

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

Rauh Jewish Archives
Library and Archives Division
Senator John Heinz History Center
Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania
1212 Smallman Street
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania 15222

Name of Interviewer: Ann Sheckter Powell

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.... Indicates run-on sentence

Transcription:

Anne Sheckter Powell: (tape cuts in) Western Pennsylvania Historical Society Jewish Archives, on September the second, interviewing

Allen Grinberg: Allen Grinberg

AP: To begin, at least at the beginning, can you tell me which part of your family first came to the United States, how far back that went.

AG: Well my father came in 1893. He came to Homestead.

AP: He came to Homestead, directly.

AG: Yeah.

AP: Now do you know why he came to Homestead?

AG: I think he, I'm not sure, I'm not sure of the exact sequence of time. But some of the brothers, one brother was in McKeesport, one brother was in East End, and one brother was in Homestead, and he became partners with a brother in Homestead. And first, they, he started out as a peddler, there's a, I forgot to show you that, and he started out as a peddler then he opened a little candy store. And he was just a very small man, and they used to call him all kinds of anti-Semitic remarks, and he just couldn't take it so he opened this little candy store and he became a partner with his brother Maurice Grinberg on Eighth Avenue near Dixon Street. They had a ladies ready-to-wear and a houseware store.

AP: Huh. So let's see your father was Meyer.

AG: Meyer Grinberg.

AP: And did your grandparents also come?

AG: I'm not sure quite of the sequence. My grandfather lived with us. We lived at 335 Twelfth Avenue. And we lived there for, until 1945. And my father passed away in '42. My grand, the only grandparent I ever slightly remember is the grandfather that lived with us, but all the other ones had passed away before I was born.

AP: Now where did your father come from?

AG: He came from Minsk. As far as I know. We really have not too much knowledge of the past history of the family in Europe, because when my father came here because of all the anti-Semitic things, he wanted to learn English, and we talked very little Jewish at the house. And he became very fluent. My mother was born in Panther Hollow, in

Pittsburgh, so she was an American citizen from the beginning, and we talked mostly English in the house so that he could learn English. So my knowledge of Yiddish is pretty limited.

AP: And the stories have a way of getting lost as well. So he came directly, it was 1893.

AG: He came a year after the strike, the Homestead Steel Strike.

AP: Did he ever talk about that at all? Did he ...

AG: Not really. It's cause they came afterwards. As I said, they were what you called greenhorns in those days, they didn't know much of what was going on, but they came, everybody came over as far as I know all at, I never remember ever talking about anybody who was left in Europe.

AP: But his experiences as you remember it were that immediately when he became a peddler he was encountering anti-Semitism in that area.

AG: Well I guess young kids and so forth that were on the street. I don't think it was anything that was real serious, I think it was just name-calling, and I guess they called all the people who couldn't speak English very well by some anti-Semitic remark.

AP: He was a young man I take it when he first came.

AG: Yeah.

AP: Did his brother already have a store, do you know?

AG: No. I'm not, very real clear on the...

AP: So they sort of cast about for one thing or another as a business until they came upon these housewares.

AG: One was a, it was a double store, one was a housewares store and one was ladies ready-to-wear, and when they split up, I don't exactly remember what year it was either, my father took the housewares and moved, and my uncle kept the ladies ready-to-wear.

AP: And that's how it continued, that there were these two Grinberg stores.

AG: Yeah. There was two Grinberg stores in Homestead all the time.

AP: And each of them was run separately from that point on.

AG: Yeah.

AP: Let's see, I saw by the ketubah that your parents got married in 1903, and then they came, your mother came...

AG: As far as I know they moved right to Homestead. They moved right into the house and they were there for all those years.

AP: So that was the house on Twelfth Avenue.

AG: Yeah.

AP: So they weren't living behind the store at any time.

AG: No. no, they lived up on Twelfth Avenue. The synagogue was on Tenth Avenue, and we lived on Twelfth Avenue.

AP: So you were close.

AG: And my uncle and his wife and family lived on Twelfth Avenue too, so the two of us lived there for many years together.

AP: Now let's see, you were born when?

AG: I was born on August 20, 1917.

AP: 1917. And you already had three brothers and sisters?

AG: I had three brothers and two sisters.

AP: Who, all of whom were older than you?

AG: I had two brothers and two sisters who were all older than I was, I was the youngest.

AP: You were born in '17 and then one of your sisters died shortly thereafter.

AG: In '18, during the war.

AP: And she died of influenza, that huge epidemic.

AG: Yeah.

AP: Now your father was not called to that, he already had a family so he was already far enough along in his life that he was not drafted for that.

AG: No. No, he was, he must have been about twenty, let's see he died in '42 and he was sixty-two years old, so he must have been about, must have been about thirteen or fourteen when he came over.

AP: Yeah. It's amazing how they got started so young really assumed responsibilities.

AG: Yeah.

AP: Were your parents observant?

AG: To a certain extent, we kept a kosher house. We didn't eat traife, I guess until I went back to college, and we used to have most of our meals at home. I mean the store was on Eighth Avenue we used to, my father and all would come home for lunch, I mean there were no restaurant in particular he could eat in.

AP: Someone said something about a kosher deli. Do you have any memory of that?

AG: There was a deli, but it was not a kosher...

AP: Oh it wasn't kosher, I see.

AG: The closest was Miller's Delicatessen on Eighth Avenue.

AP: So it was sort of what they call kosher style, rather than really kosher.

AG: Style, yeah.

AP: So he always came home for lunch.

AG: Either that or my mother would take a basket down to him.

AP: So you really needed to live fairly near your business in order to make that possible.

AG: Actually there was a streetcar that ran up Amity Street that we could take up to Twelfth Avenue. It went up Amity Street up to Homestead Park.

AP: Oh so there was streetcar tracks that went all the way up Amity. Hm, I didn't know that. I certainly don't have a memory of that. Do you remember when you started to go to cheder, I assume you were sent to cheder.

AG: I don't remember the exact year.

AP: I mean when you were a little boy.

AG: Probably about nine or ten years old, and the cheder was, used to go after school. And first you'd play a little ball out in the alley out behind the synagogue and then you

would go to cheder for an hour or two. It was an old-time cheder. You didn't learn anything except how to read. You didn't learn any of the history or anything. But then we went to Sunday school, too, we had a very active Sunday school. The synagogue was a very active place in those days.

AP: Did you feel very involved in it beyond the fact of going to Hebrew school and Sunday school.

AG: Yeah you had to. First of all there was no cars, automobiles to ride around in, and all your activities were probably in Homestead. You were kind of tied into so called ghetto, but it wasn't really a ghetto. But the fact is if you didn't have an automobile you couldn't get around, you had to take streetcars. In fact, even when I went to Pitt in '35, we used to take the streetcar from Homestead to the university.

AP: Your father had a, I saw he had a truck or whatever you would call that.

AG: Delivery cart, yeah.

AP: Did he drive?

AG: Did he drive? No.

AP: So he hired a driver.

AG: He had a driver, yeah. No, he never drove. He never drove a car. When we bought the car my brothers used to drive it.

AP: It was unusual I think, even delivery things were...

AG: Not too much in those days. Actually they used to call up the store and want everything delivered if it was the smallest item it was no problem delivering in those days.

AP: Oh so they used to take everything, if you wanted a tea kettle or whatever...

AG: Or whatever you wanted.

AP: A handheld radio or whatever it was.

AG: There weren't very many radios in those days. There were washtubs. You're losing your perspective.

AP: Did your uncle also deliver or did they use that truck for everything.

AG: No, they had a ladies ready-to-wear store. They didn't deliver.

AP: So women didn't get their clothes delivered, it was more of just the housewares things. Did your mother do all her shopping for her kosher foods and whatever also in Homestead?

AG: Yeah. Well we used to ride to Squirrel Hill once and a while, in later years when Murray Avenue became active as a Jewish food center, we used to ride there once and a while, but not very often. There were two kosher butchers in Homestead, there was a bakery, a Jewish bakery, so that everything was pretty much handled right in Homestead. Once and a while we used to ride over to Squirrel Hill to the bakery or some deli place to get something unusual.

AP: So generally speaking, you stayed pretty much in that Homestead area for all the things that you did. Your activities were in the shul, and your purchases within that community, and it was pretty self-contained.

AG: Yeah, except for clothes, most of the times we had to go downtown to get suits and so forth.

AP: Oh! There wasn't a men's clothing store here?

AG: Well there were, but for some reason or other my mother used to like McCreary's. If you remember the department store McCreary's in Pittsburgh.

AP: No, I don't.

AG: They went out of business many years ago.

AP: So when you went for things like that...

AG: For a suit or something. But for ordinary clothing and everything we got it pretty much in...

AP: Your shoes and everything.

AG: All that other stuff was all gotten in Homestead.

AP: And she did her own, she patronized your uncle for her own...

AG: My mother liked to shop in small stores, even small grocery stores. If it was a neighborhood store she liked to shop in it. She was not one to shop in a big, big, of course there were not any real big stores in those days, but she liked the local man.

AP: So she was really loyal to that, that whole kind of a way of life altogether. What about holidays? Did you have Seder?

AG: Oh yes. We celebrated all the holidays. We had two Seders, we celebrated two days of Rosh Hashanah, and we always, everything was done right at the house. We always had people, extra people in, especially for Seders. We always had big Seders at home and they were, they were lots of fun. In fact, all, most all of our family continued to have, even after they were married, to have big Seders and as a family. And the same with Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. We never celebrated much on Sukkos, the sukkah was at the shul, but uh...

AP: I was wondering about that, whether anybody ever could have a sukkah.

AG: They had a sukkah at the shul.

AP: What about things like Purim and Hanukkah was there very much that went on for that?

AG: Hanukkah was not that big of a gift giving as it has become in recent years. I don't remember anything. We used to get Hanukkah gelt, but that was about the extent of it. And Purim, I guess the kids used to get dressed up for Sunday school, but I really don't remember too much about it.

AP: So you don't remember it being a big festival, or anything special going on...

AG: No, no. Only thing I remember are the main holidays that were big.

AP: How was Simchas Torah? Was there much going on?

AG: Oh yeah. There was always, any holiday that was a holiday was celebrated. I must say that we didn't always go to all of them but we went to most.

AP: Did you go around---

AG: Sure. With an apple and a candle on top.

AP: A candle! I knew sooner or later I was going to find somebody who remembered the candle.

AG: There was a candle. Always had a candle, I was always afraid there was going to be a fire.

AP: Yeah I think that's how they got rid, how the candles disappeared, and you ended up with nothing but the flag and the apple.

AG: Flashlights they use now.

AP: What?

AG: They use flashlights at B'nai Israel.

AP: Oh really?

AG: Some of the kids bring flashlights.

AP: Oh so there still is that idea of having something with the light, but they do it with a flashlight instead. Well you're the first person who remembered the candle and I almost hesitated to ask because I thought it was just my very own memory, but at last I found a person who remembers the candle. But other kinds of activities, you had other kinds of activities you were saying at shul.

AG: Oh yeah, my mother was active in this, in the, they didn't call it a Sisterhood in those days, they called it, I don't remember, Ladies Aid Society. She was very active in that and of course all the women in Homestead were active in that. Of course my father was active in the synagogue, but he was not a very expressive, outgoing sort a person, he never became in officer or anything, but he used to attend the meetings and we went to shul pretty regularly.

AP: How many times did you go? Did you, you went beyond the regular...

AG: Yeah we used to go for all the holidays and then sometimes on Shabbos.

AP: Uh huh. And your father went also?

AG: Yeah.

AP: Was he able to leave his business?

AG: Oh yeah, we always had help in the store.

AP: Oh I see, so sometimes he would go.

AG: Oh yeah he took vacations and everything else. We still go to services on Saturday.

AP: So it's a tradition maintained all through the years.

AG: Yeah.

AP: You said that the synagogue was also sort of the center of social activity I guess for the children as well?

AG: Yes. There were not any clubs or anything. The only thing there was, was Boy Scouts. And the women always had dinners, and there was always some social, you know a few social events during the year.

AP: And all the children were included.

AG: Always.

AP: When they had the dinners...

AG: It was everybody.

AP: I see. So you really had a feeling that you were...

AG: Because in those days we never went out very much for dinner because there were no kosher restaurants.

AP: So you needed that, those dinners...

AG: They were always well supported.

AP: I hadn't realized that that's one of the other parts of the key to their successes, which is that they were very important for all those people who kept kosher.

AG: Yeah.

AP: Do you have any memories of any particular rabbis or teachers or whatever who stand out in your mind positively, negatively..., any way at all?

AG: I don't think so. I mean I don't think there were any of them that were really outstanding that made a real, most of them were just good teachers and rabbis, and most of the time they spoke in Hebrew which a lot of us didn't understand and they would, and in later years they started to give the sermons in English. But I did not understand Hebrew, we were only taught to read, we were not taught the translation.

AP: Well did the congregation understand the sermons?

AG: Most of them, they spoke in Yiddish.

AP: Oh I see.

AG: So most of them understood it.

AP: So when you were a boy, a younger boy, you remember these rabbis giving their talks in Yiddish.

AG: And the congregation was always, as they are today, critical of the rabbis you know they were never, never quite satisfied with any of them. Things have not changed over the centuries.

AP: Did you have any sense of any rabbis here that were particularly or better liked than most, or more disliked than most.

AG: The only one I remember is Rabbi Widom, who was a real, real rabbi, but I was very young when he passed away, so I don't remember too much about him, but I remember my parents talking about him. But the other ones that came would always stay for a few years and travel on, you know they were always looking for bigger and better congregations. But, I don't remember any of them that were real outstanding in my mind.

AP: You said you remember your parents talking about Rabbi Widom, in, in what ways?

AG: Well he was, he was a real, I guess the real thing to say was that he was a real mensch. And you could talk to him and you could, you know, confide in him. But that's about as much as I remember about it, because he died when I was very young.

AP: Were your other rabbis your teachers when you went to Hebrew...

AG: Oh yeah, they were always teachers.

AP: So the rabbis were the teachers who...

AG: ... additional teachers. You know, you had Sunday school which was the big thing. You had assemblies and you always had a principal and most of the teachers in those days were young people, they were not professional teachers, they were children of the congregants. And everybody knew everybody so it used to be more of a social Sunday than anything else.

AP: So did you enjoy...

AG: Yeah.

AP: Did you find that was the more enjoyable thing to go to?

AG: Yeah, but you have to realize that the synagogue in Homestead was, had no private rooms. We would sit in one corner, and another class would be in another corner, it was rather disruptive, but you learned as much as you could learn. We didn't have private rooms like the school classrooms and so forth. But we all got along and we all lived through it.

AP: Yes. Well you managed to live through however those things go I guess. I sort of lost my train of thought about... Yeah, you went to public school there as well, that was Homestead? Yeah, how were your experiences? You went all the way through?

AG: Yeah.

AP: How were your experiences being a Jewish boy in...

AG: I had really no problem at all. I had good friends who were Gentiles, blacks, and there was no, we were just all going to school and we were all students. And after school we'd play together, play ball together or do other things together. And we had little clubs that we used to participate in, but they were always a mixture of Jews and Gentiles, there was no, we didn't know of any discrimination particularly in those days.

AP: You even mention blacks.

AG: Yeah.

AP: So they were reasonably well integrated into the things that you...

AG: Yeah there were not too many of them and most of them were pretty brilliant. So there was no, there was no discrimination at all.

AP: Did you ever, what about when you took off Jewish holidays, did they ever present any kind of a problem?

AG: Never. No, there was no problem whatsoever. Cause a lot of, some of the teachers were Jewish, and they had to take off, too.

AP: Oh so there were Jewish teachers there in those days.

AG: Oh yeah. Yeah.

AP: Did they live in the community?

AG: Yeah. Some of them were very close friends. Friedlanders, I don't remember who the other ones were, but there were several Jewish teachers in Homestead. Especially in the high school.

AP: And that, is Friedlander one of these teachers?

AG: Yeah. They were a big family in Homestead, too. They had a dress store right next to our final store.

AP: Your final store was in a different location?

AG: Yeah, it was at 219 East Eighth Avenue.

AP: Did they move because they needed a bigger location?

AG: Yeah. That was, I guess that was around 1920. The business moved up from around Dixon Street up to around between Anne and Amity and that's when my dad bought a building moved up there.

AP: Oh so I see, at that point he really settled himself into that and owned the property as well so he could do what he would with it.

AG: Yeah.

AP: What about things like Christmas, did you, how did you feel about, I'm assuming that was a...

AG: Well, Christmas with us was a good day, because we sold a lot of Christmas decorations and everything, and by the time Christmas day come around we were ready to relax. Because the stores used to be open 'til nine, ten o'clock at night and I mean...

AP: All the time?

AG: No during the Christmas rush and we used to, the stores were not open on Sunday, but we used to have to go down and work on Sunday to get the stores in shape. The stores were, in those days, were really very busy and we carried all kinds of Christmas decoration and gifts and all the things that they needed for the holidays so when Christmas came around we were ready to relax. The same with any other the other ones, Easter all of them are always big business holidays.

AP: Yeah, let me ask you two things about that. I take it that you didn't feel yourself, I mean all those days, those Christmas celebrations and whatever, did you feel yourself left out or...

AG: No.

AP: And I take it the other things from what you said was you were working in the store when you got old enough...

AG: It was not a question of when we were old enough, it was, we all went down to the store even when I was a young little, sometimes after school before I went to cheder, I would go down to see my father and spend a few minutes in the store. But we all worked in the store, we did something, even if it was just unpacking crates or something, we all worked in the store.

AP: Oh I see, so you really...

AG: Everybody, my brothers all worked in the store, my sister, everybody worked in the store they had no outside jobs. It was really a family business.

AP: And that was simply what you assumed was, was what you would be involved with. I did want to ask you, I remembered the question so I'm going to jump back and then I'll go ahead, about services. Do you remember going to services in shul?

AG: Sure. They were strictly Orthodox services, they were not Conservative, there was no English and the services were strictly in Hebrew.

AP: Did the men lay tefillin as well, I mean were they that Orthodox?

AG: Well they lay tefillin when they, if they went to morning minyan. But not on holidays.

AP: Oh, that's right. Did they teach you lay tefillin?

AG: Oh sure. Before you were bar mitzvah, you had to learn everything. You had to learn to put the tefillin on. The tallis, and everything that went with it.

AP: So that was all part of your...

AG: You learned it, you learned what you had to learn.

AP: You learned, to sort of lead a service?

AG: No. I was not very good at it, I have to admit.

AP: Were there any girls in your Hebrew school class?

AG: In the Hebrew school, I don't remember. There were girls in the Sunday school class, but I don't remember the Hebrew. I don't remember, because most of the classes were rather small, I don't remember any...

AP: Do you remember if any of your sisters went, or your sister?

AG: I don't think my sister went. She went to Sunday school, but I don't think she went to Hebrew school.

AP: Could your mother read Hebrew?

AG: Yes, uh huh.

AP: So your mother could, but maybe your sister could not.

AG: I don't think she could.

AP: So she just went upstairs and sat with your mother.

AG: Yeah.

AP: And really wasn't able to participate in any way.

AG: I don't the kids, any of us, really participated too much. Most of us were outside of the synagogue on the steps or something, coming and going.

AP: Was everybody in there for ---...

AG: Yeah, oh sure.

AP: So, so there were times of really serious parts of the service when you were in there.

AG: My father was rather a modern sort of person, he tried to, my father and my mother both, they tried very desperately to make it a more Conservative synagogue where the men and family would sit together, but the people that were, the majority of the people were not in favor of that. Finally they did allow the women to sit downstairs in the back of the synagogue, but we never went to the synagogue as a family, I mean we never sat together as a family. In those days you bought your own seats, so we'd have two or three seats for my brothers, I was too young so I would just sit near them or close to them. But that was the only trouble, we never went and prayed as a family.

AP: Together, mhm. And that was something you family...

AG: They thought it should be that way, of course that was when Conservative Judaism was just starting to come into favor.

AP: Did people ever sit together for other kinds of events, like for weddings?

AG: Oh yeah, no for weddings, anything, it was just the service that they sat apart.

AP: So it was just for the formal services that they sat separately.

AG: Yeah, because there was a balcony and the women sat up in the balcony.

AP: But if there was for example a wedding, then everybody just came in and sat down.

AG: They sat together.

AP: So it was not (tape cuts out)

END OF SIDE ONE, TAPE ONE

SIDE TWO, TAPE ONE

AP: (tape cuts in) when you graduated from high school because you mentioned that you had gone to Pitt in 1935.

AG: 1935, right.

AP: So that was sort of the edges of the depression, was it?

AG: It was the Depression.

AP: Yeah, okay. But you went to school in spite of that.

AG: Yeah. Well you have to realize that school was only one hundred and fifty dollars a year. Seventy-five dollars a semester. And we had a, we had a nice store in Homestead, and I guess my father made a livable living during the Depression although business was very bad, but as I said, we were all family so we didn't have really too many employees that we would just run it ourselves.

AP: So he was able to sort of ride out the depression, maintain the store, and at the same, even to the point where he could spare you money to go, to start school.

AG: It was not easy. But actually I was the first one of my family who graduated from college so, they wanted someone to be accomplished.

AP: Were you the first one who went?

AG: No they went, but they never graduated. They always went back into the store to work.

AP: Why was that?

AG: I don't know. I guess in those days, college education was really not that important. They were gonna work in our retail business and it was more important that they get back, though some of them went to night school classes and did different things, but no real long-term education.

AP: Do you think your parents were disappointed that they didn't finish?

AG: No I don't think. I don't think it was that important in those days.

AP: But they wanted you to.

AG: Well yeah, they, I mean I guess it got to the point where there were enough in the store. I really don't know the reason why, but that's the way it was.

AP: What did you study when you went?

AG: Business admin what else?

AP: So you were going to... at the store?

AG: What else?

AP: Did your sister also go at all to college?

AG: Yeah she went to college, she went to a night school for a couple years, and she went to some of these business colleges, you know always took some classes but never the full formal four years of college.

AP: and then you went to the army in, what year was that?

AG: I went to the army in '41. I was drafted before the war started.

AP: Alright, so you had already had a chance to graduate, by the time...

AG: I graduated in '39.

AP: Right, and did you come back and work in the business when you graduated?

AG: Yeah. Absolutely.

AP: So, and then you were drafted in '41 before we declared war.

AG: Yeah. And I got out, I think it was, I was in for four and a half years.

AP: Was that the first time you, that wasn't the first time you ate outside your home.

AG: No, no when I was at Pitt I ate out.

AP: Yeah so that was the beginning of when you did. When you were in high school, did you, what did you do in, you had a mixed social life you were saying that you had non-Jewish friends and Jewish friends. What about dating?

AG: There wasn't much dating because there were no Jewish girls. It was very limited. I don't think in those days we dated when we were in high school anyhow very much.

AP: There wasn't that same kind of a thing so that...

AG: Yeah.

AP: Did you do more socializing with Jewish people when you were in high school than you did when you were in the lower grades?

AG: I don't think so. Really because there weren't that many Jewish boys or girls in my classes.

AP: So the synagogue didn't become the primary source of your friendships or your social life or whatever.

AG: No, no.

AP: Did you belong to the, that Boy Scout troop?

AG: No, that troop I didn't belong to. Cause that was, in later years I did, but I guess, yeah I guess it was, I was thinking of B'nai Israel, really, because my kids belong to the troop in B'nai Israel, when we moved out that way. Yeah, I guess I was with the Boy Scouts for a number of years. Boy Scouts were big in those days.

AP: Oh they were?

AG: Yeah, they were very big. We went, oh that's right, we had a Jewish cook up at the Boy Scout camp. The camp was on Lake Erie, and for a couple years we took up and had kosher food for the Boy Scouts. That's when we were, a lot of us were going up. But we only went up for two weeks, we didn't, there were no extended vacations.

AP: So this was all the Jewish Boy Scout kids came together, or was this that they brought kosher food for those Boy Scouts who happened to be Jewish.

AG: To be Jewish. They had their own kitchen.

AP: Oh I see, so you were there with non-Jewish kids as well, so they had special food for you.

AG: Yeah.

AP: What about any Jewish organizations when you were in high school?

AG: There was none. There was nothing.

AP: All right so then you were in the army. Did you come back to Homestead?

AG: I was married when I was in the army. I got married in '42.

AP: Well did you marry a woman from this area?

AG: Pittsburgh, yeah. From East End.

AP: How did you meet her?

AG: At Pitt. We were in, we dated for our four years at Pitt, and we were going together when I went to the army then in 1942 we were married. We were married fifty years, gonna be fifty-one years. So, I come back, and we lived with her folks in East End for a while, then we bought a house, we bought a duplex on Highland Avenue. Her mother and father lived downstairs, and we lived upstairs.

AP: So as soon as you began your married life you moved into the city.

AG: Yeah.

AP: Would you have considered living in Homestead at all, was that an option you considered?

AG: I really didn't consider it at all. Because we wanted to raise a family, I didn't think I wanted to raise it in Homestead in those days. Homestead Park and those places were much better, but for some reason or another we landed on North Highland Avenue.

AP: But Homestead Park would still have been a more mixed neighborhood...

AG: Oh yeah, very much mixed.

AP: ...than Highland Park was.

AG: Yeah.

AP: So I guess that's sort of what I was asking you. When you decided...

AG: Her family was members of B'nai Israel, so we just fell into it, so to speak.

AP: So you got this Conservative synagogue which I'm assuming you preferred.

AG: Yeah.

AP: And you had a more Jewish neighborhood --- to think about raising your children.

AG: Right. And the school systems were better too in those days. They had better schools in Pittsburgh, than in Homestead.

AP: Oh do you feel your education was inferior to what children...

AG: I don't say it was inferior, but it was not as, I would think that it was not quite as good. I wouldn't say that it's inferior. But I didn't think it was going to be quite as good as the city schools.

AP: When you were growing up there did you have any thoughts that you wished, at that point, that you lived in the city?

AG: I didn't know any better. To be frank.

AP: And your parents stayed there until your father died?

AG: My father died in '42, my father died while I was in the army.

AP: While you were in the army.

AG: Yeah he died while I was in the army. My mother kept the house and my sister and her husband lived there, and when we came back, we bought this duplex on Highland Avenue and my mother moved in with us, we sold the house in Homestead and my mother moved in with us.

AP: And that was the end of the, and what about your sister?

AG: Well she had moved out. She moved her family to another home. But my mother was, in Homestead we lived up on Twelfth Avenue there was no, she didn't drive. Then she moved over on Highland Avenue, and she could get around on buses and there was always myself or Edith to drive her someplace, so it was just a lot more convenient.

AP: And what happened to the business when your father died?

AG: Nothing. We just took, boys just took over.

AP: So your brothers...

AG: My brothers ran it.

AP: Did you stay in the business also?

AG: We were all partners, we were, the business was left to the three of us.

AP: Did any of your brothers remain living in Homestead?

AG: No.

AP: So all of you...

AG: One brother lived in Homestead Park for a number of years, then he moved to Squirrel Hill. But my brother Bernard, when he got married he moved to Squirrel Hill.

AP: So one of you moved to Squirrel Hill, one of you moved to East End, and the closest that anybody stayed was in Homestead Park.

AG: Yeah.

AP: Did that brother continue to be a member of the synagogue, the one who lived in Homestead Park?

AG: Yeah. He remained after he moved to Squirrel Hill.

AP: Is that because they felt a real affection to the synagogue?

AG: I don't know, I guess so. It's hard to tell why people do things.

AP: Yeah, that's true.

AG: How much more we got?

AP: I know that you've got to go, and so I think we sort of covered, I think we should take minute to ask if I missed anything or any thoughts that you have that we, that you'd like to add.

AG: I just think that it's very unfortunate that these small towns like Homestead and the rest of them are going down the drain as they are, because they were very pleasant and livable areas to be in. They were not big cities, but people were much closer together and I think that, I think life was a lot more pleasant and easy in those days. I think living today has become rather difficult, and certainly harder for most of the young people than it was for us in those days.

AP: So in spite of the fact that you moved to the city, your sense of having lived in that community was a delight that, as you were saying, its pleasantness and its cohesiveness, did you miss that when you moved to the city?

AG: Not really, because it became so that you could, I worked all day in Homestead and then I, and then we got some other stores for a while I was downtown, so I was moving around, I was getting out of Homestead gradually.

(tape cuts out)

AP: To recapitulate, this has been Anne Sheckter Powell interviewing Allen Grinberg in his apartment in Oakland about his life in the early years of the twentieth century, I guess from 1917, when he was born, to 1942 when he went to the army, in Homestead. This recording is part of the Homestead Hebrew Congregation Oral History Project of the Western Pennsylvania Jewish Archives of the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania. Mr. Grinberg and I have been talking in the dining room of his Oakland apartment, in August of 1993.

END OF SIDE TWO, TAPE ONE