

Transcript of Interview with Belle Green
Homestead Hebrew Congregation Oral History Project
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Start of Tape 1, Side A

Ann Powell: This is Mrs. Ann Powell interviewing Mrs. Belle Green about Homestead.. So, what we would like to do is start way back at the beginning. Were you born in Homestead?

Belle Green: Yes.

AP: You were. So your parents... Was it your parents who originally came to Homestead?

BG: Yes. My father was in business here.

AP: Okay, where did he come from?

BG: Russia.

AP: Did they come directly to Homestead from...?

BG: Uh-huh. Well, my mother first came to Pittsburgh. Her older sister was already here. Is this going on?

AP: Yeah.

BG: And her brothers and sisters all did that; they came to the sister. And from there they started to work and, of course, they married and got homes of their own. And my mother married this man, this Jacob Burechson who was in Homestead, and naturally they lived there, took up residency there. And that's where I was born.

AP: Okay. Your father came there from where?

BG: Russia.

AP: He came from Russia and he came directly to Homestead?

BG: No. He stopped off in Philadelphia because he had an aunt there. And she got him a job as one of the garment workers. And he didn't like that kind of work and he had an uncle who was living – who was already established in Homestead. So he left Philadelphia and came to Homestead. And he joined this uncle. No, he started to work for a bakery.

AP: In Homestead?

BG: In Homestead. The bakery was in Braddock. Markowitz, I think was the name of it.

AP: I heard somebody else say they started to work there.

BG: So he started to work for them. I don't know how long he worked there. And then he went into business with his uncle.

AP: Uh-huh. Doing what?

BG: They had a wholesale produce place and also they sold feed. Because at that time, I didn't like Homeville and those places because there were a lot of chickens and cows and all that sort of thing and they sold hay and they sold stuff and that for the animals.

AP: So, that was sort of... They weren't real farms, I guess, where they?

BG: No, they... Well, they were... They had their own...

AP: People had their own thing?

BG: That's right. That's right.

AP: So this seed and produce place: What was that called?

BG: Homestead Fruit and Produce: that was the name. That was owned by Mr. Samuel Averbach and my father, Jacob Burechson. They were partners.

AP: Oh, I see, okay, because I talked to Mr. Averbach. So that's the other part of the same business.

BG: You mean one of the sons?

AP: Yes, right. So that's one of the...

BG: Did he tell you my father was a partner of his?

AP: He didn't mention... Maybe he mentioned the name, but that didn't ring a bell to me, because I didn't know who...

BG: Who it was.

AP: ...who it was, because...

BG: Who it was, who the person was, because the person if it was a man, because the name just runs with the family.

AP: So they, your parents, met and they married and your mother came to Homestead and you were born in Homestead.

BG: I was born in Homestead.

AP: Were you born in Homestead Hospital?

BG: No. There was no hospital at that time.

AP: You were born at home?

BG: My mother had all three children at home.

AP: Really?

BG: Uh-huh.

AP: Now where were they living at that time?

BG: The first place I remember, they said something about living on Dixon Street, but I don't remember that. But I remember Fifth Avenue in Homestead.

AP: So that was still...

BG: The same vicinity.

AP: The same area.

BG: And we lived there. And from there my parents bought the house on Margaret Street, and we moved there.

AP: Now where were you? There were three of you. Were you the oldest?

BG: I'm the oldest.

AP: You're the oldest. Now what do you have? Sisters?

BG: No. Two brothers.

AP: Two brothers.

BG: Two brothers; one died. Did you know Herb?

AP: No.

BG: My brother Herbie?

AP: No.

BG: He was the youngest. He was sixty years old. He was the one who was in the war.

AP: We use to talk about our relatives a little bit. That's all I know. Now let's see, let's see. Let's go back and think about your memories as a child, growing up in Homestead.

BG: The first thing that hits me, of course, I went to Munhall High School – Munhall School – all the way from first grade to twelfth.

AP: Okay, that was Munhall?

BG: Yeah, that was Munhall. Margaret Street was in Munhall.

AP: But by the time you started school...

BG: I was six years old and I started in first grade, in Munhall, and I graduated in that. That whole school was in a whole square. You didn't have to go to any other buildings. I mean there were buildings, but the whole school was in a square in Munhall.

AP: Oh, from elementary school to high school.

BG: Right through high school, that's right. And I also remember distinctly Sunday school.

AP: Uh-huh.

BG: Did anybody tell you about that?

AP: Only in little bits and pieces.

BG: Well, I distinctly see the picture. Bernard Grinberg was superintendent. Do you have his name? Do you know him?

AP: Uh-huh.

BG: And I distinctly remember we use to have an assembly before we started for the day. And that was in the social hall, and the children were all seated, and there must have been at least a hundred. That's how many we had at that time. And after the assembly, we all went into our respective places where we had classes. Our second principal was... I can't think of his first name, but right now he is Doctor Zangwell.

AP: Uh-huh.

BG: Do you know him?

AP: I remember that name.

BG: Remember that name? He was a redhead. My husband had been in the home before he died. I happened to be there when his doctor came in. Usually I didn't see him, and there it was Doctor Zangwell. And I recognized him immediately, although his hair was gray. And the first thing I said to him was, "Oh, Doctor, where is your red hair?" Well, he almost fell over backwards because he didn't know who I was and was amazed that I remembered. His mother – I remember her. I had seen her and she had bright red hair. That's why the son had it. There had been other children, but I didn't know them. And he, at time, was a student at Pitt.

AP: And he was really a young man.

BG: He was very young. He was very young, and he was just starting out on his education. And he became a doctor. And that's all I can tell you about that.

AP: What happened at these assemblies right before the Sunday school began?

BG: Oh, I don't know.

AP: You just remember; they had, you being there...

BG: They always had an assembly first. And then we went into our classes. If you remember, there were two rooms downstairs off the big room, one class went to one, the other to the other. A couple stayed in the big room on opposite sides, a couple went upstairs. I don't remember how many classes we had. Of course I was in the confirmation class when I was fifteen, and I was confirmed.

I see her in front of me and I can't remember what her single name was. Her married name was Mendelson. She was our teacher, our confirmation class teacher. She was a school teacher also.

AP: And did she sort of stood out in your mind?

BG: Uh-huh. Weiss. Weiss was her name. Regina Weiss.

AP: There you were. Did the rabbi come to the assembly, do you recall?

BG: I don't believe. But by that time we must have had Rabbi Widom, and he wasn't well versed in Americanized religion and education and stuff like that, I don't think.

AP: Oh, did you...?

BG: Sure, he was the one who was our rabbi by that time.

AP: Did he ever speak English?

BG: Well, probably. I know that was he.

AP: Did you ever go to Hebrew School?

BG: Did I go?

AP: Uh-huh.

BG: Went for a little while, and then I had a man came to the house, because he was teaching my brothers – a Mr. Krotin. And I had a little bit with him, but don't ask me what I knew because I know nothing today. I've forgotten all I did know.

AP: But your parents sent you. Was it unusual for a girl to go to Hebrew school in those days?

BG: No, not really. I mean, if you wanted it, you know, he came and went around. I think my sister-in-law had him at her house, too. In fact I think he stayed at her house – the Seiavitches. You know the...

AP: Oh, she's the...

BG: Lil Seiavitch. She's my sister-in-law. She married my brother.

AP: Oh, I see. So yeah, because I think Ruth Seiavitch mentioned that he stayed at their house.

BG: Yeah, that's right, that's right. Yeah, that's a cousin, that's a cousin. That's right.

AP: So this is...

BG: That was her uncle. That was the uncle.

AP: Oh, I see. So Lil was not the daughter, one of the daughters of the man who was the shamus.

BG: No, no. The niece.

AP: The niece.

BG: There were two brothers, the two men.

AP: Was your family Orthodox?

BG: Oh, yes. Yes. My grandmother was seventy years old – one of my grandmothers, my mother's mother – and her brother went to Europe and brought her here, and she lived with my mother. She lived with us.

AP: So they brought even over, your very old...

BG: She was seventy years old. She was a little, short woman.

AP: I guess she was...

BG: She lived with us about twenty years. She was about ninety when she died.

AP: Oh, so this grandmother: You have a long memory of her being around.

BG: Uh-huh.

AP: Was she very, very observant?

BG: Oh yes, certainly. She went to shul. She walked to Margaret Street to the shul every Saturday morning.

AP: She went?

BG: Oh yes. Every Saturday morning.

AP: Did you go with her?

BG: No. She went alone.

AP: Did your brothers go?

BG: No. I don't believe. They were both bar mitzvah there, but I don't believe they went Saturdays. But the grandmother went.

AP: Went by herself. I was just wondering how many women there must have been on a Saturday morning.

BG: Not very many, not very many. And they'd have sat upstairs.

AP: Do you remember the holidays there?

BG: Oh, my lord, it was full. The synagogue was full. Mr. Grossman was in charge of the seating, and he would stand upstairs, and have his plan, his map for the seating. And if you didn't have a ticket, you just didn't have a seat. That's how crowded it was.

AP: So how about you with...? Did you have a seat?

BG: Well, there was room, I guess. I don't remember. I don't remember having special classes downstairs during the services or anything like that. I was there, but I...

AP: Did your mother and your grandmother read Hebrew?

BG: My mother read a little bit. My grandmother did.

AP: So she went all the time. Did she have a prayer book? In another language?

BG: No, no.

AP: Not at all?

BG: No, no. She came from Romania.

AP: Oh, she came from Romania?

BG: Uh-huh.

AP: Did she read Yiddish?

BG: No. She couldn't read at all. In those days, women didn't read.

AP: I take it the language in your home – did she...?

BG: Was Yiddish. Oh, sure, she didn't know any English. She never tried, so I can understand. I could make myself understood to her, but I don't speak very well.

AP: So I take it, because she was in your household, well, with kosher...

BG: Oh, strictly, strictly. I have news for you. Mine is too – still is.

AP: Oh, okay. I don't want to make any assumptions about anything, so it's better to just ask as it goes along. Was she so observant that your house was Sabbath observant also?

BG: Oh yes. Elaine had a little girl friend who lived across the street, and she use to call her over on Saturday to light the fire.

AP: Oh, she did?

BG: Uh-huh.

AP: So, you had a household where...

BG: It was Orthodox.

AP: It was really very observant.

BG: That's right, that's right.

AP: And what about your father's business?

BG: What about it? He worked; he didn't stay home.

AP: He went, he went.

BG: He always worked. Sure.

AP: But what about on the major holidays?

BG: Oh no. Then it was closed.

AP: Then it was closed.

BG: It was closed. It was closed – definitely.

AP: Now what was it like being a Jewish child going to school in Munhall?

BG: I had no problems; there were very few. There were only two who graduated high school – two Jews in my class. It was myself and Sarah Cohen. Did you get her name any place? Her name now is Sarah Gross.

AP: No.

BG: Her husband had a furniture store in Duquesne.

AP: Uh-huh.

BG: Well, the two of us were in the class. It didn't hold me back. I was valedictorian at the commencement. Our class was the first one that didn't have the commencement in the auditorium. We had seventy five. That was the largest class of that up until that time. Now it's in the hundreds because it's Steel Valley, and we had it at the Carnegie Music Hall – our commencement.

AP: Oh, so you went all the way over into the city to have your commencement.

BG: No, no, in Munhall, in Homestead.

AP: Oh, you meant in Homestead.

BG: That's right. Sure, we didn't go out. And our class was the first one to have our prom out of the gym. We had it at the Penn-McKee Hotel in McKeesport.

AP: Uh-huh. Because your class was so big that you were already trying to... How was it when you took off Jewish holidays?

BG: There was no question – ever. All of Elaine's friends were gentile up until she got to about twelve or thirteen years old.

AP: Was the same thing true for you?

BG: They always were gentiles. There were no Jews around, very few.

AP: In spite of the fact that there was just this one girl in your class.

BG: Yeah. That was friendly with me.

AP: But the rest of your friends were non-Jewish.

BG: That's right.

AP: And so your family didn't really find a problem even though you were so very observant?

BG: No, no.

AP: Whatever.

BG: And you did that in your own home. Nobody else knew about it.

AP: That's true, that's true. And you didn't find a problem, like when you brought your friends home or anything like that, or when you went with them. You were able to do your own thing.

BG: Uh-huh.

AP: And they sort of accepted that and understood.

BG: That's right.

AP: Did you feel left out, ever at all? I mean how did you feel about things like Christmas and Easter? Did that have any effect?

BG: Well, naturally, any child likes to have a Christmas tree, likes to see it. I never asked for any. I just knew that we just couldn't have it, and that was all there was to it. We observed all the holidays. We observed Hanukah. We got gifts then.

AP: Oh, there was gift-giving?

BG: Oh certainly, certainly. Oh yes, yes. Not as many as later, because like my daughter, I know that she gave her children one every night for the whole week. We didn't get that. We got one gift and that was it.

AP: What about Purim?

BG: What about it?

AP: Was there any kind of a...?

BG: Oh, Mother always had the family and my dad's family. And his mother was living, and his stepfather was there, and his brothers and sisters. My mother always had a big crowd.

AP: What about the shul? Did the shul have any kinds of celebration?

BG: We always had a dinner Hanukah time in December, up until not too many years ago.

AP: Oh, really.

BG: That right. We always did, and everybody came. I mean there weren't very many living in Homestead at the time, but they all came – I mean from the city or wherever they were.

AP: They'd come there?

BG: They'd come to the dinner. We always had a big crowd at our Hanukah dinners.

AP: The dinner: Was that your only big event?

BG: That's right.

AP: Which, aside from the high holidays, which was a different thing.

BG: That's right. They all came for the dinner. That's right. Like the Grinberg family. They all lived in the city, but they came. The Weisses came, the old-timers. They all came to that dinner. Everybody liked... There was a warmth there. And I remember one distinctly – Giddy Keizler. Did you have her name?

AP: No, but I have the Keizler names.

BG: Well, she was president of the Sisterhood at that time. It was always the Sisterhood who would put these dinners on. They worked. At that time we worked down in the basement, right alongside of the furnace. There were tables. That's where we did all the preparing of the food and everything. I worked there many a time, and my mother also, and Mrs. Coltin. My mother and she were very good friends. And what made me bring that up?

AP: I guess you were talking about the observance of the...

BG: Oh no, I know what I was going to say. And when Giddy was president, she wanted to have a – what's the word? It's not a host, so... can't think of the word that I want. Anyhow, she asked my husband to do the job.

AP: Like a master of ceremony.

BG: That's right, that's it. And they wanted to raise money. The sisterhood always had to raise money. All they did with that money was give it to the shul. So they got a cake, a big cake, and my husband got the idea to put candles on the cake. And in his speech he talked about the light. There's something in the Bible about light or something, and he suggested anybody that wanted to light a light or candle in honor of someone, please come up. And, of course, they gave a donation. They raised between six and seven hundred dollars that one night.

AP: My goodness.

BG: And she was so thrilled because this was far back. At that time this was a lot of money. That was a lot of money; that was a lot of money. She was so thrilled she ran over there and kissed him. She just didn't know what to do.

AP: I can just imagine.

BG: I remember that very distinctly. We had those dinners for a long, long time. Even when there were very few living in Homestead, they came.

AP: The people really...

BG: Of course. The Sisterhood paid for the kitchen, you know that kitchen we had upstairs. That cost thousands of dollars. They paid for that.

AP: So that's all from the money you raised.

BG: Oh yes, yes, and it was much easier to prepare for a dinner, you know, with that upstairs. We had the big stove, and we had the refrigerators. We had little dishwashers. I mean we were pretty complete. And then the dishes themselves – we had beautiful dishes. At that time we had all different kinds. We had service for about two hundred and fifty people.

AP: My God. What happened to them?

BG: They sold them to a yeshiva in Cleveland. And they came with trucks, and the men were in cars. And they came on Sunday and they took everything out of the kitchen: the stove, the washing machine, all the dishes, the silverware – everything.

AP: Everything?

BG: Everything. Of course they paid for them. I don't know how much they paid for them. But they took everything. I mean, we were having a problem; we wanted to sell it. And there was a gentile group from the church across the street, I think it was. Were interested in the dishes and they came and they saw them and they offered very little amount, and Yetta wouldn't give it to them. We thought she was wrong. We wanted to get rid of them. But anyhow, we were fortunate. I don't know how this yeshiva heard about it, but anyhow they came from Cleveland and took it all.

AP: So they managed to continue to be kosher dishes.

BG: That's right. It sure was. Well, I guess you know about Beth Shalom. The bimah, I understand, is up already.

AP: Oh, is it?

BG: That's what he, Mr. Pilch, told me.

AP: I knew it was going...

BG: Yeah, but that's what he said. That's up, but the room is not complete. They didn't put the plaques up, but they will.

AP: Uh-huh.

BG: I called them because I want to put one up for my husband. You know, they called that the Homestead Synagogue Room.

AP: Yeah, I knew. I heard they were going to.

BG: They did and I want to put his name on that plaque. He told me it's not up yet, so I will. Waiting for more money to come in.

AP: Yeah, I think that's right.

BG: That's what he told me.

AP: You said they were going to call it the Homestead Synagogue Room. Do you remember anybody actually calling it the Rodef Shalom Synagogue?

BG: Oh. I was president of the Sisterhood for two years and that's what they called it, Rodef Shalom Sisterhood.

AP: Yeah, but like when you went, when you talk about the shul, did you talk about it as Rodef Shalom or did you just talk about it as the Homestead shul?

BG: It was the Homestead Synagogue. Do you mean lately?

AP: I guess all along.

BG: All along. No, we always called it Rodef Shalom Synagogue. You didn't happen to see the synagogue now, did you?

AP: Since it became...?

BG: Since it was sold.

AP: No.

BG: You take a trip over one day and see it, see how gorgeous, what they did to it.

AP: Oh, did you go inside?

BG: No, I didn't. I didn't want to. I saw the outside.

AP: Oh, the outside. Did they fix it up?

BG: Oh my lord. They put a new roof, they put air conditioning, they made a central aisle instead of, you know, we used to have. They used to have two aisles on the sides. Well, they made a new central aisle. And the outside, remember we had grass and bushes? That's gone. It's all cement. They have two big tubs. Now whether they're live trees or artificial, I don't know. I didn't go up and feel them. But these, on both sides of the entrance, they're out in the front. They took the lights off. You know the lights were in memory of our president. What was his name? His last name?

AP: Schwartz?

BG: Yeah, he's the one who left money and that's what they did. They took them, they removed them, and put lights that go clear up like... It's metal of some kind and on top are the globes, but they're real high ones. I saw them fixing the windows. Beth Shalom wanted to know if they could take them because the windows were beautiful. But they have some glass men that are members of Beth Shalom and they came over and looked at it and they were afraid to take them out. They thought they would break.

AP: Oh.

BG: See, they were almost a hundred year old, and they said by removing them they would not be able to be used again. Now whether they used them or put new ones in, I don't know, 'cause from the outside I can't tell what the design is. But I saw them working on them. They had a big contraption in the street, like the firemen have, with a big ladder, and a man was way up on the top. And he was like reinforcing the windows, is what I saw. So that's why I don't know whether those are the original ones or new ones. But they still have the windows. They've done wonders with that. It's beautiful. They must have put as much money in that as they paid for the building, if not more.

AP: They needed...?

BG: Oh, yes. Needed a new furnace; they put air conditioning in. They did a lot of things.

AP: Were you going there until the end?

BG: Was I? No. We stopped about... Well, my husband was in the home five and a half years. We stopped before that, about three years before that, and we still kept our membership. But there was no sense in going there. There were very few there. They never had much of a rabbi. And my husband was very educated in Hebrew, and he loved good services. So we joined Beth Shalom. I was the one that got them connected with that. I called Mr. Pilch to see if there was anything there that they could use, and that's how it started.

AP: Oh, really?

BG: That's right.

AP: And that's how the connection...?

BG: That's how it started.

AP: How they came with Beth Shalom?

BG: That's right.

AP: I wondered how.

BG: And he came over and said we were so interested in our plaques, we didn't want them just thrown away.

AP: Oh, surely.

BG: That's why we were. So we joined Beth Shalom and kept our membership there. We went there. We went to Beth Shalom. In fact, we went almost every Saturday. We just loved the services there. And their cantor is fantastic. And he enjoyed himself.

AP: Oh, I see. That's interesting. There's a little connection up until now what... we didn't know.

BG: You mean how Beth Shalom got interested in...?

AP: Yeah, how they happened to get involved with...

BG: I called them.

AP: This was a fact, that this is what happened.

BG: That started it.

AP: It happened then.

BG: I wondered – I was thinking of the dishes – I wondered if they could use the dishes.

AP: Oh, so it began with that.

BG: But they didn't need them. The reason I thought of that is because when they serve a meal, like a breakfast, they don't serve butter. And it is always the fleishic dishes, because of everything, they could have used them. They do have a kitchen, but now I understand they bought dishes there. So I didn't know that. I thought they could use them for that. I had that in mind. But they didn't buy the dishes at all.

AP: Although it made sense, that it would be a useful thing... But if it is, as you say,...you got the whole thing going anyway. It turned out to be...

BG: Something good.

AP: Yeah, that's right. Not exactly what you had in mind, but even more so.

BG: It worked out. We knew if the building was sold, we didn't know if it would be a church or what it was going to be. They might have made a senior citizen place out of it or something. Who knew? We didn't know what it was going to be. So we knew all these things that they had, like the bimah, they would just throw them away. It was not good to anybody. And when Pilch came over the first day, and he saw that wood on there – the whole bimah – he was thrilled. He said we want this whole thing. And they did they took everything. In fact, my mother gave them a podium in memory of my father. And that's even over there.

AP: So that's an old podium?

BG: Oh, yes. He's dead forty, forty-five years.

AP: How many of the rabbis there did you bring in for? You mentioned this Rabbi Widem?

BG: Oh, he's an old-timer, an old-timer.

AP: He was an old, an old rabbi. When he spoke, did he speak in Jewish or did he speak in Yiddish?

BG: I don't remember, I don't remember.

AP: Are there any that stand out in your mind? In any way?

BG: Yeah, Jack Sigal: He was a young man, he was terrific. Pritzker was a rabbi. I can't remember them all.

AP: Was there a lot rather than a list of them? There any rabbis that you really felt, as I say...?

BG: Was attached to?

AP: One way or the other. You know.

BG: Jack Sigal was terrific.

AP: He came what? He came later?

BG: Later. Oh yeah, he was very, very good. My husband was sorry to see him go.

AP: Actually, talking about your husband brings something to mind.

BG: Did you know him? Did you know him?

AP: Jack Sigal?

BG: No, no, my husband.

AP: I don't remember him.

BG: Don't you remember seeing him?

AP: Probably I did. But it's been a long time.

BG: I'm attached. Otherwise I'd go get you a picture.

AP: We'll take a walk afterwards. That'll probably bring it back more than anything else.

BG: Uh-huh.

AP: When you were in high school and you wanted to start dating, how did you do that since there were only two Jewish people in your...?

BG: Well, there were fellows in the city, and Duquesne. And in those days the girls had parties. It isn't like they do today. The girls had parties and invited the boys. And they came to their home. And they had fun, they danced. What else they did in those days.

AP: Yeah, but how did you meet these boys from other towns?

BG: I don't know if it was through the Y – I don't remember. We heard of them, maybe that's why, and we just went to the phone and called them. And they were glad to come. They had nowhere to go and it was a night that didn't cost them any money. They didn't have any money either. And that Harry Soffer from Duquesne, that's very wealthy now – you know he owns all these malls and everything else – he was in my home.

End of Tape 1, Side A

Start of Tape 1, Side B

BG: But when Elaine became twelve or thirteen, I knew it was time for her to start thinking of dating. A friend of mine, Cele Trachtenberg was president of B'nai B'rith Women. And I called Cele up and I said, I'd like Elaine to get into the BBGs. And I said where do you think, you tell me where there would be a meeting that I could take her to and she'd meet the girls and see if she would want to join them. And she did. And she went to entire meetings, and she told me about going to Beth Shalom. There was a group having a meeting there, and told me what day and that I should go. So I took Elaine after school and took the bus – streetcar I guess in those days – and went over and we sat down, and the girls started to talk. For first thing, cigarettes came out of their purses and all they talked about was boyfriends and I thought this isn't for Elaine. I mean she was not that far.

AP: This was like the early fifties.

BG: Very early. She was thirteen.

AP: That was when the girls began to smoke.

BG: Earlier than that. The war was in the '40s.

AP: That's right.

BG: Sure, it was way before that.

AP: Uh-huh.

BG: And – wait a minute – she was...

AP: ...was thirty-seven.

BG: Was or is?

AP: Elaine, really – she was born in, what, 1937?

BG: That's what I was going to say. '37, and she's 56.

AP: Yeah.

BG: Good night!

AP: That will be like the early '50s.

BG: And gee, we're only on the '20s?

AP: Yeah.

BG: So where was I? What were we talking about?

AP: Oh, you were talking about how you saw how these girls were doing.

BG: Oh yes.

AP: That was why I was trying to figure out what year this was, what era we're talking about.

BG: Oh yes, it was in the '20s.

AP: Yeah.

BG: So I came home and Cele called me. "Well, how did it go?" I said, "I'm afraid it wasn't so good." So she said, "Well, don't give up. We'll find another one." And she told me about a group that met at Tree of Life. And those are for mostly girls from Oakland. And we went over there, and that she liked. And to this day, she's very, very friendly with two or three of them from way back then. In fact, I was in Florida this past December and I got in touch with one of her girls. She is very friendly and she took me

out to this... You really feel almost like family. And so she goes with them – the BBGs – and they had dances with the AZAs.

AP: And so rather than going, even then, rather than going, there wasn't anything in that whole Monongahela Valley of Braddock, Duquesne...?

BG: No.

AP: Homestead? They weren't put together in one BBG group for all the children?

BG: No. For all the girls, no.

AP: For all the young people – all the girls in that whole area?

BG: No. There was a big AZA in Braddock, because my brother belonged to that, my younger brother.

AP: Uh-huh. But that was...

BG: That was later.

AP: Yeah, in another time. So your brother had an AZA thing that he belonged to...

BG: Uh-huh.

AP: ...in that area.

BG: That wasn't later. That was before, because he's older than her...

AP: Yeah, I meant earlier.

BG: ...than her time.

AP: But you didn't have a BBG for yourself when you were growing up.

BG: No.

AP: Or when you were in high school.

BG: No.

AP: Then how did you meet your husband?

BG: I took a trip to Philadelphia. My dad had a cousin there, and it was New Year's weekend. I think Saturday and Sunday came out on that. I was working already then. And my dad said he would like to go to Philadelphia and see... His aunt was already

dead, but her daughter was... He would like to take a trip and wondered if I would like to go with him. I said I would because I didn't have anything better to do. So this cousin knew we were coming. She wanted to get a date for me, and she was very friendly with my husband's older sister. She knew she had a younger brother. So the two of them made a date for him to see me, or meet me. And that's how it started. I saw him there, and then he started coming here. In those days we had excursions on the train, weekend excursions. Did you know about them?

AP: No.

BG: For six dollars, you drove to Philadelphia or to New York and back. You left Friday night, and you came home Monday morning. You got the train back Sunday night and got to Pittsburgh Monday morning. So I used to take those excursions, and he took them. I'd come into Pittsburgh at the Union Station and walk down the steps and take my bus, my streetcar to go to work.

AP: If you were working downtown?

BG: I was working in Lawrenceville. That was my first job – at 40th and Butler.

AP: Uh-huh. Did you get a job when you graduated from high school?

BG: By the way, about two or three months later, that was the time of the crash, stock crash – '29. That's sixty some years ago.

AP: Oh, my goodness.

BG: So my dad said, "Oh, you'll never get a job. Things are tough."

AP: Yeah.

BG: But I did. I worked there until I got married – six years.

AP: That was quite a time to look for a job.

BG: Uh-huh.

AP: So now I know why you didn't take a job in Homestead.

BG: Oh, who would want to work in Homestead? What I had done here. I didn't want to work in a store. I was working in the office at a wholesale grocery company.

AP: Were the offices, did the mills have offices?

BG: Oh yeah. But there weren't many Jews working, I think, working there. I don't think they took them.

AP: So that was the sense that that was not a useful place to work for a job. When you were growing up, and I guess you were there long enough to see the changes, did you do most of everything within that Homestead area? I mean like did your parents do most of their shopping there?

BG: Oh sure. You bought your clothes. There were three kosher butchers in Homestead at that time.

AP: So they were able to do everything within that area.

BG: Just about. That's right.

AP: They could go shopping and they needn't go into the city for Jewish organizations.

BG: No.

AP: So everything stayed pretty much within that...

BG: Uh-huh.

AP: Skipping around now, what made your husband decide to come to Pittsburgh, to Homestead?

BG: To Pittsburgh. Why, things were tough. This was in... We were married in '35, and there was the Depression.

AP: Right.

BG: And I knew him for about two years before that. And it was hard getting a job in Philly, too. And he thought he would come here and try his luck here. So, in other words, he followed me here. I didn't go to him.

AP: That is so interesting. Did he do something in Pittsburgh?

BG: We bought a store. We bought it in Akron, Ohio, because I had a cousin that lived there and they said, "How about coming out here and looking here?" because things were a little better there. You know that was a tire city.

AP: Uh-huh.

BG: And he did. He found one there that he thought he liked, and we bought that. And we were married. We were married at Beth Shalom.

AP: You were?

BG: Uh-huh.

AP: Why there?

BG: Well, I didn't want the Homestead shul. It wasn't nice enough.

AP: Oh, because even then Beth Shalom...

BG: Oh yes! It was very nice. It was half the size it is now, because they have added on. And Rabbi Rose was a terrific rabbi. And so we were married over there. We had our Homestead rabbi there too, Rabbi Pinkus. And we had a very big wedding. I mean a chicken, a sit-down chicken dinner, and all that stuff.

AP: Wow!

BG: It was that time, that's when I talked to my friends and they said their mother baked a cake and they had a bottle of whisky, and they were married in their home. We had a big wedding.

AP: And all the people from Homestead came?

BG: The ones that were invited, yeah – the Seiavitches were invited, my mother was friendly with them, ...[unclear] were friendly with them. And we lived in Akron for three years. Elaine was born there.

AP: Oh! What kind of store did you have?

BG: We had a sort of a little supermarket.

AP: Oh!

BG: With meat and every thing – groceries, produce.

AP: So what brought you back?

BG: Because we thought what we were doing there we could do in Pittsburgh, to be closer to my family. My folks use to come out Saturday night. We, at that time, we were allowed to sell beer. We got a permit. We were a beer distributor, a beer distributor. So they closed at twelve o'clock midnight and he, my dad, and my oldest son, and my oldest brother... I don't know, I think my littlest came too. I don't remember. Anyhow, they decided they'd rather go; they'd travel at night. At that time it took quite a while to get to Akron. We didn't have the Ohio Turnpike, the Pennsylvania Turnpike. You used to have to go through all those towns in Ohio.

AP: That really... I mean...

BG: It took a while.

AP: You were really far away.

BG: That's right. So they left after work and came in in the morning.

AP: So that was a real burden. So then...

BG: But they liked that. So we, Ed and I, both decided what we were doing here we could do in Pittsburgh just as well. So that's what we did. We came back to here.

AP: So when you first started in Homestead,...

BG: We started working for my father with the beer. He'd go out with the load of beer with a driver and sell it, and that's the beginning of ...

AP: Did your father give up...?

BG: No, no. The produce he did gradually.

AP: Yeah, did he gradually moved out the produce all together?

BG: So he substituted it with the beer.

AP: That's interesting.

BG: And my younger brother joined him when he got out of school.

AP: And did they keep that? I guess you'd call it a distributorship?

BG: Uh-huh.

AP: So you really decided to come back to Homestead. I mean you got home, you established your own home in Homestead.

BG: Uh-huh.

AP: So I assume that was because that was really a community where you really wanted to remain.

BG: Well, I was accustomed to it. My folks were here, and that's what we did. I lived in my house 43 years. Where you ever in my home? On 17th? Now I did – that's why I sold it. I had a heart attack three months before my husband died. I used to go over there every day to take care of him, pushing that wheelchair. I used to take him out earlier, but he had a stroke. And I'd take him out for dinner Sundays or holidays. And I'd have to order a van, wheelchair van, and I'd have to push the darn wheelchair, get him back. I

always worried because you had to tell the driver when to pick you up, and I was always worried about the time – how long, how long, you know, how long it was going to take, you know, for your meal. It wasn't easy.

AP: No, it sounds very...

BG: That's when the doctor came in, and I drove myself to the Homestead Hospital and I had my heart attack. I didn't know what was wrong so I went up there.

AP: I guess you didn't feel good so you...

BG: I had pains in my chest.

AP: ...and you got in your car.

BG: Got in my car. At first I got them at night, mostly they came at night, 11:00 o'clock at night, mostly when you go to bed. And I waited until the morning. And then I called Elaine, at 6:00 or 6:30. I knew they were getting up, and I told her about that, about the pains, and what'll I do. And he told her tell her to get to the hospital. So I, okay, so I got dressed, got the car out of the garage, and went up to the hospital. And as soon as they took the cardiogram, found it, and right away they said you had a heart attack. You will have to go to the city. At that time – it was six years ago – they didn't have the hospital anymore, just the emergency room.

AP: Oh, I see it was already...

BG: Uh-huh. And she said we'll call you an ambulance, and she wanted to know my closest of kin. And so I gave her Elaine's number where she was working. They called her and told her and she said, "We're getting an ambulance." So I said, "What am I to do about my car?" because I had it parked. She said, "Your car?" She almost fell over. She said I'll have the security guard take care, keep an eye on it. It can stay there all night and you son or whoever can come in and get it. My son came in the next morning. He drove it home and put it in the garage. And from there, I was in the hospital two weeks. He came in with his wife and took me to his home in Delaware. He lives in Delaware.

AP: Oh, he lives in Delaware.

BG: And I was there for two months. And when I came back, one month later my husband was taken to the hospital and that's when he died.

AP: You had a hard time.

(Long pause)

AP: Was Elaine born in Homestead Hospital?

BG: No, I told you in Akron. She was born in Akron.

AP: Oh, in Akron. And your son?

BG: My son was born at Montefiore.

AP: Generally speaking, did you use the Homestead – like when you had a doctor?

BG: Homestead doctor. I used Dr. McGuire for the kids, for the pediatrician.

AP: Uh-huh.

BG: Do you know of him?

AP: No.

BG: He was on 10th and Amity.

AP: Never. We had a pediatrician who was in Squirrel Hill.

BG: Oh. I used McGuire for Elaine and then for Paul.

AP: So you did have a local doctor.

BG: Yes.

AP: But you had an obstetrician who went to.

BG: No, the obstetrician I went to was in town. There wasn't any here then, in Homestead.

AP: Oh, there weren't any?

BG: I don't think.

AP: That's what I was wondering.

BG: I don't think so. Later there has been, but not then.

AP: Uh-huh.

BG: I had Dr. Goldstein; he was in the Jenkins Arcade.

AP: Uh-huh. So you went into town whenever you had to go for treatment.

BG: Whenever I had to go for a treatment, that's right, for a visit.

AP: I guess that's part of what I was wondering. By the time you were married and your children were born, did you need to leave Homestead more for the same kinds of services that you used to get in Homestead?

BG: We went to the city shopping.

AP: You did? More than...?

BG: Oh yeah, more than enough.

AP: That's what I meant.

BG: But I still shopped for them. I bought things for the kids here, at Freedlander's and Smitty's. They had children's things, and I bought them, or sometimes in town.

AP: Yeah.

BG: Or sometimes in the town.

AP: Uh-huh. But the stores, the kosher butchers I guess, were they still here?

BG: I think there still were three. And then they dwindled down and there was only one.

AP: Uh-huh. And then?

BG: And then I go to Squirrel Hill to shop.

AP: You had to go to...?

BG: I still do, yeah. I didn't drive then.

AP: Oh, you didn't? When did you start driving?

BG: When I was seventy years old.

AP: You started driving when you were seventy?

BG: I took lessons and my husband was already sick.

AP: Because you felt like you needed to.

BG: I had to.

AP: My goodness.

BG: Everybody, I tell the doctors that and they look at me and they say you started when the women stop.

AP: That's amazing.

BG: I'm still driving.

AP: But it's more amazing that you...

BG: Started when I did.

AP: ...that you were willing to do that.

BG: I had to.

AP: Intimidating when you're twenty.

BG: Yeah. I had spunk.

AP: You certainly did. You really did. Now when your kids went to school in Munhall, did they have similar experiences to yours, would you say?

BG: They made friends with gentiles – both of them did. All of Paul's friends were gentile until he started going to the AZAs a little bit. But up until then they were gentiles. He went to school from the first grade to twelfth with the same kids and they were very friendly.

AP: When he went to AZA, was there still anything in Braddock or did he...?

BG: Oh, yeah.

AP: Oh, there still was?

BG: Oh, yeah.

AP: So he was still able to stay in the area in order to have friends.

BG: To make friends. Yeah.

AP: But not anything ever in the shul for any of these...

BG: No, not for children.

AP: Not your brothers...when they were boys?

BG: No.

AP: Interesting.

(Knock on door, recorder turned off)

BG: I'm not hooked.

AP: Oh, that's what you thought. The thing that I really wanted to catch on tape was that, with the kids, that you never have any memory of them ever saying that they ever had any kind of a bad experience.

BG: No.

AP: Of them being Jewish?

BG: No.

AP: In terms of them growing up?

BG: No, I don't remember anything like that. I know they all had gentile friends and they were very friendly.

AP: How was the shul for them, compared to like when you were growing up?

BG: It was the same.

AP: Was it?

BG: Yeah, they were friendly. I mean Elaine went to Sunday school and there were some Jewish boys in there; there was a Kaiser boy and there was a Weinberger boy. I mean they were friendly, but she didn't go out with them.

AP: No, right, and they didn't make up the bulk of her social...

BG: No.

AP: ...her social circle.

BG: That was during your time.

AP: That's right. And I had the same experience, of course. I lived in West Homestead...

BG: Yeah, I know.

AP: ...which made me...

BG: Even less.

AP: I was even further away. By the time I left, I wasn't interested in boys at that age. But I remember there weren't many of us girls there at that time, as a matter of fact. So that was why I wondered, you know, how that was compared to... Was the shul still as active when you were raising your kids as it was when...

BG: Oh, yeah.

AP: ...when you were young?

BG: Well, there weren't many activities, no. They used to have dances. I remember hearing about them. They were down in the Turner Hall, on Fifth Avenue. I guess it was Turner. They used to have a dance. What was the holiday? Would it have been Hanukkah? I don't know what it was. Purim, I guess it was Purim. Did you remember Mr. Miller? Miller – that would sell sandwiches and stuff? Was that from your time?

AP: I don't know. No.

BG: Do you remember him?

AP: I don't remember.

BG: Well, he used to handle the concession for the food during the dance time. I don't remember too much of that. Or they used to wear masquerades because the Schwartz boys... There were five boys in that family, so the mother and dad dressed them up like "Five Brothers Tobacco." That's a story I remember hearing when they came to the dance.

AP: This is when...

BG: Way, way back.

AP: This is way, way back. That was all gone by the time...

BG: Yeah, that was a long time ago.

AP: That was a phase. So how was it when you were still observant, is that right?

BG: I still am.

AP: Okay. So the fact that it maintains itself as an Orthodox shul worked out all right for your family.

BG: Well, my husband suggested a long, long time ago that they become Conservative. In fact, the Jewish people started a movement in Pleasant Hills and they wanted to join us if we were Conservative. And we had some old-timers who wouldn't even hear of it. The Seiavitch family was one of them. And that's why they started one of their own. In Pleasant Hills there's a center or something up there.

AP: Oh, I see. So that's what happened.

BG: But they did ask. They wanted to join.

AP: ...to come here.

BG: Uh-huh. But those old-timers wouldn't listen.

AP: Was it a kind of bitter disagreement?

BG: Oh yeah, sure. In fact, Jack Siegel, when he came... He took a mezuzah and put it on the door and put it, like, down here, in that area.

AP: Lower.

BG: And Mr. Seiavitch – he got so mad he pulled it off, and he said, “In the Bible it says it has to be so many cubits, or whatever, up, you know.” He said he wanted the children to touch it, to see it. That was his idea.

AP: Oh, I see.

BG: And he wouldn't here of it. It had to be where it says in the Bible. That's how staunch they were.

AP: It was sort of difficult.

BG: You couldn't change. I mean you couldn't make it Conservative. Later years, after they were dead, and before they gave it up, the men and women were sitting... No they weren't. I beg your pardon. They brought them downstairs because they had been upstairs. They brought them down and they put a bar and put a little curtain up to separate them. They did not sit together to the very end. Are we through? We're almost up to date.

AP: I guess before we finish this up, I wanted to – as we talked all over the place – I was trying to think of any thoughts or things that I missed...

BG: So, did you?

AP: ...or little stories that come to your mind that if we wandered all over the place that I didn't ask you about.

BG: I don't think. I told you I was president of the Sisterhood for two years.

AP: Was that a lot of...

BG: A lot of work.

AP: ...a lot of work?

BG: Sure.

AP: Did you enjoy it?

BG: Oh, yes. I was a housewife at that time. I wasn't working, and it took a lot of work.

AP: Did the shul make your primary, central circle, you know, when you were married? I guess what I was asking was, your women friends, did they come primarily from the shul?

BG: Oh yes, oh yes. Everybody belonged here.

AP: And so that was really the primarily...

BG: That drew them all together.

AP: The women's organization as well. Was there also such things as the B'nai B'rith Women?

BG: We had a group of B'nai B'rith Women. It was very active. My sister-in-law was president of it at that time. It was very active. Then it disbanded.

AP: So it was that in addition to the fact that there was an active sisterhood.

BG: Uh-huh. The sisterhood.

AP: ...the sisterhood. Was it just for Homestead?

BG: Yes, yes. We had a Women of Homestead.

AP: And that...

BG: Disbanded. I don't know. I don't know what happened. I don't remember. I was active in that, too. I had almost every job but the president. I wouldn't take that because the president had to go to the council meeting once a month, and that was in the city. But I wasn't driving and my husband was working. So how was I going to get there? So I

never took it. But I was vice, and I was membership, and I was everything, and I was financial.

AP: I just want to ask you something else about... You had two brothers who were, I guess, bar mitzvahed?

BG: Oh yeah.

AP: Were they bar mitzvahed in...?

BG: In Homestead, sure.

AP: And your son was?

BG: My son was, too.

AP: He was, too. Was there a difference in having an Orthodox bar mitzvah from the time of your brothers to the time of your son?

BG: Yeah.

AP: Was there a difference in the bar mitzvah at the shul?

BG: Not really, not really. The women still sat separate. And Paul almost did the whole service.

AP: Oh, he did. Now, did your brothers, do you remember? Of course that was a long time ago.

BG: I don't remember.

AP: You don't remember. Of course a lot has changed over time.

BG: I remember Paul did.

AP: Things kind of change from rabbi to rabbi.

BG: Yeah.

AP: Was it Rabbi Weiss when Paul was there also, or was he gone?

BG: Rabbi Weiss was there when Elaine was going.

AP: Yeah.

BG: I mean, he was. In fact, when she decided to get married, she said she wants him.

AP: Did she get married in Homestead?

BG: No. She got married in Webster Hall.

AP: Oh, I see. She had Rabbi Weiss come to marry her?

BG: Uh-huh.

AP: Was it an Orthodox service?

BG: Oh, sure.

AP: Now for the wedding,

BG: For the wedding, certainly it was Orthodox.

AP: Now, I mean, you didn't have the men and women sitting separate in Webster Hall?

BG: Oh no, no.

AP: And to Rabbi Weiss that didn't matter?

BG: No, no.

AP: So, I guess I'm trying to figure out what the rabbi...

BG: He's more modern. He was more modern.

AP: And so in spite of the fact that he was...

BG: ...an Orthodox rabbi.

AP: He was an Orthodox rabbi and he comes to...

BG: And he was a rabbi after he left Homestead at B'nai Emunoh. And now they're strictly – they're ultra, ultra. They made the women separate, and even built something to keep them separate. I didn't see it, but I heard about it. It's very... It's not my kind, I don't think.

AP: So that shul became more Orthodox.

BG: Very Orthodox.

AP: Did the women sit with the men for anything in the Homestead shul? I mean, was it always strictly separated.

BG: No. If there was, like, a Friday night service or a wedding, they sat together.

AP: That's what I was wondering.

BG: No, no. For a wedding, they sat together.

AP: So, for a wedding...

BG: That was only for a service.

AP: So I see. So when there was other kinds of events that weren't a formal service, then it was different.

BG: That's right. So if it was a meeting or something.

AP: So there really was a difference from what we think of as the ultra-Orthodox now.

BG: Uh-huh.

AP: And what you're talking about with B'nai Emunoh where, I am sure, the women would never sit with the men, under any circumstances.

BG: No. No, I doubt it.

AP: Were there things like sukkahs? Did you have a sukkah? Did your family have a sukkah?

BG: My family? No.

AP: Did the shul build one?

BG: Oh, yes.

AP: Oh, they did? The people would go to the shul?

BG: That's right. Uh-huh.

AP: We've sort of ranged all over the events or the...

BG: My father used to go sell or take orders for Pesach, for matzos and stuff, and then deliver them in his truck. He'd go around to all the members and get their orders, and then they would deliver it, get it filled and deliver it in the van.

AP: Oh really. So he would have to go someplace to...

BG: ...to buy it, to buy it – probably some wholesaler. I don't know where they bought it. And then they came to deliver it. It killed a whole Sunday, first getting the orders, and the second Sunday delivering.

AP: Oh, I'm sure. So did he do that?

BG: He did that, and I don't know who else. I guess it was my uncle, Mr. Zuckerman maybe.

AP: So they did this every year?

BG: Oh yeah, for quite a while.

AP: That was your father's thing?

BG: Job. Uh-huh.

AP: Is your grandmother and your parents interred in Homestead?

BG: So is my husband. And that's where I'll be.

AP: And that's still an active...?

BG: Oh, that's active. The money they got from the synagogue went into the cemetery fund.

AP: Were you involved? You talked about the fact that you got connected with Beth Shalom about closing it. Were you involved in all the discussions about closing, or any of the discussions?

BG: We went to a meeting.

AP: Was everybody of one mind, or...?

BG: Oh, we knew, we knew. We all knew it had to be done. Is that what you mean?

End of Tape 1, Side B

End of Interview