

**Transcript of Interview with Edgar Markowitz
Homestead Hebrew Congregation Oral History Project
Call Number: CSS #4**

**Rauh Jewish Archives
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TAPE ONE SIDE 1

Anne Powell (AP): [Unclear] 1993, and this is Anne Sheckter Powell, um, conducting an interview for the Jewish Archives of Western Pennsylvania Historical Society. I'm talking to...

Edgar Markowitz (EM): Edgar Markowitz and I live in Bethel Park, PA.

AP: OK. Maybe we can start off by placing you in time, you can say when you were born.

EM: Uh, I was born October 26, 1927 in Braddock.

AP: Oh, in Braddock?

EM: Yes.

AP: Um, were you born in the hospital there?

EM: Yes, Braddock Hospital.

AP: Oh you were. OK.

EM: Right.

AP: Um, now were your parents...your parents were living in Braddock?

EM: They lived in Braddock at the time, yes.

AP: Were they immigrants?

EM: No, no.

AP: They were not. How did they happen to be in Braddock?

EM: That I don't know...

EM: I mean my grandparents lived there.

AP: Uh huh.

EM: Well, my father had some drug stores. He had a drug store in Braddock, Rankin, and East Pittsburgh.

AP: Uh huh.

EM: And, I presume that's probably where he met my mother. But my mother died when I was about 15 months old.

AP: Uh huh.

EM: And then, uh, our family broke up. My older brother stayed with my grandparents in Braddock. And, my other brother Arthur and myself went with my grandmother and my aunt in Homestead...in Munhall, rather.

AP: I see. So, that's what really took you from Braddock to Homestead.

EM: Right.

AP: The fact that you grandmother was there.

EM: Yes.

AP: And, do you know what brought your grandmother to that Homestead area?

EM: No, that I don't know.

AP: Was she an immigrant?

EM: Yes.

AP: Uh huh.

EM: Yes.

AP: Where did she come from?

EM: I believe Austria/Hungary.

AP: So actually both sides of your family were in that were in that...

EM: Right.

AP: Monongahela valley...

EM: Yes.

AP: Area.

EM: Mmhmm.

AP: Um, and then you moved...what did your mother die from? Do you know?

EM: Uh, pneumonia.

AP: Pneumonia. Well, let's see, when was that?

EM: That was in 1929. February, 1929.

AP: 1929. Now, you say your grandmother...how ...? Your grandmother or your aunt you lived with...

EM: Yes.

AP: So how did they support themselves in the home?

EM: Well, my aunt worked at Kaufmann's.

AP: Uh huh.

EM: And my grandmother took care of the house and she also raised my other two cousins.

AP: Uh huh.

EM: Leona (?) and Helen Kline. Their mother had died.

AP: So there were...how many children [unclear]?

EM: Well, they were a little older. So there were four or six of us in the house.

AP: So there were two... [unclear].

EM: My father stayed there, too.

AP: So there were, what, three adults and...

EM: Well, yeah, three adults. And, of course when I was younger, Leona(?) and Helen were always older and I considered them adults.

AP: Yes, that's true, that's true. But as we look back on it, you know we're...

EM: Cause they were at least ten years older than I am, so...

AP: Oh, so they're sort of that large...

EM: Yeah.

AP: There was that large a break. So actually the only place you really remember growing up was in that...

EM: I went to Munhall schools. All three schools.

AP: You sort of were a baby during the Depression.

EM: Yup.

AP: So, I guess you don't have a lot of memories of that.

EM: I can remember...I can remember back...I remember when Roosevelt was running.

AP: [unclear]

EM: Against Hoover... Well that was about, what, 1932?

AP: Oh, you do? What do you remember about that?

EM: Oh, I...my brother Arthur and I, when we were at my grandparents' house in Braddock, they always asked us who we wanted to win the election. We knew nothing about an election at that age.

AP: Uh huh.

EM: Five years old. And I think I said Hoover, and he kept saying Roosevelt.

AP: Oh, I... and the right answer...

EM: We knew nothing about either one of them at the time.

AP: But, did you have a sense that Hoover was very unpopular?

EM: No.

AP: No?

EM: No.

AP: Oh, that's interesting.

EM: No.

AP: Were people very political in your family [unclear].

EM: No. I don't think...not that I can remember.

AP: It was just a little discussion about the presidential election.

EM: I can remember back to the flood in '36.

AP: Oh.

EM: Homestead and the flood there.

AP: Did it affect Homestead? Oh because of the river...

EM: Yeah, cause I remember the old Brown's Bridge, the next door neighbor Jimmy O'Malley and I used to go down in the water, and it was on the bridge and the wood was all wet. Was...

AP: Was, was that the bridge was before the Homestead...?

EM: Before the Homestead Hi Level Bridge. Yeah.

AP: Hi Level Bridge. And, so the water had come up?

EM: Yeah cause it was much lower than here.

AP: Oh. Over the bridge. Now, you lived up in Munhall...

EM: We lived up in Munhall on the hill.

AP: That did bypass...So, your cousin...not your cousin...your aunt, is that right?

EM: Aunt, Aunt Molly, yes.

AP: She worked at Kaufmann's and supported you, and your father...

EM: I would presume my father contributed, too.

AP: To the family...was your father a pharmacist?

EM: Yes.

AP: So, he had been sent to college?

EM: Yeah, he went to Pitt.

AP: He went to Pitt. Were his parents immigrants?

EM: Yes.

AP: So, it was pretty unusual, I guess, for a, ...or was it?

EM: Well, he worked his way through.

AP: Yeah.

EM: It was only two years then.

AP: Oh I see. You had to go just for two years and than...

EM: They went two, I went four, and now it's five, and it's going up to six.

AP: Yeah it just keeps on going, that's true. But when he went, he went for two years and then he was able to become a ...

EM: Right.

AP: Pharmacist. Um, and so then he had this profession and he opened these various drug stores. Did you ever work in the drug stores?

EM: Oh, yes.

AP: Where did you?

EM: Well, he had the store that I remember. He had lost those during the Depression.

And he got one up on Warrington Avenue near Mount Washington.

AP: Oh, I see.

EM: And I remember working in there in my later years, when I was in high school. And after school, and I went to pharmacy school and worked there.

AP: Oh, you too went to pharmacy...

EM: Yeah, I'm a pharmacist.

AP: So, it ran in the family.

EM: Yeah.

AP: There was this other thing about the Depression. I guess you were sort of aware of, of your father losing his businesses. Was that very traumatic?

EM: I don't know. I don't remember.

AP: As a child...

EM: As a child, no.

AP: Do you remember it being very intense?

EM: No, but I know he worked long hours. He worked morning until night.

AP: Yeah, was it, when he lost his own drug store, was he able to get a job in another one?

EM: That I don't know.

AP: OK, let's see, let's talk a little bit about the Jewish community there. Did you go to Sunday school, Hebrew school?

EM: Yes.

AP: I'm trying to think. I guess some of those years when you were begun Sunday school and Hebrew school and other schooling would have been the edges of the Depression.

EM: Right. And then they went into the war.

AP: Yeah. And that, I'm seeing would have been a time when a lot of members of the congregation were having financial problems. Do you have a sense that that community helped each other in any kinds of ways, whether the synagogue was some sort of support for people who...I mean did they do anything like that?

EM: I think they did. I remember seeing a log from their minutes at some of their meetings that they had a fund to help people in the community.

AP: Oh they did.

EM: Yeah.

AP: And I assume then, I guess...you really were...there is something that I'd really like to ask and I guess that you were too young to really know whether, you know what they did about seats for the High Holidays for people who...

EM: Yeah. I think, uh, I think they...certain people seemed to own some of their seats down there and I don't know if they charged others for sitting there or not.

AP: Uh huh.

EM: And I know a lot of times, course in those days we went quite often, and they always congregated together and the big discussion was Hitler and the refugees.

AP: Oh, really.

EM: Yeah.

AP: So you remember those discussions in the shul.

EM: Oh yeah.

AP: As a child... did your grandmother still have family in Europe?

EM: I don't think so. Nobody ever mentioned any.

AP: She was an immigrant. Did she speak Yiddish at home?

EM: Oh, well...it seemed when we understood some things, they would change to Slavish and different languages.

AP: Oh, so she...

EM: They spoke more than one language. Yes. I know my aunt understood it and a lot of times if they got any cleaning women in and they would talk in their languages.

AP: I see. So their native tongue was one of the, the Slavic languages.

EM: Yeah.

AP: And your si...your aunt worked all through the Depression at Kaufmann's?

EM: Yeah. Mmhmm.

AP: So that was able to hang on... Was your grandmother observant?

EM: Pretty much so.

AP: Uh huh.

EM: Yeah, she didn't get out much but she kept everything at home.

AP: So, if she didn't get out much, how, for example, did she get kosher food?

EM: My aunt got it in Squirrel Hill. And at that time it was down on Logan Street.

AP: Uh huh.

EM: And then when Logan Street disappeared, we went to Squirrel Hill.

AP: Oh I see. So to the early years, she would have been...

EM: Cause she used to go shopping before she went to work. And then I remember, I used to meet the bus that she came on to help her carry it home.

AP: Hmm.

EM: That was on Thursdays.

AP: Yeah because you were up the hill in Munhall and the bus stopped...?

EM: No, the bus stopped several blocks from our home, but that part was Homestead, up towards the Homestead Hospital.

AP: Oh, so it came up the hill?

EM: Yeah, that bus went through Pittsburgh I think to McKeesport.

AP: I see, so it didn't just run along...

EM: No.

AP: ...the main street, but still she had to...

EM: Mmhmm, a lot of weight there.

AP: Carry a lot of stuff.

EM: And then, like Saturdays, Saturday night was shopping night, all your vegetables, fruits and things like that we went shopping for.

AP: And where was that, in Homestead?

EM: That was in Homestead.

AP: So there were like produce merchants there.

EM: Right.

AP: Um, so what was it like being a Jewish child going to public school?

EM: We had some problems but nothing major.

AP: Uh huh, you did.

EM: We had some fights...

AP: You had physically...was it physical?

EM: Yeah.

AP: Uh huh.

EM: But we seemed to get along, even you know, it was just on the edge all the time.

AP: Even though there was sort of this fence, then?

EM: Cause there were a lot of Polish and Slavish that went to Munhall. But, for the most part we got along pretty well.

AP: So there were the kids who messed it up and the rest who just, uh...

EM: We played over in Homestead. Homestead was just a couple blocks from my house.

AP: Mmhmm.

EM: And we played there with whites, blacks and nobody questioned it.

AP: Oh really.

EM: You didn't day, you're black we're not going to play with you or anything. We had fellows who were black that we played with. But there were no blacks in Munhall. I never realized until later years that they never moved into Munhall.

AP: Oh really. So there was a difference between Homestead and Munhall?

EM: And Munhall, yeah.

AP: You went to Munhall schools.

EM: Munhall.

AP: so there were no black children there.

EM: No, I remember one time, one black family moved into the area. They were there about a year and then moved back out again.

AP: Hmm. And neighbors there [unclear]...

EM: I don't know, I don't even know what part they moved into.

AP: Oh, you just had an awareness that they were...

EM: Yeah, well the one girl was in my class at school.

AP: But in Homestead the black people mixed with...

EM: Yeah.

AP: With white. Um, it's odd because we tend to think of Munhall and Homestead all in the same pot.

EM: Yeah, they were different boroughs.

AP: They were different boroughs, but they obviously were more than different boroughs...

EM: And, I think, in our whole school, I don't think there were ten Jewish kids in our whole school. There was only one in my class. In my grade even.

AP: You had nonJewish friends as well?

EM: Yeah, I had Jewish friends.

AP: Hmm?

EM: Yes.

AP: Both, did you say both?

EM: Yeah, Mmhmm. The kid next door was Irish, and other on the other side was mixed English and what, I don't know. But, I had friends that weren't Jewish. A lot of friends that weren't Jewish.

AP: What about things like, Christmas and whatever. Did that present any kinds of...

EM: No. It didn't cause a problem because it seemed everybody celebrated everything, then. Any excuse to celebrate. We went along with it, but I mean, you realized, that you were Jewish, and you didn't believe in it, but you still went along with it.

AP: Uh huh. Meaning...

EM: I remember in high school, while when the war came, I don't know why, they quit teaching, I wanted to take French. They quit teaching French, but they kept German, and I took two years of German in high school. And at Christmas time we went in the halls and sang Christmas carols in German.

AP: And is this during..?

EM: That was during the war.

AP: Huh.

EM: Maybe they thought we were going to lose, didn't know it!

AP: So you don't remember, obviously, any anti-German feelings during the war, or yes?

EM: No. I really didn't know any German people as German people yet.

AP: Yeah. But what I mean, what I am gathering from what you're saying is that that wasn't present really in school...

EM: No, no.

AP: In terms of decisions that they made.

EM: No, I don't know why they kept that and did away with the other.

AP: Did you feel, I'm also gathering that you really didn't feel uncomfortable with the Christmas celebrations...

EM: No.

AP: And whatever.

EM: No. Then in the war I was an air raid boy messenger, and took first aid in school...

AP: Hmm.

EM: Paper drives that we went along with.

AP: Mmhmm, and there was a lot of...

EM: Right.

AP: Patriotic...

EM: When I was a senior, I worked down after school and on weekends, I worked at the steel mill. Just for a year.

AP: They were looking for people to...

EM: Right.

AP: to supplement all the ones who were gone. What did you do in the mill?

EM: In the labor gang.

AP: Really?

EM: Helped tear furnaces down.

AP: So they had young men...

EM: Oh yeah.

AP: Doing that. Well, I guess that's right, you were already over 16, you didn't fall under...

EM: Right.

AP: Those child, those child labor laws. What was it like working down there?

EM: It was hot. In this kind of weather they put you in the furnace and in the cold you worked outside. Just like magic.

AP: Was it, how was it in terms of the relationships with other people?

EM: We got along fine. We divided up in gangs and there was white and black and nobody bothered anybody.

AP: So there weren't separations even of the races in terms of the job assignments and...

EM: Not, the only one that I ran into was a graduate from Carnegie Mellon, I think, as an engineer, and he worked in a labor gang cause they wouldn't hire him as an engineer.

AP: A black man?

EM: Yeah.

AP: Hmm. So at a vocational level...

EM: Right.

AP: There were those distinctions. But at the labor level, the black and white people were together and I gather that you didn't sense there was animosity between...

EM: No.

AP: The blacks and the whites. Not that we've gone backward. Now, what about the Jewish holidays. Was there much, either in your family or the community in terms of celebrating?

EM: We took off for our Jewish holidays.

AP: Uh huh. And how about things like Passover, did you [unclear]

EM: Mmm, that one we didn't take off. We kept it...

AP: Yeah.

EM: We didn't take off school for it.

AP: Did you have seders?

EM: No, a couple times, a rabbi lived in the house directly behind us and we had gone over there a couple times he had a seder.

AP: Oh, how was the rabbi?

EM: Rabbi Pinkas

AP: Uh huh.

EM: But in our house, we just had regular meals.

AP: Yeah. Um, I guess that's what I wondered since you really had...was your father still living there, all through your years.

EM: Oh yes, yeah.

AP: Um...

EM: He died in '59.

AP: And he lived with your grandmother...

EM: Yeah.

AP: ...until, until well I guess your grandmother wasn't living.

EM: She died in '47, I believe it was. Yeah.

AP: Oh OK. So good, when he was...

EM: No, then he, had a room up over the street in the building.

AP: Uh huh.

EM: And then after I got married, he lived with us. He had had a leg amputated and he lived with my wife and I in Pleasant Hills for a while.

AP: Oh I see. You know, I guess what I was wondering was, you know what I was thinking that a household, that was for the most part was headed by women, so I was wondering, did the congregation, like people, you said the rabbi invited you sometimes for seders, did you always have seders to go to, or not?

EM: No.

AP: So the congregation didn't really...

EM: No, not like they do now.

AP: Well, I guess I just want to mention that they had their, and I was wondering if they sort of made sure that everybody in that congregation had a seder to go to.

EM: I don't, I don't know.

AP: It sounds as if that wasn't the case. What about things like Purim, Hanukkah? Was there much of a celebration in those?

EM: Well, we kept it, but there was not a big celebration, no.

AP: Not even in the synagogue?

EM: Not in the synagogue. They had services.

AP: But no big celebrations.

EM: No.

AP: How about Simchas Torah? Simchas Torah?

EM: Just services.

AP: Just services?

EM: Yeah.

AP: Did you go with friends?

EM: Oh yes.

AP: But you don't have a real sense that they were very festive or anything...

EM: No.

AP: Now, when you went to Hebrew school, when did you start to Hebrew School?

EM: Well I, uh...

AP: Were you young?

EM: Yeah, in the late '30s I guess. Anywhere after '37, somewhere around there.

AP: Did you, I mean, did you go four days a week to Hebrew school?

EM: Yeah.

AP: And you went to Sunday school also?

EM: Right.

AP: Do you remember any of your teachers or rabbis or anything like that?

EM: Well, Rabbi Pinkas was there most of the time, all of the time I was there. Even when I was confirmed he was still a rabbi.

AP: Mhmm.

EM: And uh, I remember in Hebrew school we had a Mr. Chanin. And I think he left. And there was a Dr. Teich. He was a, he came over from Europe.

AP: Mhmm.

EM: And he was there for a while. I think that's, that's the last I remember the teachers there.

AP: Did they make much of the, I mean like what's it, what is your memory of them? Were they, uh..?

EM: Well, see them, they taught you a little bit of Hebrew and it was just to see how fast you could read.

AP: Mhmm.

EM: And everyday it was just drilling out, read fast.

AP: So you didn't get a sense that you remember it. That there was any, I don't know, that you were getting something from them about [unclear]

EM: No.

AP: Anything like that.

EM: No.

AP: Did you have friends with the, the classmates that you had in Hebrew school?

EM: Oh yes. Sure.

AP: Sunday school?

EM: In fact I think you talked to a friend of mine not long ago, Harold Newman?

AP: Yes, I did.

EM: Yeah because I bumped into him the other day and he said, "I gave her your name, and she already had it!"

AP: That's right. I got it from [unclear]

EM: Yeah we's going, we ran together in a group.

AP: Uh huh.

EM: Harold and Kenneth Fisher and I, and there was a Donnie Samuels and a Leonard Stahlberg.

AP: Mhmm.

EM: And we all...and Larry Roth, now he's down in Texas, now. And, we all went around together.

AP: Was that when you were children, or was it more...

EM: Teenagers.

AP: When you became teenagers.

EM: And, uh, in those days nobody had cars. You went around in street cars.

AP: Where did you go? I mean did you stay in the area, or did you go...

EM: Well, yeah. Downtown Pittsburgh and the Y in Oakland was pretty active at that time. Kennywood had dances.

AP: Oh. So at the time you were in high school, your social circle became more Jewish.

EM: Yeah.

AP: And that's what you're saying.

EM: Well most of the time we weren't allowed out. During school nights you didn't go out.

AP: Right.

EM: Like Friday nights you could go to a basketball game or something but other than that? No.

AP: So, you went to basketball games on Friday nights?

EM: Yeah.

AP: So there was objection to what you were doing?

EM: No, we didn't go all the time.

AP: Nothing like that.

EM: No. And then they used to have, they used to have pretty big Friday night services in Homestead at one time.

AP: Oh, did you go to those?

EM: Yes.

AP: Did your, did your father?

EM: No. No, my father worked from morning until night. All the time. About the only real time we some him was on the holidays for Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur. And so

a lot of times on Friday night, he would come home late. I don't think he came home until midnight then.

AP: My goodness.

EM: And when he got home and I used to come down and talk to him.

AP: Do you have any idea why he never opened a drug store in Munhall or Homestead? Since that's where he lived?

EM: That I don't know.

AP: Because that certainly was a trek for him. He had to go...

EM: About a half hour, yeah.

AP: And did you say, did he drive?

EM: Oh yes.

AP: Oh I guess he had to if he was going at such hours. And you said your grandmother didn't get out very much.

EM: Not too much, no.

AP: So I take it she was not one who was very involved in the synagogue.

EM: No.

AP: So did you have any sense that the synagogue in any way made up the community, a community that you were a part of, or was it just a place where you went for your classes and your services?

EM: That was it. I think that's why they lost most of their members.

AP: You mean because people didn't have a sense...

EM: There was nothing there, really, except for the holidays.

AP: Do you think, in retrospect, that they could have been a more supportive community?

EM: Yes. Because even during the holidays, a lot of times there was standing room only, they would get so filled up.

AP: Mhmm.

EM: During the war years, yeah.

AP: So sometimes, like when you went, you didn't, you couldn't even get a seat?

EM: Well, I, my father had a seat there and I had a seat, but they used to get packed.

AP: Uh huh. When, did your grandmother go to services?

EM: Yeah, she used to go, on the holidays.

AP: Now I take it, did you live close enough to the synagogue that you could walk there?

EM: Uh, yeah, we didn't live too far.

AP: Hmm?

EM: We didn't live too far.

AP: Would she have driven? I mean...?

EM: No, she didn't drive.

AP: No not, I meant would she have ridden?

EM: I don't remember. I don't remember. I think we always walked.

AP: Did she read Hebrew?

EM: She read Yiddish.

AP: Uh huh.

EM: But I don't think she read Hebrew.

AP: So, did she have any Yiddish prayerbook?

EM: She must have. Maybe she read Hebrew too, I don't know. I's have to ask my cousin about that. And I know she used to get... there was another Markowitz family

that lived near us. I don't think we were related though, but they came from the same town.

AP: Oh.

EM: And, uh, they used to get the, I think it was the *Daily Forward*. One of the papers and she used to always give it to my grandma and I used to go up there and get them for her once a week and get them for the whole week for her.

AP: Uh huh.

EM: And she read them.

AP: Hmm. So she didn't read any English.

EM: I don't think.

AP: Or probably if she did it was difficult. And she was able to speak to you somewhat in English, I take it.

EM: Oh yes. She spoke English very well.

AP: Oh, OK, so, yeah, I'm still trying to get a fix on where she was in terms of that whole thing... Now this grandmother that you lived with, was that your mother's?

EM: My father's mother.

AP: That, oh that was your father's mother. And the grandparents who were in Braddock were...

EM: My mother's

AP: Your mother's parents. And you had a brother who stayed with them.

EM: Right, he was killed during the war.

AP: Yeah, did you have a chance, with your brother in Braddock, did you ever have a chance to see him?

EM: Not too much. Not too often.

AP: Huh. It must have been hard for your father.

EM: I don't, I think my father was wrapped up in his store.

AP: And so...

EM: Now, my, my brother worked there too, my older brother.

AP: Oh so he, when he saw your father, he saw your father...

EM: Daily.

AP: At the store. Oh, so before he went to the army, he worked in the store with your father?

EM: Yeah.

AP: Had he already graduated and went on?

EM: He, he didn't graduate from school. He quit.

AP: He quit.

EM: He didn't graduate from high school. And then he worked, I know he worked at one time there was an ice cream company in Braddock, the Meyers & Powers.

AP: Uh huh

EM: And then after that he worked in the mill in Homestead, I think, for a short time and then he went to the army. Just after Pearl Harbor.

AP: So did he, did he continue to live with...

EM: No, he didn't, he lived with my grandmother in Braddock until he went to the army.

AP: So he stayed with her even though he was taking all these other jobs...

EM: Yeah.

AP: He stayed with that grandmother. So, he never moved closer to you.

EM: No.

AP: During that time.

EM: He was only in his twenties.

AP: Did you have a chance to know him in a...

EM: Yeah. We got along real well.

AP: I was wondering how that was if you were living in different communities. Did he come to celebrate holidays?

EM: No.

AP: And you didn't go to celebrate with him?

EM: No.

AP: So there was a, when your, all those holidays...did your father take them for the holidays?

EM: He did yeah, Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur he took off.

AP: He did. And he was with you in the shul in Homestead.

EM: Right.

AP: But your brother continued to stay...

EM: In Braddock.

AP: In Braddock. And did you know those other grandparents very much?

EM: Well, my grandfather died, I was pretty small when he died.

AP: Uh huh.

EM: And, I don't know, somewhere about 5, I guess, somewhere around there.

AP: Mmhhh.

EM: Then my other grandmother. We knew, my other brother and I used to stay there occasionally.

AP: Hmm.

EM: Like when we got off school for Thanksgiving we would stay there for a day or two. Christmas holiday we would stay there for a day or two.

AP: Did you like doing that?

EM: There was nothing to do there. Cause they were all old, so much older.

AP: Yeah.

EM: And my bother wasn't there much. My older brother.

AP: Yeah.

EM: And with my uncles, well, two of those were pharmacists in Braddock there, too. And uh, there was really nothing to do.

AP: Oh I see. So there were other, there were other sisters and brothers of your father, or was this your mother's?

EM: This was my mother's.

AP: Now, so those were her two brothers who lived in Braddock as well.

EM: There was three. Three brothers there. Four brothers. One was a doctor and he was in Ohio.

AP: Uh huh. And the others were pharmacists?

END SIDE 1

BEGIN SIDE 2

EM: ...got out of high school. After graduation, my father said, "What are you going to now?" And, well, I said, "Go to the army." That was a mistake. And he said, "You get down to that pharmacy school and get registered tomorrow!" That was the choice I had.

AP: When was this...what year did you graduate from high school?

EM: 1945, the war was just over then.

AP: So you were going to go to the army anyhow?

EM: Yeah. It seemed every time I went down, we enlisted in the air force, and we'd get down supposed to leave and it was closed. You want to go to the infantry? We'll take you in the infantry. No, I don't want to go to the infantry. Three times I went down, and then once I got drafted, I was supposed to leave Saturday morning and Friday night they called the draft off and never bothered me after that.

AP: For heaven's sakes! Now, by the time you were thinking of enlisting, your brother had already been killed.

EM: Yeah, he was killed on D-day. In '44.

AP: Was he in the infantry?

EM: Yeah.

AP: So in spite of his being killed, you still were going to...

EM: Yeah.

AP: ...enlist, or maybe – because of that? I mean was there anything that you...

EM: I don't know. I don't know. It just seemed everybody I was in school was going.

AP: It was this patriotic...or?

EM: And, I know that the one time we get down to the end – at the end of your tests they have a psychiatrist.

AP: Uh huh.

EM: And I think he needed a psychiatrist. And he asked me how I was doing in school. And I said I'm doing OK. He said what do you mean "OK?" I said I get A's, B's, C's...He said you're not flunking? I said no. He just says go back and finish school and stay out of the damn... And the thing was, I always wanted to go to Alaska.

AP: Uh huh.

EM: And, he stamped, and I left. And all the ones I went to school with then, they went to 18 months in Alaska.

AP: No kidding. So there was your, ...

EM: That was devastating.

AP: If only he had [unclear] you would have been in Alaska.

EM: Right.

AP: Did, do you remember when your brother died? Did that have a large impact on your family?

EM: Yeah.

AP: Did he ever stay? I mean did he ever do the same thing that you did in reverse? Did he come and stay...?

EM: No. No, I don't ever remember him staying there.

AP: Hmm.

EM: That's his picture back in there.

AP: Oh.

EM: He was 29.

AP: Nice looking boy. Did you have a sense really given the fact that you were – I guess there was a lot of this around that you had a sense that people were dying all through the war?

EM: Oh yeah.

AP: Um, but, I'm trying to think what I'm trying to ask you... Well, I think we'll just put that [unclear] and go a little bit back and forward. When you were in high school, and you said you had mostly this Jewish circle of friends, I'm assuming that part of that is that none of you would have gone out with nonJewish girls. Or is that not true?

EM: I don't think that was true. I don't, in high school, I don't think I ever went with a nonJewish girl. In fact I didn't go much with girls at the time.

AP: But, when you met...

EM: But, but I met her.

AP: Where did you meet your wife?

EM: Her nephew Larry was in our crowd and that's when I met her and she used to come visit their house and stay there.

AP: Oh! So one of the things...

EM: So I think I was 14, 13 and she was 11.

AP: So this is one of your friends from Homestead who met her when she was...

EM: Well she lived in Clairton.

AP: And she came to visit from Clairton.

EM: Yeah.

AP: Did you have other relatives that you remember going to visit, speaking of all this visiting?

EM: Yeah. My, on my mother's side of the family.

AP: Uh huh.

EM: In McKees Rocks, I had an aunt out there. Her sister, Aunt Mildred. I used to go and stay there for a few days at a time.

AP: Did you have any sense that the Jewish families in different areas and the Jewish life in McKeesport, you said McKees Rocks..

EM: Rocks. McKees Rocks They lived in McKees Rocks, yes.

AP: Yeah, in McKees Rocks, or in Braddock which was the places you were visiting, were they similar to Jewish life in the Homestead area?

EM: I think they were a bit, I think they had more activities, cause I belonged to AZA...

AP: Uh huh.

EM: We played basketball, it was always in Braddock and McKeesport.

AP: Uh huh. And...

EM: And the dances we had it was always in McKeesport. Or over at the Y in Oakland.

AP: So, that's interesting. The AZA that you belonged to, was it located in the Homestead area?

EM: Homestead, yeah.

AP: But, you had a sense that it was to these other little communities that you had to go for...

EM: All the activities were there.

AP: ...activities. Were they larger Jewish communities?

EM: Yeah, oh yes.

AP: Oh they were.

EM: Especially McKeesport.

AP: Uh huh. So that was part of the reason why more...

EM: Uh huh.

AP: ...was going on there. I'm trying to figure out whether there was a sense that also that those communities, those Jewish communities...

EM: Can you hold that a minute while I have some stuff cooking there.

AP: Sure! [recording paused then started again] [unclear] Where did you learn to cook, when you were a young boy at home? Did you help your grandmother cook?

EM: With some things, yeah.

AP: Did she teach you or did you just...

EM: I don't remember, just watching I think.

AP: [unclear].

EM: And then after, I was married, I learned how to cook a lot.

AP: I'm more interested in the fact that you learned to cook when you were a boy! You know, that, I think...

EM: Yeah, I was, I remember when I was in high school, there was about 4 or 5 of us, we were in the Boy Scouts then, and we figured we were going to learn how to cook, so we took cooking in school. I took it...

AP: No kidding!

EM: We did pretty well in that. I think maybe by the end of that, maybe 2 or 3 of us lasted the whole semester in that.

AP: There were several of you actually...

EM: Yeah, yeah.

AP: Signed up for cooking. And, you didn't feel that there was any problem with it.

EM: No, no we had fun.

AP: I think, it breaks our stereotypes of how everything has not happened until the 60's and the 70's. Did you, and, did you go shopping with, oh that's right you said.

EM: Yeah, I did, I went shopping.

AP: You know how to get your food and everything?

EM: I know how. I don't keep kosher but I don't bring any pork or any ham in the house.

AP: Yeah, then...

EM: We never have.

AP: Now, when your grandmother was...

EM: I used to watch them, yeah.

AP: So you, I mean, like, so you know how to do that whole business with the salting and things like that.

EM: Oh, yeah.

AP: I guess I wanted to go back to that thing you started to go into. Did you ever go to these other communities besides to visit, for other kinds of, now you didn't go there at all for services or that kind of thing, all that happened?

EM: No. Not then, no. I know with my in-laws, I go up to Johnstown and stay over there.

AP: Now?

EM: Yeah. We go up Friday night, Saturday to shul.

AP: Mhmm. Now, I guess what I was trying to figure out was as you were growing up, that Homestead area was pretty much a self-contained community in which you lived,

or whether even as a boy you were going other places for other kinds of activities or services?

EM: No, we went to the Y in Oakland quite a bit.

AP: Even when you were younger?

EM: Yeah.

AP: So, you really looked for your activities in many cases...

EM: Yeah.

AP: And they really did...

EM: And we were limited because nobody had a car. We went everywhere in the streetcars. Downtown to the movies.

AP: Uh huh. And you went downtown...

EM: Ice skating at the Duquesne Gardens when it was there.

AP: Uh huh. So you actually left the area.

EM: Yeah.

AP: With reasonable frequency and went other places?

EM: Yeah.

AP: This is with your friends I'm assuming because...

EM: Right.

AP: Your grandmother, or anybody else would not have been able to take you.

EM: No.

AP: Um. So let's see. You met your wife who came from Clairton and when did you get married?

EM: 1949 when I graduated from Pitt.

AP: Uh huh. Is that when you graduated pharmacy school?

EM: I graduated '49, yeah.

AP: I didn't realize that Pitt had a pharmacy school.

EM: Oh yes, at that time, it was up on the Boulevard of the Allies. You know that Mercy Hospital, you know up on that hill where the heliport is?

AP: Yeah.

EM: It used to be a three-story building, and that was Pitt pharmacy school.

AP: Oh I see.

EM: That's where I graduated from.

AP: And so after you graduated, you got married. Now, your grandmother had already died?

EM: Yeah,

AP: And so where did you get married?

EM: Pardon me?

AP: Where did you married?

EM: In Homestead, in the shul.

AP: Oh, you got married in the shul in Homestead!

EM: Yeah.

AP: How was it that you got married in Homestead rather than being married in Clairton?

EM: I don't know. I don't think Clairton had a shul then, they closed theirs up. Way back then.

AP: Oh.

EM: But Shirley's sister and her family lived in Homestead, and, I don't know, it seemed they came to Homestead quite a bit.

AP: I see, and her sister's family was named...

EM: Zwibel

AP: Zwibel And they were the ones who lived in Homestead. So she already...

EM: No, they lived in Clairton.

AP: Oh they lived in Clairton!

EM: And Roth is the one that lived in...

AP: Oh Roth! That's right she did live...

EM: Roth, Molly Roth is the one that lived in Homestead.

AP: So, from a small community like Clairton, a small Jewish community like Clairton, they already had to find another Jewish community.

EM: Yeah, most of them went to McKeesport. They had affiliations over there.

AP: But because she had family Homestead, she came here instead. Who was the rabbi who married you?

EM: Rabbi White, no, I forget his name. Rabbi Weiss was supposed to, and we were getting married on a Sunday, 29th of May, and Friday, they told me they can't do it, his daughter died in Israel. And we got a rabbi, he's gone now, too, I forget his name. He was from Squirrel Hill. He took us in between weddings. Because I think it was the one day that you could get married at that time.

AP: Oh, I see.

EM: He took us in between weddings.

AP: So Rabbi Weiss had a daughter who died.

EM: Yeah.

AP: Do you remember if the community did anything... I should break this into two questions. With your grandmother, you also had a death in your own family, do you remember much support from the community in terms of that?

EM: I don't think. I really couldn't say. I don't know.

AP: And you were getting married, so you wouldn't have noticed. [unclear]

EM: We were living in East Liberty then, too.

AP: Pardon?

EM: I said, we moved to East Liberty when we got married.

AP: Oh, so you didn't stay in Homestead.

EM: No, I didn't stay in Homestead.

AP: Since you were married, you left. Was there a reason for that?

EM: I don't think. We just wanted our own home.

AP: I mean, I realize you didn't want to live in the same house, but I'm try to think, did you continuing to live in the Homestead area, at all.

EM: We didn't give it any thought and years later we thought we should have, really, at the time.

AP: Uh huh, so events just sort of carried you along.

EM: Right.

AP: When you moved to East End, did you continue your association with the Homestead synagogue?

EM: Yeah. Mmhm.

AP: You did.

EM: For a time, yes.

AP: So you considered that you were part of the community.

EM: We were only there a short time and then we moved up to Pleasant Hills. And at that time we belonged to Beth El. And they were up in, on Broadway Street, on Broadway Avenue. Then they build a place out there on Cochran Road.

AP: So you moved. Pleasant Hills is not all that far from Homestead, is that right?

EM: That's right. Right by the airport there.

AP: Did you choose that part of the county because...

EM: We really liked the house, when we looked at homes around.

AP: So you would have just as easily moved to Monroeville or some other place.

EM: Well, we didn't want to be too far away from our store. Because I worked for my father.

AP: And that was still on Mt. Washington?

EM: Yes.

AP: OK, so that was the factor.

EM: It was only eight miles away.

AP: That affected it. It was the location of the store rather than the consideration of being close to Homestead itself. I want to ask you a question. Do you remember when you got married in Homestead, did people sit separately during the ceremony?

EM: Well, we had a small wedding, because my wife's mother had died not too long before that. And we only had forty people there, mostly immediate family.

AP: Well, what about the immediate family?

EM: It was downstairs, so they were sat together. It wasn't upstairs in the synagogue.

AP: I see, So as long as the events were happening it was not where the [unclear] was.

EM: I can remember in the earlier years, all the women sat upstairs. Then as it got smaller and smaller, they came downstairs but they had the curtain up. Then I think they did away with that.

AP: Finally, yeah. When you say downstairs where your service was, you mean not in the sanctuary altogether, right? I'm asking a number of people if they remember whether people sat together or separately for services, they couldn't remember...

EM: They were together then.

AP: I don't mean services, I mean about things like weddings, and since you got married, you might know. Now was there a reason that you didn't have your wedding in the sanctuary?

EM: I think, I think because it was so small.

AP: Oh, it was too big for the wedding. And after that you went away and that was the end of your association with Homestead. [unclear]

EM: Yeah.

AP: Did you maintain any ties to that community?

EM: No just to visit my aunt and my cousin down there. And some of my friends lived down in that area.

AP: Now they stayed. Your aunt and your cousin stayed in that area.

EM: In Munhall. Then they moved to Homestead Park.

AP: Do you think they felt more attached to that Homestead Jewish community than you did?

EM: I would think so.

AP: Do you know why that would be?

EM: No.

AP: It's just the vagaries of... So it isn't attributable to any real differences in the way that you perceive the community or...

EM: Oh, no.

AP: Anything like that. Or how it changed [unclear]. Anything that changed in terms of the flavor of the community from the time she [his cousin Helen Kline] was a little girl.

EM: It got smaller and smaller though. She taught school out there and had a lot of friends. She still does. I'm surprised some of the teachers I had in school were still living.

AP: Are they really?

EM: Not many.

AP: [unclear] career for longevity. I want to ask you something about contrasts. Do you have any thoughts about your connections to the Jewish community that you were involved with after you married and had your own children compared to the way the one in Homestead was.

EM: No, I never really had too much to do with them. I'd go to service and that, and that was about it.

AP: Do you feel the same ways about the one where you are now?

EM: No. I sort of semi-retired now and only work twenty hours a week. And before my work schedule didn't permit all this. And now, I go quite often.

AP: Oh, I see. This is really the first time you've had the opportunity to really get involved with the synagogue community.

EM: Right.

AP: [unclear] This is really your first experience at being able to make a choice to do that.

EM: So I try to go now I don't work on Friday nights or Saturdays, and I go, almost every week I try to get there Friday nights and Saturdays.

AP: Do you not work on Friday nights and Saturdays by choice?

EM: Right now, yeah.

AP: So, in some ways, would you say that you have a more—I'm trying to think what the word is—you have a more intense Jewish observance than you did when you were a boy.

EM: Yes.

AP: Would you have gotten that from your family do you think, were your other grandparents as religious or more religious than [unclear]?

EM? I don't know. I have no idea.

AP: You don't have any sense of [unclear] their religious identity at all. Would you say you had to come to this yourself?

EM: I would think so, yeah. Although my grandmother, where we lived, observed the holidays.

AP: Did she light the Shabbos candles?

EM: Yes.

AP: You had that [unclear] in the background to draw on. And would you say... How would you characterize your feelings within that Jewish community in looking back: positive, negative, mixed?

EM: In Homestead? Probably negative. Because you had certain people who ran it and they didn't listen to anybody. They did what they wanted to do. That was it.

AP: Uh huh. So [unclear] you family in not being involved.

EM: We belonged to B'nai Brith in Homestead. Some of the older ones belonged, but they never paid their dues. And we'd ask them for their dues and they would say "We're good for it." And that's the only answer we ever got. "We're good for it." So we closed it out and sent the charter back so they couldn't start another one. We were just butting our heads against the wall, down there.

AP: So you really went around the [unclear] to some extent. You really had the sense that it really was a closed community and that you were not an integral part of it.

EM: Right.

AP: That was hard to penetrate. When did you belong to the B'nai Brith?

EM: That was in the '40s.

AP: You were a young man starting to get involved [unclear].

EM: Of course, B'nai Brith meant playing basketball and things and having parties.

AP: This was after AZA. [unclear]

EM: Right.

AP: [unclear] within a Jewish context. Do you find that your synagogue here is a more....

EM: Oh, it's so, they have everything going all the time, every week.

AP: It's also one that you see as more accessible, that is more accessible.

EM: Yes.

AP: For an outsider coming in.

EM: They have a school for the children. They work their way up, it's very involved. I was surprised when I got a letter from them a week ago that they were going to start sending bills out for the dues monthly. I guess a lot of people weren't paying them. They said it costs \$40,000 month to run that place. I found that hard to believe—40,000 a month.

AP: [unclear]

EM: They have things going all the time. They have teachers, qualified teachers. They really got it all together. I think they can compete with anything in Squirrel Hill.

AP: [unclear]

EM: I never went to any shul where children and adults could conduct services. They can go up. Young children 13 and 12 and up can go up, and they can conduct a whole service.

AP: Did you have sense that you couldn't do that in Homestead?

EM: No.

AP: Were you bar mitzvahed? What did they have you do? Did you read...

EM: You just read your haftorah and that was it. And here they conduct the services. And I've never met so many adults, men, who can go up and do it, too.

AP: So your sense is that even though it was an orthodox synagogue, that you were going there four days a week really and you didn't get all the skills...

EM: I don't think that they had teachers who were qualified. Anyone who wanted to be a teacher could be a teacher. As long as they showed on Sunday for Sunday school and for cheder. It was a job for...

AP: So your sense was their skills were [unclear].

EM: Now you have to be qualified to teach there.

AP: You were a child without a mother. Did you have the sense that anyone in community reached out to you in a different way because of that?

EM: No.

AP: In retrospect did you...

EM: Yes. Because I never knew anything about my mother. I talked to my cousin. No one ever says good, bad or indifferent, how she was, or anything else. My father never talked about her.

AP: And your grandparents?

EM: No.

AP: And there wasn't anything that happened in the community that they made extra efforts for the children.

EM: Hmhm.

AP: There were four children in your home [unclear].

EM: And as far my father, I hardly ever saw him. It was up to my cousin and my aunt. I guess we were more like brothers and sisters than cousins.

AP: I would think so since you were raised together.

EM: I keep contact with my cousin down in Homestead Park.

AP: I was wondering about that. That immigrant children who didn't have a family if there were others in the community and the community didn't do anything extra [unclear].

EM: No.

AP: [Unclear]

EM: It seems to me that you are, people who came from Europe they were more old fashioned. They just didn't get into that.

AP: They didn't get into things inviting you to come for a Shabbos dinner or come for the holidays?

EM: No.

AP: Or over the holidays? When Yom Kippur was over did you go home to break the fast, but there wasn't any outreach to involve you for coming other places.

EM: My one aunt and uncle, I guess. They lived in Homestead. I don't remember if we went there after Yom Kippur or not. We used to go down there at times to their house visiting.

AP: Now where were they?

EM: Before they built the new mill, they were in Homestead. Lower Homestead. They had a grocery store there. Then they moved to Squirrel Hill. They retired.

AP: That mill was built in the early '40s.

EM: Oh, yes.

AP: So most of the time you were growing up, they weren't there, they were someplace else. So the community [unclear] that you had other family in that community. It's interesting.

EM: No. Today things are different.

AP: [unclear] I guess. Different in that you think communities make more effort to

EM: We had ten foster children.

AP: Where?

EM: Here.

AP: [unclear]

EM: Over a few years.

AP: [unclear]

EM: Not all at one time. Over a few years.

AP: How did get them?

EM: From the children's services, Family and Children's Service.

AP: And somebody brought them?

EM: From little babies up.

AP: And then they had a family.

EM: We kept them until they were adopted.

AP: [unclear]

EM: We had some from a few days to almost a year.

AP: Very interesting. I think you [unclear] anymore. [unclear] Children who need you. Were they Jewish children?

EM: No. None of them were.

AP: Unhuh.

EM: Not as far as I know, anyway.

AP: For a minute I felt surprised.

EM: That's my daughter and that's my other daughter.

AP: And they grew up here? In this community.

EM: They grew up here. My grandchildren are grown up now.

AP: What did you say?

EM: My grandchildren are grown up.

AP: So these are your daughters'? I guess you can tell by the [unclear].

EM: These are her boys here. The little boy with glasses is going to be bar mitvah now. And on the other one, you can't see them on the other side. They are in the back. That's my other daughter's. A boy and a girl. She just graduated as a nurse from Mercy Hospital. That's two years in school now.

AP: Was this community an easy community? [unclear]

EM: People mind their own business out here. These people next door here have been here over three years. I don't even know them. I know their names and that's it.

AP: How was it to try to raise your children Jewishly in this community?

EM: I never had a problem.

AP: This has been Anne Sheckter Powell interviewing Edgar Markowitz on the Homestead Jewish Project for the Jewish Archives of the Western Pennsylvania Historical Society, July 19, 1993.

