

**Transcript of Interview with Ruth Stein Halle**  
**Homestead Hebrew Congregation Oral History Project**  
**Call Number: CSS #4**

**Rauh Jewish Archives**  
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**Senator John Heinz History Center**  
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Ann S. Powell:

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Transcribed by Marygrace Denk

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Pre-interview Notes:

Transcribers Notes:

(?) = I am not sure of the spelling.

(talk over) = both interviewer and interviewee are talking at once.

Transcription:

ANN SHECKTER POWELL: Were you born in the Homestead area?

RUTH STEIN HALLE: Yes, I was born at Magee Hospital. I was born May 12, 1940. I am fifty-three years old.

AP: Now for some back-up before you. How did your parents come to Homestead? You were, they were already there when you were born?

RH: Yes, my father, my father had a, or I should say my grandfather had a business in Homestead on Eighth Avenue. And my father went into business with him. It was a bar on Eighth Avenue. Then my father opened up his own bar, at Sixth and Amity Street, which was next to the railroad tracks. And that's where we were raised. I mean, that's, that's what my father's business was. And through high school and through business school.

AP: (?)

RH: We had the business. Yes.

AP: So your, it was your grandparents who actually came to Homestead.

RH: My grand--, my father's father. And my mother's father had a grocery store in Squirrel Hill. And then they sold the business, and they came to live in Munhall. Next door to my mother and father, that was already their second, my mother and father's second move.

AP: Oh, I see. So you had, in the end you had grandparents from both sides of your family here, who lived in that area.

RH: Uh huh.

AP: This is the first time I heard of people who had made the move from Squirrel Hill to Munhall rather than ---

RH: No, not from Squirrel Hill, no, from Duquesne, ---

AP: Oh, I see --

RH: My mother's parents, my mother's parents lived in Duquesne.

AP: Oh, I see, okay.

RH: Not from Squirrel Hill.

AP: Okay, they were already in the area.

RH: Uh huh.

AP: I take it, it, were, were your grandparents immigrants?

RH: Yes, yes. Let's see what I can remember. My mother's mother came from Russia. I really don't remember where my father's, I guess, from the same. I guess from the same.

AP: (?)

RH: Yeah.

AP: Have you have any idea why your grandfather came, opened his business in Homestead?

RH: No. I really have no idea.

AP: So when, you were born in the city. You weren't born in Homestead Hospital. They went to the city for---

RH: Right. Right. Because I, because, I guess, that's where the doctor was, I don't even know who the doctor was at the time. But the pediatrician, I remember, was Doctor Sydney Saul. And I used him for many years even after my children were born, too. We'd go to Squirrel Hill.

AP: So, even, even as a child you remember going to Squirrel Hill or having the doctor come from Squirrel Hill. To, to, to you in Homestead.

RH: Right.

AP: So there were already things that were happening outside that any, any

RH: Absolutely. Absolutely because there was, there weren't too many things going on in Homestead or Homestead Park at the time. And if you wanted a doctor, you, you went across the Homestead High-Level Bridge into Squirrel Hill, or that area.

AP: Now, when you were a little girl, where was the, where was the first place in Homestead where you lived?

R H: Well, it wasn't Homestead, it, it, we never lived in Homestead, we lived in Homestead Park.

AP: Oh, you did, from the time you were a child.

RH: I believe we lived on Virginia Avenue. Which is in Munhall. Which was near Sherman's Pharmacy. And then we moved to Davis Avenue in Homestead Park. And that's, that's really where I, I remember growing up.

AP: Do you, do you remember living in Munhall at all or was that before you ---?

RH: That was, I was very small.

AP: So your memories were all of being in Homestead Park.

RH: Yes.

AP: Which is, is that still the Munhall School System?

RH: Yes, because Park School, we walked to school at Park School, and then we went to Woodlawn Junior High, and then we went to Munhall Senior High.

AP: So you were ---

RH: Which is no longer there.

AP: Like so many things.

RH: Right. Things change. For the best, for the best.

AP: You know, you see, were your parents observant? At all? I would like to say, how would you describe them?

RH: As far as religious wise --

AP: Uh huh.

RH: Yes, my mother, my mother kept a kosher house. My grandmother, who lived next door, kept a kosher house. And that's the way we were raised. And what you did outside of the house, you did on your own. But as far as inside of the house, yeah we kept a kosher house.

AP: So for example the High Holidays, when you were going to shul, did they walk from Homestead Park?

RH: No, we rode. We drove, we drove. As far as that part of it, the religious part of it, we drove and drove back home again, but, no, but we did not walk.

AP: I thought that was an incredibly long walk.

RH: No, no, we did not.

AP: What about kosher food? I mean, meat. How did your mother and grandmother get that?

RH: They would go to Squirrel Hill and get the meat, and they would come home, and if nec --, they kashered the meat themselves in the cellar with the, the wooden racks and the salt and everything, and the salt and everything. And they each had freezers in their own homes. And that's the way they kashered the meat at the time. And

(talk over)

AP: No, I'm sorry, go ahead.

RH: Go ahead.

AP: Did they drive to it, did your mother drive?

RH: My mother drove, my father drove, yeah, whatever they needed as far as anything kosher, they had to go to Squirrel Hill, to Murray Avenue to get it.

AP: And you had a, a, now what about you, did you have any kind of back and forth in terms of, I, I guess I'm trying to figure out what it was like being a Jewish child growing up in, largely in a non-Jewish area.

RH: There were only three of us at that time, that lived in, well, two of us that lived in Homestead Park, then when I went to the senior high school, then we met another friend. Who lived down in what they called Lower Munhall. And then the three of us, we were the only three Jewish children in the Munhall school district at the time.

AP: In the whole school district?

RH: At that time, yeah I mean at that point we were seniors. Because the Woodlawn only went from I think 'till tenth grade. Eleventh and twelfth grade you had to go to the senior high school. And I mean, there were other Jewish children that were older than we were at the time.

AP: Yeah, but where, where you were, you were really, that was, that was as many ---

RH: That was it. I mean, we had the Homestead BBYO. And I remember having, we had a tournament in Homestead, and they came in from all over. And we housed kids I, I, I must have been sixteen at the time. And because I remember driving to some of these affairs that we had to go to.

AP: Yeah.

RH: It was fantastic.

AP: You have to ---

RH: Your first initial, you know, of, of meeting people with, of, of the opposite sex and, and gathering all these Jewish children together in one place. It was just very, very exciting.

AP: Was there a BBG chapter in Homestead or Munhall, in that area?

RH: Not, there weren't enough girls for a BBG chapter and weren't enough guys for an AZA chapter, so they called it a BBYO.

AP: Oh, I see. Then you had a combined group.

RH: Uh huh.

AP When there, --- when its all ---?, so there was something there for you.

RH: Yes, there was.

AP: And there were enough of you to put something together.

RH: Yes, there was.

AP: That, did that feel, adequate to you?

RH: Yeah, it was. And then as we grew older we would go into Squirrel Hill for, for dances and other AZA and BBG Conventions. Or whatever there was. I mean we were never deprived of going out of town, if there was something in, say, Beaver Falls or wherever, we were, we always went. Because that was your way of meeting new kids and, and keeping friendships with the old. Or going to McKeesport. And we always did.

AP: What about dating, were you, did you, I mean, did you have to find people within, within, the, within BBYO or something or did your parents --- ?

RH: Within the Jewish Organization?

RH: It was difficult, but as you grew older, I mean, our parents were strict. So you adhered to what they asked you to do.

AP: So you didn't like --- ?

RH: Nope. Not at the time. And then as we grew older, and we were into the BBG/AZA era, if you went to these affairs and you met a date, then and if you were close enough to home, or you were away from home, and you would go out, and then come back to where you were supposed to be.

AP: And was that generally the situation with the other Jewish kids --

RH: Yeah.

AP: Now what about, did the shul do anything for you?

RH: When they had, when the BBYO Convention was held in Homestead, they had it at the Shul, and I don't remember really what all else, they had to have some athletic activity someplace, and I don't remember where it was. Or bowling, probably within Homestead someplace. I just don't, I just don't remember.

AP: As for, for any social life, in terms of Jewish social life, it really had to be BBYO. There wasn't anything that was happening in the, in the synagogue per se.

RH: No, No. We brought it all together, whoever was president at the time, and vice-president. And, and we didn't mind it at all. I mean, at least we had someplace to go to hang out. And communications with everybody else and friendships that we kept in touch with.

AP: Did you meet in the synagogue?

RH: Yeah, and sometimes we met at homes.

AP: Oh, I see, because it was, the group was small enough.

RH: Yeah, there weren't that many. There weren't that many.

AP: Were the kids in BBYO largely people who you already knew from the synagogue?

BH: Yes. Yes, they belonged to the Synagogue, because Homestead was, it wasn't that big of a Synagogue to begin with. And we just, everybody just knew everybody. And not that many new people were coming into the area whether it be Homestead, Munhall or Homestead Park. You knew who was there and...

AP: Yeah. What about when you were a child, and you went to public school? Do you have any, any, I guess I don't want to say problems, but you know I mean, being Jewish, did that create any special situations for you?

RH: It always, it always raised questions and problems. But even with my own children here, raising them here, with a mixed community. But you, I, with my father, with the business he had, for instance, at Christmas time, he put up a Christmas tree in the, in the bar. And we would go down and decorate the Christmas tree. There were a lot of friendly people with, that my mother and father had that would invite us over, you know for the Holidays, or you know, this, that or the other thing. And, but you always knew you were Jewish. You never wanted to be something that you weren't. And we just,

that's the way we grew up. And, with having my own children, you go through the same thing, and come, come Hanukkah time, you, I used to decorate the windows with glass wax and put the different decals on the windows. And borrowed an electric Menorah to put in the window, and you still have the same thing, my neighbor across the street, we go over and we decorate her tree, my children know that and they entertain, and I have entertaining here they're invited here also.

AP: Uh huh.

RH: It's a give and take.

AP: So actually, you don't, you don't have a sense of a really intense difference from your experiences when you were a child to your

RH: No, no.

AP: Children's experiences now?

RH: No, no, because I did the same thing, I would do the same thing for my children as I did as a child growing up, that I can remember.

AP: And otherwise, I am gathering then that there wasn't any kinds of pressures in going on

RH: You got the names called to you, but you just ignored them. And you just went on.

AP: Then you did those kinds of experiences.

RH: Sure, sure, you did.

AP: What about missing classes, you know, when you took off Jewish holidays? Did you ever have a problem with that?

RH: No, you just did it, because you wanted to, and because whether you wanted to or not, it was because it is what your family said you had to do, so you didn't question. "Do I do it or not do it." And

AP: Nothing was said?

RH: Nothing, nothing was said. I mean, you made up whatever work it was or any tests or anything else.

AP: Analogous with what's happening with your children now.

RH: Same thing.

AP: So you didn't feel any intense pressures from the school or any kind of negative-ness--

(talk over)

RH: No.

AP: (?)---- in rather you were there ----(?)

RH: No, no

(talk over)

AP: So in terms of that, there, there wasn't that ---

RH: No, No. There's no difference between Jew and Gentile,

AP: Did you have many Jewish friends?

RH: Yes, I had a lot of Jewish friends. In fact on Davis Avenue my friend Gay McGill(?), who lived across the street, and my friend Linda Redschein(?) lived behind, and those were two of my best girlfriends. And Linda was the same age as I am. Gay was a year older than I was. In fact we have a class reunion coming up in, in October. And I hope to see Linda at that time. Gay I lost track of, I mean, her family, I think, still lives on Woodlawn Avenue. But maybe we'll see her at the, at the reunion.

AP: Yeah.

RH: I'm looking forward to it.

AP: Yeah

RH: There were a lot of, of kids that, from my class. I wasn't the most popular person in school, but there were friendships that... And I have not kept in touch with people. Which is very, very bad, and we'll see everybody in October.

AP: And that's what always happens.

(talk over)

RH: And my friend sent me a letter from Florida. She's coming up for the reunion too. That will be nice to see her, too.

AP: (?)

RH: These were, this was the other Jewish girl, there, there were two, two Jewish women and one Jewish guy.

AP: Did you also have close non-Jewish friends?

RH: Yeah, the two girls that I grew up with, on Davis Avenue, were non-Jewish. And the same would happen on Holidays, too, I mean, if we had a holiday or birthday party, or whatever, they were there. So we all got along well together.

AP: Now, did you go to Hebrew School?

RH: Yes, we went to Hebrew School. Does the smoking bother you?

AP: No, not at all.

AP: Do you have brothers and sisters?

RH: I have a brother, his name is Daniel. He lives in Squirrel Hill. He's married, and he has two children, Lee and Joseph.

AP: Now is he older than you are?

RH: He's younger than I am, He's seven years younger than I am.

AP: Oh, so he grew up--

RH: Also in Homestead Park.

AP: At different times, you were, like, not going to the same schools at the same time, or having the same, or similar kinds of experiences. –

RH: Well, I was older. So I was born in 1940, and he was born in 1947. And he was very sick as a child and, I think, that was one of the reason my grandparents closed the store and moved from Duquesne to Homestead.

AP: To be nearby (?)

RH: Right. But I was the queen bee up until, up until he was born.

AP: Yeah, then you were always there (?) anyhow.

RH: Yeah, right.

AP: So you had to take, what, a bus, how did you get to Hebrew school from Homestead Park?

RH: We were driven in car pools.

AP: Oh, during ----

RH: They, there were younger children than, than we were. But somehow they managed to get us back and forth. We never missed anything.

AP: Were there many girls in Hebrew school, or were you in the minority, another minority for that?

RH: Yes, there were less women or girls, and yeah, there were more guys then we were, and I know the Fisher twins were, were the same age, Steven and Stewart Fisher, and Normy Weinberger, Eddie Grinberg, Margie Carpe. Brings back old memories. And Hinda, we met when we started Hebrew school. (?) They were all in our, in our age group.

AP: And did you all have a class? Did you share ---

RH: We shared the same class. Yeah.

AP: And did you go four days a week?

RH: Yeah, I think we did. Yeah.

AP: Did you mind that?

RH: No, no. Just like, gentile kids have to go to, what's it called?

AP: Catechism?

RH: Catechism, yeah.

AP: This is what we had.

RH: Yeah, same thing. There's no difference between the two religions, there really isn't.

AP: And you went to Sunday school as well.

RH: Went to Sunday school also.

AP: Who taught in Hebrew School?

RH: Oh, I don't remember.

AP: Did they have regular teachers?

RH: Yeah, they brought in teachers.

AP: Okay, so you didn't have to rely on Rabbi (?).

RH: No, no, they brought in, they brought in teachers. And they weren't Israeli teachers either.

AP: I guess there wasn't too [much in Israel in those days?].

RH: No, there wasn't, so, I don't even remember who the teachers were. My father has all that, the books with growing up and everything, I don't have that.

AP: Oh ----

RH: He's got them. He's got them, I don't have anything around here.

AP: So he kept all them. Were they active, your parents?

RH: Yes, very active in the shul. Very active.

AP: Your father's name was?

RH: Bernard Stein.

AP: Bernard. Okay. So he's still in the area.

RH: He lives now in Greenfield, yes. And my brother lives in Squirrel Hill and, on, I just forgot the name of the street.

AP: Yeah, it's easy for these things to just vanish...

RH: Douglas, Douglas

AP: Oh.

RH: Okay, so they're close by.

AP: You stayed in Homestead until?

RH: Until I got married.

AP: Oh, so you were there, did you meet somebody from the area?

RH: I was working at the Veterans' Hospital in Oakland. And I worked for them for two and a half years, and I was entertaining at my home one evening, my parents' home, and that's how I met my husband.

AP: So he was not, he was not from Homestead?

RH: No, he lived in Squirrel Hill.

(talk over)

AP: And it was after that that you moved. Now where did you move, when you, when you got married.

RH: When I left home, we moved, our first apartment was at Fifth and Negley in Shadyside.

AP: You moved into the city itself.

RH: Uh huh.

AP: Then at some point you decided to come ---

RH: Well, after having my sons, I have twin boys, and the apartment started, the walls started closing in, and after we moved to Fifth and Negley, then we moved to Ellwood Street. And after Ellwood Street, then we moved out to the South Hills.

AP: I guess the reason I was asking was having had the experience of growing up in, not exactly the, the modern suburbs, but something that was not, you know, was not the mainstream Jewish city community. You, you choose having privacy for a little bit, to do something similar, I, I guess, because you were talking about the fact that your children have experiences not all that different from yours, being out here.

RH: Well, my husband worked in Shadyside, so, he's a pharmacist. And it was just easier to be in that area. And at the time, I can't say everybody, but several of my friends at the time, when they got married, they moved to Shadyside. That was, like, their first apartment, and after that then they moved from Shadyside to their own homes or where ever else they were going.

AP: But you weren't looking for a predominately Jewish community after having – (talk over) – in Homestead.

RH: No, no.

AP: So what I'm getting at was, I'm assuming that means that your sons are growing up there with sufficiently satisfactory

RH: It was.

(major talk over)

AP: (?) to get a really changed kind of situation

RH: You mean to live in the Squirrel--, no no.

AP: (?)Exactly.

RH: No, no, nobody really wanted to be in the main heart of Squirrel Hill. I always said that as a kid. I don't know why we can't move to Squirrel Hill. You know, but,

AP: You did just, just -----

RH: I did, but that was just 'cause they had more fun, supposedly, you know and, but, but we didn't have any problems, where ever we had to be, my friends, as we got older, even before driving, my friend, from Lower Munhall, Hinda, her father, at the time, would drive us to Oakland, and/or my father would drive us, and, and, or my mother would drive us and then Mr. Mandell would pick us up. So we never lost anything, we never lost ground. And we never missed a trick.

AP: [Did you notice that a lot?], when you were in Squirrel Hill, like for various services, I mean, aside from using the pediatrician, like, using your memory, did you take any kinds of, were there, were there any kinds of things, I guess rather than my being specific that took you into the city regularly?

RH: No, not that I can think of. I mean, just the doctors.

AP: Did you take any kinds of lessons. Did you take music lessons?

RH: I took piano lessons.

AP: Now, was that in Homestead? Or in the Homestead area?

RH: Yeah, it was. Yeah, because we had a piano downstairs in our house. And I can't remember who gave me the lessons.

AP: But it was somebody within that --

RH: Yeah, within the Homestead area. And I remember my brother taking saxophone lessons, and they would come to the house and give him lessons.

AP: Generally speaking, aside from going to the kosher butcher and to the pediatrician, those were the only that you really

RH: Well, we went to buy clothes in Squirrel Hill.

AP: Oh, you did?

RH: Yea.

AP: It wasn't in Homestead

RH: Yeah, bec-, I mean, depending, you hit Squirrel Hill, or else you hit Homestead first, and then if you didn't find what you wanted, then you'd go to Squirrel Hill. So, I mean, or going downtown.

AP: Did you know kids from other, where you were having these BBYO experiences, were you able to compare your own experiences with kids who were in more self-contained or remote Jewish communities? You talked about Beaver Falls that was really separated from the city the way that Homestead is.

RH: Yeah.

AP: I was wondering if you had any sense that their experiences were really, very different from someone like you. ---

RH: They were about the same because that was the first time I met Bernice, Bernice Epstein, Myers, and we used to go on the train to, to Beaver Falls. She would pick us up at the train station, or she would come to visit her grandparents that lived on either Ninth or Tenth Avenue.

AP: Oh, so, she had

RH: So, she would come in, and then she would come to Sunday school with us on Sunday, and we became very good friends, she and Hinda and I. And then, and as I said, we would travel to McKeesport, and we met people there. And basically, you know, Beaver Falls had the same thing. I don't think they had enough for an AZA or a BBG. I think they had a BBYO also. So, you know, they didn't miss anything just as we didn't miss anything.

AP: Did you find that you had more, or was there a different kind of affinity that you had for other Jewish young people who lived in the other small towns versus the ones who lived in the city? Or was that a kind of separation, not –

RH: No, there wasn't really any, we were just glad to see everybody, and we talked on the phone to everybody and kept in touch that way. But no, I don't think there was any big difference.

END OF TAPE ONE, SIDE ONE  
TAPE ONE, SIDE TWO

[Apparently discussing the conversation lost when tape-side ends]

AP: I suspect by now, it's ready for us.

RH: Yes, it is.

AP: Every so often I hear my voice coming in, in the middle of a sentence.

RH: Oh, certainly, you have to jump right in there.

(talk over)

AP: Right, there's not that much that is lost, you can sort of pick up the momentum with what was happening.

RH: Oh, yeah.

AP: Except when you turn it over and you forget what you were talking about. I wanted to ask you, and asked you before about, how it was in terms of missing school with Holidays, and I sort of wanted to jump in just to ask you do you have you any memories in terms with your own, I guess your own connections with the synagogue and your own connections with celebrations. With not, not so much in comparison with what was happening in the non-Jewish community, but just in terms of, of like you said your parents were very active in the synagogue. Did that involve you in any way?

RH: There were, well, the synagogue itself, had dinners, they had luncheons, we were, we were there for the dinners and for the luncheons.

AP: Okay, the children came.

RH: My mother was president of the Sisterhood, for many years, and they were also, they were also, had a dinner for them, I don't remember how many years ago it was. And we were there for that. My brother's Bar Mitzvah was at the Homestead shul, my confirmation was at the Homestead shul. Rabbi Jack Siegel was the rabbi at the time. I think Rabbi Pritzker then came in later. But there were always, the kitchen was very active.

AP: Uh huh.

RH: You know, even my grandparents, on my mother's side, were very active. And if there were affairs to be held, between my mother and my grandmother, they were always in the kitchen cooking or doing something for the affairs.

AP: Did they take you along?

RH: Younger, yes, I went along. And then as I got older, no, I did not want to go. My brother and I stayed home or whatever we did. And I drove when I was sixteen. So, we just did our thing.

AP: Now, I guess I was wondering, if you were involved in that kind of a way, being a little girl brought along while her mother and her grandmother were getting things ready and going to the dinners and whatever, did that make that feel very much, did that do anything in terms of creating a sense of community?

RH: Well it did, when I first got married, we, we did not keep a kosher house, while we lived in Shadyside. And then when we moved out here to the South Hills, I said to my husband, "I do want to keep a kosher house." And we did, and up until a few years ago I have kept a kosher house. We'd go into Squirrel Hill and get the meat and did the same thing as my parents did.

AP: Because you had a model.

RH: Right.

AP: I also wondered if that made you feel more connected to the older people and whatever because you saw them in other times of relationships rather than just at the High Holidays. Or was that not

RH: No, it was just certain people that you look for at the holidays. But shul was always packed. No, not really.

AP: Did you get married there?

RH: No, I got married at Webster Hall at the time. The wedding was there and the reception was there.

AP: Did a Rabbi from the synagogue marry you?

RH: Yeah, I, I, I think it was Rabbi Jack Siegel. Who is now in Houston, Texas. I think I had two rabbis, I know that Rabbi Jack came in for my son's bar mitzvah, too, in '76.

AP: Oh.

RH: He flew in.

AP: Because you wanted him to come back?

RH: Yes.

AP: So you felt –

RH: A very close relationship to him.

AP: Yes, that was what my question was going to be, whether you had developed a very close relationship with any of these Rabbis.

RH Yes.

AP: Or any

RH: And then I –

AP: or any relationship to any of them.

RH: And I can't remember now, but when my son went to reserve training, Army training, he met, one of the rabbis that was from Homestead. Or, or, I'm sorry, from the South Hills. And he wrote and told me who he met and I, I just can't remember who it is. But Rabbi Jack we're very close with. We've been to Texas twice, for a bar mitzvah and a bat mitzvah. And they have four children, and now they have grandchildren.

AP: Is he still an orthodox rabbi?

RH: Yes, yes he is.

AP: So, when your son had his bar mitzvah,

RH: My sons.

AP: Your sons?

RH: I have twins.

AP: Oh that's right, they would have had them together. When your sons had their bar mitzvah was it an orthodox bar mitzvah?

AP: It was a Conservative, Beth El is very Conservative Synagogue

RH: This rabbi didn't mind coming to a Conservative ....

RH: No, not at all, because I think more so, that he is more Conservative than Orthodox, but no, there was no problem whatsoever.

AP: Did that kind of a sense carry over, I guess carry back because you are talking about later on. But was it also like that also in the synagogue that it was not as strictly Orthodox, as other synagogues were.

RH: No, Homestead was strictly a very orthodox synagogue. I mean, the men and women separated. I remember they had a big to-do when they had to put up the mechitza in between and...

AP: You mean, because some people didn't want them to do that.

RH: They didn't want that, and there always were women who went upstairs and there were women, most of the women went upstairs at the time, before that even happened. Then they put in the mechitza then there were women that came downstairs and sat behind the curtain and the men sat, you know, closer to the pulpit. That was something at that time.

AP: So was it that you know when you said that they had the to-do, was it because some of the men didn't want the women to come downstairs at all.

RH: Right, right.

AP: Oh, I see, they said why bring them down at all.

RH: Right, right.

AP: They said why bring them down

RH: Right, right.

AP: I was wondering where, where that that argument was falling.

RH: Because its been like that, like that for years. And women just did not come downstairs; women sat upstairs.

AP: Do you remember doing that?

RH: Yeah, I do, and I remember my mother having a seat downstairs, and the curtain was on one of the rows, and my mother had a permanent seat, like the second row behind the curtain and my grandmother had a seat next to her. And whoever wanted to stay upstairs, stayed upstairs, but then little by little the women started coming down and getting permanent seats down stairs in the back.

AP: But when you were a young girl, oh, plus it was identified as being [permanent rows?]

RH: Yeah, yeah

AP: But when you were a young girl the women were going –

RH: We went upstairs. Because at that time, that's were the women went. Then in later years they came downstairs.

AP: And your mother and your grandmother, did they both speak Hebrew?

RH: Yes, yes. They did.

AP: Did you stay for services?

RH: Yeah, we stayed

AP: with the people?

RH: Yeah, we stayed, we took breaks, just like any other kid, and you went downstairs to the reception area and fooled around, horsed around, whatever, and went back upstairs for services, and then, then, you

AP: The children didn't have permanent seats like the ---

RH: No, we just either squeezed in or moved to a different row or whatever, talk with our friends, but we were there. You had to be there, there was no question, you were there.

AP: Did you miss it at all, that shul when you left?

RH: No, because with having my sons, and living in Shadyside, we would always go back for services.

AP:

RH: Until we moved out here to the South Hills, and even then, we didn't really join a Synagogue until my sons, well my sons were old enough to go to kindergarten or first grade. Then we joined a Synagogue. But up until that time we would travel to Homestead, back and forth and

AP: Was your father (did your father), did your husband come from an orthodox family?

RH: He was bar mitzvahed at Poale Zedeck. But his family was not religious at the time, and he just fell into this family and he, he never, he never balked at anything that was going on. He just went along with it.

AP: Okay. That's what I was going to ask. Was it hard to say, "Okay, you go down there, and I'm going upstairs"?

RH: No, no he never balked, he has never balked to this day. And he just goes along with it and, you know, he, in fact with the Holidays coming up he says, "Well. I guess we got to go again." And I say, "Yes, we do. So, these are the days you have to ask for off at work now." So, OK, it's just what you do.

RH: It's the same thing every year. It doesn't change.

AP: You have a month to go so you can get started on that.

RH: Right.

AP: Now, both your parents are still alive.

RH: My mother has died; my father's living. He's the only one, right now, that's living. My grandparents on both sides have passed away.

AP: He doesn't still have that business, does he?

RH: No, no. He retired. I forget when he retired.

AP: Did he live here until he closed the business?

RH: Yes, they lived on Davis Avenue until he retired, and they closed the business. I mean, my brother was married already at that time. And he just, he sold the business.

AP: It was, probably, a tough business.

RH: Very tough, 'cause he was never at home. And when he was home, he just came home, like, to eat and sleep, and go back to the business, because he went back at eleven o'clock at night, and didn't come home until two or three in the morning. So it was tough. My mother was like the father. Because, even though my mother worked with him at the time at the business, with the lunch business, she worked in the kitchen. And then when I was older, I remember also going down and working in the kitchen with her. And getting out the hamburgers and stuff like that,

AP: So, it was, it was a bar and a restaurant, bar-grill.

RH: Right, but they only served lunch. For the mill workers. And I think in the earlier days, the kitchen was open for dinners. And because there were people who stayed upstairs and they were mill workers that stayed upstairs.

AP: You mean they rented rooms

RH: Uh huh, there were rooms upstairs.

AP: And they were, what, single men who didn't have a place to stay, I mean, did they –

RH: Yeah.

AP: They just stayed there for a long time?

RH: Yeah, they just stayed there. Mm hmm, yeah. They had permanent rooms there. And then there were some people who just, just I think American Bridge, at the time, was the biggest employer around.

AP: Uh huh.

RH: So as long as they were hiring people, and people needed a place to stay, then they stayed upstairs. And they got, they served breakfast downstairs, whatever it was, toast, eggs, or whatever.

AP: Oh.

RH: And lunch and dinner. And then they closed the dinning room for dinners, and it just breakfast and lunch business.

AP: Because these people upstairs didn't have cooking facilities.

RH: Right.

AP: Then they had to have a room to eat.

RH: Right. Right.

AP: And you say you remember going to help in this.

RH: I remember in, I know it was before a Super Bowl game, that I was much older, and going down to help, in the, in the bar. I wasn't pouring drinks or anything, but I helped in the kitchen.

AP: Did you mind that?

RH: No, no, because it wasn't, it wasn't a permanent thing. And it was just fun to be at the bar at the time, and then as I grew older, I didn't really care for it anymore. I grew out of it.

AP: Were they nice, were the customers nice?

RH: Oh, very nice, very nice people.

AP: So they weren't really rough and tough?

RH: No, no.

AP: So your parents, I guess, were involved in the synagogue long after you were gone.

RH: Absolutely

AP: Were they, was your father there 'til the end?

RH: Yes.

AP: So he had to go find another synagogue at the end of his, after he was retired.

RH: No, they still belonged to Homestead up until it closed, just what, two years ago or thereabouts, and now he goes to the synagogue with my brother, to B'nai Israel.

AP: Oh, they go to East End? Even if he is in Greenfield?

RH: Yes.

AP: Because I know some of those people went to Beth Shalom with that whole business.

RH: Right, they all scattered and now, but the first year, he, after my mother passed away, he came out here, and now he goes to synagogue with my brother, B'nai Israel.

AP: Then he is, he is doing a Conservative one (?).

RH: Right.

AP: Was it hard for him to lose the synagogue and whatever?

RH: I don't think so, I think that after so many years, when everybody was leaving the area. And, I mean, they didn't even have a rabbi; they brought, they would bring a Rabbi in for services. And no, I don't think there was any problem as far as finally closing it up and saying, "This is it." Because he wanted to do it for years before, and this one said no, and this one said send out letters, and this one said no, they didn't want to, and...

AP: Oh, so he sort of hung on with it beyond the time when he thought that it could really maintain itself.

RH: Yeah. But it was time because it was, nothing going on, I mean, they couldn't even get a minyan. So, everybody, whoever had yahrzeits or anything had to go into Squirrel Hill..

AP: Oh, I see.

RH: and they wouldn't even bring a rabbi in or even have the ten men for a minyan.

AP: Was your mother buried in the synagogue, in the cemetery here?

RH: No, not in Homestead, she's buried at Beth Shalom.

AP: Oh, so you really don't have anything that brings you back in contact with that community.

RH: No, there's nothing there for me.

AP: There's not, I guess for your father

R H: No. Just his business that that was there. That's all.

AP: Did he sell it, or was razed?

RH: He sold it. I think the sign is still there.

AP: What was it called?

RH: The Stein Hotel. Yeah, at Sixth and Amity. When you went over the Homestead high-level bridge and you took the ramp to the left, and you traveled over the train tracks, there was the business. It was a whole block.

AP: A whole block?

RH: Oh yeah, it was huge. It was a huge bar. It was the biggest bar in, I want to say almost the biggest bar in the city. Oh, it was huge.

AP: Oh, so they must have had other help then.

RH: Oh, yeah, there were lots of hired help

AP: Then it was not like a

RH: No it was not just like a ---

AP: "Mom-and-Pop" --

RH: No, this was a big situation here.

AP: And that's, that's the story of Homestead. I'm recapitulating in my own mind, 'cause you mentioned this Rabbi Jack Siegel. Were there any other rabbis or characters or whatever who stood out in your mind positively, negatively, eccentricity?

RH: No, I remember Rabbi Pritzker was there. I think he was there at the time for my brother's bar mitzvah and things like that. But, now I, I, if somebody would say the name, then I would say, "Okay, yes, I remember."

AP: But not people who really stand out

RH: Rabbi Jack was the first one, he came from McKeesport, and he was a young rabbi and we, because of my family and my grandmother, he had an apartment in Homestead, and we would go and help him set up his apartment, and he would come up to my grandmother's for dinner and meals and my mother, they were just like brother and sister together.

AP: Oh, he was unmarried then.

RH: He was unmarried then. He was just a fantastic guy, and he still is.

AP: And he just left for something bigger?

RH: He then went for Portland, and he married, yeah, he married while he was in Homestead.

AP: But not somebody from Homestead?

RH: No, he married a McKeesport girl. Toby. I know her name as well as I know my own, Troutner (?). And the wedding was at Boda (?) Country Club.

PA: How interesting, he didn't get married in the synagogue.

RH: No, no.

AP: You went to the, you went to the wedding.

RH: I was at the wedding, and then he, I know that my grandmother went with him to New York to tell his mother and father that he was getting married. Because he would sleep at my grandmother's every once in a while. And my grandmother was like the mediator between his family, between his family, because they were very, very religious people, very orthodox people.

AP: They saw him as less religious than they were.

RH: I don't want to say to hat.

AP: It's always interesting because these, these gradations of being orthodox, and, I guess, that was one of the things we were trying to get an idea of, with, how orthodox is a shul that has to be, is the only shul for a whole community? Is it different from an orthodox shul within a, within, like, Squirrel Hill, where people say, well, I'll go here, or I won't go here, I'll go to something else, and, I guess, part of the thing, you know, like I was asking you did the women really sit separately

RH: Yeah, they did, and nobody minded, and then that's

AP: Were there holiday celebrations in the, in the synagogue?

RH: Oh, sure. Yeah, oh yeah.

AP: And did everybody come for them?

RH: Everybody came for the Holidays, for carrying the apples, and always one family donated the apples, and, and they had the flags, and they, yeah, you always went to shul for the holidays.

AP: Now, did you sit separately for things like that?

RH: Not so much for that holiday, because it was open for Simchas Torah, it was open.

AP: Uh, huh.

RH: But, but...

AP: So everybody would come, the kids would just come in, and the adults and, and you would all be together.

RH: No, I think we were still separated, we were still separated. Yeah, once they put up the mechitza it was separated.

AP: Do you remember walking around?

RH: We walked around with the flags and the groggers, and, oh, yeah,

AP: When you were a girl, were you walking around with the men, with the boys, with whatever?

RH: Yeah, 'cause I would sit with my father, you know 'cause he would sit in the corner where the window was open. And ---

AP: That's right, there was no air conditioning.

RH: Right, none whatsoever, and it's --

AP: How about weddings, do you have any memories, did people sit separately during weddings? Although, yours and even the rabbi's were not there so it might be harder

RH: I don't remember. I don't think that we went to weddings. I mean we as children. I don't think there was --

AP: They didn't have the whole community come when someone's child got married?

RH: The community was invited because everybody was close with everybody so it, it, if there were out of towners from that particular family, they also were invited. But I don't recall being in the shul for a wedding. Because you didn't bring kids to weddings.

AP: That's what I was trying to figure if it was different.

RH: No, no

AP: Then, then the whole –

RH: No, you didn't bring kids to weddings. I mean unless it was your own immediate family, you know, or the same for a bar mitzvah or a bat mitzvah, other than that you didn't go.

AP: Were you bat mitzvah?

RH: Yeah, I was bat mitzvahed in that synagogue.

AP: So that synagogue did have bat mitzvahs for girls

RH: Now wait a minute, wait a minute, I shouldn't say that. We had a confirmation. We did not have a bat mitzvah. We did not have a bat mitzvah. My brother was bar mitzvah there, but we, I did not.

AP: Would you have liked to have been?

RH: No. It didn't really matter. It didn't really matter.

AP: Did you stay in Hebrew school until the age at which you ---

RH: You had to, you had no choice.

AP: Was that the age that was essentially the same time as if you had been bat mitzvahed?

RH: Yeah, that was fine, I mean, you balked at it, just like any other kid today does, you know, "Do I have to go? Why do I have to go?" Athletics, of course, were involved, the same as they are today with kids, and with my kids, too, as they were growing up. So if the kid was involved in something, and Hebrew school was involved, the kid went to the athletic event. I mean, this was what they wanted to do.

AP: So it sort of works out.

RH: It works out, it works out.

AP: Now, did I miss any reminiscences, thoughts, or observations that somehow didn't fit into this little parade of conversation that come to mind, as you were talking?

RH: There's always things, but I know my parents were very happy in Homestead, and they did a lot for the community and for the synagogue, and they were rewarded for it, I mean, everybody liked my mother and father and my grandmother and grandfather.

AP: Their name was the same....

RH: Their name was Colton (?).

AP: Oh, I see, this was your mother's ---

RH: My mother's mother and father. And

AP: Your sense is that they were happy and involved with the community, and the community responded to that..

RH: And what they did for the community back

AP: In terms of just being supportive--

RH: Being supportive and helping out in the kitchen, and having dinners, and

AP: Yeah

RH: I know when my sons were born they were having a huge spaghetti dinner that day, on a Sunday, and they just, well my mother was, my mother was with me, I think, at the time and my grandmother was in the kitchen making spaghetti or whatever, and they just left the shul and went to the hospital.

AP: You mean, other people came too?

RH: Yeah, there were other people that came, and then they left and went back to the synagogue and had the spaghetti dinner.

AP: Was the spaghetti dinner like a fundraiser?

RH: Uh huh.

AP: Oh, I see, they did all these things to raise extra money

RH: They did, just like any other synagogue, they didn't have bingos just like they do today, but they had like, a fifty-fifty raffle that my father was in charge of and brought money into the Synagogue.

AP: What's a fifty-fifty?

RH: If you pay like a dollar, you would get x number, x number of, x amount of dollars, like by the daily number,

AP: Oh, sure. (talk over)

RH: No, no they used it from the paper at the time, it was the stock number, OK, that, that was the number that they used on a specific day. But there were other things that he initiated for the synagogue that they made money for.

AP: Oh, so, he was sort of like a creative...

RH: The liaison between bringing the money into the synagogue or managing to get money made for the Synagogue.

AP: Do remember any other ideas for things that they did?

RH: ---

AP: Okay then, thank you, this is Ann Sheckter Powell interviewing Ruth Stein Halle for the Homestead Hebrew Congregation Oral History Project of the Western Pennsylvania Jewish Archives of the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania. We've been talking at her home in Bethel Park.