

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

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Name of Interviewer: Anne Sheckter Powell

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Transcribers Notes:

...	indicates an incomplete sentence
(unclear)	indicates the word(s) could not be understood
(?)	indicates that the spelling may not be correct

Transcription:

Anne Sheckter Powell: (cuts in) okay yeah, so now you can do it.

Helen Kline: I'm Helen Kline. I was born on July 7th, 1917 at 1700 Penn Avenue.

AP: So there's all the sevens. So you were not born in Homestead.

HK: No, I was born in Pittsburgh, in the Hill District. No, the Strip District, the Strip District.

AP: That's where that was. When did you actually go to Homestead?

HK: I came to Homestead in 1919.

AP: Oh shortly after you were born.

HK: Two years, almost two years. My mother died on May the seventh.

AP: Of 1919?

HK: 1919. And I came to Homestead to live with my aunt and my grandmother, my sister and I came.

AP: Oh, so you have to memory of being anyplace else.

HK: I have no memory of being anyplace else. We lived on Eighth Avenue. The building is now torn down, it was right across from the, where the Homestead Post Office is now. My grandfather built that building.

AP: You mean he was a...

HK: No. He had it built.

AP: Oh so he was, what was his role in having it built?

HK: He...

AP: Oh he, the building you were in was the building he that he had contracted somebody else...

HK: He had contracted to be built. In fact it had the name Markowitz.

AP: That was your maiden name?

HK: My grandmother's, I'm single.

AP: Okay let's see. So, of course you weren't Helen Kline, you were, when you were, before you were married.

HK: I was never married.

AP: Oh I'm sorry! So you were always Helen Kline.

HK: Yes.

AP: And Markowitz was...

HK: My mother's maiden name and my grandmother's and aunt who raised me.

AP: Oh I see, okay.

HK: And in those days they used, when they built they always had the name, not always, but usually the name was up on the building, Markowitz.

AP: I actually thought your name was Single, like the Lieutenant Governor, you know that you're maiden name was Single.

HK: Oh, no!

AP: So what happened to your father when your...

HK: He remarried and had another family.

AP: Mhm, so you didn't live with him at all.

HK: No.

AP: You stayed with the...

HK: We stayed with my aunt and my grandmother. They raised us. My aunt took care of my sister and I, she worked in Kauffman's.

AP: Your aunt did.

HK: Mhm. She worked in, for (unclear) Company for nine years and they wanted to send her to college to be a pharmacist, and she was a very bright lady, and they wanted to

send here there to be a pharmacist and she couldn't do it, she had a mother and two children that she was responsible for. Then she went to work at Kauffman's.

AP: Selling?

HK: Selling.

AP: What did she sell?

HK: She sold, she was a representative for Peggy Sage nail polish, which you don't even hear of anymore.

AP: That's right.

HK: And she worked, really worked through the company, through Kauffman's. Then after they stopped selling that, she went to, she worked in the drug department.

AP: So in a way she was like, was she like your mother?

HK: She and my grandmother were both that way.

AP: (unclear) to figure which of those two you thought of as your mother.

HK: Yes. It was funny once, when I was teaching, I taught school. We were sitting around the table at lunchtime and we were talking, and everybody at that table said they thought at some time in their childhood that they had been adopted. And I said I never felt that way, I was the only one, they didn't realize that if I had been adopted I would have been in a home with a mother and a father or something. I never felt as if I was adopted. Because I knew I was living with my aunt and my grandmother.

AP: It was sort of like a family that chose you.

HK: Yes. They were, they were the best.

AP: Now, your grandmother, did she come from Europe?

HK: She came from Europe when she was sixteen. And I don't, and I think she was sixteen, I don't know whether she was married before she came or not. They married young in those days, and I don't remember. The things that we didn't ask, that I wish that I had.

AP: Exactly. That's the reason for doing this.

HK: That's right.

AP: Otherwise time passes and you wish you had all these memories recorded, but they're gone.

HK: That's right, that's right. But she came here when she was young, because my mother was born in McKeesport, and my uncle, who was a brother was born in Braddock, and my aunt was born in Pittsburgh, the one I lived with, she was born in Pittsburgh.

AP: So what brought them to Homestead?

HK: I don't know why they came to Homestead, I really don't.

AP: But there they were. And so your grandfather had a business there then.

HK: He was in the produce business. He was in the produce business.

AP: Oh I see, so that's the business he had in Homestead.

HK: He was gone before I, he had moved away, moved to Florida. He was a restless creature, he moved to Florida, and he came to visit now and then.

AP: So there was your grandmother, and your aunt, and...

HK: My sister.

AP: And your sister and you. There were four females running the household.

HK: Uh huh. And two of them were running it, my grandmother kept house and my aunt worked.

AP: But I mean they were keeping everything going.

HK: They kept everything going. And then when I was about seven, we moved up onto Louise Street, my aunt bought a house there.

AP: So what happened to the building on Eighth Avenue?

HK: Well it was rented. There were apartments there, it was rented, then during the Depression my grandmother lost it, because nobody paid any rent and they couldn't keep it up. She lost it during the Depression.

AP: But up until then, they left that building there and then your aunt bought a house up on Louise Street.

HK: Yes. And we lived there for twenty-eight years. My grandmother died while we were there, she died in '47. And she was a very sweet person, she was a doll. And they were unusual people, both of them. My aunt never, she did everything for everybody,

she never said, "I did this for you" or "I gave that to you" that's the kind of people they were.

AP: That's wonderful.

HK: When I was eleven, my uncle, who was a brother to my aunt and my mother, his wife died and he came to live with us, with two children.

AP: Two more children?

HK: Two more. Fifteen months and two and a half.

AP: Oh. So now let's see, you were how old then?

HK: I was eleven then.

AP: And was your sister older?

HK: She was thirteen.

AP: So you had a thirteen year old, and eleven year old, and two little babies.

HK: Two little ones.

AP: And your aunt, and your grandmother, and your uncle.

HK: And the uncle.

AP: My goodness. That's really amazing what people were able to do in those days.

HK: Yes. And when his wife died, he called up and said can I send the boys over? And his mother, her mother, could have, she took the older boy, but we were always sorry that he didn't come too.

AP: So one child was sent to another grandparent?

HK: Went to the other grandmother's.

AP: And the family was separated.

HK: The family was separated. And she wasn't too good to him. She wasn't the nicest person. She, well, we were always sorry. And then after, after Ralph, that was the one that lived with her, after he went overseas, the grandmother died. And Molly wrote and told him not to worry when he come home, he'd have a home with us.

AP: Was Molly your aunt?

HK: Yes, Molly was my aunt. He'd always have a home with us, but he didn't come back. He was killed on D-Day.

AP: What a sad story.

HK: Mhm. But the other two boys are both living and well. The youngest, the one that was fifteen months old when he came to live with us is now sixty-five. And he's a pharmacist, the other boy worked for the post office.

AP: Did they seem like your brothers?

HK: Oh yes, definitely. Definitely.

AP: And did your uncle stay with you all the time?

HK: He stayed with us for a long time. He, at one time he owned three drugstores in Braddock and Rankin, and I think the third one was in East Pittsburgh or East, I think it was in East Pittsburgh. And then, he had people running them, and then you know he lost all three stores during the Depression. Then he started up again up on Mount Washington. And started up the store again, and then, in a few years the building about a block away was for sale and he bought that, it had a couple of apartments above it. Then during the war he couldn't get gas to come home every night from there. So he started to stay in a room above that.

AP: Yeah that was a bit of a trip altogether, wasn't it?

HK: Yes.

AP: From Homestead to Mount Washington?

HK: And that was when we were still living on Louise Street. And then after, he lost a leg, and he went to, he'd come home for weekends, but he lost a leg, poor circulation, and after that he went to live with Edgar, the youngest boy. Both of the boys were married, and my sister were married by then.

AP: Did, just to go back, did you know what your mother died from? Or this aunt? These were young women that died.

HK: Well my aunt was, died when we were in this house. She and I built this house together. My mother died of pneumonia. She got the flu and then pneumonia during the flu epidemic in 1919.

AP: Oh she was one of the victims of that terrible flu epidemic.

HK: Mhm. She got the flu, and then turned into pneumonia.

AP: Now I meant the other, the woman who died leaving the three little children, that aunt.

HK: Oh, she died of pneumonia.

AP: She also died of pneumonia.

HK: She died of pneumonia.

AP: That really was a killer, wasn't it.

HK: They had a little girl too that would have been my age, and she died of diphtheria when she was five years old.

AP: This is before her mother died.

HK: Before the, no... yes. Before the mother died, yes.

AP: Because that little girl was never...

HK: No, she was never...

AP: That's a lot of um...

HK: A lot of sadness.

AP: Little children learn to live with a lot of loss.

HK: That's right.

AP: But your memory of your childhood, is it generally, you know how would characterize it, was it generally happy?

HK: Yes.

AP: Yeah, so I mean you didn't think of yourself as...

HK: No, we didn't, even during the Depression, my aunt worked for thirteen dollars a week, was paying the interest on that house because nobody could make the payments then, but she paid, as long as you paid the interest they carried people through. And she, but we were always well dressed. I can remember when she had a woman come out and make dresses for my sister and I, pink silk dresses.

AP: During the Depression.

HK: Well I don't know whether, it was before, before that.

AP: ... they really, they really loved you and (unclear) wonderful sense of that, that you were not really a deprived child.

HK: Oh yes, oh yes. Oh no far from it. We didn't know, we knew there was a depression but we didn't feel it. You know, we, I can't remember not having, there was never a time we didn't have enough to eat you know. But they were that kind of people. They didn't cry poor ---. We never knew that she was working for thirteen dollars a week and keeping, keeping us...

AP: So you didn't feel like a burden.

HK: Oh no, that was home.

AP: That's really wonderful.

HK: They were wonderful people, they don't come any better than that.

AP: So her name was Molly Markowitz.

HK: Molly Markowitz.

AP: What was your grandmother's name?

HK: Sarah Markowitz. Sarah.

AP: Of course obviously you didn't call her, you called her Bubby?

HK: No, we called her grandma.

AP: Oh, you did!

HK: Uh huh.

AP: Did she speak Yiddish?

HK: She spoke it, Jewish or Yiddish, but we never learned, we never picked up, at that time you know, people were, she spoke English as long as I ever remembered. She must have learned it very fast. But I could understand, my sister and I could understand the Jewish, but we never spoke it. Now I'm sorry. Now I wish I knew more languages.

AP: All those things, exactly.

HK: But in those days it wasn't fashionable. Remember?

AP: Right, they were very eager for the children to really assimilate and they felt that that other language would hold them back, right.

HK: That's right. But my aunt and my grandmother both spoke Slavish.

AP: Oh they did. That's where they, where did they come from?

HK: My grandmother came from, I know it was someplace near Vienna, so it was in Austria-Hungary.

AP: It was in Austria-Hungary.

HK: But my aunt learned it from people that worked around there. She learned to speak Slavish when she was young, Slovak, and when they wanted to talk about something they didn't want us to know, they'd say it in Slovak, because we didn't.

AP: She learned Slovak in Homestead?

HK: Oh yes.

AP: From the people in the area?

HK: Mhm.

AP: That's interesting.

HK: But I can remember, my grandmother would talk to people, when we lived on Louise Street people, older women would walk by, I say older women (laughs), but they would walk by and she would go out the walk and talk to them you know, and I'd say, "Were you speaking Slavish?" She'd say, "No, Polish." Or Hungarian or whatever they spoke, she could speak, I guess they grew up knowing all those languages, or learned them from the people.

AP: That's really interesting.

HK: She could speak, you know I would ask her, "What were you talking..." you know.

AP: Well they obviously then had a lot of interconnection with people in the neighborhood.

HK: Probably.

AP: In spite of the fact that they really weren't in business there, or weren't really working there at all.

HK: I think they originally came, and in fact I'm sure they did, from the Northside, because I have, I have some old gas bills from Cliff Street I think.

AP: My heavens.

HK: I saw that in the paper the other, just yesterday, those run down houses on Cliff Street and I wanted to get out those bills.

AP: And see where they were.

HK: And see how close that was to that.

AP: That was the list of those houses that were supposed to be repossessed.

HK: Yes.

AP: That's really interesting. And you kept that all those years.

HK: My aunt kept them.

AP: And so did you.

HK: Yes, and I still had them in the drawer. A lot of the things I have given to my cousins, things that are old, because he collects a lot of those old things, but I still have all those old, some of those old bills.

AP: Well I'll ask you about these things later on. I guess I'll sort of go back, so you went to school in Homestead, and you were going, did you go to Hebrew school?

HK: No. There weren't many girls went in those days. I had one friend that went and I think she was the only one.

AP: Yeah, right. What about Sunday school?

HK: We went to Sunday school. Down on Tenth Avenue.

AP: Oh where, that was where the shul was.

HK: Uh huh.

AP: Was your family, was your aunt and your grandmother involved with the shul? Well your aunt was working.

HK: She was working. My grandmother belonged to the sisterhood, which was called the Ladies' Aid Society then.

AP: Oh. So it wasn't called the...

HK: Sisterhood. It was the Ladies' Aid Society

AP: Do you remember anything about that at all? I mean were you, let's go back, did you go to shul when you were a little girl for holidays and things?

HK: Oh yes. Yes, we went, when I was little that place used to be filled to capacity. We used to sit on the steps upstairs, the children would sit on the steps because it was so full. When it closed, there were two of us upstairs most of the time. I still sat upstairs. Not because of religion, because I was that religious that I wouldn't sit downstairs, but I liked it up there. You could look down and see, and all my memories were up there.

AP: That's right.

HK: Molly and I bought our seats up there, although the last few years we had the whole upstairs.

AP: --- you bought the entire upstairs.

HK: We had the whole upstairs to ourselves because most, you know as things change the women wanted to sit downstairs. So at first they let them sit in the back and they put up curtains, in fact I made the curtains for them.

AP: Did you.

HK: Uh huh. Short curtains you know, on top of the bench.

AP: So that they could see over.

HK: So that, to shut the women off from the, well then as things changed more they decided the women could sit with the men. But I still liked it upstairs, I never, well if we'd go for a holiday or for --- or something, everybody would sit downstairs. But for the high holidays I always sat upstairs, my memories were there, I'd look around and I'd think Anne Hazel sat here and this one sat here and this one sat here.

AP: Yeah, so that whole area was filled with...

HK: Filled with memories.

AP: And the images of the time when it was really full.

HK: That's right.

AP: So you always came to shul when you were a little girl with your...

HK: With my aunt and my grandmother.

AP: And you sat on the steps.

HK: We used to, sometimes there was room, people would come and go, but a lot of the times we sat on the steps.

AP: Did people have assigned seats, or did they just sort of come and take whatever?

HK: For the holidays, people had regular seats, and sometimes you bought, and for year we bought tickets for the holidays. And then Molly and I decided to buy our seats. You could buy your seats and then they were yours for, to sit in all the...

AP: Oh I see, so then you could have a very specific seat all the time.

HK: There were a lot of people who had, a lot of them had names on the seats. But we never bothered having ours.

AP: Oh so some people chose to really have their seats identified.

HK: Yes. Well I, you know there were a lot of them there, but they kind of quit doing that. But any other time, except for the high holidays, people sat most anywhere that they wanted to.

AP: Because it's not that full.

HK: No.

AP: Did you learn to read Hebrew?

HK: No.

AP: Did your aunt or your grandmother know how to read Hebrew?

HK: My grandmother did.

AP: She had evidently learned...

HK: She probably learned in Europe.

AP: In Europe, mhm. But your aunt couldn't either.

HK: No, she couldn't read it either.

AP: So you were sort of following along in English.

HK: Yes, I always read the English.

AP: I assume your grandmother was Orthodox.

HK: Yes, yes, (unclear) was an Orthodox shul.

AP: I mean like did she keep kosher?

HK: Yeah, I still do.

AP: Oh so your whole family does.

HK: Yes, I do it because it's just a habit. I have the dishes, and I have, you know I'm just used to doing it. And I see no reason to change now, you know.

AP: Of course not. It's an important tradition. Since, well actually now I'm thinking maybe your grandmother wasn't as old a woman as you sort of think a grandmother as being, did you help her go shopping and things like that?

HK: Well, we'd go to the stores. At that time there weren't any supermarkets. We'd go to the store for, she'd go down to Homestead and shop, and sometimes we would go with her. And then a lot of times my aunt did the shopping, she would go from work to Logan Street in the Hill District, because you had to go there to get meat.

AP: Because there wasn't any...

HK: There weren't any, there was one kosher butcher shop, but at first I don't think there were, there was a kosher butcher shop, but a lot of times we, yes my grandmother would go there, I remember going there with her. But a lot of times Molly would go up to Logan Street and bring meat home, and you didn't have refrigerators to keep things as long as you can now, and she'd usually shop every week.

AP: So she'd walk up from Kauffman's to the Upper Hill?

HK: She probably did.

AP: And I'm guessing get the meat and then take the streetcar and come home. That's a real, a lot of work.

HK: Yes, and when I think of the things that she did, and then, well my grandmother died while we lived on Louise Street. And my cousins, my uncle went to, by that time, that was around the time he had his leg off and went to live with Edgar, and then Edgar was married, well they were both married. No, they weren't married when my grandmother died, my sister was the only one that was married then. And then shortly after that the two boys married, and Edgar lived out in Pleasant Hills and his dad went to

live with him. And then it was just my aunt and I, and we were in this big house, and it was really a big house.

AP: It probably had to be for all the family in it at one time.

HK: There were eight rooms, and a reception hall that was easily as big as my kitchen, pantry that was two-thirds the size of that, it was a big house. And I wanted to get out of the big house, so we sold the big house, it was too big for us. Started looking around for a house to buy and there was nothing, there weren't many homes to buy then, and I wanted a place on one floor. And one day I went home and I said, "I found a lot today and I think I'm gonna buy it." When I said it, I said it as a joke, because when I think of it she was sixty-five at that time and that's, you know, sort of like to think of building a house, so I just said it, threw it out. And one day she said, "We may end up buying that lot that you were talking about." So that's what we did, we ended up buying this lot and building this house.

AP: Oh so you had this house built for you.

HK: Uh huh. We had this house built for us.

AP: That was a project, wasn't that?

HK: For two women, who didn't know anything about building a house. But you start to inquire and you learn a lot, and we didn't do too bad for two women.

AP: I would say not, you did very well. But it's a formidable, especially as you say when one of the women was already probably ready to retire.

HK: Yes. Well she was sixty-five, I would have been around thirty-five then. Because she was thirty years older than I. And so we built this house, and I was really glad when she got sick that we were on one floor, because that was we could, I had to have help in the house when she got to be bedfast, she had a stroke.

AP: Oh that's very difficult.

HK: But I never told her, she never realized. I don't think she did. She's a very bright woman but you know, I think God takes care of those things you know, I didn't, I don't know why I just didn't want her to know what happened you know. But for a woman who was as active as she was, she worked til she was seventy-four.

AP: Oh she didn't retire.

HK: She worked til she was seventy-four. And I would have encouraged her to retire earlier, but I thought she'd gonna go to pieces if she didn't. She was active, she went to town, she went to shul every Saturday morning.

AP: From here?

HK: Yes.

AP: Did she drive?

HK: No.

AP: She walked from here?

HK: She'd take the bus.

AP: Oh I see, there's a bus.

HK: She'd take the bus, or sometimes I'd take here if I was up, she would get up before I did Saturday. And she was active in the Sisterhood when she retired, and then she became ill. She was bedfast. Between being in the hospital, she was bedfast for about three years. And I had to have help, at least part-time, five days a week anyway, but at least she was not sick a lot of that time, I could, we could get her in the wheelchair and take her into the kitchen to eat with us in the evening, I had this table pushed over, you know what you do when you have sickness, you have furniture...

AP: You have to change the whole way your house is designed.

HK: All over the place, you know. That was when I quit working. I took a couple leaves, and then I didn't want to put her in a home, because we weren't raised in a home.

AP: Mhm, that's right.

HK: We weren't raised in a home. And the two boys that lived with us, when they were babies when they came to live with us, the other grandmother kept saying to my uncle, put those children in a home, it's too much for your mother, she's raised two families already, but those children in a home. Well she kept nagging and kept after him until he did, he took and put them in the Jewish Children's Home. They were there for one week. Everybody went around crying the whole week. (tape cuts out)

END OF TAPE ONE, SIDE ONE

TAPE ONE, SIDE TWO

HK: And as I said...

AP: About putting the kids in...

HK: My uncle took, and put them in the Jewish home. We all went around crying for the whole week and the next Sunday, my aunt and my uncle and I went over to the home

to see the kids, and we come back and we were all crying, and my grandmother said to my uncle, "You go tomorrow, and bring those children back." And my uncle said, "No, I'll wait 'til school's out and the girls can help you." And I said, "No you go tomorrow!" And he went the next day and brought them back. And that was the end of the home. And his mother-in-law kept quiet after that, she never said again, take those children.

AP: What an experience. Was that the home in East End?

HK: Must have been, I don't remember where we went. I remember being in there, it was an old wooden building. At least I think it was an old wooden building, I know the floors inside were bare, at least in the room, I can remember the room where we saw them.

AP: Do you have any sense that the shul did anything extra for families like yours, where there wasn't a man who could help out and whatever?

HK: I don't think so, but then I don't think, probably they did have the, people to do it, probably everyone was struggling with their own...

AP: Well for example at Pesach, what did you do about a Seder?

HK: We never had a Seder. We never had a Seder at home.

AP: So no one in the congregation ever invited you?

HK: We always had dinner, you know our big dinner for the holidays, but we never had a Seder.

AP: Yeah, that was what I was wondering about, so they --- up on that. Did you say that you did go to Sunday school?

HK: Mhm.

AP: So that was the connection that you had with the shul. Actually let me ask you something about just going to school generally, you went to school in Homestead.

HK: Munhall.

AP: Oh in Munhall.

HK: Munhall.

AP: Yeah, and so you were, I suppose a minority as a Jewish child?

HK: Yes.

AP: Did you have any sense of that when you went to school?

HK: No, no. No, really I can't say that, there were a couple others, but I don't think we were differentiated.

AP: So it felt generally as if you were in school.

HK: That's right.

AP: And your friends were, you had non-Jewish friends as well as Jewish friends?

HK: Yes, because your friends usually were, they were people around my age in the neighborhood that we played with.

AP: What about a social life when you were in high school, club activities and whatever, did you belong to things in school or were there Jewish activities at the synagogue?

HK: No, there were no Jewish activities, there was so few of us.

AP: So generally speaking it was, I'm sort of just trying to think about, the thing about being in this Jewish community in Homestead, did you really have a sense that you were in a, or Munhall I guess I should say at that point, did you have any sense that you were in a Jewish community or were you just really have a sense that you were in this little town that...

HK: Yes it was more that way than being in a Jewish community, it really wasn't that much of a Jewish community. There weren't too many girls our age. I have a friend who lives up the street, who was born the week after my mother died, and she's named for my mother, and we were close friends with her family, and a few other families in the neighborhood, but not, there weren't too many girls come to think of it, there were a couple more that we were friends with.

AP: But generally speaking it was just, it was, it was a pretty mixed...

HK: Pretty mixed.

AP: And your grandmother, let's see, she was still living when you were in high school right?

HK: Yes.

AP: Your grandmother didn't, I mean she didn't care whether you were bringing home Jewish or non-Jewish friends?

HK: Oh, not girlfriends. But we didn't go with any boys that were non-Jewish.

AP: So what did, what happened with that? Like you and your sister, or I guess even your younger cousins, they were boys.

HK: Right.

AP: So that's a different, and that's a different age because there was a bit of a break between you.

HK: Uh huh. Now my sister, she's married to a Jewish fellow, Oringer, David Oringer.

AP: From the, furniture?

HK: He was a nephew, his father was a brother, the Oringer that owned the store.

AP: So when you were in high school and thinking about going out on dates, you had to find Jewish boys to do that.

HK: Yes.

AP: Was that hard to do?

HK: Well... yes and no.

AP: Mhm. Where did they come from, did they come from the shul?

HK: No, no most of them were from Squirrel Hill.

AP: So how would you meet them?

HK: Well we had relatives over there, and I guess that's how we met them.

AP: Did you do you very much, in terms of the city, as you were growing up, or was this pretty much the community in which you did all your activities, I mean were there things that you found yourself going out of the Homestead area for in terms, your aunt I understand shopped and brought the kosher food home from downtown, or uptown, but you know other than that, did you take any kinds of extra lessons or anything like that?

HK: Oh yes. I went over to, well this was after I was working, I went over to Pitt, well even after I had my master's degree I went to Pitt and took adult education classes, art classes. I went to Carnegie Institute and took some art classes. I used to do painting.

AP: So this is when you were, did you do this when you were a child?

HK: No.

AP: This is after you were grown.

HK: After I was grown.

AP: So when you were a child, most of your activities were in Homestead.

HK: Yes, definitely most of them were in Homestead.

AP: Now obviously you had to have gone to college.

HK: Yes.

AP: So this aunt and your grandmother sent you on to college.

HK: There was a little bit of money left that my mother left that was tied up in a trust fund, which my aunt managed to get, because she didn't have the money to send me to college, but there was enough money in those days to pay for the college tuition, and she kept me in spending money and everything else, in clothes and everything else that I needed.

AP: Did your sister go also?

HK: No, she went to business school. At that time most everybody became a teacher or a nurse, you know there weren't a lot of..

AP: Choices?

HK: Choices for women then. And so I went to Indiana State Teachers College for two years, which is now Indiana University of Pennsylvania. I went there for two years and I got the rest of my education at Duquesne University after I was teaching.

AP: Oh so you mean you were able to teach after going to college for two years?

HK: For two years at that time, but you had to go on.

AP: So it was like a conditional certificate.

HK: Mhm. So I got the other two years and master's degree, well it took me four years to get the last two years and two more years to get my master's degree because I was working, going to night school and summer school.

AP: So you went away to school.

HK: For two years.

AP: In addition to going to college, you went away. How did you decide to go away? It was unusual in those days wasn't it?

HK: Well, it was the only place you could go for two years, to one of the teachers colleges.

AP: Oh I see. Was your sister still at home at that time?

HK: Yeah she was still at home.

AP: I was thinking otherwise it would have probably been harder for them to have you go.

HK: Yes, and I think, first I was homesick, of course I wouldn't admit it. But, and then I really liked it.

AP: You must have been one of, were there many Jewish students at Indiana at that time?

HK: Well it was strange, there was several. In fact, a neighbor I was talking to had a cousin who was going there, in fact I met them and went with them when I went up when I started there. And when I got up there, I was a couple days late starting because of the Jewish holidays, and when I went up there I didn't have a roommate, and this Jewish girl I was with, was from Braddock, and she says come on we'll go down to the office and we'll ask, so they said the girl that was to be in there had cancelled, did I mind being alone. I said no, because I had this friend who was, I just met she was about five doors up the hall. So we went out one afternoon and I come back and I went to open the drawer in the dresser and there were clothes in there, and then I had gotten a roommate while I was out, she was late starting too and she come in and she was a Jewish girl, and her mother wanted her to be in with a Jewish girl.

AP: Oh and arranged that?

HK: Well I didn't have a roommate, and they would have put her with me probably no matter what I wanted. But it just worked out that way. Her name was Shapiro, she was from New Castle.

AP: Was that the first time you had eaten non-kosher food as well when you went away to school?

HK: Yes.

AP: Was, was that a difficult transition?

HK: No, it wasn't. We weren't fanatics about religion, I wouldn't have brought it in the house, I still don't, but it isn't because I, I don't have any desire to.

AP: So when you came back then, you came back to Homestead, and did you at the...

HK: I taught in Munhall.

AP: Oh you did.

HK: Mhm.

AP: So you went back and taught in your very own school.

HK: Mhm.

AP: And did you continue to take Jewish holidays off as a teacher?

HK: Oh yes.

AP: And did you ever have a problem with that?

HK: No. I never had a problem taking off for many years, we didn't get paid for it. Then they started to give us personal days, of course my personal days always went for the Jewish holidays.

AP: And you didn't have any more. Were there other Jewish teachers there when you were teaching?

HK: There were a couple, there were a couple more in the district.

AP: So it wasn't a large number.

HK: No, but there were a couple more. But there was never any question then, I just took off.

AP: And as long, and you never had any problems.

HK: No, never had any problem. I know that one time Molly was going to take off, and for some reason, I don't know who the boss was then, said no, and she was ready to quit.

AP: Is this at Kauffman's?

HK: At Kauffman's.

AP: There you are. And that had, it's Jewish foundation.

HK: That's right.

AP: And there was Munhall that probably knew very little about Jewish holidays.

HK: That's right.

AP: So...

HK: And I started, I have three nieces, and the once niece, she's a doctor now, but when she was in college she wanted, what brought this up was before we put this tape on, I was saying how Molly did for everybody. She was, had a chance to go to Europe, for I think she was there about eight weeks, they worked for five weeks and then they could tour Europe or do what they wanted for the other three weeks, and all they needed was the fare to go over, and Molly have her the fare to go over.

AP: Oh my.

HK: She was a good person. She did for everyone.

AP: Out of her little earnings.

HK: Out of her little earnings.

AP: My goodness.

HK: She gave her the fare to go over. And then some spending money, we have her spending money, and she used to come and stay with us a lot when she was little. The other girls did too, but (unclear) was the oldest, she came more than the others.

AP: Did the synagogue ask you, since they now had a trained teacher in their midst, did they recruit you at all to teach in the Sunday school?

HK: No, I could have but, I really didn't want to.

AP: What did you teach?

HK: First and second grade.

AP: So you were teaching small children.

HK: Uh huh.

AP: I saw the Spanish book and so I thought maybe you were teaching high school.

HK: No, I, that's something I just did in the last few years. I started to study Spanish.

AP: And sign language.

HK: And sign language.

AP: That's interesting you keep broadening your horizons.

HK: Oh yes. I would like to get in a sign language class, and Spanish class, but I can't get the advanced Spanish now, of course I don't have that much, we tried to get the, a fellow to teach advanced Spanish, and he said he would, but the people that run the adult education up here, they're --- themselves, and they don't run it, they're really not up on what they should be doing, because everybody in that Spanish class would have come back. They all wanted it, he said he would teach it, they were afraid they won't get enough so they offered Spanish 1 again, which I have taken a couple times. And the sign language I would like to get into a class, but I, because you can learn to sign, that is no problem you could even learn to do that yourself you can learn all the signs. But you can't receive unless you have learned to receive, you need the practice. And I watch anything that I can on T.V., there's a program, they're not carrying it on our stations now, it's being carried in other places, called Deaf World, and it's a religious program, but I watch it anyway.

AP: Because you get to see the signs.

HK: I watch, this man is very good and I can follow his signs. But they're not carrying it anymore. And I watch that Reasonable Doubts program on T.V. with M-- M-- (unclear) just so I can watch, but she goes so fast.

AP: That you can't follow.

HK: That it's hard. I can pick up signs, and then they don't sign every word when they're doing it.

AP: It's probably too much for the viewers.

HK: Yes.

AP: We're gonna jump around, I sort of want to go back because I mean obviously you have memories of the war here. Do you have any memory at the same time of any sense about the condition of Jews in Europe?

HK: I remember knowing it was terrible. It was terrible. We didn't have anybody there.

AP: But there was, I mean you have some memory of being aware that awful things were happening.

HK: Oh definitely. Yes. And I really don't think we knew at the time how bad things were, that were happening.

AP: Did the Jewish community do, were they, was there anything in the shul trying to raise any kind of awareness like that?

HK: I don't recall that.

AP: What about when Israel was declared. Was there any kind of a celebration?

HK: No, I don't think there was. I don't think there was. I don't recall anything.

AP: Do you remember much about, were there events of any kinds of celebrations in shul besides the high holidays?

HK: They had dinners there.

AP: Just for the whole community.

HK: For anybody who wanted to go.

AP: Did most people go?

HK: Yes, most people went. They would get a nice crowd.

AP: And you stayed with the community all, until the end.

HK: Yes, although I was never real active in the Sisterhood until after I was retired and by that time, my aunt was gone, and by that time the community was small and we would have minion breakfasts for the people on Sunday morning for anybody that wanted to come. And the women worked in the kitchen, the women worked in the kitchen. We had a nice kitchen down there.

AP: So you continued to go to services until, was it last year?

HK: Last year. I guess it's been, this is the second high holidays that we haven't had any services.

AP: So what will you do now?

HK: I don't know, there's no place I really want to go to. I don't have ties anyplace or family anyplace. My cousin has joined up in Mount Lebanon up at Beth-El, but his daughter, he has a daughter that goes there.

AP: Yeah it's hard after you've been, I mean obviously even though you were busy working, you still thought of yourself as a part of this community.

HK: Oh definitely.

AP: Do you have any, any strong memories of any of the rabbis who were at the shul? Either positively or otherwise.

HK: Yes. I think the one I liked the best, the first one I remember was Rabbi Pinkus, and he lived right in back of us for several years, but Rabbi Weiss, do you remember Rabbi Weiss?

AP: Yes I do.

HK: He was a wonderful person. He married my sister. He was supposed to marry my youngest cousin, and one of the sons called the house that day, the day before I think, or a couple days before and said he couldn't marry, something had happened. And that was when his daughter died in Israel, do you remember that?

AP: No... I don't.

HK: He had a daughter that was over in Israel, young girl, that died over there. So someone else came to Homestead to marry my cousin, I think it was Rabbi Halpurn, and I liked Rabbi Weiss.

AP: So his daughter died while he was the rabbi in Homestead congregation.

HK: Yes.

AP: Did the congregation do anything?

HK: I don't recall.

AP: I'm trying to think what a congregation does when, instead of the rabbi comforting the congregants, it's the...

HK: Yes. I remember going to his home when they were sitting ---, but she was buried over there. She's buried in Israel.

AP: I guess that's generally true, that somebody who's gone to Israel, they don't bring back.

HK: No, I think that's, and she was just a young girl, I don't know whether they ever found out what happened. Probably picked up some disease or something. I liked Rabbi Weiss. When he found out Molly had been sick he came to the house here.

AP: He was no longer the rabbi then.

HK: He, no. He was no longer the rabbi here. He went to a small, I don't know why he left Homestead. He was over at a small shul in, I don't remember if it was B'nai ---, I think that's where he was, wasn't he? And he came here to see Molly when she came home from the hospital. And he had a woman, she wasn't a Jewish woman, but she was studying Judaism, she was studying, I don't know whether she was converted or not, but she drove him every place. And he was in here telling me, I don't know why I had

though he had driven, and he said this woman's out in the car, and I said why didn't you bring her in? So I went out and got her, it wasn't even that warm. So she came in. Of course he's dead now too. But I liked Rabbi Weiss, and I like Rabbi Pritzker. Do you remember Rabbi Pritzker?

AP: No, as long as I remember Rabbi Weiss was there so he was the only person in my own memory.

HK: Rabbi Pritzker came and he was a very nice person. He went to Canada. I think he joined a school there, he taught at a school, or they ran a school or something there, but I liked him.

AP: He came before, was he before Rabbi Weiss?

HK: No he was after Rabbi Weiss. And then I remember another little rabbi that was here for a very short time, and people weren't too fond of him, but I thought, I liked him because (phone rings and tape cuts out)

AP: You were talking about the rabbi that the congregation...

HK: Oh, his name was Finer, Finer, I think it was Finer. But he came to the hospital a couple times to see my aunt. And he came over when she left the hospital, the doctor had suggested we take her to Whiteman Manor, for therapy, because he had just started her on therapy when they made us move her, and he came over there to see her in the worst kind of weather. And for that I liked him. He was not a speaker, but he was a, he was a good person. He came, I liked him. Then we had a couple others after that I think. We had one that was a rabbi, we had one that was a rabbi when my uncle died, who was according to, wasn't allowed to come into the cemetery, and he wrote us a letter saying he didn't have time to come to visit when we were sitting ---. Of course I wasn't sitting, but my aunt was you know. And so I didn't think too much of him.

AP: My goodness.

HK: Yeah. And then we had one like that when my aunt was sick who officiated at her funeral services, and he only came here once because some other woman sent him, told him to come all the time she was sick. And then when we had the unveiling, he stood up there and talked about her husband, it was a single woman, I was so mad at myself that I didn't speak up right in the middle of the service.

AP: Oh how awful. That's just terrible.

HK: Isn't it?

AP: Yes, that just really is.

HK: I mean he had officiated her funeral, and he was reading a prayer and talking about her husband, she didn't have a husband. But I did like Rabbi Weiss and Rabbi Pritzker.

AP: Now, you know this Rabbi Fine, or Finer, the one that the congregation didn't care for, was that, you said he wasn't much of a speaker, was that the problem?

HK: I think that was it. He wasn't here too long.

AP: I guess it was hard for, or was it, this community never had a rabbi for a really long time.

HK: Rabbi Weiss was here for a long time, Rabbi Pritzker for a good while. I'm trying to think who any of the others were. Those were about the only ones.

AP: I was just trying to figure out if it was because it was hard for a small community to keep a rabbi for a long period of time.

HK: I don't know, the house that's next door to our, what was our synagogue (phone rings and tape cuts out)

HK: (cuts in) Our great-grandmother is the oldest grave in the cemetery, it was the first grave there.

AP: Really? So not only was your grandmother here, but your great grandmother was here.

HK: My great-grandmother.

AP: So she's the first grave in the cemetery.

HK: The first grave in our cemetery.

AP: Does it look really different from the others?

HK: No, the stone is beautiful. There's no English on it, it was Rabbi Pritzker that read the stone, but the stone held up beautifully.

AP: Did you know, did your great grandmother, your great grandmother didn't come directly to Homestead when she came to America did she?

HK: I don't know. I don't know. But I know that she lived with, my aunt remembers her and said she was a very sweet person.

AP: This is your grandmother's mother?

HK: My grandmother's mother.

END OF TAPE ONE, SIDE TWO

TAPE TWO, SIDE ONE

(noise)

AP: You were saying that your...

HK: Her maiden name, my grandmother's maiden name was Schwartz, but after my grandmother married my grandfather, my great-grandmother, her mother, married his father.

AP: Really? How interesting, so they met their --- and they married.

HK: But I think that was, that must have been, I don't know whether it was in Europe or here.

AP: So they both ended up being Schwartzes.

HK: Ended up being Markowitzes.

AP: Oh, Markowitz, that's right, Markowitz.

HK: But I don't think Markowitz is on her, I think the name on her tombstone is Goldi Schwartz.

AP: So she used that name.

HK: Probably that was, she was probably not married to him that long. I don't really know.

AP: And the name for most of her life would have been...

HK: She may have even married him in Europe, and then come here. I don't know how, the things that we didn't ask that I wish I knew.

AP: Yeah that's, it always gets away from you. But even when I finish with this I will think of things that I wish I would have asked you.

HK: But the grave is no, the stone is lovely, it's held up beautifully. It's been cleaned.

AP: Oh, really?

HK: It's been cleaned. But the, the writing on it, it's not raised, it's indented as I remember, which, she's buried not far from my mother.

AP: Oh so your mother is also buried there.

HK: And my mother, my great-grandmother, my grandmother, my mother, and my aunt and my uncle are all buried in our cemetery.

AP: So it's a real family plot. When you go to the cemetery, you know, before the holidays, I guess you still see a lot of the old congregants then.

HK: Yes, although there aren't that many that, there's so few. You see people that come from other places, and then they youngest boy's wife is buried there too. Edgar's wife. He's the one that just called before.

AP: Oh his wife is also...

HK: His wife died about two years ago.

AP: But there aren't a large number of people who come to the cemetery, is there a set time or do you just, everybody chooses their own time before the holidays when they go?

HK: There is a set time. They send out letters every year, I don't know about this year. Did you know Oscar Cohen?

AP: I knew his name, he just died.

HK: He just died. Oscar sent the letters out last year. I don't know when they'll be sent out this year. But we didn't always go, well we used to when my aunt was living and for years after that, but we didn't always go on that day, a lot of times because Edgar had to work that Sunday, he's a pharmacist. And he had to work that Sunday, so we would pick a day when he didn't have to go and they everybody would come here for brunch, I'd always have the boys and my sister and her husband and they boys and their wives here for brunch after we went to the cemetery.

AP: Yeah. Do they do something there, when, if you went on the day that they had as the designated day, did they have some kind of a get together afterwards for everybody?

HK: No.

AP: No, so it was just that you would see whoever you saw.

HK: Yes. But I go out in between the lot because it's not that far from here, and Edgar does too, he goes quite a bit. And we were out there on Mother's Day, I often go out on Mother's Day, and I told him as soon as we get a little bit cooler weather we want to go out and fix up the graves. They take care of them, they do, they keep them nice for the holidays, it is kept pretty nice, but we'd like to go out and weed and fix up the individual graves and Edgar and I go out a good bit together and do it.

AP: It's nice to have someone to go with. Since you were with the shul to the end were you involved at all in the decision to close it?

HK: No. No, we wanted to keep it open. We knew we couldn't keep it open any longer.

AP: So, but I mean, as the remaining members, I guess you were a member, or however they, what, did they have members...

HK: Well they did but women were not members. Single women were not members.

AP: Oh.

HK: And once after, oh I'd say ten, fifteen years ago when we, when our congregation was getting small and we would have these minion breakfasts and I brought it up, and I said I can't see any reason why single should not be members. And they decided, well this is the congregation, we are the congregation, we can make our own rules. So they decided single women should pay, and widows, should pay half dues, well I paid them for several years, and then Milton Wolff, who was the treasurer, said, "Helen, you're the only one who's paying dues." He said, "If you want to make a donation, make a donation. As far as I'm concerned you're a member." So we would donate, we always did donate money you know.

AP: So before that, before you had made this proposal.

HK: Single women were not, were not really members of the congregation.

AP: I guess in some ways, and so only men were making the decisions for everything with the synagogue, is that right?

HK: Yes.

AP: Because even married women were technically not members, they were only members by way of their husband.

HK: That's right. Yes.

AP: And so all a single, or a widow, or a single woman would do, using single women to mean everybody without a husband, all they would do then is pay for a seat, is that right?

HK: Pay for a seat.

AP: I see.

HK: Of course they always made donations. We always made donations at the high holidays.

AP: And so like when you were going to Sunday school or when your cousins were going to Hebrew school your grandmother was probably just paying for their schooling, rather than having the whole membership.

HK: That' right.

AP: Oh I see.

HK: We had, for oh about fifteen years, first it was the Sisterhood, we sent out cards. I had charge of them for about fifteen years, for any occasion they were, I don't even have one left, I used the last of them, but anyone who wanted to send a card for any occasion we had cards printed, at first they were the Sisterhood, and then when the Sisterhood dissolved we made, the last cards were made out: The Homestead Hebrew Congregation. A contribution has been made to the Homestead Hebrew Congregation by so and so, and then in memory of or whatever you wanted to do. For birthdays or anniversaries and everybody would call me, and I'd send them out.

AP: Oh so you did it.

HK: I did them for about fifteen years before.

AP: So you knew all the good and bad events that were happening.

HK: Yes, mhm.

AP: The Sisterhood dissolved because there were not enough women to do it?

HK: I guess, I'm trying to think why they, I guess we still had a handful, but there weren't that many so they just dissolved the Sisterhood.

AP: And then when all the decision making was going on about how to maintain, or not being able to maintain the synagogue, that was also, now that you were a member, were you involved?

HK: Yes. We had several meetings. We tried to keep it open, some of us fought to keep it open at least for the high holidays, but it really wasn't practical, we realized that even though we wanted it. They needed a lot of repairs. They needed a new furnace, and a lot of repairs, but that place was home to me, you know.

AP: Yes it's very hard to close a place that was...

HK: That's right.

AP: So in spite of the fact that you, you lived in this larger Homestead community, I'm saying Homestead even though it's Munhall, I mean that whole area, the shul was really a special, a special part of that life.

HK: Oh definitely. That's why I don't want to go anyplace else.

AP: That's nice that it was such a, at least that it's such a happy memory.

HK: Oh yes.

AP: It was a warm congregation.

HK: It was.

AP: Do you still have relationships with other people who were members of it?

HK: Yes, this friend of mine that was named after my mother lives right up the street. And I have cousins that came there. There aren't too many people though that, there's a handful, a handful of us still around here. You've probably talked to the Katzses, Clarice and Bob.

AP: Yes I did. Because they were really involved I guess in closing it.

HK: Yes.

AP: I guess before we end I should just ask if I missed anything, or if anything come to mind that you'd like to add?

HK: I can't think of anything. I'll think of a lot of things after you leave.

AP: I know, just as I will think of the questions I wish I had asked, that's why I thought, well, we'll give it a moment to see if we missed something as we were jumping all over the place with these things. But I hope we, well if you think of something give me a call.

HK: I will.

AP: Thanks very much, this was wonderful.

HK: Oh you're quite welcome, I enjoyed having you. How would you like a cup of coffee and something?

AP: This has been Anne Sheckter Powell interviewing Helen Kline in her dining room, in her home in Homestead Park in July of 1993. We're talking about the Homestead Hebrew Congregation Oral History Project of the Western Pennsylvania Jewish Archives of the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania.