

Transcript of Interview with Shirley Edelstein Litman
Small Town Jewish History Project
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Transcribers Notes:

Incomplete sentences are marked.....

Post-interview Notes:

These comments were offered by Shirley Edelstein Litman after the interview.

SEL was born on October 20, 1924.

In this comment: "... but we were by far the most trustworthy..." (page 4) SEL intended to say that the Edelsteins trusted their customers and extended credit to them.

Transcription:

Joyce Edelstein: Today is January 31, 2016. I'm Joyce Edelstein. This is the Small Towns Jewish History Project. I'm speaking to my aunt, Shirley Edelstein Litman at her home in Coconut Creek, Florida. We're going to be talking about Nanty Glo, Pennsylvania, which was her hometown. Aunt Shirley, when were you born?

Shirley Litman: I was born October 24, October 20, 1924.

JE: Okay. And how did the family get to Nanty Glo?

SL: When my father arrived in America, in the United States, I should say...

JE: And what was his name?

SL: Aaron Israel Edelstein.

JE: And what year did he arrive?

SL: I believe it was 1902, if I have my figures right. And he knew Wolf Charlson, who was to be his brother-in-law shortly, and he suggested he open a store in Nanty Glo, Pennsylvania, which at that time did not have what was considered a very fine store. So then my father took his advice and moved and settled in Nanty Glo.

JE: And what, how many people lived in Nanty Glo back then do you think?

SL: I think it was around seven thousand.

JE: Mhm. And so he opened a store. How did the business operate? We want to know how many employees there were, did everyone in the family work in the business, that kind of thing.

SL: Well my father, and I know there were, well, I believe there were several men who worked in the store in the beginning, and they were of the Jewish faith.

JE: Do you remember any of their names?

SL: No, I never knew their names. And they, there were no hotels in Nanty Glo, and they were kosher and wouldn't eat out, so as a result they became quote, end quote, boarders, and lived at our home. And my mother prepared their food. They ate at our table. Of course I wasn't born yet in those early years, but this is only what I know. And they, as I say, three of their meals my mother prepared because they wouldn't eat in a, anything that wasn't kosher. So I think there were two boarders. They lived, they ate, and slept at our home.

JE: Mhm. And what was your mother's name?

SL: My mother's name was Lilly, Lillian, Leah actually, but we called her Lilly. And her maiden name was Charlson.

JE: And in the business, did, now you have a lot, you have a lot of brothers and sisters, siblings.

SL: One sister I had.

JE: Sister, so when you say the names of any of the family give their actual names.

SL: Okay.

JE: And did, did the siblings work in the business?

SL: No, my eldest brother, Nathan, helped out sometimes on a Saturday. You know, Saturday night was when, of course was the biggest selling venue of the week. Miners, all of our customers were miners, of course, coal miners of course, and they had received their checks, but most of their purchases were on the books, if you know what that means, were charged. And they all had a running balance. But when it was payday, which I think was every two weeks, then hopefully they came in and paid on the bill. But the bill never got paid completely because they always needed new merchandise, you know, for their families. We had clothing, shoes, no food, but we had home supplies, you know, linens, and things of that sort. And we even, in the early days, had on the third floor, we even had an elevator in the store, we had some furniture. So their needs were never endless, and my father was very generous and trusted them. And so their purchases far exceeded their payments, so as a result we always had, they always had quite a large balance on the books. And most of them were trustworthy and paid on the bill, but as I say, it never got paid in full because their purchases out, overstated their payments.

JE: Right. And the store was called?

SL: Edelstein's.

JE: Edelstein's. Okay. I thought it was called Edelstein's Big Store.

SL: Maybe it was, I think it wasn't.

JE: Oh, okay. And it was three stories?

SL: Yeah, it was a three story brick building.

JE: On the main street in Nanty Glo?

SL: Yes, it was on Main Street.

JE: And where did the business get its supplies?

SL: I really don't know.

JE: Oh, okay. And the customers, you were saying, were coal miners.

SL: Yes. Everybody, all the working people were all coal miners.

JE: And were, what ethnicity were the customers?

SL: They were Polish, I think a few Czech, and I think most of them were Polish. But they were a fine ethnic group. A very religious ethnic group. There were, in, I'm trying to think of the name, in one of the sections of Johnstown there were numerous churches and most of the wives went to mass first thing in the morning with their...

JE: Kerchiefs on their heads?

SL: Their kerchiefs, their babushkas, yeah. And they were very fine, a fine group of people. They were trustworthy, and as I say, very religious. And they were, there were two, there was also another store in Nanty Glo, more or less our competitors, in quotes.

JE: Oh? Who owned that store? Yes, give the name.

SL: Julius Levinson owned the other store.

JE: Uh huh, and what was it called?

SL: Levinson's. Obviously. But their, but we were by far the most trustworthy and our merchandise was, I think, of the better quality and most of the people shopped at our store, Edelstein's.

JE: And so that leads to the question what did other Jewish families in the town do for a living?

SL: Well, there was Julius Levinson owned Levinson's store. And there was Herman Donofsky may have had a store, too, but I can't quite remember that.

JE: Did the, it's funny because they mention in this printout that they do, they have collected information about the Donofsky family.

SL: Yes, Herman Donofsky.

JE: Herman Donofsky. And did you go to school with his children or...?

SL: Well, Herman Donofsky, by coincidence, this is really strange, Herman, Howard rather, excuse me, the son, Howard Donofsky, who later became a dentist, Howard Donofsky and my sister, Harriet, were born on the same day, which is so unusual you know for the three Jewish families to have them born...

JE: And what day was that?

SL: Harriet was born November 21, 1912. Ten, excuse me.

JE: 1910.

SL: Ten, no twelve.

JE: Twelve.

SL: Yeah twelve, Ben was born in 1910. Ben was born in 1910, and Harriet in 1912, and then Lester in 1916.

JE: 1918.

SL: 1918.

JE: Mhm.

SL: Excuse me, I stand corrected.

JE: And then Ben, I mean, Abe?

SL: Abe was born in... Let me think.

JE: Oh-eight?

SL: Abe was born in 1908.

JE: Was he?

SL: I mean Abe was born in 1908, Ben was born in 1910, and Harriet in 1912.

JE: And these are all the Edelstein siblings.

SL: Yes, the children.

JE: Seven children.

SL: There were six biological. My mother raised six biological children, my eldest brother, Nate, who was born in 1908? Harriet was '12, Ben, Abe was '08, 1906, I guess

Nate was born, and he was, his mother was Rachel, who was my mother's elder sister, and she passed away and left two children, Nate. Her eldest, Harry, died of meningitis, and my sister, Harriet, was named after him. And Nate, she raised Nate as her own child even though it was her nephew, we always considered him as our real brother even though he was actually I guess a half-brother or whatever you call it.

JE: But you were saying that Howard Donofsky and Harriet Edelstein...

SL: Were born on the same day.

JE: That's funny.

SL: That really is quite unusual.

JE: Yeah. And there were three, only three Jewish families in Nanty Glo?

SL: It was the Edelsteins, the Levinsons, the Donofskys. Then there was Leah Berkowitz and her mother. I never knew of a Mr. Berkowitz. That was long, you know, anyhow, Leah and her mother lived in Nanty Glo as well, and that was it. Then there were, there was a Abe Book, who lived in Vintondale. There was no Mrs. Book, he was never married as far as I know. And he lived in Vintondale, and he had a small store in Vintondale. And I'm trying to think, I think there was... [recording cuts out]

JE: And where did the Jewish families, the three Jewish families, live? In Nanty Glo?

SL: We lived on Caroline Street. And Levinsons lived on Main Street, just a half a block away from us. And I failed to mention the Newmans. Henry Newman and Jeanette Newman and their son, Gerald, they only had the one son, lived about a block and a half away from us, I can't remember the street. And my mother's best friend, I think, was Jeanette Newman. Gerald's mother, that was her best friend. And every Saturday Jeanette would come to our house, and sometimes Rose Levinson would come, and my mother would serve tea and cookies. Of course, I had the honor of passing the homemade cookies around in the living room to the three ladies. My mother, our house was always the house where anything took place. It was like the center, the center meeting place of Nanty Glo. My mother was always the hostess.

JE: And what did the Newmans do for a living? You don't remember?

SL: I don't know what they did for a living.

JE: So really there was-

SL: Oh excuse me, Herman Sedloff, I don't think he was related, but he lived with them and he was the publisher of the *Nanty Glo Journal*.

JE: Oh. Was he Jewish?

SL: Oh, Herman Sedloff? Oh sure.

JE: And so there were more than three Jewish families when you think about it. There's the Donofskys, the Levinsons, the Edelsteins, the Newmans, and then a few others, not maybe big families.

SL: No, Howard Sedloff wasn't married, he was a bachelor. He lived with the Newmans.

JE: Yeah. And so you were saying that the Edelstein home was sort of the central meeting place.

SL: Oh, for everything, yes.

JE: Did you observe holidays? Was there, what was the level of religious observance in the town and how did that work?

SL: Well, of course, we had no synagogue, of course. But on the High Holidays, we hired, we hired supposed cantor, he was, he called himself Reverend Henderson. And his fair, his voice, eh, not too great, but it was the only voice we had. He stayed at our house, of course, and he was from Altoona, and he led our, we rented rooms above the Moose in the Moose Hall above where the Moose group had their meetings. And in the Moose Hall was where our services were. And of course everything was in Hebrew. And oh, I have to mention about the bar mitzvahs as well. Of course I didn't understand anything about the services, nor did my sister, so it was rather hard for us to get anything out of the services although we always attended and paid attention although we didn't know anything that was going on because it was all in Hebrew. And one incident I want to tell you about, we always, when services were almost over, which I thought were quite lengthy, they started at eight o'clock and weren't over until about one o'clock, my mother gave us a signal, an eye signal, and we used to leave so that we could get home and start warming up dinner and get, you know, everything ready for dinner because everybody was certainly ready by the time they got home.

So as we were walking from the Moose Hall, we, the Catholic Church was at the end of the street and across the street, and the school and the nunnery was on our side of the street so we had to pass the school to reach our home to start heating up the dinner and get everything ready. And it just happened to be when school was released, and a lot of school children were on the street, which as I say, was at the bottom of the street where we lived, on Caroline Street. And as we passed, and of course we were all dressed up in our holiday finery, and we heard some of the kids whispering to each other, "There go two teachers from high school going home." Thinking that, there I am, about twelve years old, two teachers, my sister and I. My sister happened to be a teacher, but certainly not I, and they're going home. So we kind of thought that was, yeah, a little humor.

JE: Did you observe Friday Sabbath? What was...?

SL: Oh, my mother always had a Shabbos dinner, chicken and, chicken soup and the whole business. We always had a wonderful... Oh, my mother baked bread three times a week. Of course she did all the baking, she baked every day, cakes and cookies. But she made bread three times a week and her challah was, mmm, scrumptious. She even made rye bread, which if you are aware or not aware, you needed a yeast, a starter to get, to make pumpernickel and rye bread, and she did, she made the starter on the stove on the, in our coal stove. You had to do that in order to bake rye bread and pumpernickel bread, and she bake bread three times a week but baked every day cakes and cookies and what have you because her, not fancy, but delicious.

JE: Were there Friday night services or minyan? Could, did you get a minyan together?

SL: No. Well if we had a minyan, yeah we you know, we had that in our home. We had no temple or synagogue.

JE: Right. So there wasn't a regular minyan every week?

SL: No.

JE: No. So it's basically the High Holidays and observing the Sabbath.

SL: Yes, well in our home we observed the Sabbath. My mother, of course, lit the candles, Friday night candles, and we always had a Shabbos dinner and that was about the extent of it because we had no prayer, no congregational prayer, no.

JE: How did the, your brothers, Abe, Nate, Ben, and Lester, and Bobby, how did they get bar mitzvahed? How did they prepare for that?

SL: Reverend Henderson from Altoona, who, as a little sideline...

JE: He was a reverend?

SL: Well he called himself a reverend. He was learned in the Jewish tradition.

JE: But he wasn't Jewish?

SL: Of course he was Jewish!

JE: Is Henderson a Jewish name?

SL: Yeah, of course he was Jewish.

JE: But he called himself a reverend, not a rabbi.

SL: No, he wasn't a rabbi. He called himself a reverend. And of course he stayed at our house, and he took a bath once a year he said. So when he came he had to take a bath in

our home. And he tutored the boys for their bar mitzvah. And my mother prepared, did all the preparation food-wise, for the bar mitzvah and we had all of our relatives who came from the nearby towns come. And she worked tirelessly to get everything ready for the bar mitzvahs. Now the only one who didn't have that in Nanty Glo was my younger brother, Bob, who had his bar mitzvah in Johnstown.

JE: Right.

SL: But the other boys were all celebrated in Nanty Glo, and my mother prepared everything. And we had, excuse me, I think it must have been about seventy-five or eighty people. All the relatives and everybody came. And she prepared everything.

JE: And how often did Reverend Henderson come to tutor them.

SL: I don't remember.

JE: Oh, but over a period of months they would get ready?

SL: Yeah, they were, you know, they were qualified to be bar mitzvahed.

JE: Yeah. And they conducted a bar mitzvah ceremony in Moose Hall.

SL: Moose Hall.

JE: So you're saying my dad was bar mitzvahed in Moose, in the Moose Lodge.

SL: Except for my younger brother, Bobby, was in Johnstown.

JE: What was it like to be Jewish in Nanty Glo and what was daily life like? And how did the Jews and gentiles get along?

SL: There was never any anti-Semitism at all. We had a wonderful, wonderful relationship with our neighbors, with all of our friends. My two, I have two lovely, three actually, lovely girlfriends who were not of the Jewish faith. And we came to our house to play, we had a playroom up on the third floor. A very large room which was our, like a playroom. And my grandmother lived with us. Her name was Ida. And...

JE: Is that your mother's mother?

SL: My maternal grandmother. And she sat daily, from meal to meal until bedtime, in what we called our reception hall. We had a very large yellow brick home and there were four rooms on each floor, and you entered into the reception hall, and if you walked straight through the hall you went to the kitchen. And if you turned right you went to the living room and north of that you know was the dining room. And each room was very large. Then we had the four bedrooms on the second floor and on the third floor my brother, Ben, slept, that's where he wanted. That was his, uh...

JE: Domain.

SL: Domain. And he lived, his bedroom was on the third floor. And then we had, as I say, another room, a big room across the whole width of the house which was our playroom, I guess you could call it our playroom. But I didn't mention in our home, leading from the bedroom, my mother and father's bedroom, there were four bedrooms, my grandmother had the bedroom when you walked, when you reached the second floor to the left. My, Harriet and I, my sister and I were to the right. And then the bedroom my mother and father had, back, north, back of them, when you walked, the third bedroom, and the boys were opposite my mother and father.

And then there was a, I don't know how to express it, a whole, the whole length of the house leading from the boys' bedroom there was a, my mother had, there were beds, there must have been about ten cots, not cots, beds, and we had company constantly all summer long. Poor relatives, relatives from Cincinnati whose parents had been killed in the tornado of 1916, and they spent all summer with us. And then we had relatives who were very poor, and they came and stayed all summer.

JE: Who were these relatives?

SL: My sister's, my mother's sister, their name was Aaron, from Butler, Pa., and they were all very, they used to come and stay all summer. And then my mother and father would outfit them with clothing for the winter.

JE: The last name was Aaron.

SL: A-A-R...

JE: And their son, Chester Aaron, wrote a book called *About Us*.

SL: He wrote numerous books and got numerous awards for his books.

JE: Yeah, and they, was it a sunporch?

SL: Well we called it a sunporch. And there were, not cots, beds, the whole length and the beds were never empty.

JE: Mhm.

SL: They were always occupied.

JE: So what was a typical day like in, in Nanty Glo?

SL: Over the summer you mean? Or, well in the winter, of course, we went to school. And my sister was a teacher in high school.

JE: In the Nanty Glo High School?

SL: In the Nanty Glo High School.

JE: So Nanty Glo had an elementary and high school?

SL: Mhm. And...

JE: So you went to school.

SL: I went to school until, then, when the crash came my father, of course, lost the store and the house, he went to bed a rich man and woke up a poor man. The crash ruined everything for him. And he had a heart attack, his first heart attack in 1936, and numerous ones after that until he passed away. And so in, we moved to Johnstown where my brother, Abe, had opened up a general...

JE: You mean Nate.

SL: No, Abe.

JE: Abe?

SL: Abe opened up his doctor's office in Johnstown so we rented a house in Johnstown.

JE: And Abe became the dermatologist.

SL: Well that's later, after he married. Oh that wasn't right away.

JE: So initially he was a general practitioner?

SL: Oh he delivered babies, he did everything.

JE: Oh, I didn't know.

SL: Oh, he only became a dermatologist because his wife did not want him, after he married, did not want him to get up in the middle of the night to deliver babies and be on call in the middle of the night for emergencies. So he studied and became a very fine dermatologist and he had, and he became a dermatologist and had patients who came from many miles to, to have his services. He was very, very fine. Not only a fine dermatologist, but a fine diagnostician for other things as well.

JE: So back to daily life in Nanty Glo when you were growing up.

SL: Well, as I say, I had two, three girlfriends who were not of the Jewish faith, and we had a very fine relationship. There was never any sign of anti-Semitism ever, ever. We

had a fine relationship with all of our neighbors and friends. And we were, everybody called my father A.I., even though he wasn't the mayor, he was kind of like the most regarded person in Nanty Glo for his ethics, for his good relationship with them, and everybody loved him. Just they adored my father. And they held him in very high regard.

JE: In, what was school like?

SL: Well, me, I say that I was a good student. Never any problems. And as I say, my sister, when I reached high school, as I say, we moved to Johnstown when I was sixteen, so when I was to enter my senior high. So I spent all my school up through junior high in Nanty Glo, and my sister taught me French and English in high school. And need I say she was a good teacher and I was a good student.

JE: And she taught in Johnstown High School?

SL: No, no, in Nanty Glo High School. Oh yes, she taught in Johnstown High School after we moved, after she was married, after she had her children, yeah.

JE: And talk a little about life at home more.

SL: All I ever remember of my mother was she never got out of the kitchen. Some of the people, when they came in to pay their bill, if they didn't have money, they would bring a bushel of tomatoes, a bushel of peaches, they would bring potato, they would bring things to pay off their bill and my father was, as I say, was very generous. He never turned them down if they needed clothing, shoes, whatever. And even if they couldn't pay for it he still gave them whatever they needed, so if they didn't have money they would come with produce so my father would bring it home and my mother would make jam, jelly, she canned peaches, so all winter long we had canned peaches and plums for dessert because she just never, never got out of the kitchen.

JE: And what did you do for fun in Nanty Glo?

SL: Well, family-wise, we had a piano, an upright piano in our reception hall, and she would play the piano. Oh, I took piano lessons for twelve years, just as an aside.

JE: And in the reception hall of your home you had a piano.

SL: A piano, an upright piano.

JE: And grandma played?

SL: No, no. No, no, Harriet played.

JE: Harriet.

SL: Oh, my grandma didn't play.

JE: No, I meant your mother.

SL: No, my mother didn't play.

JE: Oh.

SL: Oh, no. Harriet played and Nate played the violin, not too well. And my brother, Abe, played the mandolin very well. And we had a piano book with all those old songs, "The Gloaming", and you know, "Row, Row, Row Your Boat", you know those old kind of songs. And she would play and Nate, the violin, and Abe, the mandolin, and the rest of us would sing and we had many family groupings around the piano. And our entertainment, every Sunday, my relatives from, the Edelsteins from Indiana and the Shonbergs from Indiana, Pa., and my uncle and aunt from Barnesboro, everybody came.

JE: What were their names?

SL: Charlson, Wolf and Sarah Charlson.

JE: Wolf and Sarah Charlson. And the Shonbergs, how were they related?

SL: Molly Shonberg was my uncle's daughter, she was my first cousin.

JE: Wolf's daughter?

SL: No, Meyer's daughter.

JE: Meyer.

SL: Meyer Charlson's daughter. And [cousin] Lily, and Ruby, she was my father's, my mother's niece and he was my father's nephew, Ruby Edelstein, and they met at Abe's bar mitzvah, which was in June, and the following Valentine's Day they were married. And every Sunday everybody came to Aunt Lily's, and Aunt Lily had dinner. We had tuna fish salad and salmon salad and potato salad and blah, blah, blah, all that stuff. And cookies and cake. Everybody came to Nanty Glo. And every Sunday there was a penny ante game in the kitchen around the kitchen table.

JE: Poker.

SL: Yes, poker, Penny ante is poker for pennies.

JE: Yeah.

SL: And they, the, as I say, they played around the kitchen table and Gerald Newman came from, you know, from Nanty Glo and Freda Levinson from Nanty Glo, and Molly

Shonberg, and Ruby Edelstein, and Gerald Newman, and my father, and I guess that was probably it. And they played until dinner time and then my mother had all this food and everybody ate. I don't know how she did it, but she did. She never wasted, never settled down to rest, she was on the go, perpetual motion. I don't know how she did it. She was the first to rise and the last to go to sleep. I don't know how she did it.

JE: And this was every Sunday?

SL: Every Sunday, rain and shine. Every Sunday they came to Aunt Lily's.

JE: And did you keep kosher?

SL: Oh sure.

JE: Yeah, so this was a dairy meal on Sunday?

SL: Oh, oh yes. Oh Sunday, yeah, it was tuna fish and salmon salad, yeah. Oh yeah.

JE: Oh that's not dairy, that's, is that considered dairy?

SL: Of course. And there was a kosher butcher shop in Johnstown until they weren't able to, then from that point on we had to go to Pittsburgh for our kosher.

JE: So, when you were growing up in Nanty Glo, you would go to Pittsburgh?

SL: No, at that point we went to Johnstown.

JE: So during your, I see, so Johnstown had a kosher butcher.

SL: Yeah.

JE: What was that called?

SL: Ruder's.

JE: Ruder's?

SL: Their name was Ruder.

JE: Yeah. And was there a movie theater or any kind of entertainment?

SL: In Nanty Glo? Yeah, there was, every Friday night, my father took Bob and I to the movies, you know the cliffhangers, you know the serials, you know they left somebody hanging on the cliff, you had to go back the next week to see it. And then we would stop at Riney's. It was Rinehart, actually, we called it Riney's pharmacy. And he had a soda fountain and we had, my father bought us an ice cream cone for five cents. And believe

me, it was delicious, the Sanitary Dairy ice cream. And we had ice cream cones because in those days there were no freezers, you couldn't have ice cream in the house. So if you wanted ice cream, you had to go to Riney's to buy it and bring it home. And so we went to the movies, and then we had an ice cream cone for five cents, that's what that cost in that day. And that was the highlight of the week for Bob and I, when my father took us to the movies.

JE: And you two were the youngest in the family.

SL: Yeah, there was six and a half years between the brother next to me, Lester, and me. My mother, I think she thought she was through, but then nevertheless Bob and I came along. And we were a year and half apart, my brother Bob and I, to the day.

JE: Oh you were born on the same day?

SL: No, a year and a half apart. I was born October.

JE: Uh huh. No, but I meant the same, October twentieth.

SL: No, he was born April twentieth.

JE: April twentieth.

SL: A year and a half.

JE: Oh, I get it.

SL: Yeah.

JE: And well, let's see, what else is on the list of questions. Let's see, I think we covered some of this, where did the Jews meet to pray and you said the...

SL: Well, that was only on High Holidays.

JE: Only on High Holidays. And where did you go, where did you go for communal events and were there any Jewish organizations in town?

SL: In Nanty Glo? No, there weren't.

JE: No Jewish organizations?

SL: No.

JE: And you only prayed on High Holidays.

SL: Yes. Well my mother, my mother, my father put on the Jewish uh...

JE: Tefillin?

SL: Tefillin every morning.

JE: Oh.

SL: Oh yes. He did that every morning in the dining room. Every morning.

JE: Before he went to work?

SL: Before he went to work. And my mother blessed candles and we had a Shabbos meal.

JE: So when he, he did some prayers in the morning, you said.

SL: Every morning, every morning. He put the thing on his forehead, I forget what it was called. He did that religiously every morning, I think, I guess before breakfast.

JE: And he recited Hebrew?

SL: Mhm. He used to read the prayer book every, it was in the dining room he used to do that, I remember.

JE: Did any of you, his children, follow?

SL: No, none of the boys did that, just my father.

JE: Just your father. And hmm, did he put on a prayer shawl also?

SL: Mhm.

JE: Yeah?

SL: And a yarmulke. He put on a prayer shawl and a yarmulke and did the tefillin and you know.

JE: And did he wear a yarmulke when he went out into the world?

SL: No, no. Oh, no. No, just when we blessed the wine on Friday meal, you know when we said the bracha, the prayer over the wine, and my mother always baked a big challah, you know the twisted bread and said the prayer over the bread, the bracha, the prayer over the wine and the bread. That was the only time that he wore a yarmulke. Skull cap.

JE: Now the Jews of Nanty Glo, did you, you relied on Johnstown for your kosher meats, were there any other times that you relied on Johnstown? Or Altoona?

SL: Well, for the hospital.

JE: For the hospital.

SL: Yeah. My brother, Lester, should I tell you a very humorous story? When my mother was about to have Harriet, when she got labor pains, she said, "Israel, you better call Dr. Ebandjieff that I'm ready to, I'm ready to deliver."

JE: She told her husband, Aaron Israel, her husband.

SL: Yeah, so he went to Dr. Ebandjieff's office, when he got to the house, which happened to be, the alley behind their house and the alley behind our house was the same by coincidence. He happened to be in Vintondale, which was a coal mining town about ten miles away delivering another baby. So my father came back and he said to my mother, "Can you wait a little bit because Dr. Ebandjieff" this is a true story, "Dr. Ebandjieff is in Vintondale delivering somebody else's baby." And my mother's about to have, I think it was Harriet.

JE: So what happened?

SL: Well, I guess fortunately I guess he got in time to deliver Harriet. Oh, and Lester, when she was about to deliver Lester, he was premature, she was having many problems so she had to go to the hospital in Johnstown. And Lester was born in Mercy Hospital in Johnstown. And then when she had Bob and myself, we were born in Mendenhall's in Johnstown, because at that point it was too dangerous, you know. So we were born in Johnstown as well.

JE: Yeah. Where in Johnstown?

SL: Mendenhall. It was a maternity...

JE: Mendenhall?

SL: Mendenhall. It was a maternity hospital, so to speak.

JE: And you talked about the crash, the stock market crash and how that devastated your family.

SL: Yes we lost our store, we lost our house.

JE: When you lost your store...

SL: And the house.

JE: When did the Jewish population then start to decline in Nanty Glo? Was that the turning point or...?

SL: Well, by that time some of the elder people had died. I'm not sure when Herman Donofsky passed away, I don't remember, then his wife, Rose.

JE: Were the Donofskys older than your parents, Aaron Israel and...?

SL: No, I don't think so.

JE: About the same age.

SL: Yeah, about the same age. They were all, I think, relatively about the same age. So...

JE: So the question is, when did the Jewish population start to decline in Nanty Glo?

SL: Well, we moved away.

JE: What, what year did you move away?

SL: The year that I was to be a senior in high school. I graduated in '42, so we moved in June of '41, because I graduated June of '42 from high school. So I spent my senior year of high school in Johnstown.

JE: And when did the store close?

SL: Well, the store closed after the crash.

JE: Oh really?

SL: Yeah.

JE: 1929? The store closed right then?

SL: Then my father had his first heart attack in '36. I think it did.

JE: So what did he do between '29 and '36?

SL: I really don't remember.

JE: You didn't have the store after the stock market?

SL: I don't think so, I don't think so.

JE: It didn't limp along?

SL: I was very young, I was born in '24, so I was only five years old.

JE: I thought you were born in '20?

SL: I was born in '24.

JE: '24.

SL: 1924. So in '29 I was only five years old, so I really don't remember too much of that.

JE: I see. But I know, what did him in was the fact that he extended credit.

SL: He extended credit to them all. He would never refuse any of his customers merchandise for their children, for their wives, whatever. So they all had big accounts you know, owed my father a lot of money, but half of them didn't have money to pay. So by the time, oh he had thousands and thousands of dollars on the books, but he always paid his bills for the merchandise, so as a result, you pay your bills and no money's coming in...

JE: So...

SL: I mean the people meant well, but they didn't have the money to pay. There were strikes, they didn't have money, so as a result you can't pay out and not get money coming in.

JE: And how long, during the day, Grandpa went to the store, and then did you come home for lunch?

SL: Oh, everybody came for lunch. There was no restaurant.

JE: No school cafeterias?

SL: Oh no, everybody came for lunch. And on Fridays we, as we were nearing the house, you know walking, we all walked, there were no school buses, we could smell the aroma of the bread, you know. And every Friday for lunch was a special treat. We used to make what we called little challahs. They were twisted, I don't know, the same dough as challah but you made little twists. Even now they melt in my mouth. And the same lunch every Friday. We had these warm little challahs and ground, what we called ground bologna. It was jumbo bologna, sweet pickles, and a little mayonnaise, just enough to hold it together, and that was our Friday lunch. Every Friday.

JE: So everyone came home for lunch.

SL: Everybody came for lunch.

JE: The children, and your father.

SL: Everybody. Everybody came for lunch, every day because there was nowhere, there were no school cafeterias. But Saturday night the store was open until at least ten o'clock, and my mother used to make sandwiches for all the help and my father, and I think my brother Nate, when he wasn't in college, used to help out in the store on, when he was home, on Saturday night.

And she used, they liked fried egg sandwiches with ketchup. And she made millions, I don't know how many sandwiches, piles and piles, and one of us, whoever was around, used to take, oh and thermoses of hot coffee, and we used to take it to the store and they were very busy. And in between customers they used to eat a sandwich. And she made, I don't know how many, fried egg sandwiches. I still remember carrying them to the store with a thermos of coffee. That was their Friday, that was their Saturday dinner. For the whole, for everybody. For the clerks, for everybody.

JE: Was the store ever closed? Did it close on Sunday?

SL: Oh yes. Oh nobody was open on Sunday, oh no. And, but there weren't any restaurants in town so everyone ate at home.

JE: So everyone ate at home.

SL: Everybody ate at home.

JE: Did the store close for lunch?

SL: No. Oh, no.

JE: I mean during the week.

SL: Oh, no. My father came home for lunch.

JE: But the store stayed open.

SL: Oh, yes. Of course. The clerks were very honorable. One I remember was named Grace, I can't remember her last name. I don't remember the others, I do remember her. I don't remember the others' names. But they were very honorable, wonderful people.

JE: Yeah. Well, that's really great. It sounds so like you were a very tight knit family.

SL: Wonderful, close knit family. We all loved each other and wonderful relationship with the parents, with our parents and my siblings.

JE: Can you think of any, let's see if there's any other questions... Can you think of any other memories or funny stories or...?

SL: Oh yes, I can tell you one. I was an avid reader, and there was a family called Shadden in Twin Rocks, which was, I think, about eight or ten miles from Johnstown. They had a little store. And she, for some reason or another, loved me. And she used to, she was a teacher in Twin Rocks, and she used to loan me books to read and I just used to sit on the front porch. We had a swing, you know, and I used to sit in the swing, when the weather was good, of course, not in the winter. And I was an avid reader and one of the, and in one of the books I was reading there was a cat named Withy, W-I-T-H-Y, why, I don't know why his name was Withy, I don't know. And so my mother got me a cat, a calico cat, and I named it Withy. And I loved Withy. But when we were moving, when we lost our store and our house and we were moving to Johnstown and we were, we rented a house that was on the streetcar tracks between Memorial Hospital and Mercy Hospital on Franklin Street. And my mother was afraid it was dangerous for the cat. So my brother Ben said he knew a farm, which was about twelve or fifteen miles from Johnstown, and they would love to have Withy. So he took Withy, and, of course, I cried, so he took Withy to this farm. We moved to Johnstown, as I say, in June.

JE: Of '41.

SL: Of '41. And that winter my mother's in the kitchen as usual, and she hears a scratching at the back door. She opens the door, this is a true story, and Withy had never been to Johnstown. Withy had been from Nanty Glo to this farm wherever in Berlin, Pa., which was I don't know, twelve or fourteen miles from Johnstown. And there is Withy. Dirty, thin, and this is a true story. Withy came to our house in Johnstown.

JE: Unbelievable.

SL: Isn't that an unbelievable? I still, she was a beautiful calico cat, and I still remember. That's a true story. How she found us...

JE: How old of a cat was she at that point?

SL: Oh I don't remember. She was a little kitten when I got her.

JE: Right.

SL: I lost, that I don't remember.

JE: How old were you when you got her, do you remember?

SL: I don't remember. I had her for several years, so she was at least probably five or six.

JE: Withy.

SL: Withy. She found us in Johnstown, honestly. So of course we kept her until she passed away. She wasn't killed from a streetcar, but she did pass away. But my mother opened the door and there was Withy.

JE: Wow. And how old are you now?

SL: Ninety-one.

JE: Ninety-one. Well, we'll take a break now.

SL: Okay.

JE: And we'll see if there's more to say.

SL: Do we have much more or should we go and... [recording cuts out]

JE: This is Joyce Edelstein. Today is January 31, 2016, and I'm continuing my conversation with my aunt, Shirley Edelstein Litman, for the Small Towns Jewish History Project. We're at her home in Coconut Creek, Florida, and we're continuing to talk about Nanty Glo, Pennsylvania, her hometown. You said that you were incorrect in the first part of the recording when you said your father came from Poland. He really came from Lithuania.

SL: Right.

JE: So and tell us..

SL: As did my mother.

JE: Say that again.

SL: I incorrectly stated the fact that my father came from Poland. He came from Lithuania, as did my mother, although they didn't know each other there. But by coincidence they both came from Lithuania.

JE: And your parents met because your father knew her brother.

SL: Yes.

JE: And that was Wolf Charlson.

SL: Wolf Charlson was my uncle, yes. And my father was married originally to my Uncle Wolf's sister, Rachel, and they had two children, Harry and Nathan. And Rachel passed away, he died first, Harry died of spinal meningitis as I recall hearing, and then Rachel passed away, I'm not sure why, something that was incurable in those days. And

my father was left with two-year-old Nathan. So the custom in those days was if a person's wife died, he automatically married an unmarried sister if one was available. So he married my mother, and they, by the way, had a marvelous, wonderful marriage, even though it was, in quote, kind of prearranged by custom. And she raised my brother Nate, who at that time, as I say, was two years old, but raised him as her own. And then my mother and father had six biological children as well.

JE: And again, your mother's name?

SL: My mother's name was Lillian, well Leah, but we called her Lily.

JE: And do you have anything else you want to talk about in terms of what it was like to be Jewish in the town or your daily life?

SL: I never felt any differently that I would have felt, you know, there was never any differentiation with my friends. In fact, on Christmas Eve I used to go with them to, they belonged to the Methodist church, and I used to go to Christmas Eve services with them, to the Methodist church. Just to, you know, be enlightened, it was interesting. So I mean, we never had any disparagement between my religion and their religion. And they came to my house and I would, her mother used to make a wonderful shortbread, a cookie for the holidays. So I remember when it was shortbread time I used to go to their house to taste the shortbread cookie, I think it was called, a shortbread I think. But we never had any problem.

JE: Let's see, and just to get a better sense of the Edelstein general store, the department store, about how many people were employed in the store would you say?

SL: Well the old days he had several men who came from Pittsburgh, and as I mentioned earlier, lived and boarded at our house. But of course I wasn't even born yet so I don't know them. But then I know there were several clerks, I really don't remember how many. But they were all, they were ladies, no men. They were all ladies who lived in Nanty Glo and so, but I, one was named Grace, I don't remember the others.

JE: Oh he didn't employ that many men, or...?

SL: No, there were no men. There were just ladies, just lady clerks.

JE: Uh huh He probably employed some men to unload.

SL: Oh, yes. But then he gave up the furniture after a while and it was just you know, linens, and clothing, and shoes. No food. A lot of the, miners' wear that they needed for work, work shirts and work pants that miners wore. And shoes.

JE: Children's clothing?

SL: Children's. And I remember they had a lot of work pants and stuff that the miners wore.

JE: And none of your brothers worked in the store?

SL: Well Nate used to help out.

JE: Just Nate?

SL: I think only Nate. I don't think the others did.

JE: I think my dad mentioned occasionally they'd go in.

SL: I don't think so.

JE: Not, not as a regular thing.

SL: I don't remember anyone working except, no.

JE: He said he did a little bit. He helped out.

SL: He may have. See, don't forget I was very young in those days so I don't remember. There was six and a half years between Lester and I.

JE: Yeah, that's true. And, and your grandmother, Ida, your mother's mother, she spoke only Yiddish, correct?

SL: She said she didn't understand English. She understood everything that was going on, but she claimed she only understood Yiddish, so as a result my mother spoke to her in Yiddish. So as a result of that, I do know a few words of Yiddish just from, you know, overhearing and so forth. She knew everything that was going on although she claims she didn't understand English. My girl friend...

JE: And did you speak to her in Yiddish?

SL: No. I didn't, no.

JE: You didn't speak to her?

SL: There was, she was a very European woman and she really didn't make herself part of the, of the children. She was close to my mother, my mother took wonderful care of her, but there was no relationship actually between her because she was, wasn't I guess, she was a European woman and didn't...

JE: You said she would sit in the front hall and knit.

SL: She used to sit, and we called it our, and crochet. She spent her whole day in the reception hall. We had a wicker set of furniture, I still remember it. And she sat by the front door all day long.

JE: And the other Jewish families lived in, you all lived in houses?

SL: Oh, yeah.

JE: Mhm, not apartments.

SL: Oh there were no apartments. Oh, no, we all lived in houses. We had a beautiful yellow brick, yellow brick house. It was beautiful.

JE: Would you say the Edelstein house was the biggest?

SL: I think so. We had the first indoor toilet. And we had the first refrigerator in Nanty Glo. I remember that. And we had an ice box and the person who sold the ice box, he used to come, it was in a little room outside of the kitchen where the ice box was. And he would come, whenever we needed ice, great big tongs I guess you'd call 'em, and he'd deposit the ice in the ice box. I can still remember that.

And then we had a coal bin, we had a coal furnace in the basement. And I remember the coal bin was a chute and there was a, you know, a door, and you'd open the door and put the coal and the coal would go down the chute into the furnace room. Our basement was divided into four big rooms. One was a laundry room. One was a furnace room, where the coal came. One was a fruit cellar because my mother, as I said, worked twenty-four hours a day, well not quite. And we, and it was made-to-order. The shelves were designed to hold pint jars and quart jars and it was filled constantly with all the stuff that, you know, tomato, she'd put up tomatoes and fruit, whatever. That fruit cellar was never empty. And then we had a laundry room, a furnace room, oh, and we had a shower in our basement and a toilet in our basement. So we had like four different, the furnace room, the laundry room, the fruit cellar, and this little bathroom.

JE: Hm. And I'm just looking at these questions.

SL: And there was a shower in the basement, too, yeah.

JE: So do you know, back to how the family even got to Nanty Glo, Wolf Charlson was living in Barnesboro.

SL: Right, and he told my father that Nanty Glo could use a fine...

JE: And how far is Barnesboro from Nanty Glo?

SL: I think it was around twelve miles or so.

JE: Oh, okay. So coming from Lithuania he went directly to Barnesboro.

SL: I think so, I think so.

JE: And he came knowing that was his connection.

SL: Yes.

JE: Uh huh.

SL: I can't remember how he knew my Uncle Wolf, I don't remember that. Maybe because they came from Lithuania. I really don't know to tell you the truth.

JE: And do you know how long Uncle Wolf had been in Barnesboro or...?

SL: Well he was established here, he had a big furniture store.

JE: Right.

SL: He was established there.

JE: And well that's interesting. I think we've covered a lot. Do you remember the Jews in Nanty Glo getting together for any kinds of community or Jewish events?

SL: Not Jewish events except for the High Holidays.

JE: Just the High Holidays.

SL: Just the High Holidays.

JE: So you didn't have like a...

SL: But the Passover, my mother invited all the stray people who didn't have anybody. And we used to, in addition to the family, we had it extended into the living room. She had a big folding table, or card table, I don't remember what it was, and we had it extended all the way, and we had a big oak dining room set, huge. You know everything was big in those days.

JE: Mhm.

SL: And she put both leaves, or three leaves, and then in addition to that card tables and stuff to extend it into the living room to accommodate everybody for the Seder. My father always conducted a very nice Seder. But oh, we had a lot of people.

JE: Did it go long into the night?

SL: Not into the night, but it was pretty long. It was pretty long. Longer than I, as a child, appreciated.

JE: Did you say the four questions?

SL: Bob did.

JE: Oh Bob.

SL: He was younger.

JE: Because he was younger, right.

SL: He said the four questions.

JE: And what about Sukkos? Did you make a sukkah?

SL: No, we didn't have a sukkah.

JE: No, so the Jews didn't really get together other than...

SL: Other than the High Holidays.

JE: Other than...

SL: I mean they were friendly, don't misunderstand.

JE: Yeah.

SL: No, every Saturday afternoon, I told you, the ladies came and sat in the living room.

JE: Uh huh. Did, did your brothers and sisters also have, did they have a mix of Jewish and gentile friends?

SL: Yeah.

JE: Like you did?

SL: Yes.

JE: Because there really weren't that many Jewish children.

SL: No, Gerald Newman. There was Gerald Newman.

JE: Gerald Newman.

SL: Let's see, they only had the one son. And then the Levinson children, but Freda, I think I told you, used to play penny ante on Sundays.

JE: Was she a child?

SL: She was, yeah.

JE: She was...

SL: Yeah, Levinson, Freda Levinson was a child, was one of their daughters, she was the eldest in the family, yeah.

JE: How many kids did the Levinsons have? Arthur, right?

SL: They had Arthur, and Louis, and Freda, and Harold, and another young one, I can't remember his name.

JE: Uh huh. So they had a big family.

SL: I think they had about five. I think five, I think they had.

JE: So really your family, the Edelsteins, was the biggest family.

SL: Yeah. And the Donofskys just had one.

JE: Uh huh.

SL: Mildred, who was a few years, several years older than I so she wasn't really friendly, I mean like my girlfriends, she...

JE: Was older.

SL: Was older.

JE: Well they had two, didn't they have the dentist?

SL: Yeah, they had Howard and Mildred.

JE: Howard and Mildred. The Newmans had one son, Gerald. And then the Levinsons had about five.

SL: I think they had five.

JE: And then the Edelsteins.

SL: Louis, and Freda, and Harold, I can't remember the other names.

JE: And then the Aarons.

SL: Oh, Rosalyn was another one. I think they had five children.

JE: Yeah. And the Aarons were in...?

SL: They were in Butler.

JE: How far away was Butler?

SL: Oh, it was about forty miles I think.

JE: Oh really, so it's quite far.

SL: Oh yeah. It was southwest of Pittsburgh.

JE: Oh, hmm.

SL: Or rather, is, I shouldn't say was.

JE: And that was your mother's younger sister.

SL: Older sister.

JE: Older sister. So she had two sisters, Rachel...

SL: And Svisky.

JE: Svisky, Celia. And then one brother, Wolf.

SL: Oh well, she had Wolf, and David, and Meyer, and Abe was killed. He was coming from South Fork, which is a small town, in the winter over to Nanty Glo, and the horse was frightened by an animal or something and started to, you know, run, and my uncle was killed. So that, my brother Abe was named after him, he was very young. And my mother said he was a handsome young man, he was thrown from the horse.

JE: Oh.

SL: He was killed. That's many, many years ago.

JE: So she had quite a few siblings, your mother.

SL: Yeah. And Dave lived in Pittsburgh, and Uncle Wolf and Uncle Meyer. Uncle Meyer was in Beaverdale. And Celia, of course, lived in Butler. And then Rachel, you

know that was Nate's mother. I guess that's everyone. And Dave in Pittsburgh. I guess I said that.

JE: Yeah. And your father had a brother, right?

SL: He had a brother in Pittsburgh, Uncle Dave. And then coming over on the boat, he was coming with a brother and when he got to Ellis Island, the brother wasn't there. They never knew what happened, whether he fell off the ship or was killed and someone threw him overboard. They never knew what happened to my brother, to my father's brother, with whom he was traveling.

JE: So he was traveling with him, and at one point he couldn't find him?

SL: Never knew what happened to him.

JE: How strange.

SL: Yeah. So my father, was only Uncle, Uncle Dave. Oh, he had a sister in Cincinnati.

JE: Uh huh.

SL: And she and the five members of the family were killed in the tornado of 1916, I think it was. And two daughters, Sylvia and Nettie, used to come and spend the whole summer with us because they were left, they were teenagers with no father or mother. Five or six members of the family were killed, uncles or something, the Tennenbaum family, their name was Tennenbaum. It was my father's sister. Meyer Tennenbaum. Five or six members were killed in a tornado. So Nettie and Sylvia used to come every summer and stay with us for the whole summer.

JE: Hm, interesting. Well I think we've got a lot of good information and so we'll sign off for now. And we'll sign off for now, and I'm sure you're available if there are further questions.

SL: Yes, if I can help you, I shall.

JE: Well, thank you, Aunt Shirley, for spending this time to talk about Nanty Glo.

SL: Oh you're welcome.

JE: We'll say goodbye for now.

SL: Okay. Maybe I'll think of something else.

END OF RECORDING
END OF INTERVIEW