BBYO or AZA. And there was some of the kids I

met ended up married to people they met there. I remember dating some girls from Brownsville, and I dated a girl from Fredericktown and, what was another little town near there, Belle Vernon, there were some Jewish, one or two Jewish people so we got acquainted that way. That was a kind of some interesting things that went on in those days, but that's how we got together and served the same purpose. I think there were quite a few marriages that came out of those gatherings, too.

EL: Tell me a little bit about the JCC, here.

MK: The Uniontown Jewish Community Center was a situation where the temple and the shul people got together, oh I don't know if anybody, whether you or whether the Opalls told you anything about this, or whether Myrna will tell you when you talk to her. But in those days, every few years we tried to merge the shul and the temple. And every time we had a meeting there was something that caused it to fall apart. I remember one time, and we had a lot of Jewish people in town then. One of the first ones, we had a meeting, I think they came to the shul, and we all met with their board of directors and the shul board of directors, and we couldn't get past yarmulkes. And it broke up. But who was gonna wear yarmulkes and who wasn't, and whether they could come in and wear them if they wanted to. Or they didn't want, they couldn't agree on that so they broke up, and then a couple years later we had another meeting and we thought we had a merger was going to be accomplished and the subject came up the temple has a cemetery and the shul has a cemetery.

The shul cemetery was really, like I told you, well maintained and really built nicely. And the temple cemetery never had a fence put up and it's right, it's also in Hopwood. It's about five blocks away from the shul cemetery and they never had their basic plan done right so they didn't save enough money to take care or the maintenance properly, so it's, it's halfway done. You know, they do it halfway even now. And the difference is that we have people who would call us and they, they were mixed marriages, so we couldn't bury them so we would always send them to the temple cemetery so that's how a lot of our members are even buried there, too, so that was the difference between the two.

But the one thing that we got along where they could have merged, it shows it could have been done if they just had a little more patience, was the Jewish Community Center was owned by a coal baron. I can't remember who, I think it was the, oh his name will come back to me but he was a real rich guy who owned all the coal mines and was in the steel business and he lived in that house, built that house. And when it was for sale, the Jewish merchants in town, the guys got together, and they said well let's buy and we'll make a community center out of it and that's how it happened it come to be a Jewish Community Center. They bought the building, and they took out a mortgage. I don't remember how they worked it out but the temple members and shul members all were involved and they worked together fine and they even raised enough money to put a swimming pool in up there. And our kids all grew up there. They just lived there, you know, ever summer they would stay up there and swim and they had a room for meetings and then all the bar mitzvahs and all the weddings and everything that went on, most of them were done at

the Jewish Center. And that's, that was the beginning of that and now it's, Jewish families can't even keep it going either.

EL: I'm going to stop you for a second to change batteries.

MK: Okay.

END OF FIRST RECORDING

START OF SECOND RECORDING

EL: So what did you study at Pitt?

MK: I was a business major. I took accounting and finance.

EL: Did you always intend to come back to Uniontown?

MK: Yeah, we knew that, we knew when we were in the service and came home and went to school, my brother and I knew we were going to come home. My dad wanted to retire, he was getting to the age where he didn't want to have to take care of the business any longer. And so my brother graduated as an engineer, and I felt like well I would get into the advertising and the bookkeeping end of it. So that's how we picked and chose our fields.

EL: So you divided the responsibilities of the business.

MK: Pretty much, yeah.

EL: And what year was this you get back? Where were you in the service, where were you stationed?

MK: I was in the Navy, and the last part of my service, well this is an interesting point. I was assigned to the battleship. I had my training in Sampson, New York, and I came home for a week and then they said you're going to be assigned to the battleship U.S.S. *Massachusetts* and it is in Bremerton, Washington, in repair. It had, the *Massachusetts* had been in all the North African battles, and there's a lot of history there. And when I was assigned to it, it was still being repaired, and it was getting ready to go to Japan because the war wasn't over with Japan yet. And when my brother was in the Air Force, he had had all his training in different parts, he went to, he was in New England for some training, there was a Pittsburgh area they had some training for him. And then he went into somewhere in the South, they based some training there, and then when he graduated training as a pilot in a B24 his group was assigned and they were ready to go to Japan. So they sent them all to Seattle.

So I was in Bremerton on the ship, and he was in Seattle getting ready to go to Japan, and they dropped the bomb. So there's a letter that I have downstairs, I know where that is,

and my dad wrote a letter to my brother and in it basically is what he, my sister was home and she, he would dictate the letters, and she would write 'em out, type them or whatever. So in this letter, he said "I know you're in the base and you're going to be going over to Japan," and he said, "and I know you're going to come home." And he said, "and I know you're gonna raise a family and you're gonna take over the business." It's hard to, hard to remember that line of reasoning, but anyway I kept the letter because I couldn't get over the fact that he made that statement.

So it was a little bit after that that the bomb was dropped and my brother got discharged. He came home and he signed up to go to Pitt, and I was still on my battleship and they were trying to decide what to do with it. So they said we're going to decommission it, and in order to do that you have to go to the east coast. And the Norfolk was the base where they would decommission it. So we went down to San Diego, it was like the shakedown cruise, they wanted to make sure everything was working right on the ship, it had been repaired and injuries and damages had been done when they were in the North African battles. So we spent a little time in San Diego, and then they said okay, well you're gonna, your ship, you're gonna bring it around to the east coast, so we went to the Panama Canal and we went through the canal and came up to Norfolk and then we were based there for a short time. And based on points, those of us who were ready, we got discharged first and some later.

So the thing that I remember about the Panama Canal was quite an experience to see how it was done and how it was laid out. And a number of years ago, I don't know, maybe about five or six years ago, my son-in-law in Pittsburgh, one of my daughters married this guy who was really interested in history and he was, he was so involved in, wanted to know about the service, he got involved in parachute jumping in Pittsburgh. And they used to go to different places, and they would jump in for a program in different parts of the area. And so when he heard that I had been through the Panama Canal, he said I got a book it tells how that, the canal was built. And how the, you know, France started it and they just gave up because they couldn't get past the malaria. And so I said, oh I want to read that so he gave me the book and I read it and I really enjoyed reading what they had to go through. You know it talked about how Teddy Roosevelt was president at the time, and he had a couple doctors that he sent down there just to figure out what to do to defeat the malaria problem. And the book, you know, named the doctors that handled that and how they accomplished it, and how they got started and picked up all the pieces that France had left there. The equipment, and there was you know, thousands of dollars worth of equipment that France just left there, and they said we give up. And then they showed how they were able to accomplish completing it and what a big deal it was, it was interesting, too.

EL: What year did you come back to Uniontown?

MK: We, '49, I came back, we got married in '49.

EL: How did you meet?

MK: We, that's another story. In the summer when I was in high school, I was a junior and there was another fellow in town by the name of Allen Barry, Allen Bortz, Allen Bortz. And he and I were good friends, and we decided we were gonna hitchhike to Atlantic City because we had a couple weeks off from school. So we were all set, I had my suitcase ready and he had his ready and we were gonna go out and start hitchhiking and he calls me that night, "Hey guess what? I got a ride for us." This Cohen Furniture family, Les Cohen was one of the brothers in the business. He was going down to visit Atlantic City with his family and he was driving, so we got a ride the whole way. So we went to Atlantic City and we rented a room on the boardwalk, near the boardwalk. A couple blocks away, we had to walk to the boardwalk. And we went down to the beach and we were you know, swimming, roaming around, and he and I decided, well one day let's go over to the Steel Pier. This musician, what was his name, the blind musician that sang, and, oh God, what was his name, he's still around but he's not performing anymore. Anyway, Char?

Chari Kronick: What?

MK: What was that guy that was playing at the Steel Pier?

CK: What?

MK: What was that guy that was playing at the Steel Pier when we went to visit?

CK: It wasn't James Krugel.

MK: No, no it was a black guy, a black guy.

CK: I don't remember.

MK: He's blind. Anyway he wrote a lot of music.

CK: Oh, what's that guy's name? The one that's blind.

MK: Right? I can't think of it.

EL: It's not Ray Charles.

MK: No, no this was a younger, he was younger. Anyway he was on, he was doing his program on the Steel Pier, and he was just a young kid. He was probably seventeen or eighteen then, and he had written songs already. And he was doing, I'll remember one of the names of the songs and then you'll probably know who it is, but anyway, he was performing and we went to, we wanted to see and hear him sing. And we were walking on the Steel Pier and this Allen Bortz buddy of mine looks over and he says, "Hey, I know her." And he yelled at some young girl and it was his cousin and her name was Joyce Jubelier. And there were three other girls with her and they had come down there

to visit Atlantic City, too, so Chari and the three others, Joyce and two other ones, and we started to talk to them. Char? So we started to talk to them.

EL: Let me pause this while-

END OF SECOND RECORDING

START OF THIRD RECORDING

EL: Okay.

MK: So where were we? Where'd I leave off?

EL: You were at the Steel Pier and you had...

MK: Oh yeah, and we were at the Steel Pier and he and I were walking and he knew this girl and it turned out to be a cousin of his, and three other girls were with her and one of them was Chari, and that's how we met. So we were there for maybe a long weekend or something and they were staying on one end of the beach and we were on the other end and we would walk down and meet them and spend the day with them. And then in the evenings, I don't remember him, if he dated one of the girls or not but I started, Chari and I got acquainted. And we didn't really hit it off right away, there was, I don't remember what it was. But anyway, so then we came back home and we did correspond a little bit and then I went to the Navy, as soon as I graduated, I went right to the service so it was one year later I went to the service. And we corresponded and we really got to know each other by writing back, letters back and forth. And then whenever I came home she was going to Pitt and I went to Pitt so...

CK: Stevie Wonder.

MK: Stevie Wonder. That 'a girl, I knew you'd remember before I did. So whenever we came back and we, that's when we really started to get to know each other. So she lived in Squirrel Hill on Darlington Road, so it wasn't too far from Pitt and I would, back and forth, up there to visit, and I spent a lot of time on Darlington Road.

EL: Did business change a lot after you and your brother took over?

MK: Yeah, yeah, the business did change in as much as that was the point where when we came into the business that they started to sell a lot of garments that people could wash instead of dry clean. So wash and wear became very popular, and the dry cleaning business was hurting. And so my brother and I kind of tried to figure out what to do. And we got into a couple other things and that was one of the reasons we took part of the building and made the bowling lanes in the back of the dry cleaning plant in Uniontown. And we put in ten lanes there. And then, we also had some labor problems where our employees went on strike, and they put in a labor union where one of the officers was Jewish and he was terrible. And we, my dad was still around, he said, I remember telling

them we were meeting and they were trying to refine the contract and my dad said, "Here, take the keys." He said, "I don't even want to be involved with it anymore, you guys are just ruthless." You know, the union, they just wanted everything and didn't want to leave anything for the investors.

So Sid and I were trying to figure out what we were gonna do, it didn't look like the cleaning business was gonna last. So the next thing he and I heard about, there's some kind of a business you can get a franchise in. And it was the, like the Kelly, and they would you know have people who would sign on, and they would rent the employees out. And so we started to do something like that. We went to New York and looked at a franchise, and it wasn't a Kelly but it was another name for a company that they would hire people and then they would rent them out, rent employees. And we were gonna buy the franchise. And then we decided, well we would just start the business up and use our own name and we called it Three Rivers Institute. And we had the office in Pittsburgh down near, down near the county building. It was on Fifth Avenue and another street there.

EL: And what was the business?

MK: Three Rivers Institute. And what we did we start training people to do office work, cashier training was what we started with, and then we went into computer training and he and I would share the time. He would go in three days a week, and I would go in three days a week and we would work. So we thought we had something else if the cleaning business didn't last, we'd have another business to keep us going. So we operated that for a number of years and it did pretty good.

And then, then computers came on the scene, and that was about the time we decided in the cleaning business that the future was more leaning toward rental uniforms so we started to rent uniforms out, to gas station uniforms and, and car dealer uniforms and nursing uniforms and things like that. So that became a big part of our business, the uniform business. And we were renting equipment out, and we rented dust, carpets, you know for entranceways and things like that with it. And then after that got going pretty good that became the dry cleaning business and laundry business became about half of it and the rental business became about the other half. And then we sold that to a friend, to an outfit from New England. And then he wanted to leave town and retire so he and his wife went to Virginia Beach to retire, and I kept running the bowling business, and we farmed out the dry cleaning business to our cashier, our bookkeeping lady, and she and her husband operated it. And they rented the building, and then I rented out the bowling business to another two guys that I knew were interested. So he and I retired about 1970, around late '75, somewhere around that time, right after my mother passed away.

So he went down there, and I kept running the bowling business, and then I retired from that. And we still had some rental properties and I kind of took after, well actually the cleaning business I rented the business to these two different families. And we, I, my brother and I got along on the rent money, and we sold the franchise, the business in Pittsburgh to another guy from out of town, and he took that over and we didn't get any

rent money there, it was a cash deal. And he was making payments I guess it was on it, so we got out of that business too. So then the, the whole thing was here. I was running the bowling business and rental units and gradually I sold off whatever I could and the rental units, so we wanted to get out of that business too.

And the other thing that happened was in the building where we had the bowling business, we had a couple of extra rooms that we had used for garage space, and the union, South Union Fire Department was just getting started and they were beginning to do bingo nights to raise money to buy equipment. So we donated part of our building to the South Union Fire Department, and they held their weekly bingo games there in our building and they also had their two trucks there. They would pull the trucks out and have bingo in the same area. And that's how they got started and they became very big and they bought a building next to us that they opened up. I don't know whether it was ten years or so that they stayed in our building free to get started. So we were able to say we helped them get where they were and they became a real, a real big operation after that. So, but all the volunteer fire departments are not doing as well as they used to either, but I think they still run their bingo though in their building. So these are some of the history of what went on there.

EL: When did the Jewish community start to shrink?

MK: Well the, it was because the parents here were getting to the point where they want to retire and the kids all went away to school and after they went away to school they found other places. There weren't any opportunities for their businesses to grow here any more, and they would find jobs elsewhere and that's when the Jewish Community Center started to lose membership and there weren't enough people to keep it going.

EL: Let's finish up by talking about Sports Night.

MK: Okay.

EL: Because that's an interesting institution, Sports Award Night.

MK: Yeah, the story there was that we were to the point where there were about, oh a dozen members of B'nai B'rith and each one would take a list to sell the ads in the book and these kind of pages like this. They would buy those kind of listings and then there were smaller ads that didn't, these kind of listings, we had a diamond page, a ruby page, and a silver page, and so on, and each one you know cost a different amount of money. So we had one fellow, Chester Miller, who sold near the end, he was selling about eighty different ads. And he would bring in, his ads sold would bring in, oh I'm trying to think how many thousands of dollars he would sell on his own and then other fellows would sell five ads or four ads or three ads, and it was okay when there were enough guys going. But then they, people left town or passed away and we had three or four, three or four guys who were left doing it, and he was still selling eighty percent of the ads and two or three of us would sell the other twenty percent and that's when we decided we better try

to, if we wanted to keep it going, we had to get somebody to help pick up the job. So that's how the Rotary got involved with it.

EL: And what was the purpose of the event?

MK: The purpose was to honor the students from all the schools. And we would honor them because they were good students and athletes. But also our feeling was that we got our name as a Jewish organization in the county that we were doing something more than just doing something for ourselves.

EL: Because the awards went to people who weren't necessarily Jewish?

MK: Hardly any of them were Jewish. I don't even remember one or two cases where it turned out that they were a Jewish student that was involved. I can remember maybe two and the majority of them were non-Jewish so that was our reason for feeling that it was a good thing to keep it going because B'nai B'rith was known as an organization that was doing things for the whole community. And the other thing that developed that was interesting, the, some of the students, when they were in high school and they would come to the banquet and they had, we were giving them their award that they made, the Sports Night Award and they would put it on their resume and these kids would say, oh when we were little kids in fourth, fifth grade and we would see the B'nai B'rith Sports Night that was the one thing we wanted to accomplish when we got into high school. And they remembered it from way back. So we felt that we were really, you know, making a mark and that's why we didn't want the Sports Night to stop because we ran out of people.

EL: So that's why the Rotary collected and...

MK: Yeah, the Rotary took it over. So so far they've been keeping our name on it and that's one of the things that we were, kind of felt proud that we were able to keep it going as long as we did.

EL: All right well thank you very much!

MK: My pleasure, and you better get to Myrna, she'll have a lot...

END OF THIRD RECORDING

END OF INTERVIEW