

**Transcript of Interview with Louis Averbach**  
**Homestead Hebrew Congregation Oral History Project**  
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Transcription:

TAPE ONE SIDE 1

**Anne Powell (AP):** Okay. This is Ann Sheckter Powell interviewing...

**Louis Averbach (LA):** Louis Averbach

AP: Okay. About life in Homestead Jewish community. So, I guess we'll try and start at the beginning. Were you born in Homestead?

LA: I was born in Mount Oliver.

AP: Oh, you were. So you were born in that area.

LA: I was born in Mount Oliver. And I was not born in the hospital.

AP: You were born at home.

LA: I was born where we lived...

AP: Really!

LA: At that particular time.

AP: And when was that?

LA: November the 19<sup>th</sup>, 1914.

AP: Okay. As the war just about was beginning. The First World War.

LA: Shortly after the First World War.

AP: And you were born at home?

LA: Yes.

AP: How many children were in your family?

LA: There were seven children in the family all together. I'm the last of the seven.

AP: And I assume they were all—obviously if you were born at home—everybody else probably was, too?

LA: Yes.

AP: Was it your parents who had come to Munhall?

LA: Yes.

AP: And do you know what brought them there?

LA: Many immigrants came here for the very same reason. For economic reasons. For security reasons. And for a happier life. And they found all three.

AP: That's a wonderful thing. So, your parents were both immigrants, then?

LA: Yes.

AP: Where did they come from?

LA: Romania.

AP: Oh, Romania. And did they come—when they came to America—did they come to Munhall right away?

LA: My father came first. Around nineteen three. And he came either to Homestead or to Braddock.

AP: Oh, he did.

LA: And he worked for a bakery known as Markowitz Bakery in Braddock. And after he earned enough money he went back to Romania and then the rest of the family came over. At that time there was my father and mother and five of the seven children. They came over separately. So when they came over, they first lived in Homestead. Then they moved into Munhall. And in Munhall my father

went into business. And that's where he had been ever since.

AP: So all of your aunts and uncles from your father's side of the family all lived in that Munhall area.

LA: Practically.

AP: Mm-hmm.

LA: Practically all of them.

AP: So what kind of business did your father go into in Munhall?

LA: He was in the business that pertained to hay, grain, and feed.

AP: Oh.

LA: Primarily at that time, of course, there were very many horses and people had their own chickens. And many people had cows up in the hills behind Homestead and Munhall. And that is a type of product that he handled at the time.

AP: Oh. I see. So what happened when the animals started to disappear and the horses were replaced by the cars? What did he do?

LA: Well, at the time—by that time—they had already gone into the produce business, wholesale produce.

AP: And was that...

LA: And then after that he retired.

AP: I see. So when he had the wholesale produce business, was that...

LA: We had a wholesale produce business and we had the hay, grain and feed.

AP: And were those both—were both of those businesses in...

LA: They were combined into one

AP: And were they in Homestead?

LA: They were in--it's referred to as Homestead. Although the establishment itself was in Munhall. But there were in—it's referred to as Homestead.

AP: Was it on 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue?

LA: And at that time, as I remember, we had horses.

AP: Oh.

LA: I remember them quite well.

AP: Oh. Tell me about that. Tell me about the time...

LA: I remember we had two horses. One was called Jake. One was called Topsy. And of course you heard this story many times. After a while the horses seemed to know exactly where to go.

AP: No. I didn't know that.

LA: Oh, yes. And the stable for the horses was down on 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue. And the horses knew exactly where to go and where each one had his stall.

AP: Really? What did you use—did you use the horses to draw like a carriage that you...

LA: No. We had a wagon.

AP: A wagon.

LA: And at that time, both in Munhall and in Homestead, there were blacksmiths. And even today when I think about it, I can recall the odor of the hoof of a horse being burned so that the shoe would fit on could fit on properly.

AP: Really.

LA: It was being prepared for a new set of horse shoes.

AP: Huh.

LA: And any time I smell that particular odor, I can refer to those days in Munhall and Homestead.

AP: It brings back, the odor brings the whole thing back to you.

LA: Yes, yes.

AP: So now let's see. You lived, where was your home, the house that you lived in?

LA: Well, at first my home was up above the business like many homes were.

AP: And the business?

LA: On 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue.

AP: On 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue.

LA: Up above. And then we moved to a house on 9<sup>th</sup> Avenue.

AP: Mm-hmm. And so, you had to stable the horses somewhere...

LA: The horses were elsewhere.

AP: ...other than where you...

LA: No, now the horses were about three or four blocks away.

AP: Uh huh

LA: Along the railroad tracks.

AP: Uh huh.

LA: In Homestead.

AP: And were the blacksmiths' shops down by the, uh...?

LA: They were right on the avenue. Right on 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue.

AP: They were!

LA: There were two of them.

AP: My goodness.

LA: That I recall.

AP: Um, so when your father, did your father use the wagon and horses for his business?

LA: I'm sorry?

AP: Did he use the wagon and the horses for his business?

LA: Oh sure! Sure.

AP: So he would have to walk from the house down to get his horses.

LA: Well, he didn't go down there himself. He had people working for him, and they would go down. The people who were the teamsters, who drove the horse and wagon, they would go down and get it, and bring it up every morning.

AP: Oh, I see. So that's, you remember teamsters as being real teamsters.

LA: Oh yes.

AP: Rather than truck drivers becoming to a teamsters...

LA: Oh yes.

AP: Um...So, you have a lot of memories of those early days, I take it.

LA: Oh, I have quite a few memories.

AP: Um, I guess we ought to try some of those memories in terms of...

LA: In a matter of fact, I remember every once and a while, the term is, the term is "spooked." The horses were spooked. And they would run wild down the street.

AP: Really?

LA: And somebody had to run after the horses and stop them, just like they do in the western movies.

AP: Did they run down those hills?

LA: They would run down the street and someone would have to run after the horses and grab it by the reins, or grab it by the bit, and stop the horses right in the street. But it was not unusual.

AP: Uh huh.

LA: That would happen every so often.

AP: So, it was just almost an occurrence that was not...

LA: It was an occurrence that, it was an occurrence that was not an unusual situation.

People had seen it time and again, and they were aware of it.

AP: Were the streets at that time, were they, did they have the Belgian block or were they dirt, or?

LA: 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue had, uh, brick.

AP: Oh, it did?

LA: But, the original street was merely brick on top of gravel and dirt.

AP: Uh huh.

LA: So that, over a short period of time, they developed many bumps and ruts.

AP: Uh huh.

LA: Uh, so, when a teamster would drive the horses down the street, because of the condition of the street, he would very often try to get into the streetcar tracks, because the streetcar tracks, obviously, were very smooth.

AP: Mm-hmm.

LA: Now, it would be a smooth ride for the wagon, it would be much easier for the horses to pull the wagon...

AP: Mm-hmm

LA: Along the streetcar tracks...

AP: Sure.

LA: than along the street.

AP: Oh!

LA: Now, the only problem is, that every once in a while a streetcar came along you would have to get off of the tracks.

AP: Or the streetcar would stuck behind the horse!

LA: But there's one thing that I'll always remember that was interesting. Whenever there was an intersection, or anything involved...

AP: Uh huh

LA: Between horses and a motored vehicle...

AP: Uh huh

LA: The horses always had the right of way.

AP: Really?

LA: Right. They always had the right of way. And that was an accepted situation.

Because the horse was a living animal, and it was always accorded that benefit of having the right of way.

AP: That's interesting. Um, did many people have cars at that time? And, do you remember a time when the car was the exception and the horse was sort of the rule?

LA: Uh, there were automobiles, but certainly not what we have today.

AP: Um hmm.

LA: But, the streets were often crowded with horses and wagons, and uh, the trucks that were there at the time, most of them did not have pneumatic tires. They were solid rubber.

AP: Mm-hmm.

LA: And the trucks did the same thing the horses, they usually tried to get in the street car tracks, because the solid rubber wheels created a bumpy ride.

AP: Oh yes. That's right.

LA: So, they tried to get in the streetcar tracks and have a smooth ride.

AP: So, everything was in those streetcar tracks!

LA: The streetcar tracks were very, very popular at the time. Absolutely.

AP: Were there a lot of streetcars?

LA: Yes. Yes, there were a lot of streetcars. And, I remember the open streetcar in the summer time that went to Kennywood Park.

AP: Mm-hmm.

LA: Especially during the school picnics, they would come down from all over the city, including Squirrel Hill. They would come down through Homestead. The streetcars were open. They would drive through and just as your kids and they are today. They'd be screaming and hollering and singing or always had something to holler about in a very pleasant, gay manner.

AP: Mm-hmm.

LA: None of them had guns and none of them had knives.

AP: Yeah, they had picnic baskets.

LA: No, and none of them had howitzers, or rocket launchers.

AP: So it was...

LA: And they had picnic baskets and they always had tennis shoes. But, the tennis shoes were all made by Keds and they were 98 cents a pair for the two shoes.

AP: 98 cents.

LA: They were less than one dollar.

AP: And, did you wear them all the time? Or, were they special for the...?

LA: They were special. Anytime a picnic, anytime there was a picnic it was time to buy a new pair of tennis shoes and then they were worn all summer long. Except when school started, or during the winter and naturally we wore other shoes.

AP: Mmm. Not like tennis shoes now, which are the all-purpose wear?

LA: Oh, no no no. These are 98 cents. But, they served the purpose and they served it very well.

AP: So it was very festive on 8<sup>th</sup> avenue during the summer?

LA: It was what?

AP: I said it was very festive on 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue during the summer.

LA: Oh, yes, yes.

AP: With all that going on.

LA: Yes, yes.

AP: People didn't get off the street cars and actually shop in Homestead, though, did they, or did they?

LA: Some people used streetcars and many people walked.

AP: Mm-hmm.

LA: Saturday was the busiest day of the week by far. That was when they got paid. Either Saturday or Friday night. Saturday in Homestead, and also the other boroughs, but I'm talking about Homestead and Munhall, it was extremely busy. People came in from West Homestead, people came down from Whittaker, people came down from Homeville. And, at one time, there were no public transportation from Homestead going up to Whittaker or Homeville. And, those people used to walk two to three miles, walking down the hill, they would buy what they needed and walk back up the hill.

AP: Huh.

LA: Finally, Someone by the name of Bamford initiated a bus line.

AP: That's what I thought I remembered, that there was a Bamford bus line.

LA: Yes, and they initiated a bus line, but still, everyone did not use a bus line. Now that you're talking about buses and so on, to go from Homestead into Pittsburgh. It was one streetcar check to go into Squirrel Hill. But, if you wanted to go Downtown on a 68 streetcar, or on a 55, it was two streetcar checks. However, streetcar checks were three for a quarter. And, if you were in Homestead at the time and were down at the bridge, in the old bridge, people were walking across the bridge, because if you walked across the bridge on the Pittsburgh side and got on a streetcar, you'd have to pay only one streetcar check to go from there all the way downtown. Now, similarly on the way back, people would get on a streetcar downtown, and when they would get to the old Homestead bridge, they would get off. That way there's one streetcar check and then they would walk across the bridge.

AP: And they saved that little bit of extra..

LA: Hey, that eight and one third cents...that's not like an eight and one third cents today, that would be almost for buying power and the ability to get it, it was worth over a dollar. Thinking of buying power, in terms of labor.

AP: Mm-hmm.

LA: The amount of labor expended to earn 8 and 1/3 cents in those days roughly, I would say, the same amount of labor today would probably bring in 2 dollars. And that is no exaggeration. Because, I remember, at one time the steel works, a mature man working in the steel works was getting 30 cents an hour.

AP: Really?

LA: And then later on they went up to 50-60 cents an hour. As a matter of fact, there was a movie one time, and I think it was with Fatty Arbuckle.

AP: Uh huh.

LA: And I think the name of the movie was, *60 Cents an Hour*. And at that particular time, for a working man to earn 60 cents an hour, he was a wealthy man. And during the Depression in Munhall, I'm talking now about 1931 in Homestead. Two of the people who were considered extremely fortunate were the teachers and the people who worked for the post office. They were each making about 150 dollars a month. And that was a 150 dollars coming in every month, every month. Which was much, much more than anyone else was getting, and they were not even sure of working every month. Far from it. So, now we're going back quite a few days and forth. In those days, the synagogue in Homestead, the place was extremely busy. The place was crowded with people. The holidays, it was overflowing.

AP: Mm-hmm. Um, yeah. Well, since I guess we got to the synagogue, I take it you went to cheder when you were a little boy?

LA: Um, yes, I went to cheder there.

AP: Uh huh. Do you...how old were you when you started? Do you have any idea?

LA: I would say I started cheder about the same time I started school. Approximately 6. Uh, that's approximate.

AP: Yeah. And, how often did you go?

LA: 4 nights a week. Um, 4 afternoons a week after school. And on Saturday morning. Then, on Sunday, we went to Sunday school. And, uh, we went to the synagogue, as a cheder bucher.

AP: Uh huh.

LA: Uh, on Friday evening.

AP: Oh! So, the boys from the cheder also went Fridays nights as well as Saturday mornings?

LA: Yes. Yes, it was very well attended.

AP: Huh. Oh! This is just boys who went, at that time, I'm guessing.

LA: There were a few girls.

AP: Uh huh.

LA: Not too many, but there were a few girls.

AP: Uh huh. Did your, did your father go with you when you went to shul on Friday night or Saturday morning?

LA: On Friday night, occasionally. Saturday morning, no.

AP: He had to go to work?

LA: Yes.

AP: When you went to Hebrew school, to cheder, was it the rabbi who taught you?

LA: Uh, there often was the rabbi and sometimes they had an assistant.

AP: Uh huh. So, there were enough children for the...

LA: Definitely.

AP: Were, were there a few classes?

LA: Yes, yes. Yes, there were enough children to have a regular cheder.

AP: Who do you, do you remember any of the people that taught you?

LA: People who taught me?

AP: Yeah, rabbis or otherwise?

LA: There was Rabbi Goldberg. There was, um, I don't remember the rabbi or not, Danzig. And, um, there were some others, but I remember those two in particular.

AP: Mm-hmm.

LA: Rabbi Goldberg, Rabbi Danzig. I can't remember the others off hand.

AP: How did you feel about cheder? Did you enjoy it? Did you mind going after a day of school? Uh, were the rabbis nice? Those kinds of things.

LA: Well, I didn't mind going to cheder. Danzig was a very nice person to get along with. Rabbi Goldberg was a little bit too old fashioned for me.

AP: Mm-hmm.

LA: Uh, in addition to everything else he ever learned when becoming a rabbi, he could have studied a little bit of psychology. He could have studied more about how to handle people and how to handle children. I didn't get along with him too well, obviously.



AP: Was he harsh? Was he harsh?

LA: He was harsh. And he showed favoritism to the nth degree.

AP: Oh my goodness!

LA: Oh yes. If I, that's the way it was.

AP: Mm-hmm.

LA: And, it wasn't bad that way, only I hear many stories about, about those who lived in Europe. And they went to cheder, and started early in the morning and stayed all day long. I don't necessarily mean they hated what ever they did...

AP: Mm-hmm.

LA: And the story that I hear that the teachers were extremely harsh. So maybe what I had was really very easy compared to what it used to be. But, uh, that's the way it was.

AP: Did they use physical punishments on the children?

LA: Uh, at times yes. Yes.

AP: With a hand, or with a paddle or...?

LA: Uh, there was a combination of factors. It was a combination of factors and also another way to punish is merely by the tone of voice. And the tone of voice was an excellent method of punishing.

AP: So did you go to cheder until you were bar mitzvah age? Were bar mitzvahs then similar to the way they are now?

LA: Uh, it was about the same.

Tape cuts out.

LA: No, no, no, no. I'm sorry. I didn't know what you meant.

AP: Ok.

LA: No, There was no such thing as a party. No, I mean, not the kind that you're referring to. There was no such thing. Not only for me, not for anyone. It just wasn't thought of.

AP: Uh huh.

LA: As a matter of fact, I don't know when it began, but that is comparatively a recent innovation. When I say recent, 50 years is recent.

AP: Uh huh.

LA: No, there wasn't any such thing as they have today.

AP: Uh huh. So you...so a person would have an aliyah and read from the haf torah...they just had...

LA: No, they did.

AP: Uh huh. Give a speech?

LA: No.

AP: No?

LA: No.

AP: So it was quite different in some ways I guess.

LA: Well, they weren't all the same. They're all somewhat different, but they were definitely not the same as now. They were definitely not the same as now.

AP: But, do you, you remember... Did you continue to go to Saturday morning services?

LA: No, no.

AP: So that was just the requirement while you were...

LA: That was it.

AP: ...while you were...

LA: That was it.

AP: Did you continue going to Sunday school? Or, was...

LA: No. I didn't go to Sunday school either.

AP: So, you were graduated when you were bar mitzvahed.

LA: As far as I'm concerned, I was through. Except it doesn't mean that I didn't keep on the reading. I mean I would read very many things pertaining to Judaism.

AP: Uh huh.

LA: Primarily from a historical point of view and primarily to refresh my memory about some of the bible stories. So called bible stories. As a matter of fact, my, uh, my memory for a lot of those stories are...is very good. Not only from the days that I went there, but, uh, I've read up on it since. And I do remember quite a bit.

AP: So, you feel as if you actually learned something there that you...

LA: Oh definitely! Definitely, there are many, many things that I have learned that I will never forget.

AP: Hmm.

LA: And, it's interesting.

AP: So you were reading Jewish literature even when you were a boy?

LA: No.

AP: Oh, this is subsequent years...

LA: No, no, no... I read, um, I read many things now pertaining to Judaism. Not necessarily the religion. Sometimes pertaining to the religion, but I get literature from the American Jewish Committee, the American Jewish Congress, the World Jewish Congress, the Simon Weisenthal Center, the American Israeli Political Action Committee, I get literature from that and I practically read every word from beginning to end. In addition to that, what ever I see in the New York Times or any publication, I read it. And I think I have a pretty good picture of what goes on.

AP: I would say so.

LA: And a pretty good explanation for a lot of things that go on. So that, while I may not be involved directly in the religious, heavily in the religious aspects of Judaism, I am involved in the historical and cultural aspects of Judaism.

AP: I just this sort of raises some questions, but maybe I'll sort of go back to that earlier thing. You talked about how filled the shul was in the earlier years.

LA: Especially on the holidays.

AP: On the holidays.

LA: On the holidays it was absolutely filled.

AP: Uh huh. Did you go to regular....did you go to the services with your parents?

LA: Yes, on the holidays.

AP: Were your parents, um, observant?

LA: It depends on what you mean by observant.

AP: Well, why don't you tell me what their level was...

LA: What is observant and what is not observant?

AP: Well, I...

LA: You see? Even under the term of being observant, there is a definite span of...within that, um, definition.

AP: Right.

LA: Of observant...

AP: Did she keep...

LA: Ok, my father went every holiday. He would go in the morning, he would stay there all day for Yom Kippur. My mother was not as observant as my father. But it so happens that, um, we did not follow... as children we were not forced to follow every precept of what was considered proper Judaism at that particular time. Every little bit of behavior or every little ritual it involved. But I remember on Passover, we had a complete Seder for two nights. And, uh, I remember on, uh, Yom Kippur we had to fast. But he was not as adamant about it as I know some of the other parents were. And yet, they were more adamant than a few of the others. I would say that they were not extremely demanding. And I never felt that they were extremely demanding because I saw what others had to do.

AP: What did others have to do? What did the more demanding parents require of their children?

LA: Well, this would be my personal interpretation. I was not in their homes and see everything they had to do. But some of them would go to shul, to the synagogue with their fathers in the morning and sat there all day long. They were not allowed to move, they were not allowed to go outside, they were not allowed to anything except those things that they had to do. They had practically no freedom of movement. And, um, that to me, at that time, was very, um, very much required and demanding. And naturally, if they were demanding in that one respect there were other ways in which they were also... Which was quite obvious. Now, there's nothing wrong with it, if that was the way they wanted them to be, that's the way they could be. I'm only talking about myself.

AP: Did your mother keep kosher?

LA: Yes.

AP: Did she had...did you have chickens of your own?

LA: No.

AP: I mean, cause you said some people did.

LA: Oh, No, no, no. That was, um, these are people who lived up on the hill and they had a certain amount of ground.

AP: Oh, I see.

LA: Where they had chickens and they had their own eggs and some of them even sold eggs.

AP: Uh huh.

LA: And some of them even had a cow. And a few of them had a goat. Those are the people to whom we sold. Now, most of those people that I am referring to were the immigrants that came from Eastern Europe. Uh, they were the Slovak and Polish and Russian and so on.

AP: Mm-hmm.

LA: No.

AP: Did your parents speak Yiddish?

LA: Oh yes. Yes.

AP: Did you?

LA: I speak a little Yiddish.

AP: But, was that their...

LA: As a matter of fact, you know, there were times that I even though I should go down to the community center...

AP: Uh huh.

LA: When they have the class in Yiddish and relearn some of my Yiddish. Um, Yes, I, uh, I think I might even, uh, consider it again.

AP: And sharpen up on what you knew.

LA: Oh sure. Sure. I wish I had done that all along. I could have used it in many, many areas. In many places where I had been.

AP: Like... when would you have found it...?

LA: I had traveled around a little bit.

AP: Uh huh.

LA: And one time I was down in Lima, Peru. When I was in Lima, Peru, it was Saturday morning and I was walking on one of the main streets and I saw that...

END OF TAPE ONE, SIDE ONE

TAPE ONE, SIDE TWO

LA:...Sure enough, he was Jewish.

AP: Uh huh. Deepest (unclear)

LA: And, and I spoke some Yiddish. And of course he spoke Spanish. And somehow in Yiddish, we were able to get along with my, with the amount of Yiddish that I knew. So I decided, well it wouldn't be a bad idea. So he said there were four synagogues in Lima. One of them was an Orthodox synagogue. Just momentarily the name slips my mind, Beth Jacob. Beth Jacob. That's the one where he went. It was Orthodox. So (unclear) Orthodox synagogue, how am I going to get there? So I got a cab. So I went down to the synagogue and I walked inside. So sure enough, I was greeted there. And somebody came over and asked me, Hey...what my name and where I was. Where my parents come from. Just sort of a friendly way. And, then he walked to a group of men, there were only about 19 people there. And, he must of have told them undoubtedly he told them where I came from and where my parents came from. So he told them my parents came from, obviously he told them my parents came from Romania, because I saw them put their hands to their faces and shake their heads.

AP: Oooh! Not a Romanian!

LA: Yeah, so anyhow, I was sitting there and all of a sudden, someone came over...[Yiddish- Avyester?]

AP: Mm-hmm.

LA: I said [Yesuley?] he said Ben [Yshier?] So I knew I was getting an aliyah.

AP: I see, so he asked who you are...

LA: Right.

AP: And so it translated for this...

LA: So...

AP: You name and...

LA: I went up on the bimah...

AP: And you get an aliyah.

LA: Now, this is in Lima, Peru, the rabbi was a young fellow. He had a beard. And I'm pretty sure he was a Hassid. He had a beard and he was shukling. He was shukling

and reading and dovening. And finally, in a little break he turned to me and said to me in a sing-song fashion, "So how are the Pirates making out?"

AP: Oh! In Yiddish I guess?

LA: No! In English, in perfect English!

AP: In English? Oh for heaven's sake.

LA: "So how are the Pirates making out?" Down in Lima, Peru. Well, anyhow, so happens he was an Israeli.

AP: Oh.

LA: And he went to a yeshiva in New York. So that's how he knew about the Pirates and the Yankees and so on.

AP: My goodness.

LA: I was, I was practically...

AP: You would not have been expecting that.

LA: I was extremely surprised, "So how are the Pirates making out?" Well, I went over to his home and ate that day with him and I enjoyed it quite a bit. So anyhow, if I had known Yiddish better, that's what all came about. There were very many areas where I had been. Where if I had have known my Yiddish better, I would have no hesitation in knocking on someone's door if I knew they was Yiddish and introduced myself. I would have no hesitation. But, since my Yiddish was somewhat meager, and I had not used it in a long time, I thought it probably best to just forget it.

AP: When, um, when you went to shul did the congregants talk Yiddish to each other or did they tend to speak to each other in English?

LA: They spoke both.

AP: Oh. Uh huh.

LA: It was very common practice to say something in English, automatically switch to Yiddish and then come back to English, and then come back to Yiddish and then come back to broken English. And then come back to Yiddish. The change, I presume, was made when an individual, without thinking about it consciously, felt that he could get his point across better with the feelings and emotions involved by witching over to Yiddish. And then he would do the same thing and come back to English. Now, very often at home, when we had company, that's the way a lot of them would talk. And I was usually fascinated with the way they would talk in English and then all of a sudden they were talking in Yiddish. And then they would come back to English and then they would talk in Yiddish. As a matter of fact, and even once and a while, I think they threw in a little bit of Romanian along with it, too. So, that was the situation that existed. I would imagine it existed in my experience, that's the way a lot of people had to find it. And I feel sure the same thing happened in the synagogue. They did not speak Hebrew.

AP: Uh huh.

LA: They, here they spoke either Yiddish or English or they had the blend of the two that I described.

AP: Uh huh. Um, did your mother read Hebrew?

LA: Yes, she would.

AP: Was your mother able to read Hebrew?

LA: Yes, yes.

AP: So, she was able to participate in the service?

LA: Uh, I don't know to what extent. She was able to read Hebrew. But she was not extremely versed in Hebrew. Uh, that was about it. My father, of course, he knew Hebrew extremely well. My father, of course, there are very many people who would say my grandfather was a rabbi in Europe. And his father before him was a rabbi. So I have the same [geschichta?] Not my father, but he was extremely well versed because his forbearers were all rabbis.

AP: I see.

LA: So, I remember, every once and a while, Rabbi Goldberg, whom I mentioned before, would get in a conversation with my father and they would talk about the philosophy in Judaism and so on. And I remember, the subject came up about schlug kapores? My father told the rabbi, "I don't schlug kapores I ever did and I never will." And the rabbi says, "Why not? Why should you schludig kapores. You're Orthodox." He says, "If I have any sins, they're my sins. My sins don't have to be transferred to the chicken, the chicken is not responsible for my sins." And I know, I remember I used to think to myself, what kind of business is this? You transfer the sins to the chicken, it's not the chickens fault. But what good is it, 'cause you end up eating the chicken and sins come back into you anyhow.

AP: Oh the chicken was eaten after it was killed!

LA: I remember that very well. I used to think about that. What kind of business is this schludig kapores. The sins go into the chicken but you eat the chicken anyway now the sins are back inside, so what did you gain?

AP: Well, did you ever see anybody actually do that?

LA: Uh, to a very small degree.

AP: Uh huh.

LA: To a very small degree. You hear about it much more than you see it. I don't know if you ever saw it.

AP: No I didn't.

LA: But I'm sure you heard about it.

AP: Yes I certainly did.

LA: But it's one of those things that you hear about quite a bit but you don't see too often. But never the less, that's the way the conversation went, and I can still remember in my mind, what kind of business is this? You're gonna eat the chicken anyhow, so...

AP: What was the (unclear)?

LA: ...So, you're getting the sins back into you.

AP: Internally.

LA: That's right!

AP: Let's see, I was going to, I got carried away with the story about schludig kapores. Um, but I guess I was... When you went to Hebrew school, and spent so much time, were most of your friends the children you went to Hebrew school with? Or were they the children who were your neighbors and the children you went to regular school with? Was, I guess, part of what I'm trying to figure out is, is how much of a role, otherwise, did synagogue play in your life in terms of providing friendships and relationships and whatever?

LA: OK. Many of the other, uh, students who went to cheder with me, they were already my friends who went to school in Munhall.

AP: Uh huh.

LA: Now, the ones who lived in Homestead... most of them I met at the cheder.

AP: Uh huh.

LA: I undoubtedly would have known some of them anyhow, and some of them I did.

But based on what you're asking me, I would have to admit... That some of them I became quite well acquainted with simply because I met them at cheder.

AP: But, were your close friends, uh, Jewish children when you were growing up?

LA: Most of them, by far. Although I had a number of gentile friends. But, most of them by far were Jewish.

AP: What was it like being a Jewish child in, in the public schools then? I guess you were pretty much of a minority in terms of religion, but did that have any effect that you remember?

LA: I remember very well. And I very often have made the statement that I wish I had been born on the Hill, in Pittsburgh. Being one Jewish child in a class in Munhall was not a good experience. Or, being one of two or three was not a good experience.

AP: Mm-hmm.

LA: There are certain things that had occurred that at the time I could not explain, but as I grew older, and I looked back upon them, I can remember what they were. And then I obviously can see that there was anti-Semitism involved. And that was true in Munhall much more than in Homestead. There is no question about it in my mind. Anyhow, that is the way I feel about it. At the time that these things occurred, I was incapable of understanding the significance of certain things that had occurred, things that were forthcoming, things that I had experienced. It was not a good experience. Even living in Munhall where I lived, it was a daily situation where I lived, and I lived in a nice place, to have other children, upon seeing me, they would say, "zhid." You know what zhid is?

AP: It's a ...

LA: Jew! A negative method of saying Jew.

AP: It's from middle European languages.

LA: Zhid or cheeny, or sheeny or even those, see we had quite a few parochial schools. Or even those who went to parochial schools where they spoke in English and it was, "JEW!" Now, when you live through that day in and day out, and day out and day in, you know you did ask me a very pointed question.

AP: Mm-hmm.

LA: And I'm giving you an answer.

AP: Mm-hmm.

LA: And there is no question that what anyone having put up with that for years and years and years and not knowing the reason why, not knowing the reason why, can't understand it. In fact, I can remember I don't positive, I was not five years old yet. And I remember someone calling me a, "God damned Jew!" And I remember the incident very well. And I remember, I was six years old, I was called a, "Christ killer." And I was thinking to myself, what do you mean, "Christ killer?" I never killed anybody.

AP: Mm-hmm.

LA: And I never killed anybody and who's Christ? I didn't know who Christ was. What's this business about a "Christ killer?" But these were not isolated incidents.

These were things that occurred day in and day out and day out and day in. And there is no question about what anyone, to some extent, would have been affected by that type of environment. And that was why there were times when I said I would have been much better off if I had been born up in the Hill District where a lot of people, whom I know now, were born. Uh, while I enjoyed my childhood, there were very many painful experiences because of it even in the school itself, which I'm not going to go into.

AP: They'd be interesting to hear, if you're willing to...

LA: As a matter of fact, as a matter of fact, after this is turned off I could tell you some experiences. but I don't want to go over here.

AP: Are there, is there maybe just one that you could share?

LA: No, no, I would just as soon not.

AP: Oh.

LA: No.

AP: Because...

LA: You see these are things that I cannot prove.

AP: Of course.

LA: But now, when I look back, and I try to analyze a situation, I try and analyze, this is what happened, what preceded it, why did it happen, what was the result of it, what was it all about?

AP: Mm-hmm.

LA: You know, in those days, you don't think in those terms.

AP: No of course not.

LA: But as time goes on, and we all become somewhat more sophisticated in many areas of life, we begin to see things differently. We begin to understand them differently. And as we go over it a few times, we become more and more convinced, and I think rightly so, that our analysis is somewhat correct. As a matter of fact, I'll tell you one thing I did because of that. About two years ago, someone showed me a sheet that came out of a church, I forget the name of the church, down there in Greenfield, written by a Father Joe, in which he had his homily for the day. But right in the middle of it, right in the middle of it, he had something to say about Jews, something awful to say about Jews. I still have a copy upstairs somewhere. And I was looking at it, and I was thinking to myself, after all I've gone through, am I going to just sit here and take this? I am not an activist, I am not a militant. But some how or other, I couldn't take it. And that was on a Tuesday morning. I was looking at it, I was at Rhoda's at the time.

AP: Mm-hmm.

LA: I was looking at and thinking, "What am I going to do?" How do you handle this?

So I took this sheet, and I got in my car, and I drove down to that church. They have a large parochial school. It was raining that day. I remember it was Tuesday. It was raining that day and they had a large parochial school, and I looked at school and all those children in there, and this is what this Father Joe was teaching those children.

Well I got out of the car. I didn't go rushing up and banging on door. As a matter of fact, I a little reluctant, I was a real little hesitant, and I thought to my, "No, if there's ever a time that I've got to do something, I'm gonna do it now!" Just for myself! So I went there, to the rectory, I think that's what you call it, and I knocked on the door.



The priest answered the door, and I asked if he were Father Joe Restich (?) He said, "No, But he's here." I said, "May I see him?" He says, "Sure, step inside." They treated me very nicely. So Father Joe Restich came down. He looked (unclear) young man, he took me to his office. I showed it to him. I told him the story, as I told you, about being called a, "God damned Jew." When I wasn't even five years old about being called a, "Christ killer," and about a lot of those other things. I says, "I don't know what the reason is, and I don't know why this is here, but I just felt as though I had to come down here and talk to you about it." I was not demanding, I knew my place. I could not have acted more like a gentleman, no way than I did. I was not an activist at that moment. I was not militant at that moment. I was just, "Why?" He looked at it, and looked at it, and looked at it, and looked at it, before he came up. He said, "Where did you get it?" That was his answer. I said, "What's the difference where I got it?" I said, "The fact it's there and I don't know why." Anyhow, we talked about different things, he never did tell me. I never did demand it. I was in no position to demand anything. I thought I had a lot of crust to go in there anyhow. So I felt the best I could do was just handle it. Let him sleep on it. I left and that was the end of it. Whether or not he had ever written anything like that again or not, I don't know. But, you see, this is to the extent that I was telling you. That when these things occur over and over and over again, to some extent it has to influence an individual's behavior. Now, it undoubtedly influenced my behavior in many different ways, of which I don't, of which I'm not aware.

AP: Mm-hmm.

LA: However, since we're talking about that, I do want to mention this. I was in the army for four years. I was here in the States, I was in India for a year and a half or so, and in all those four years, never once had I ever heard anything anti-Semitic. Never once, and I know a lot of fellows did. And, I always felt that I was very fortunate not to have been subjected to that type of situation in the army.

AP: You were in the army during the Second World War? You were in the army during the Second World War?

LA: Yeah, I'm not old enough to have been in the Spanish American War.

AP: No. I know that! No I was trying to figure out if you were there after the Second World War.

LA: No, no, no.

AP: But it was during...

LA: No I was there during the Second World War.

AP: And you were stationed in India?

LA: I was in India for a while. I want to tell you something funny too. Not funny, interesting.

AP: Mm-hmm.

LA: I became very friendly with a Hindu. Apparently he was the upper echelon of society. And his job during the war, was to go around to different areas in India, and he would tell me that he had made a friend. Well, like he made me one, uh, in this town a fellow from Cincinnati, and he went somewhere else and met another fellow from somewhere that was really friendly and every one of them was Jewish. Every one of them!

AP: I guess it wasn't...

LA: Every one of them.

AP: That's a very, uh...

LA: Of course, obviously by the name he didn't know.

AP: No of course not.

LA: He didn't know, but I knew.

AP: That's...

LA: And um, I just thought it was a very interesting observation.

AP: Certainly is.

LA: A very interesting observation.

AP: Because there certainly, certainly Jewish soldiers would have been a minority of the people who he would have met. I'm assuming.

LA: Yeah, yeah. But the ones with whom he became friendly. Now, he was probably referring to those that may have had a commission. In other words, he had to go into different offices. And, check on different things. Which is perfectly alright. So, the manner in which he was treated, and I'm sure he went to other places also. But when he spoke of the ones with whom he was very friendly, and the ones whom he liked quite a bit and got along very well. They were all Jewish names.

AP: That's, yeah, that's fascinating.

LA: Every one of them. No exception.

AP: Yeah, that's certainly a very revealing story.

LA: Yeah.

AP: Were you still living in Homestead at the time when you went to the army?

LA: No. at that time I was already married. And I was living over in Squirrel Hill.

AP: Oh. I see. I guess, going back to school again, you went to the Munhall, all through the Munhall schools?

LA: Yes.

AP: When you were in high school, did you, what did you do about a social life? Did you go out with the non Jewish girls there, or?

LA: No, no. No, I told you what it was like over there. No.

AP: So...

LA: And in those days it was not like today. And then and I told my family was not extremely rigid, but they were somewhat Orthodox.

AP: Mhmm, so they would not have looked kindly on your doing that.

LA: No.

AP: So, generally speaking, were there, were your, did you have, how did you have a social life in high school I guess is what I'm asking you?

LA: Well I had the friends whom I knew, that's all.

AP: Were there organizations, were there things in the synagogue for you? Were there groups outside of it that were Jewish?

LA: There's nothing to speak of with which I became deeply involved.

AP: So, where did you meet, I mean, like when you were, if you went out...?

LA: I went to, primarily we went to Squirrel Hill or East End.

AP: Uh huh.

LA: Sometimes out to Braddock.

AP: I see.

LA: And in every instance there was primarily a group of where there were Jewish people. But that's just the way that it happened to be. At the time.

AP: So, it was not the shul in Homestead that became...

LA: No, no, no.

AP: ...the source of your real social life. I guess I want to ask....well you were already married, so that was, you were married when you went to the army.

LA: Yes.

AP: Do you remember anything during that time, in terms of what you knew about the condition of Jews in Europe or the situation of Jews in Europe.

LA: Very little. It, very little. Uh, I had an idea what was going on, but not anywhere near the extent to which it was going on. As a matter of fact, very few people knew.

AP: So, let's see, you graduated from high school when?

LA: 1931.

AP: And, uh. Almost as you were going into around the Depression time.

LA: Well, just as it began.

AP: Yeah. So what happened when you graduated from high school? What did you do then?

LA: Well, I went to Pitt part time for a while.

AP: You did!

LA: Yeah, I went part time.

AP: Uh huh.

LA: And uh, I tried to get a job somewhere. Jobs were hard to get. And at that particular time, my father was still in business. He opened up a grocery store over there in Homestead where he had some property.

AP: So he had, he was in the produce business already.

LA: He had already retired.

AP: Oh. Uh huh.

LA: But when the Depression came in,

AP: Uh huh.

LA: Uh, the situation had changed a little bit.

AP: So he opened...

LA: Yeah.

AP: Another store...

LA: Yeah. And I worked in there with him.

AP: Uh huh.

LA: At the same time I was going to Pitt part time.

AP: Where was the grocery?

LA: Over in Homestead. On Dickson Street.

AP: Oh, down on Dickson.

LA: Yeah, yeah.

AP: Oh, that's when Dickson was still...

LA: Oh, it was very active, oh at that time it was very active.

AP: Hmm.

LA: Yeah.

AP: Great. Were your parents active in the shul?

LA: My father was the treasurer.

AP: Oh. So he was?

LA: But from a social point of view, he was not active. And my mother was not active. They went to all the affairs that they had, but from the strictly social point of view, they were not extremely active, no. No.

AP: But, so it's, did you go to these affairs that the shul had, or was that just for the adults?

LA: Say that again please?

AP: I asked if these affairs that the shul had that your parents went to, did you also go?

LA: Oh sure.

AP: Uh huh.

LA: Oh, oh all the kids went.

AP: Oh, they did.

LA: Oh, it was a big event.

AP: Oh, I see. So it was for everybody.

LA: Sure.

AP: Um, do you remember holidays, observances in the synagogue, any of them with particular...

LA: Oh well,

AP: Pleasure...

LA: I'm assuming that you had already interviewed other people who told you all about it.

AP: Well, but everybody's...

LA: OK.

AP: ...views are different.

LA: OK. So I have been thinking what am I going to tell you that maybe no one else did.

AP: OK.

LA: So, I have two things.

AP: OK.

LA: One of them is this: This is just a little vignette. At Passover... Instead of people going out to shop for Passover goods, two of the people, two of the member of the synagogue, would go to each Jewish family, who were members of the synagogue, and get their orders for matzah, matzo meal, farfel, and cooking everything. They would get all the orders together.

AP: Mm-hmm.

LA: See.

AP: Yeah.

LA: And then when it would come in, they would deliver it to the Jewish families. And, whatever money they made on it, which was all right, it was for the synagogue. However, there was something else that they did. They also had, they also had items for those people who could not pay. But no one knew who they were. There was one woman who took care of that. She knew who they were. And she would give them the order, they would give her all the Passover products, she would take care of the delivery and nobody knew who they were.

AP: Hmm. That's nice.

LA: Yeah.

AP: Do you know who the woman was who did that?

LA: I think it was a woman by the name of, I don't know, Mrs. Friedlander.

AP: Oh, it was from the store, from the Friedlander store.

LA: From one of them. I don't know which one. But it was a Homestead woman. And then of course, there was another member of the synagogue who would go around every year, and, um, he would take around with him Chanukah candles. He would deliver Chanukah candles. I mean, it was just understood that when Chanukah comes around...

AP: He was...

LA: He already had some accumulated from last year and the year before and the year before, you still bought a box of Chanukah... You still bought a box of Chanukah candles.

AP: They were the orange candles then? Were they?

LA: I think they were all orange and they were not twirled.

AP: Uh huh.

LA: If you know what I mean by...

AP: Yes.

LA: Twirled. They were all straight.

AP: Just straight.

LA: Yeah. And I think, were they made by the Atlantic Oil Company? The thing one the (unclear) that had the light the gasoline?

AP: Were they? I don't know.

LA: Well I know they made the candles that you use on Shabbos.

AP: Huh. I didn't know that either.

LA: Yeah. Yeah.

AP: So, like ARCO? The same Atlantic Richfield Oil Company?

LA: Oh, well, yes. At one time it was strictly Atlantic.

AP: It was just, it was just Atlantic. So they were the makers of the Shabbos candles?

LA: I, I think they also made the Chanukah candles, the Chanukah candles I'm not sure...

AP: Uh huh.

LA: But the one for Friday, uh, they made. But I still remember the name.

AP: Did they celebrate Chanukah in the shul?

LA: Uh, They celebrated a very many of the holidays. They celebrated Purim...I don't, uh, I don't recall. I would say they had services. But whether or not...I know they had celebration for Sukkos and a celebration from Purim. They had celebrations for many different things. You ask me specifically for Chanukah, I don't recall.

AP: Well, I guess I really meant it, I guess I meant it on...

LA: No, no, no. I would say yes. Yes, because they would have a Chanukah play.

AP: Uh huh.

LA: On Sunday. I remember that. That would have a Chanukah play.

END OF TAPE ONE, SIDE TWO

TAPE TWO, SIDE ONE

AP: (unclear) When you had these anti-Semitic experiences, did you tell your parents?

LA: No. No. It wouldn't do any good.

AP: So you just kept it to yourself?

LA: That's all. No.

AP: What about when you took Jewish holidays off from school?

LA: That did not seem to cause a problem. No, now I would have to say that that did not seem to cause a problem. But what did cause a problem, now that you mention it, you know, comes Christmas and you had to get in line and sing Christmas carols. Of course, I kept quiet. I didn't sing. All those Christmas carols were sung, and you know what I'm referring to.

AP: Yeah.

LA: Uh, and of course, that way I was more or less influenced quite a bit by the cheder and the rabbis and the things that I had learned. That was a little bit painful at times to just have to stand there. But, OK, it was one of those things. But, you see, it's really a summation of a lot of little things. Each one in of itself is no big deal, but it's a summation of things not only in quantity, but even in time. In space and time and volume. Now, when you begin to add it up, it really gets to be a little bit of a burden at times.

AP: Yeah, I'm sure.

LA: At times, and there are many, many...[fades out] We would get together in somewhat...[cuts off]

AP: We were talking about celebrating to the Jewish holidays and what was going on in the synagogue. That's where we were before we digressed...[fades off]

LA: Well,

AP: ...into other things.

LA: I, uh, I would imagine that when it comes to the Jewish holidays, you'd get a lot more information from other people than you'd get from me.

AP: Well, it's your own memories...

LA: Because I don't remember... I'll tell you something about a Jewish holiday, now I don't mean to be funny...

AP: Yeah.

LA: I don't know... I hope you take it right. OK. If you're talking about Jewish holidays, there's certain on Yom Kippur... The synagogue was here. The recreation rooms, the Sunday school rooms were down below. On the Jewish holidays, some of the young women were very religious and they would breast feed their baby downstairs. Because of who was there and who was walking around.

AP: Really?

LA: This is not an unusual situation.

AP: Those are marvelous!

LA: Huh?

AP: Those are wonderful little, little pictures of things. And in fact I haven't heard from anyone...

LA: You haven't heard that one have you?

AP: Absolutely.

LA: Well, OK! I told you I remember a lot of little things!

AP: That's right!

LA: I remember a lot more!

AP: Well, that's what...

LA: Well, I mean they wouldn't have (unclear). But, this is not an unusual situation.

AP: You know what? And it's a marvelous picture. The women were just down there, oblivious to anything.

LA: There the women were right there, of course, at that time, it seemed a little funny to me. It didn't have any connotation of anything, except when they held the (unclear) over here.

AP: Uh huh.

LA: Anyhow. You might want to know that. Maybe you never heard of that one.

AP: No, I certainly didn't.

LA: Well, anyhow, that did exist. Now, I'm not saying it was very frequent, but it did exist. OK and I won't say there was a group of them huddled together.

AP: It, it was just...

LA: It was an individual situation.

AP: You were there. Now, you had a lot of sisters and brothers who were there also.

LA: Yeah, yeah.

AP: I guess, um... So, did that make a difference to be part of such a large family? Was that sort of...

LA: Well, there was quite a big difference in age between me and five of my sisters and brothers.

AP: Oh.

LA: Only on brother. And you may have contacted him, Joe Averbach.

AP: No, I haven't talked to him.

LA: Oh. OK, he's about a year and a half older than I. He lives... you'll never find his house. He lives up in Whitehall. He would remember quite a bit, probably. A lot that I told you and maybe a little bit. Did you ever contact... I think you contacted Milton Bordson(?).

AP: Yes, I haven't had a chance to talk to him though.

LA: He's um, a cousin of mine, or a second cousin. He and I were very friendly. In fact Milton Bordson(?) is a very fine person.

AP: Now, I guess getting back to your family, you said a lot of your brothers and sisters were a lot older than you.

LA: They were, they were a lot older than I, and they were married while I was still quite young.

AP: Uh huh. Did they remain in that area also?

LA: They, they remained in the Homestead synagogue for quite a while. Then finally they drifted apart. One went to the B'nai Israel in East Liberty and the other one went to Beth Shalom over here.

AP: So they didn't stay living in the area after they married?

LA: No.

AP: Had children...

LA: No, no.

AP: Did they all leave? Did they all leave that Homestead/Munhall area?

LA: Yeah.

AP: They did.

LA: Yeah, yeah.

AP: Um, I guess going back to your own history, when you graduated and it was the Depression and you were working in the store and you...

LA: Yeah.

AP: were...

LA: I was going to school at the same time.

AP: Yeah, that was unusual to be going to school during the Depression, I guess...

LA: Well that's why I went part time.

AP: And you lived at home until you...did you, did you graduate?

LA: Yeah. I graduated in 1938.

AP: Ah. And, and then what did you do after you graduated? Did you still stay in the store?

LA: No. No, no. After I graduated, I, had a degree in metallurgical engineering.

AP: Uh huh.

LA: I worked at the steel works in Homestead.

AP: Oh, as an engineer?

LA: Yeah. In metallurgical engineering. And, and then, uh, I worked in the army and never went back to the steel works. I went into business with one of my brothers and a brother-in-law. And, uh, while I was in business, I was putting in a lot of time and finally I decided that was putting in too much time. And I used to go to different places and take different courses. Didn't make any difference what, I just took different courses. That's when I should've taken some Yiddish.

AP: Uh huh.

LA: And I was taking different courses, and then I decided I'll go back to Pitt.

AP: Uh huh.

LA: At night.

AP: Uh huh.

LA: So, I was thinking languages, in which I would have enjoyed. I think I had philosophy which anyone can enjoy. And I was thinking psychology. So, I looked at the schedule and I decided I'll take psychology, and I kept on going. And going and going and finally they said, look, if you want to keep on going, you'll have to go to graduate school. So, I took a test and I got into graduate school, and I got my masters degree.

AP: In psychology?

LA: Majored in psychology. I would not take a masters of science because I did not want to have to write a thesis. I got a master of education.

AP: Mm-hmm. I see.

LA: I earned a master of education, but I majored in psychology.

AP: I see.

LA: But I did a lot of other things, too.

AP: So, did you then, you just did this for yourself or did you decide...did you start another career with that?

LA: No. No, no, no, no. I did not have another career with it. But you see, what I learned there, not all psychology, there are other things. And my attitude towards education is: it's the greatest thing in the world. To know about this and know about that. Even now, even about two years ago, I bought a book on algebra.

AP: Huh.



LA: It was at the book store. And I went through the book, and I worked every problem in algebra. I just wanted to see if I still knew my algebra. Then I got a book on biology. One of these how to books or simply easy learning. I still enjoy all that.

AP: That's marvelous.

LA: Now, I, I enjoy it.

AP: That really is, because you're one of these true students who just gets educated because...

LA: Oh, I like that. Matter of fact, I told you, I get the magazines, and I get these literature from these Jewish organizations and I read almost every word. Even my wife gets the magazines and reads every one of those that are written for the women. Every time there is at least one article that I can find in there pertaining to Judaism one way or another is worthwhile reading.

AP: Uh huh. You worked at United States Steel, then is that right?

LA: Yeah.

AP: Did they discriminate against Jews? Do you remember?

LA: When I was there, the answer is yes! With a capital Y and a capital E and a capital S! See.

AP: OK.

LA: YES. Now, I am not saying, I am not saying that this was the intent of the corporation. But this is the way they operated over here. And again, I was subjected to that. And uh, so, I worked there for three years.

AP: Mm-hmm.

LA: But when I came out of the army, I decided I'm not going back.

AP: So you didn't go back to Homestead at all when you got out of the army or did you?

LA: No. No.

AP: Uh huh. Were you parents still there?

LA: Yeah. They were still living.

AP: Mm. And you were already married?

LA: I was married and I had a child when I went into the army. My oldest daughter.

AP: OK, so, after you got married, you still lived in Homestead when you were first married?

LA: No, no. I moved to Squirrel Hill.

AP: Oh, as soon as you got married...

LA: Yeah.

AP: You lived in Squirrel Hill.

LA: Yes, I wonder if you would excuse me for a moment.

AP: Sure. Of course.

LA: (unclear) about it.

AP: OK.

LA: Dean Holbrook(?) The name came back to me.

AP: Mm-hmm. And he was the Dean of the school of engineering?

LA: Yeah. He was the Dean of the school of engineering and mines at the University of Pittsburgh in 1935. At that time, I was registered in the school of mines, and my major was metallurgical engineering. He asked to see me. And when I saw him, he told me for my own good, so he said, that I should not take engineering or mines

because I would find it very difficult to get a job after I graduated because I was Jewish. However, I continued with the course and graduated.

AP: Hmm. So you needed a lot of fortitude to keep on going. A lot of students left at that point.

LA: That was it. It's funny, I hadn't thought of that name in so long. I'm surprised it even came back to me. I don't know how I thought of it. From that time until now. Over 60 years.

AP: Yeah.

LA: No, not quite. Over 50.

AP: Long enough.

LA: Yeah.

AP: To, ah...

LA: But, now, now I'm beginning to wonder how did that name come back to me? Now I'm going to wonder about that! Why did that name come back to me? I had no reason to remember that name.

AP: It's interesting. I think once you start talking about some things, it sort of kicks in...

LA: Well...

AP: Those memories...

LA: Well, yeah. OK, whatever it is, I remembered the name.

AP: Well, there you are. It's uh, yeah, you certainly have a lot of...

LA: Oh, I ran into quite a few things.

AP: Mm-hmm. So, I take it that partly those experiences, well, you can correct me if I'm wrong, when you got married, I assume that you made a conscious decision not to remain in that area and to move to the city, to Squirrel Hill?

LA: No, no. No, it wasn't a matter that I wanted to move out of that area because of that. It was just as though I was becoming involved with another group of people. Many more people whom I knew, whom I met, and with whom I got along very well. And, many of my friends who had lived here, who had lived in Munhall or Homestead, had already moved.

AP: Uh huh.

LA: So, while my parents still lived there, I wasn't moving that far away.

AP: Mmhmm.

LA: And, uh, my wife and I would visit them fairly often. So, that was the primary reason I moved into Squirrel Hill.

AP: Oh, I see.

LA: It wasn't so much that I wanted to move out of that area. For that reason.

AP: I see. Um, well since we've wandered around, I guess before we finish this up, there maybe things that have come to your mind or maybe that I didn't hit on...

LA: That's all right. Go ahead.

AP: That, I thought maybe we could just sort of wander around and you can sort of share any kinds of thoughts or memories or...

LA: What do you mean, "share?"

AP: Reflections. Like...

LA: I'm doing all the talking! I, somebody asked and... Just to try and get me to talk. We're not sharing! I'm doing all the talking!

AP: Well, they don't want to hear me on this. I'll tell you stories...

LA: That's OK. I'm only...I'm a kibbitzer on top of everything else. Go ahead, what do you, what do you want to ask me?

AP: No, I just wondered if, if there are some things that I might have forgotten to ask you. Some thoughts that come to your mind.

LA: Well, I did mention a few things...

AP: Yeah.

LA:... that you did not ask me...

AP: That's right.

LA: ...because I thought they might have been apropos to the situation.

AP: Yes, they were.

LA: Uh, I remember one thing.

AP: Uh huh.

LA: It's very interesting. I may have been around 14, 15 years old. And, I was still living in Munhall. At that time, when Rosh Hashanah came around, or Yom Kippur, and this happened in any small town, it seems as though half the town was closed down. There were so many Jewish people there in business. Now, this one particular year for some reason or other, a number of the elderly Jewish people died. Now, they're all going to die eventually, some die today, tomorrow, next week, next month and so on, but in a comparatively short period of time, there was an unusual number of them that had died. And now, the older Jewish people, who were somewhat superstitious, felt that there was something wrong. That there was some punishment from God. They actually believed it. And they went to see Rabbi Goldberg. Rabbi Goldberg was supposed to come up with some kind of a prayer. What happened after that, I don't know, but I do know that it was considered an event from God, that something had gone wrong cause so many of them had died in a comparatively short time. And they felt something had to be done about it. Or whether there's a prayer for it, I don't know whether there was or not, I don't know what happened. But, I do remember that situation very well. As a matter of fact, now that I think about it again, I'm sorry that I didn't follow through. But, at that age, I would not have thought of it.

AP: You don't think of it...

LA: I do remember the situation.

AP: Huh. Did your parents believe that?

LA: My father was very skeptical about a lot of these things. He was very well learned. But he was not, he believed fully, completely in God, but he was not extremely superstitious. Uh, no, he did not talk about it. No, I would say no. He was not superstitious. Especially considering his age and the time.

AP: But a lot of the people obviously were.

LA: Well, when you say a lot, out of the whole community, I don't know...

AP: Some...That's right...

LA:...how many there were...

AP: Enough...

LA: There was about, enough brought it up that they went to see the rabbi. Now, I'm sure they were only a small percentage. I'm sure it wasn't the whole group going up to the synagogue. There were probably a few of them. They probably got a few more and brought the idea up and they went to see the Rabbi. What the outcome was, I don't know.

AP: That is an interesting story. And, it's another story I've never heard.

LA: Well, I'm sure there are a lot of stories I haven't heard, either! Well, that's right, you...

AP: You're a good story teller!

LA: Well, OK. That was an incident. How would you like to go to the synagogue on a Friday night? And, on your way to the synagogue, you pass a place where there is some kind of a hall, a meeting hall. And who's holding a meeting, and walking across the street, a whole group of Ku Klux Klanners!

AP: Goodness!

LA: Right on Ninth Avenue and Dixon!

AP: Really!

LA: Yes! They would have a meeting there once and a while. And they would go from that hall, right across the street there was a church.

AP: Uh huh.

LA: But whatever church that was, it was not a Catholic church. It was not a normal Protestant church. Whatever kind of a church it was, I do not know. But, I do remember every so often the Ku Klux Klan, in their regalia, would march from that hall to the church or from the church to the hall. And that happened occasionally while I was on my way to the synagogue.

AP: Oh my. Were you scared?

LA: It was a situation not so much being frightened, but bewilderment. What was it all about? Who are they? At that age, now I am talking about a very young age. Maybe 8 or 9.

AP: Yeah.

LA: At the most, it would be 10. I didn't know anything about the Ku Klux Klan. I know I heard of the name, and here they were. With their white robes and their hoods.

AP: Well, like when you were going, were you with your father? When you were walking, were you walking with your father?

LA: No. Walking alone.

AP: Oh, alone.

LA: Yeah. I was walking alone. Oh, I would feel uncomfortable, there isn't any question about it!

AP: Yeah. That would seem very...

LA: Yeah.

AP: I didn't realize that the Klan was over in that area in the state.

LA: Well, this is around 1922.

AP: Uh huh.

LA: In other words, I would have been about 8 years old. I say 22. 22 or 23.

AP: Yeah. Around then.

LA: That's right.

AP: Huh. So they were active then. There were not black people living up there then were there?

LA: There were some black people that lived in Munhall, but most of them lived in Homestead. But, uh, but black people, they, uh, they were accepted like anybody else. There wasn't any concern about the black people.

AP: So the Klan was right out there.

LA: No, I remember that very well. I can picture it right now. I can see the building, I can see the church. I can see them marching two by two.

AP: That must have been quite an experience.

LA: They were there.

AP: Boy! In fact I suspect it was quite an experience for an adult!

LA: Yeah, yeah. They were there.

AP: Do you remember any adults talking about them?

LA: What's that?

AP: Do you remember the grownups talking about Klan?

LA: No, not too much. Because they had seen it before, themselves. No, there wasn't too much talk about it.

AP: So you don't remember your parents being really...

LA: No. No, no.

AP: ...upset by that. Or anything like that?

LA: No.

AP: Do you know if your father experienced any anti-Semitism in his business dealings at all?

LA: Not overtly. He was highly respected. Peculiarly, my father came from Romania. He knew how to speak Romanian. He could speak Slovak, Polish, and so on. And not too far from him, lived another Jewish gentleman. He was from Hungary. And he knew how to speak Hungarian very well. Now, these immigrants, they came over after the First World War. They were the Slovaks, the Polish, the Hungarians, the Russians, and so on. They would have problems. The Slovaks, the Polish, and the Russians would come to see my father for advice. And the Hungarians would go to see Mr. Schermer.

AP: Huh.

LA: For advice. So, uh, as far as I could tell, they were highly respected, both of them were highly respected. I never knew of any problem that was involved any way at all, where they were concerned.

AP: Well that's interesting, and obviously the people who came to them held...

LA: They held them in respect.

AP: Yeah, they held them in high enough regard...

LA: Oh yeah. Sure, sure. Because well, my father was a pretty good philosopher. He, he was pretty good.

AP: So the rabbi strain stayed with him a little bit. So, I guess your memories of living in that area are somewhat mixed. Um, are some of them fond?

LA: Where we lived, ourselves, most of them spoke English. There were a few of them that couldn't. I'm talking now about, the gentiles. Christians.

AP: Mm-hmm.

LA: There were a few of them who didn't speak English, but the ones I'm talking about who couldn't speak English, they were the ones who lived up in Whitiker and Homeville and up further on the Hill. They were the ones that worked both in the mill, and they also had a large back yard where they had chickens.

AP: Uh huh.

LA: Not too many of them had a cow, but some of them had a cow. Or some of them had a horse and wagon. But, uh, no I never heard of anything ever being said in the store, in my father's store, that would have been anti-Semitic or derogatory in any way at all. Never.

AP: So, your parents were generally...

LA: As a matter of fact, as a matter of fact, you heard from the Jews than you did from the others. Cause if you got, not Mr. Schermer, but others, Hungarian Jews looked down upon the Russian Jews.

AP: Mm-hmm.

LA: And the Russian Jews looked down upon the other Jews. There was more, sometimes, antagonism among them then there were among the people about whom I was just speaking. And Jewish people. Now, you would be surprised how much they would forgo. I can remember a Hungarian Jew would, "Oh, you were the God damned Russian!" Meaning Russian Jew.

AP: Meaning Russian Jew.

LA: Sure, they were a low-class Jew.

AP: Huh. In that little community.

LA: Of course, where we were, there were not, uh, I can't remember any German Jews. But you usually hear that the German Jews consider themselves being in a higher social strata than the Hungarians, the Russians, the Romanians, or the Polish.

AP: Exactly.

LA: Oh, they were, they had a better opportunity for education. There's no doubt about it.

AP: And they came earlier than generally speaking.

LA: Yes. Yes, they did.

AP: So, your parents, as you were saying, I guess generally, um, had a comfortable life. They were satisfied being in that area, then?

LA: Oh yeah. Yeah.

AP: And you, yourself, when you think about those years in Homestead, or in Munhall I guess.

LA: Well, you see, everything was alright, you know sometimes, an individual doesn't know what it's like or how he's living until he lives somewhere else.

AP: That's true.

LA: I assumed that I was living a normal life. But be the situation that existed. It wasn't until after I had gone and I had learned that there are other ways in which a person could have existed. Because even among Christian people themselves, they were critical of each other, and found fault with each other, and sometimes to a very great degree.

AP: Mm-hmm.

LA: There weren't any question about that at all. And maybe in their mind, they thought, so what's the big deal? So I call you zhid So what? I don't know. All I know is that I used to hear it every day and it got to the point I didn't like it. But, you would assume that's the way it is.

AP: Yeah.

LA: I didn't know any better at the time. With what could I compare it?

AP: That's right. That was your experience. That was your life.

LA: See, there was nothing I could compare it to. All I know is that things were going along alright. We got along OK, other than that.

AP: Do you still have...Did you maintain any contacts with that Jewish community after you left?

LA: The community really didn't exist as such very much. Some of them moved out to California. Some moved into Squirrel Hill, some moved into East End. Um, but I see a few of them. Of course I see my cousin Max. He lives out in White Oak. But actually, no, I see some occasionally, and I say hello with them, I talk with them, but there is not too much...well, as years go by, you know, you make other acquaintances, other friendships. You have other situations where you're involved more and more with other people. And, um, the older associations seem to fade away. They don't die, they just fade away.

AP: Well, this was a wonderful interview! You had a lot...I said this was a wonderful interview!

LA: Well, I don't know if it was or not, because I never had experience with an interview before.

AP: Well, you had wonderful stories to tell, I'm really glad...

LA: Well, I don't know if they are or not. You asked me questions and you're putting me in a position where I can remember a few things every once and a while.

AP: Well, I'm glad, I mean it's wonderful...

LA: Sure, just like that last one with the fact that so many Jewish people all died!

AP: Mm-hmm, yes, I mean...

LA: So close together, now that was a little unusual story, but...

AP: Exactly, exactly...

LA: That actually happened.

AP: Yes.

LA: And I suppose if I were to think about it, not only I, but anyone, in any synagogue, who had been involved in any one synagogue for a long time would have many, many stories to tell.

AP: Mm-hmm. But, they're different.

LA: Oh, sure, sure. They'll all be different and each one itself could create interest.

AP: That's right. That's right.

LA: See.

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END OF TAPE TWO, SIDE ONE

TAPE TWO, SIDE TWO

AP: A few days after Mr. Averbach's initial interview, he telephoned me to share additional information that he had remembered after the interview was over and that he thought might be of interest.

He talked about that fact that he remembered a very active Boy Scout troop at the synagogue, number two, in fact, that he had been a member of. He remembered that the

Sunday school was so active that it used to sponsor a very popular annual picnic, and he talked about the open trucks with benches that congregants provided so that the children could simply sit in these trucks as they went to various places such as Piney Forks, Locust Grove, Jefferson Beach, which he pointed out wasn't really a beach, or Rainbow Gardens, popular places for outings at the time.

He also talked about the fact that he remembered that Purim was a very big event in the schul when he was a boy and that they had a ball, actually a fancy dress ball, that was held at a place called the Turner Hall. He said that the Turner Hall was a settlement type of house, of place, that was owned by the German community in the Homestead area. And that he remembered that on occasion its facility was even used for a Jewish wedding. As he remembered, that building, which was on Fifth Street, remained in use until the advent of the Nazis and the changes that occurred within the German community at that time, probably in conjunction with the fact that that also was the time of the Depression.

The mention of the German community in Homestead led to a conversation about the nature of that community as he remembered it. What Mr. Auerbach remembers was that at the time of the advent of the Nazis, prior to Kristallnacht, that the American German community's sympathy for the Nazi regime was apparent. At least the community that he was aware of. He actually talked about the more prevalent German communities being in the Northside of Pittsburgh, up East Ohio Street, and Troy Hill, Millvale and Etna, and said that he recalled German military training, paramilitary, I guess you would call it, occurring there during, sometime, during that period.

He again alluded to the fact that at that time the situation about the treatment of the Jews in Germany as he recalled it was becoming known in the United States and he remembered the American German community making apologies or explanations for that treatment in terms of the nature of the Jewish community there and its perceived problems within the larger German society as Germans perceived it.

What he also said about the German community in Homestead was that on the whole he did not recall that they worked as laborers at the same level as the Slavs who were in the mill, they tended to be in higher positions in the mill when they were there. And in fact, he recalled that a man who began to work with him and who advanced far above him, when he began to work for U.S. Steel, was in fact a German, or a person of German background. He thought that the Scotch-Presbyterian leadership of the mills was, felt a greater affinity at least of those Germans who were Lutherans, than they felt for the Catholics and Orthodox populations of that, that were the Slavs.

The other subject that Mr. Auerbach recalled that some of the smaller communities, or small communities like Homestead, had more than one synagogue, not necessarily one being Orthodox and another being Conservative or Reformed, but rather of the different ethnic backgrounds. That is to say that one of them might be Hungarian Orthodox synagogue and another would be the Russian Orthodox synagogue. He thought that one of the strengths of the Homestead community was the fact that for whatever the disagreements or the dislikes that existed among the members of those various



backgrounds, that they did all come together into one schul, so that they, there was no splintering of the community and in the end that it saw itself primarily as a united Jewish community rather than a fragmented one.

Those were the general recollections that Mr. Averbach called to share and I think it was worth having him record it again on the machine since he didn't care to have yet another visit just to put them on, but did want to add them to the record as he reflected on additional thoughts that he had had about his memories in Homestead.

To reiterate this is Ann Sheckter Powell, having conducted an oral history interview as well as a telephone interview with Lou Averbach regarding the Homestead Hebrew Congregation Oral History Project of the Western Pennsylvania Jewish Archives of the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania. The original interview took place in Mr. Averbach's living room, of course the subsequent one was on the telephone.