

Transcript of Interview with Iris Stein Nahemow
Homestead Hebrew Congregation Oral History Project
Call Number: CSS #4

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The following notations were used.

.... = incomplete sentence. [unclear] = inaudible
(?) = question of spelling

Transcription:

This is August 1993
Anne Sheckter Powell interviewing Iris Stein Nahemow

TAPE ONE OF TWO SIDE ONE

IRIS STEIN NAHEMOW: I am Iris Stein Nahemow. I am a native Pittsburgher. I was born in June of 1958. My father's family went back many generations in Homestead. My father's grandfather was one of the founders of the synagogue back in the turn of the century, Well, I guess it was in the early, was it in first decade of the century? Wasn't it?

ANNE SHECKTER POWELL: He was a Stein also?

IN: He was a Stein also. And when I go to the cemetery before the High Holidays I have, boy I don't know how many graves that I, I visit. But his is one, Charlie Stein is his name and his wife was Bessie. These were my father's paternal grandparents. His father, my father's father, Joseph Stein, is also buried there. His mother, Bessie, they have the same name, and, oh gosh, I, I visit at the, the request of a first cousin of my father, I visit her mother's grave, this is my father's first cousin who lives in Jerusalem, Clara Hammer. I visit her on each of my trips and we reminisce. And that's how I know a lot more than my father told me because Clara was part of the group that came over with my from Russia. So I have her stories as well as my father's stories.

AP: Wait a minute, your father came?

IN: My father came from Russia to Homestead.

AP: With his parents and grandparents?

IN: No, No. His grandfather and grandmother were here. Whoa, wait a minute – yes, his grandparents were here, his father, Joseph, was here. His father came a number of years before to earn money to bring the rest of his family. Then, of course, the Bolshevik revolution and the First World War intervened. So, my dad ended up coming with his mother and his sister and brother, in about 1922 or 1923.

AP: Oh gee.

IN: But with the ganze mishpocha who came because two cousins, Sam Weiner and Sam Gordon, sent another cousin, actually the husband of a cousin, the...and that was the paper I was looking for, I can't believe I threw it away. Avi Melnick, who is the grandfather of Rene Abrams, who belongs to B'nai Israel right now. Do you know Rene?

AP: Yes.

IN: Okay, this was her grandfather. His first wife, was a Saten (?) who was related to our family. And Sam Weiner and Sam Gordon, after the First World War, sent Avi Melnick to Europe to gather the family together. And he spent in excess of a year in Europe before he could get them all out because, of course, it was illegal for them to leave Russia. But that's another source of some information that I have is from Clara, who did travel with the group, from Clara.

AP: Did they all come together?

IN: Absolutely, absolutely. It was Kaifa Gubernya and I don't remember the exact town, but father told me it was very near Boyarka,, and as I've talked to Russians today they say "Boyarka, it a suburb of, of, Kiev, today. It was outside of, outside of Kiev.

AP: (unclear)

IN: But they all, they all more or less traveled together, because these two uncles, and they were not blood relatives, but they were married into two sides of the, of the family. Sam Gordon was my uncle on my grandmother's side, on my Bubbie Bussie's side. Sam Weiner was, was related to him on my father's, grandfather's side, the Stein side. The Weiners were on the Stein side, and the Gordons were on my grandmother's side of the family.

AP: So they all (unclear).

IN: They had, they had a very, very difficult trip. My father and Rene's grandfather confirmed this, he remembered the whole story. He said "Oh yeah, Morry ran away and I had to go and find him." But they had, they literally to walk most of the trip. Because they were leaving illegally, they did not have papers. And they were taking out young boys who were soon be eligible for the draft. My father was the only one in his immediate family, he had a brother who was crippled, and he had a sister who, of course, no one was interested in her for the army. But my dad thought he was putting his family at danger. And so, one night, when they were near the Romanian Boarder, my father ran across the river at night. And he said he was being shot at by the Russians on, he was ten years old when this happened. Can you imagine? He was being shot at by the Russians because they did not want him to leave, and the Romanians because they did not want him to come in, and there were snow drifts. It was Boyarka River, and, now wait a minute, how could the river and the town be named the same? There is some inconsistency here. Well, be interesting to find out.

But he told me that, that it was the river to cross into Romania and he hid behind snow drifts, finally they gave up. Others have said to me "You know, these border guards really didn't care so very much. They'd fire some perfunctory shots and they'd figure "Well whatever will be, will be." So my father finally got across the river. He was in Romania. He was separated from the rest of his family. And he wandered down the river

until he came to a town, he milled around in the town square until he heard people speaking Yiddish. He approached them, told them that he had escaped into Romania and the family that he approached took him in. And he spend several months living with them. He said they were so poor, there wasn't an extra chair in the house for him to sit on. And his job was to tend the goats out in the field. And he and my mother always laughed about eating mamaliga which I think is a some sort of a corn polenta because that was all he got to eat there. It was all this family could afford. But other people were coming through, in that way, to get to Belgium which was where this uncle Avi Melnick was. He had money, he had been sent over with money, so he was able to buy or bribe, or do whatever he could, but he did not have a lot of access. But, my father would send word that if anyone found his family to let them know where he was. And eventually they found him, and the uncle went back and got him. And then of course, he came across with his family.

My father was a very, very generous man, a very giving man, very caring. He told me later, he said, "You know, I was eighteen years old before I realized what those people had done for me. And there was no way to say thank you." My father spent the rest of his life saying "thank you." But he said it to everybody he came into contact with. You know he had a little hardware store in Greenfield, and that was what he ended up doing after other jobs, the dream was to have his own business. And he used to take care of the elderly people in that community. My mother would say, in the middle of the afternoon he would leave with a paper bag in his hand, and my mother would say, "Where are you going". And he would say, "I have to make a delivery". "What are you delivering?" "I have a light bulb to deliver." My mother would say, "I bet you are going to install it, too." And my father would say, "If I don't put it in, who's going to put it in?" But that was and I truly believe that it was the fact that he could never directly thank the people who had actually taken him in. He spent the rest of his life saying "thank you" in other ways. A lot of good happens in the world in these sort of things, doesn't it?

AP: (unclear) He might have done it anyhow.

IN: Yeah, yeah, he's was so very good, true. That's true. Let me tell you a little bit... would you like to hear about the stories that Cousin Clara, who traveled with the family told me about?

AP: Yes.

IN: Okay. It was very difficult getting out of Russia, and she said at one point they were arrested and put into jail. They were found and put into jail, and there, there was a large group of them traveling together, some young girls with them. And a couple of men from the town broke into the jail, and the family were afraid they were going to rape these young girls who were with them and so the family just started putting up a roar, started screaming, and so the town people came out, they were able to escape as a result of that and go on their way. But they crossed the Ural Mountains on foot, in the winter in order to get out. And when you think of what they went through, it's incredible, it is just incredible.

IN: Now uh---

AP: Did he leave Russia in 1920 or 1921?

IN: They came to America in 1922

AP: Probably took them a year...

IN: Probably did. And, when they got to Belgium, though, then everything was fine because the two uncles had given this third uncle enough money that, that people could be housed, they could be fed. They did not come in steerage, they came second class on a boat so they had really had what were fairly, you know, what were really reasonable accommodations to come over. But my father said that my bubbie would not, when they were served their meal, my bubbie would not let them eat all that they were given, they were allowed to eat half of what they were given, and the other half she wrapped up and took down because many of their neighbors from their same town, their same, same shtetl were traveling in steerage and didn't have food. So she took half to her neighbors and friends who were not so fortunate. So they really took care of each other. God knows how they would have survived if they hadn't.

AP: And that was the last wave that came. There was almost no one came after that.

IN: Yeah, isn't that interesting. That's right, that's right. Well, I think they probably would have come a lot of years earlier had the wars not intervened. My father talked a lot about what it was like in Russia, too, with the progroms. They lived through progroms. Life was not easy.

AP: (unclear)

IN: Sure. He said his way of dealing with the progroms was he figured that the soldiers would never think a Jewish child would be out on the streets, so he was out on the streets running after the soldiers. He figured that was the best way to hide.

AP: (unclear)

IN: He looked, he looked very much like I look. He probably didn't have a kipa on. That's right, that's right. That's true.

AP: So when he came to America, he came to Homestead?

IN: When he came to America, he came to Homestead. And although he was about twelve years old. My father had no accent, so he was pre-puberty. And he did have his bar mitzvah at the Homestead Synagogue. And his grandfather was like a shammas there at that time. His grandfather did train him for his bar mitzvah. Because I remember him telling me that. He was put into first grade in the Homestead school system. I think he

only went to school for a couple of years. The family couldn't afford really for him to be in school very long. But he said the teacher, whose, the class room he was in, Miss O'Brien, and he said, "She was wonderful to me." And she really understood, I guess, what it was to be a big kid coming in with no command of the language or anything. But he didn't, he didn't stay in school very long.

AP: Did he, being the only child, an immigrant child at that point, in his classroom?

IN: You know he never talked about that. I don't know. He might not have been, because when I think about it, his brother and sister would have been put in the same class. Or similarly, because they came at the same time. So he may not have had that experience, if there were a large group of them that came. And a lot of them did go to Homestead, with a couple of exceptions. Clara and her family went to Palestine. But her mother had tuberculosis. Now I do not understand how they got her mother into the United States with tuberculosis, but they did. They lived in Haifa, they were living in tents, It was clear her mother was not going to survive, and so they came to the United States, and they came to Homestead, also. They had a grocery store in Homestead. And they lived there until her mother died a few, a few years later, And then her father took the three children and moved to New York City with them, because it was, it was her mother's family that was here in Homestead. He was a sister, her mother was a sister to my grandfather, Joseph Stein.

AP: Did they live in Palestine because they were Zionists?

IN: Oh yes, oh yes,

AP: Oh they really went there for religious reasons.

IN: Oh yes, oh yes, exactly, exactly. For a philosophical ideal.

AP: That's what I meant.

IN: They were, they were, they were Zionists.

AP: They didn't just happen to go to Palestine?

IN: No, no, no, no, they had to work very hard to get to Palestine. It was easier to come to the United States.

AP: (unclear)

IN: That's right.

AP: When your father came, did he ever tell you what his grandparents were doing?

IN: Oh yes, they made cigars, they made stogies. They had a business.

AP: In Homestead?

IN: Uh huh. Absolutely.

AP: Like a little store? (unclear)

IN: That's right, they rolled tobacco, and they, they were cigar makers.

AP: Hmm.

IN: The Steins were. And, in fact, he said it was very interesting that all the women smoked. Can you imagine? I don't know if it was cigars or cigarettes, but they all, all of the women in the family smoked.

AP: Uh hum. Uh hum.

IN: Now my, the other part of the family were in the bakery business. In Europe the family had had a flour mill. And they would take wheat and what other grains were grown by the farmers and they would grind it into flour and then, then sell the flour. That was the business in Europe. When they came to the United States, Sam Weiner, the other uncle, opened a bakery in Homestead. And I know that my father worked for him in Homestead. So there were several, several businesses there.

AP: It wasn't a kosher bakery? (unclear)

IN: I think, I don't know the answer.

AP: Uh huh.

IN: I don't know the answer,

AP: Because I assume at one point, there was a kosher bakery there. I didn't remember the name of it or anything like that. And only one person remembered it. So that was why I trying to figure out if his was the kosher bakery.

IN: I wouldn't be surprised. They were very religious people.

IN: But I don't know, I don't know. Next time I'm in Israel and I see Clara, I'm going to ask her. She will know.

AP: Where was the bakery?

IN: I don't know.

AP: Do you know where the cigar store was?

IN: I don't know that either.

AP: These were probably really tiny little operations.

IN: I am sure they were. These were, you know, when I asked Clara what kind of people my father's grandparents were, what were they like. She said, "They were very simple people." In fact, when I asked the grandfather's name, I said Charlie, she said, "Charlie?" She only knew the Yiddish name.

AP: Was it Hetzel

IN: It was Chaya (?) or something. There was another, I don't, she told me what it was. But she even smiled. She said they were very simple people.

AP: So there he was with his cigar store. And there was your uncle with his bakery.

IN: Bakery.

AP: And there was your father, what, helping in the cigar store?

IN: No. My father started out working at the bakery. He went to work in the bakery.

AP: And then his parents came?

IN: No, his parents were, he came with his mother.

AP: Yeah, that's what I mean.

IN: He came with his mother. His father had already been here.

AP: Okay.

IN: And I believe his father was doing something with the bakery as well. Because when I was a little child, my father worked for United Baking Company. He was a driver and he delivered to stores.

AP: Uh hum.

IN: And I think his father had done the same thing.

AP: Uh hum.

IN: But in Homestead, and delivering bread to grocery stores.

AP: What did United make? (unclear)

IN: No, no, United, United was a bakery, mostly breads.

AP: What's the brand?

IN: No. It was United Baking Company. They were a big, big bakery on the South Side, in the '30s and '40s.

AP: Yeah. So your father was, and your grandfather was here.

IN: My grandfather was here.

AP: And probably doing something with the bakery.

IN: Right.

AP: Do you know why the grandfather came to Homestead?

IN: I'm sure it was because other people from their community were there.

AP: Uh hum.

IN: There would not be any other logical reason. It was that some people had come, and as I have talked to some people in other small communities around Western Pennsylvania and West Virginia, they felt the opportunities were there for them.

AP: To go to the mill towns?

IN: Uh hum. To go to the mill towns and to, many of them started out as peddlers with a cart. But they could with a very little money and very little education and a lot of hard work, make a living of some kind there. There were, they felt there were a lot of opportunities there. In Homestead, the steel mills were there.

AP: Do you think there were other town people there, besides your own mishpocha?

IN: Oh. Absolutely. Absolutely.

AP: Oh, there were! There was a whole lot (unclear).

IN: Annabelle, Annabelle, when I was in high school, at the High Holidays, in that synagogue, you could not buy a seat, the place was packed, absolutely packed. And that was the Homestead community. Homestead, Homestead, Homestead Park and Munhall had a very large Jewish population. And I always felt that our family was a very, very small family in that whole picture. There were other families, that at least to me as a teenager or as a young adult, looking at the community, our family was a small one. Mimi Winikoff came from one of the larger families. She was part of the whole Weinberger family. They were definitely one of the larger families in the community.

AP: But they weren't all from this little town, is what I meant. There were other towns. you don't remember other town's people, landsman, from the place that your father's family came from who were in Homestead?

IN: I think they were all, not all, I would say a very large number of them, absolutely. Because you know, this whole group that Sam Weiner and Sam Gordon together helped to bring over were all, all from the same community.

AP: That probably meant, given the fact that your grandfather had already been here, and your family... look I guess we're getting ahead of ourselves. Your father stayed here, he grew up here.

IN: My father stayed there, he grew up there. His parents owned a home. Synagogue was on Tenth Street, and they lived of Twelfth Street. And they had a house there. My father worked for the family bakery. And my parents were married in 1934.

AP: Now where did your mother come from?

IN: My mother came to this country at just at about the same time as my father. But from a little town called Skvyra also right outside of Kiev, about 60 miles out of Kiev. Her family settled on the Hill. And my parents met at the dances at the Y.

AP: In Oakland?

IN: The dances at the Y in Oakland, absolutely. So that is, that is how they met and when they married in 1934, my grandfather Joseph Stein died that winter, pneumonia. And they had to move into my grandmother's house in Homestead, at the time because she needed help in making her mortgage payments and so forth, and everybody really needed to help with that. And at that point she, kinda divided the house and rented rooms. And that is how she then continued to support herself.

AP: Then (unclear) your father was working for United Bakery?

IN: No, my father continued working for the family bakery until about 1935. And I think at that point, because of the Depression, he was laid off. Now whether they closed the bakery, or sold the bakery, or something happened, but it was a result of the Depression. And my father was unemployed for perhaps six months or so. And then he went to work for United Baking Company. And he work for them until 1950; from that time on. It's a very, very close community there. It's interesting, my mother never really felt a part of it. That was hard. Hard for her.

AP: She never felt included?

IN: No. No. She always felt as if she was an outsider. I don't know if I want to say this on tape, I'm not sure how much that was the community or, or how much would have been my mother. You know. But it was a very tight-knit, a very, very tightly-knit group.

AP: See that can be the flip-side of a tight-knit community.

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

AP: And it's one of the things you wonder about, when you're trying to get a picture of what's that really mean?

IN: They cared very much for each other, they, they truly did.

AP: But your mother stayed there just because (unclear) what her preference would have been.

IN: Probably because it was his community. Also, she had to go live with her mother-in-law. How many of us, how many of us would have liked that. Not me!

AP: And her, her in-laws, his whole family, being one of the founding families of the thing, and she's the (unclear).

IN: Yeah, and she was the new girl in town.

AP: Were you the first child they had?

IN: Yeah, I'm the oldest.

AP: Were you born in Homestead?

IN: I was, well, no we actually, we lived, I never lived in Homestead. I lived in East End, and I lived there until I was twelve or thirteen years old when my father finally left United Baking Company and opened the hardware store. And that was in Greenfield.

AP: (unclear) When did they actually move out of Homestead?

IN: Probably about 1936 or 1937, right before I was born.

AP: They were, she was able to, in some way, they was able to leave your grandmother,

IN: Oh yeah. Once, once.

AP: Once they got her.

IN: Once they...Exactly, exactly.

AP: So that's the only thing your mother had about not being part of that community, made itself known to the extent that she made another choice about where they would live.

IN: That right. Yeah, yeah. And they had lived had lived in East End though. They had an apartment of their own in East End before my grandfather died. And then they moved back to Homestead, and then they moved back to East End.

AP: They were already....When they got married they didn't start off in Homestead did they? They started off in East End.

IN: In East End, right.

AP: Then they came back.

IN: That's right.

AP: Then they went back.

IN: That's right,

AP: I see.

IN: Okay.

AP: That's a real...Did they maintain their connections there?

IN: Oh! Absolutely.

AP: Uh huh.

IN: My father maintained a very close connection and that was the only synagogue he ever belonged to. He was active in that synagogue. He went to services in that synagogue. It was, it was a little awkward because, now I knew you were originally from B'nai Israel. Well, my father would never join B'nai Israel Synagogue. I went there. He paid tuition for me to go to Sunday school.

AP: Me, too.

IN: You, too! I wasn't the only one. See I didn't know that.

IN: But it, it wouldn't have cost any more to be a member then to pay this...

Unidentified voice in background: Iris, I'm sorry, (unclear) called, do you want to talk....

(tape clicked off)

AP: We were doing the thing about the (unclear) move to Homestead.

IN: Um hum.

AP: And lived in East End.

IN: Uh huh.

AP: So, (unclear), you went back, what to your grandparents for the holidays.

IN: Well, actually we rode. Although it was an orthodox synagogue, my family did not live an orthodox life style. And my father would leave for shul early in the morning and come back and get the rest of us about ten o'clock.

AP: He drove?

IN: He drove.

AP: He was always (unclear).

IN: That's right. He drove, he drove.

AP: And so he would drive you on Yom Kippur?

IN: Absolutely.

AP: Did you ever find a problem with that?

IN: Probably no, because my father's philosophy, my father was, was comfortable with it and so I didn't, I didn't feel a problem with it. My father, you know, always believed that God understood that there were compromises in life.

AP: I mean, like, did you sense anything about that in terms of the Homestead community.

IN: No, no.

AP: That's, that's really what I was talking about.

IN: No, no. Even though it was an orthodox synagogue the police, on the High Holidays, the police came through and they covered the meters. And the...

End tape one, side one

Begin tape one, side two

IN: There was a comfortable relationship there. I never, I never sensed antagonism. Others who, who lived there may have felt it a little differently than I did. I never felt that

AP: Uh huh. Did you have cousins or relatives who were your contemporaries who live in Homestead?

IN: Yes, I had one cousin in particular, whose father's name was Ben Stein, there were a number of Ben Steins, and she lived in Homestead. I, I never heard anything different from her.

AP: That's what I was wondering...

IN: And she and I were close.

AP: If they said "Oh you have such a different life in the city," or anything like that.

IN: Huh uh.

AP: The way things are here, we wish we were there.

IN: Well, by the time she was in the eleventh grade, her family felt they wanted to move into Squirrel Hill because they were concerned about her dating boys who were not Jewish and they wanted her in a Jewish neighborhood.

AP: Was she doing that?

IN: Knowing her I doubt it.

AP: Uh huh

IN: I doubt it.

AP: There was that whole choice of not going out or finding someplace else, or being...

IN: I, I no, the sense that I have was that between BBYO and just the closeness, you know, the closeness between the family, and so forth, it was doable.

AP: And the fact that Homestead wasn't far from the city.

IN: Wasn't far, exactly, exactly.

IN: But still the family, the family was very clear, always, that this was not going to be acceptable. I mean it was, the messages in the family were in no way, shape or form, confused messages. We all knew what was expected.

AP: Yeah, exactly. Now your grandparents were still living, in the time, in the time you were growing up.

IN: My grandmother was still living, yes.

AP: That's right, your grandfather died (unclear).

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

AP: Did you go to (unclear)?

IN: Yes, yes. And my father was the favorite child in the family.

AP: Uh hum.

IN: He was her "Moishe, ay, Moishe" you know. She loved my father, and I looked like my father. So I got a lot of, you know, very positive strokes. The other, I've talked with some of my cousins, who, who experienced her as being somewhat critical. Some negative kind, I never experienced that.

I went there and she would take me for walks and we would go into, there's a little park, a war memorial park there, and I remember going there and, you know, playing in that park. She had many neighbors and I remember Yiddish being definitely the language of the moment. You know, even. I was never taught Yiddish. I was the generation that they spoke Yiddish so that the kinder would not know you were talking about. But right there on her street, and Mrs. Coltin lived not so far away and I think there may have been some of the Seiavitches lived on that street. It was very close, you know, it was two very short blocks. It was practically at the corner of McClure, you know, coming down the street to the synagogue. She couldn't have been much closer.

AP: So did you go there for other holidays? Minor things, did you go there for any social events?

IN: We went to the synagogue, we went to the synagogue for those kinds of things, for you know, every dinner, every fund raiser, that sort of thing. Oh, yeah, we went, we went to those kinds of events, but not to holidays. My grandmother was a widow, she didn't have the holidays at her home.

AP: Uh hum.

IN: It's really, it's very interesting, you know, I think my children live a very different Jewish life today than I lived. It may be a richer Jewish life than I had. And, and I would

explain it this way. My grandmother was a widow, my father had almost no Jewish education, from the time he was a little boy the country was at war. He came to the United States; he had a bar mitzvah. And that was, that was the beginning and the end of it. And that was true of my mother, also. My mother's family in Russia had been very, very well educated, but certainly her generation was not. They, they were poor, we had enough to eat but, we were, we were not affluent, by a long shot. You know, every nickel counted. And so we went to synagogue for holidays. But, there were not the richness of celebration in the home that I observe today with my family, did not exist in my childhood. There was, there was as if there was no one to do it. Even Passover, even seders, which were held in my home, were basically dinner. There was really very little religious observance that went along with it. But that I, I feel very sure was because the, you know my grandfather had died, my father had really very little education. I think my father probably knew prayer book Hebrew and that was it. I don't know that he was able to go much further than that. This was, this was a generation that struggled. They had a different kind of Yiddishkeit,

AP: Uh hum.

IN: Because Yiddish was spoken, they grew up in homes where kashrut observed, there was very little assimilation. Their world was very largely a Jewish world. But it was not a knowledgeable world.

AP: Uh hum.

IN: It was a, you breathed the air, and that was what there was. My husband and I just returned from a week's vacation with my cousin Joyce, who is the daughter of my father's brother. And we talked a lot about this. About the fact that they went to synagogue, but there didn't seem to be much knowledge, they were, they were not scholars. They were simple people. And that generation was struggling to make a living and to send their children to school. They wanted their children to have more education than they had. That was really the goal. I've had the luxury of good education. I live, I live at a level of affluence that my, I remember when I finished graduate school and I got my first job, and this was in the 1970's, so you can compare salaries, and my father wanted to know how much I was earning, and I wouldn't tell him. And he said, no it actually it was by the mid 1970's, that he made this statement. He said, he said, "I bet you're earning, you might be earning ten thousand dollars a year", which was roughly half of what I was earning. He, he, he couldn't fathom the kinds of numbers you know, so I have the luxury, right now, of having given my children a good Jewish education. Fortunately, whatever it took for me to know that this was very important was there. My children have had this kind of education, they've had Camp Ramah, they've had School of Advanced Jewish studies. We have learned how to put a more educated approach to Judaism back into our lives, that I think is what is necessary. And I'm not talking about Homestead, I'm talking about my philosophy of Jewish continuity, but it's they didn't have that luxury.

AP: And you were talking about Homestead because that really is, is what you're saying what that community was able to do.

IN: What I remember are things like I remember the fund raising dinners, I remember when the new kitchen was put in so that Bob Katz son's bar mitzvah, so that the women didn't have to walk down the steps to do the cooking for the bar mitzvah itself. I remember my father's devotion to anything that was synagogue needed. And I remember the time that they called and asked him to be part of the Chevra Kadisha. And at that point, you know, we had, we had an extension telephone, I guess my father and I picked it up at the same moment and I overheard the rabbi, a new rabbi asking my father to do this, and my thinking, "Oh my God," because I know my father, I don't know how he did it, but if it was needed for the community, my father did it.

AP: Did you know what it was?

IN: Sure, Yeah I did, because by that time I was already teaching in the Sunday school.

AP: Oh yeah.

IN: I got involved right about the time when Rabbi Weiss left and went to B'nai Emunoh. My father always said that should've never happened. That Rabbi Weiss misread the community. He thought they were going to fire him.

AP: Oh, really?

IN: And that was not what was going to happen at all. And there were a couple of disgruntled people but it's not a synagogue if you don't have a couple of disgruntled people. But he left and went to B'nai Emunoh and then began a series of rabbis who came for really short term, short term service in Homestead. I was hired to teach Sunday school there when I was sixteen years old. I had just been confirmed myself. So, yes, I do, I remember all of this, and I remember the tradition, I remember mostly the example my father set and how much it meant to him. How could it mean less to me? You know what I'm saying?

AP: It's exactly what he would have hoped, I would think.

IN: That's right.

AP: I want to go back to your saying this thing about Rabbi Weiss because it's interesting you say that because in many cases when I've asked people who they remembered the rabbi who stands out in their mind. Rabbi Weiss recurred (unclear).

IN: Of course. Of course.

AP: And most of them were unaware of why he had gone. They just assumed there was a better offer or something like that.

IN: My father's memory of it was, because I asked him the same question, because life with its interesting little twists and turns, one of my cousins on my mother's side is married to one of Rabbi Weiss' granddaughters. So there is an order to the world, isn't there? And I asked my father and he said there had been (unclear) politics, as I had described to you, and he felt he was afraid he was going to be fired so he left.

AP: Do you know if they had fired any rabbis before that? Or wouldn't you know that?

IN: I was too young. Rabbi Weiss was the only rabbi that was there until I was about sixteen and I think he had been there for many, many, many years.

AP: He was the one that I remember when I was a little girl, so that had to be.

IN: Where was your family from, Annabelle? Where did they live?

AP: We lived in West Homestead, just me and my mother.

IN: I remember that it was you and your mother, that's right, but I didn't realize the Homestead connection.

AP: Yeah. That's what I'm saying.

IN: Oh boy! Did you know Marshall when you were, when you were

AP: No because he was in a...he was older, we talked about that.

IN: That's right, four years

AP: There was just enough that he seemed like an old person.

IN: That's interesting. Now how did your family get to Homestead?

AP: Well, I'm going to tell you afterwards.

IN: Okay, okay.

AP: Did your father ever tell you any stories about the other rabbis? The other rabbis I knew.

AP: The ones that came after, what about the ones that came before?

IN: He never said, he never told me anything about them.

AP: So Rabbi Weiss only went, not because he wanted to go to another synagogue, but because he thought that this one was going to fall out from underneath him?

IN: That was my father's perception.

AP: Interesting.

IN: You might want to try to validate that with some other people to see if there's any...

AP: It's hard to do because most people had no idea why he left, and thought he left because B'nai Emunoh gave him a better deal.

IN: My father's sense was different.

AP: It would have to be someone who did have a sense of it. Generally speaking, people who observed it didn't really know what was happening. You had this bifurcated experience. You were going to B'nai Israel, which was conservative and you were going to this orthodox shul. And your parents were doing essentially something of the same thing.

IN: Uh hum.

AP: How did you go about, you know like, the thing about the separation, the thing about the women going upstairs? Did that bother you.?

IN: No, it's the way it was. We, my mother, and my sister, and I, and of course; see my father was also the hub of my mother's family. He really, in his own quiet way, was a very, very strong personality. So eventually, you know after my Bubbie got too old to climb the steps at the Margareta shul, she came to Homestead with us and my aunts and uncles and all, all came. We went to shul there.

AP: Your mother's family started going to Homestead as well.

IN: Right, well, you know if you can't lick them, join them. I guess is the philosophy. That's right. We, we sat on the first floor behind, what, the mechitza? Yeah, behind the mechitza. Behind the mechitza. Give me a break. It was up and we sat in the first row and the people, we were sitting, we use to sit, as you walked in, on the left-hand side. And my mother would it move over and all the women sitting in the middle did the same thing. I mean...

AP: What would you do, push it over....

IN: Of course, of course.

AP: You pushed the curtains aside?

IN: Absolutely, Absolutely. Annabelle, this is what it was like. Go on. You know, I mean, that's what it was like. Look, what is Judaism? You, you, keep talking until you

find a rabbi that tells you what you want to hear. That is indeed what it was like. This was the way the world was. You know you, Bubbie kept kosher and we didn't keep kosher. And you know what you can bring into her house, and what you can do, and, and it was an accepted fact. And I didn't see anything hypocritical about it and it was just the way it was.

AP: (unclear) the way people look at it, you do everything or you do nothing, it's the in between that is hypocritical. It's absurd. It's the spectrum of Judaism.

IN: Absolutely, absolutely. One of the other things that I remember, too, was that as my children were little, or when I started to have children, you know, and when they were old enough to come to synagogue, and I think this was when my daughter wanted to be married there. Was that my father would take them there. But not only that, if we went for High Holidays, my kids came in and right down front to Papa, and my little girls sat with him. You know, they were all over him, they were on his shoulders, they were in his lap, they were climbing. He was very, very tolerant of the children, very, very tolerant of the children. And Jerry Schwartz was the president at that point, and if the kids got too noisy, Jerry took a book and went [knocking on table]. And you know everything kept on. So more regular than anything else, you heard this [knocking on table] during services. But, every, it was a big, it was a family. Now, I not telling you there weren't cliques, there really were, but it was a family.

AP: (unclear)

IN: Pardon me?

AP: I said, even families have their own little cliques if you have a big enough family.

IN: Absolutely, absolutely.

AP: Originally, when you were a little girl, you must have sat upstairs.

IN: I sat upstairs with my grandmother, that's right.

AP: Was there a mechitza then? That, probably, hadn't been put in yet. Well it was really jammed, there wouldn't have been room for the women to have been downstairs, I assume.

IN: I don't remember, by the time I was in my teens, there was a mechitza.

AP: Uh huh. (unclear)

IN: I remember that.

AP: And when you were a little girl, when you were coming when it was really crowded...

IN: Packed!

AP: There was, you were sort of, inched in wherever you were going to sit?

IN: Yeah, yeah. My Bubbie, my Bubbie was, oh, there were assigned seats, absolutely, absolutely, but there was room. You know, it, it, that wasn't an issue.

AP: Yeah. So you could just come and find a spot.

IN: And it was benches, it wasn't individual seats, so if you had to squeeze in, if you had little children, you know. Yeah.

AP: And when you got married, you went there with your husband?

IN: No, no, I did not.

AP: Oh, okay, it was your father taking the children.

IN: It was my father taking the children. Well, you know, I, it was a second marriage for me, so I have to, I have to go back and say that's not really true. When I was married the first time, during the very few years I lived in Pittsburgh, because the first years that I was married, I lived in Philadelphia, because my husband was in graduate school there. And when we moved back to Pittsburgh, Debbie was already born, and those last three years, those last three years we were married we did go to Homestead with, with my dad. And my first husband actually got fairly involved in things there.

AP: Really?

IN: Yeah, yeah. Then when we were divorced, Marty grew up in a totally non-observant Jewish home.

AP: Uh huh.

IN: Nothing. I mean, he had no religious training of any kind. And he, we joined Temple Sinai, because this was my compromise with him because he knew no Hebrew, he knew, he had no synagogue skills of, of any kind because his family had never, had never gone. And my father didn't push. My father was, although my father adored him, he really kinda let nature take its course. And, what we started to do were things in the home. Then, at the point where Marty, as the kids got more involved, Marty got more involved because the kids were getting more involved. That was at the time there was so little going on anymore in Homestead that my father tended to join us, a little bit more at Tree of Life, because the kids were doing things.

AP: You're at Tree of Life.

IN: We're Tree of Life members now.

AP: You, you, he graduated from Temple Sinai.

IN: He graduated from Temple Sinai to Tree of Life. Well, what happened was that my Homestead cousin's son had a bar mitzvah. They were living in Youngstown, Ohio, at the time. We went up for the bar mitzvah. And it was the first service I had attended in a conservative synagogue in five or six years. And I walked out of there and I said, "Marty, this is the first time I've felt I've been to shul in years. And it matters more to me than to you." And so he said, "Do what you want." And, you know, life progresses. I guess the person who wants it more tend to influences the person who wants it less.

AP: Sometimes.

IN: But, so Marty was never really involved in Homestead. The other ways that I got involved were that I was very close to my father, and even as an adult there were things that went on, my father used to say to me, "Come on." And my father, my father was very much a European man. He would, he wouldn't say, he wouldn't call me up three weeks in advance and say, "You know, there's something going on at the synagogue and I want you to come with me." He would stop at the house at seven o'clock and he'd say "What are you doing?" "Oh, nothing much." "Get dressed, I, I want you to come with me." "Where're we going?" "Ah, there's something going on at the synagogue. I want you to come with me." All right, can you imagine doing that to one of your children.

My father had that kind of influence. He really did, I, you know, got dressed and went. And in later years what I knew best was really through the cemetery, unfortunately. And Oscar Cohen. And Oscar and I really became buddies. I guess it started when my grandmother died in the mid-seventies and I got involved in all the preparation around that. And again that was when, you know, that was after my grandmother died. My mother decided which funeral parlor. And my father came over the next morning and he said "Well, I'm going out to the cemetery. You know, I want to, I want to show them which plots, etc." And it was, it was, it was quite a process. But he took me and he, in a sense, handed me the gauntlet, so to speak, by taking me along in those ways. He made the links for me to have the relationships so that once he was gone, I had them and could continue, in that way.

AP: So you did, in some way, I'm gathering. And you started making connections with these other people, and then what did you get involved in, you got involved in the synagogue (unclear)?

IN: It more, its more, no I am not officially involved. It will happen, it will happen, it's very informal. I talk to Bob Katz regularly, he calls to fill me in on what's happening. I have a promise I haven't yet fulfilled, but I've promised, Amir that I'm going to help him to raise the money he needs to, to get everything else established, at Beth Shalom. So mine has been sort of a spotty in and out, hasn't it? Is the different than what you expected or different than you.

AP: Well, I would assume or I had to assume that it would be different just because of what I knew already about the outlines of your life, that how, what were all these connections and how did you get there. And then, of course, there was the thing of the article, where I saw your daughter was, herself, personally connected. And I knew you would have to keep (unclear)

IN: Oh yeah, oh yeah. Well, it was, the wedding there was not my idea, it was my daughter's. And it was because my father would take them there. Same thing, my father would arrive at the house about forty-five minutes before Simchas Torah services would begin and he's say "I want to take the girls with me, would you get them dressed?" That's the way he did things, you know.

AP: Yeah.

IN: And they were involved enough. Because of the things he did, that was, that was the wedding.

AP: Did you do things like Simchas Torah and Purim?

IN: At Homestead, at Homestead, we did that at Homestead. That's right. Those were the things that we did at Homestead. Because my father, but now see those were synagogue related. You know?

AP: Did men and women sit together, do you remember?

IN: No, they did not. They sat...

AP: They still sat separate even for the little, the smaller kinds of things. They still sat separately.

IN: They sat separately.

AP: And so what happened when the kids were going around, for example? You know, on Simchas Torah, for example?

IN: Remember going around, but I don't know the answer to that. I don't remember ever going around. Maybe it was only the men who, who did. It would've had to have been, but the kids following them. As an adult, I don't remember. I am disappointed that I don't have that memory clearly.

AP: No one does. It's a most amazing thing. It's completely lost, including mine. I should try to find someone else that I can ask.

IN: Isn't that interesting?

AP: There really (unclear).

IN: Ask Mimi Winikoff. I, she could very well have that memory in a different way. Hers would be a little bit later. But she's not ten years younger than me.

AP: So it wouldn't be that big of a gap.

IN: No, it's not that big a gap, it's not that big a gap. Have you talked to, talked to the Reeses?

AP: No.

IN: Okay. Barry Reese, who does the Entertainment Books here in town, was from Homestead. Edward Reese's son, his wife lives, I believe at Munhall Road, at the Imperial House. But Barry Reese would remember, he was another of my Sunday school kids. And then there was the, I want to say Silverman family. Susan, no it wasn't Silverman. It will come to me at some point. These kids would remember, they're enough younger.

AP: Overall, when you went to all these family events, did you get involved with children? (unclear) Going back to that feeling that your mother being the outsider, I'm wondering how you felt.

IN: I probably have closer relationships with them today, as an adult than I did as a kid. Kids are miserable, they're mean. You know, they are just not nice. And I always felt somewhat that way, although I am a pretty assertive person. And I probably established more relationships because I was assertive, than a normal, you know, a normal person would. Today I find my conversation with Mimi Winikoff, in the grocery store is very interesting. She said, "We all need to get together, we need a reunion." And she said we got to do it. And my cousin, Ed and Ben and da da da are in town and we've got to get everybody together. She also told me, and I don't know if anyone has told you this, Ben Simon, who owns Gordon Shoe Store, is a Seiavitch from Homestead. Did you know that?

AP: No, I did not.

IN: I did not either, I found that out. And the Seiavitch family was, of course, absolutely, key for my, my whole life.

AP: Do you remember him?

IN: Oh my God, of course I do. I remember, I remember Mr. Seiavitch at, you know, not only in the cemetery, but also in the shul. And his wife, who was, now there was a woman to deal with, that was a presence. I remember my father taking me to one of the Chevra Kadisha dinners.

TAPE TWO OF TWO – SIDE ONE:

IN: There was such good humor about all of this and, yes, there was arguing and bickering and I remember when my father's cancer was diagnosed and when my father was first put in the hospital with his stomach cancer. And it was right before Rosh Hashanah. 1981, 1980 or 1981, 1980. And we had to call Jessie Seiavitch. I don't remember what her last name is now-- Reuben.

AP: Reuben.

IN: And Jessie, it's Morry Weinstein, Jessie, I'm not going to be able, I'm in the hospital. Hello?" He said, "She hung up on me." He said, "It's not that's she got mad at me, I think she got upset." Well that's exactly what happened. You know. But that's the way it was a very emotional, a very, very emotional group of people.

AP: So if there was all this outpouring, this more passionate kind of thing....

IN: It was passionate, there's no question.

AP: Did they, did you remember them maintaining animosity, hostility?

IN: They're Jews!

AP: There's Yom Kipper, too.

IN: That's true, that's true. You know what I'm remembering is, one day when I was at the cemetery with Oscar, with Oscar and a few other people, 'cause Oscar use to keep me informed – boy am I going to miss him. I'd come out and, you know, he would tell me what's happening here and what's happening there and so forth and then he used to say, I remember when my mother wanted to have a double stone put on my father's and he tried to talk her out of it. He said, "Rhea, don't do it. You never know what, what things are going to bring. Look, there, this one up there, A Mermelstein is up there, up on the top of the hill. I've got two graves taken up there. What is it? She's buried there, and he wanted a double stone. And then he moved California with his daughter, and she buried him out in California. And, you know, and I mean, were there animosities? You know, one could call those animosities. I see that as if you try to scrape it all away, they didn't hate each other

AP: Uh huh.

IN: It was, it was, it was a certain piece of Jewish life that was the way really of expressing themselves. Have you read the book *Home Fires* by any chance?

IN: My book club is reading it right now. I've gotten through about half of it. It describes very similar families. But you know what I'm saying,

AP: Yeah.

IN: I can say somebody can look it and say they are animosities; I don't think that was really meant.

AP: What I was saying is that, for example, you didn't find there were people who didn't speak to other people, or did you.

IN: But of course.

AP: Or, I won't go here is so and so is there? So they had those kinds of fallouts.

IN: Oh yeah, yeah. They did.

AP: But they didn't lose people from the community, did they? (unclear)

IN: I don't think they did. I don't think they did. But on the other hand maybe they, maybe there were some they did lose. There were also some very strongly held feelings, you know, they had the opportunity to merge with the synagogue in Pleasant Hills.

AP: Uh huh.

IN: Thirty years ago I guess it must have been. And the merger would have required moving to conservative practice rather the orthodox practice. And they turned it down.

AP: Uh huh.

IN: The congregation would have survived if they had accepted it.

AP: Yeah.

IN: The building may have moved, might have moved at some point. The congregation would have survived.

AP: Probably the building, probably the building is nicer than what they have in Pleasant Hills.

IN: The building is spectacular. Or was spectacular. I know with my daughter's wedding, the notes we got from people about just how beautiful it really was.

AP: Where you married there?

IN: No, no.

AP: But you were in Pittsburgh both times that you got married.

IN: Uh huh.

AP: Did you want to?

IN: My children were named there. Even though I wasn't married there.

AP: You just have daughters.

IN: My daughters, yeah, yeah. No, because the, the weddings were going take place in a place where the receptions could be held, too. And I was a child of the fifties and we were so proper about everything that we did then, even the nostalgia didn't enter, didn't enter into it. Everything had to have the right brocade on the edge.

AP: I guess the price we pay for (unclear).

IN: That's interesting.

AP: The reason I asked you was did you ever, was the same things true with weddings, well, by the time your daughter got married, did men and women sit separate?

IN: No, men and women sat together for the wedding and when I talked to them about it, I said "Would you be willing to allow men and women to sit together?" and they said, "You know, it's so small today that the men and women sit together now anyway."

AP: Uh huh.

IN: We might as well take the mechitza down and leave it down. You know when you have thirty people at services the women were coming and sitting with their husbands.

AP: But before that then, since they, since you had asked them about it that actually answers the question. Before that, evidently, the men and women were sitting separately, even for weddings, probably. Other words, it would have been a question you would not have had to ask.

IN: I don't remember. I don't remember.

AP: Do you remember going to weddings there?

IN: I'm sure I was at other weddings there. I don't remember. It would have been as a child.

AP: No one remembers that either. (unclear) It's odd, these are the things people don't remember. And it was through the question that had been in our minds at the beginning. And the question was--was the only shul for a whole community, and as you say, for example, you were driving there and there were a variety of things people were doing in

term of how they were utilizing that shul, did it extend to these other kinds of things like, like weddings but, but no one seems to have a recollection about, about how that was.

IN: Annabelle, my daughter's wedding was the first wedding in thirty years, so you're really asking people to remember back a long ways.

AP: A long time.

IN: When Ben Stein started to look for the huppa. He had no idea where to look, no idea. He literally searched the building. He found the poles, he had no idea where to look for the velvet cover. He found it in a closet, hanging on wire hangers and there was rust all over it. And he said, he thought "Well, we'll see what happens." Every single drop of rust came out of it. It is gorgeous. It is gorgeous. With Lisa's wedding we borrowed it to use at Tree of Life. My daughter's wedding in May.

And when they turned the lights on, the whole thing has light bulbs underneath it, my husband took it home. He polished the brass. He rewired the, you know, the whole thing, because the wires were really frayed and Tree of Life was afraid to let us even to put a light bulb in it. We turned the lights on and Mort Godfried was concerned. He said, "Look, that's old velvet, look, it's all mottled and so forth." My daughter came in and said "Oh, look, isn't it gorgeous, you really can see how old it is."

And it's, it's, you know, that's how long it had been, that's how long it had been. The congregation did not, did not die an easy death. It struggled on for so many years beyond it's really being viable. Which says a lot about how those people, who were left, really cared. Had they had a more expensive building to maintain, had they had less resources, there, because, you know, in the end they had no rabbi, they really had no expenses. In many other communities they never would not have been able to have hung on as long.

It is interesting that that nostalgia is existing among my age group. I would wonder about Ruthie Stein, I would be interested in, in knowing what her, she's a member of Beth El must have taught there for five years, so I saw a lot, a lot of kids coming through. I did a bar and bat mitzvah parents' workshop at Tree of Life a number of years ago. And Mimi Winikoff was there because her daughter was there because her daughter was having bat mitzvah. And we reminisced about what bat mitzvahs were like in Homestead. We talked about that. And bar and bat mitzvahs, I'm sure there were no bat mitzvahs there. There had to have been bar mitzvahs, but she remembers that it was the women who got together and cooked. That that's what was done. There was that kind of sense of community. You know you have much more of a right of passage there then when you go out and spend \$30,000 putting on an absurd kind of extravaganza. And well at any rate.

AP: That's right. That actually raises the thing, since you were talking about bat mitzvahs. When you were teaching Sunday school, they were not, what grade were you teaching?

IN: I taught the right before confirmation, pre-confirmation and confirmation levels.

AP: Oh, they were pretty far along.

IN: Right, yeah. I'm sure, no that isn't true. When I started, I taught there a lot of years. All of a sudden I'm realizing, when Barry Reese was my student, I was teaching kindergarten.

AP: Oh so you taught through the whole spectrum.

IN: Well, I also taught, you know there were two sessions in when different aged students came in, so I taught different aged students at different times.

AP: So rather than have all the students come in at the same time? See, you were this from?

IN: From 1954 until about 1958, 1959.

AP They were into high school.

IN: Yeah.

AP: And at that point they had these little shifts.

IN: Uh huh.

AP: So, they had, like, the younger children come at one point and the older ones at a different one so they didn't have to hire a whole range of teachers.

IN: Well, you know, but, we taught, we taught two, two sessions.

AP: Were there many children?

IN: The classes were small, five, six, eight.

AP: Uh huh.

IN: Things were very small by that time, very small by that time. The congregation, right after Rabbi Weiss left, and Rabbi Segal, Rabbi Jack Segal, I don't know if that name's come up at all, has it?

AP: Uh huh.

IN: He was there for about three years. Maybe it could have been a little longer, I'm not sure. He was a very, very dynamic man. And I think he went to McKeesport after that. And he married a woman, Chotiner from McKeesport. Toby Chotiner from McKeesport. He really was a dynamo.

AP: And you were teaching when he was there.

IN: Uh huh. He was the one who hired me.

AP: Was he a help to you?

IN: Oh he was wonderful, absolutely. People loved him. I remember a sermon he gave the first Rosh Hashanah that he was there, and the building needed a lot of money put into it. And he, he literally, they, they came about as close to calling cards as they could. The pledges were made verbally in the synagogue that night. And he had standing room only. And, he was getting gifts, this was, this had to be in 1954, 1955, of \$1,000, \$2,000 from people.

AP: That was incredible.

IN: That was incredible amounts of money, incredible. I remember that, and I remember when a couple of those pledges were made and just a murmur going through the synagogue. He basically said because he said that when our parents die we discard, I remember things from this sermon, when our parents die we discard their shoes. Because no one is permitted to use the shoes, that is not allowed in Halacha, because no one is allowed to walk in their shoes again. However, Halacha does not say that we cannot assume their responsibilities. We must assume their responsibilities. What would your parents think if they saw this leaking roof?

AP: Hmm.

IN: And he did the job.

AP: And he was a young man.

IN: He was a young man. He was terrific, he really was.

AP: Why did he move to McKeesport? Was it big move?

IN: I think it was a bigger synagogue, a bigger, a step up. That probably was a move because it was a better contract for him. I think he also thought about going to medical school at that point. In fact, I remember when I was in college, I would run into him in the Cathedral and he was taking some science classes. But at some point he abandoned that idea.

AP: And then I think went someplace else?

IN: And he's in, he's in Texas now. And I think the Stein family is in touch with him.

AP: She's in touch him, Ruth, Ruth Halle is.

IN: Uh huh.

AP: So they really made connection with him. But he was a help to you in terms of how you were going to teach and (unclear).

IN: Oh, absolutely. Absolutely.

AP: He was, he was involved with the children?

IN: Yes, he was, he was very warm with the children. The kids really liked him a lot.

AP: When you had the older kids, which was in the '50s, what was your sense of their sense of growing up in that Homestead area at that time? Was this, was this, did you sense that they were having any difficulties, that they were feeling isolated, or that they were, you know, struggling more with the things like dating, (unclear) than city Jewish children were?

IN: I wish I could, I wish I could answer that. I cannot. I don't remember. Mimi's the right person to ask that question, she would remember.

AP: Where the parents involved (unclear)?

IN: Very much so. The parents were very, very much involved. It was the center of Jewish life and the community. And they seemed to care about each other a lot. They really seemed to be friends, and

AP: So when you were teaching them, you had this feeling that there was this closeness (unclear).

IN: Oh yeah, oh yeah,

AP: They weren't just dumping their kids –

IN: Not at all, no, no, no. It was very different from my experience at Tree of Life, I chaired the school committee at Tree of Life for several years, when I was on the board, the parents were dumping their kids there. It's like "fix it!"

AP: That's the whole problem. We always go through the same thing with Jewish education. It a real loss.

IN: It is, it is. The smallness, the closeness, the intimacy, is a loss. I travel through many small communities in my work. I see it happening everywhere. This a little bit unique in that the families are still closely, they're closer, they're around. I still see a number of them and for Mimi to say, "We need to do something, we need to get together in some way." I think that the same spirit that my Bubbie showed on that ship coming over and

taking food down to her neighbors, we exhibited, we, it was an example, I don't know how, I don't know how to say it. It's, we have a definite feeling for each other even though we don't a lot of each other. There is a common bond there, something that we share, that is important to us. It's like Jack Segal said, we can't walk away from our parents' responsibilities. And things do change. I've had the feeling for a long time that it only going to be a matter of time until I assume some of the responsibility with the cemetery in Homestead. And it really is just a matter of time. I have a job where I work 60 hours a week, as I put in fifteen months a year, and so there's not a lot of extra that I can add at this time. But that is something that I know I will do because I feel I have a responsibility to do that. Mimi's comments to me told me she had some of that feeling as well. I ran into a family, at my daughter's wedding, who were from Homestead, too. They're from the groom's side. Arnie Landy.

AP: I know him.

IN: Do you?

AP: He went to Hebrew school with me.

IN: Where?

AP: In Homestead.

IN: In Homestead, okay. Now how did you go to Hebrew School in Homestead? Well, I'll ask you that later. But when the rabbi mentioned, the huppa being from Homestead, you know, in part of his whole thing to the kids, afterwards Arnie came over to me and said, "You look familiar, and I kept wondering where I knew you from as soon as the Rabbi said, I thought Iris Stein." So he is, he is around, too.

AP: You know that is so interesting because that's the thing I was asking you about. The kids did know you even though (unclear).

IN: Oh yeah, oh yeah.

AP: Because he is our contemporary.

IN: Oh yeah, sure, they knew me.

AP: But they didn't include you.

IN: Well, You know, I would probably have to say that as a typical kid and adolescent I probably felt more left out than I really was. You know what I'm saying, don't you? You know. We're so hypersensitive as kids.

AP: You need a lot to happen. You can't just go there and say....

IN: That's right. You know it's like "I'm a visitor, be nicer to me!" And they just say "We don't need her, we've got six other people." You know.

AP: You didn't go to Hebrew school with us.

IN: That's right, that's right. Now you see, my parents never thought to send me to Hebrew school. It's interesting that your mother sent you to Hebrew school. I went to Sunday school, I had a little at B'nai Israel.

AP: You only went to Sunday school at B'nai Israel.

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

AP: I didn't know you in Hebrew school.

IN: I didn't go, I didn't go.

AP: Was there a reason? (unclear) lot less girls.

IN: Did you, did you ever know my cousin, Beverly Stein? She would have been enough, would have been three years older, you probably wouldn't have.

AP: The same thing with Marcia Gordon. (unclear) old people.

IN: That's right.

AP: (unclear)

IN: That's right, that's right. You know, when Marshall came to my daughter's wedding, and his wife told me what happened, which was interesting because it was the first he had been back in the synagogue in years. And she said, he came early, and she said he sat in his father's seat and cried. Did some mourning. That it was, it was that kind of thing, my Aunt Rose, who was an interesting woman, and hadn't been back for years, I can't even tell you how many years, this was my father's sister, was so close to her mother, and we had the aufruf there as well as the wedding.

They literally turned the whole congregation over to us, we probably had one hundred, one hundred twenty-five people there for the aufruf. The place was packed again. And then we had a luncheon downstairs afterwards. My older son-in-law is from Milwaukee, although the kids live here you know. So we used the Homestead synagogue, so they gave us literally every aliyah and our kids led services, although Debbie was not permitted on the bima. It was only the men. My son-in-law did the haftorah but they were still you very keeping to some of those traditions. But my Aunt Rose came, and sat there for a while and she's a very un-emotional woman. She said, "Every time I look up in the balcony I see my mother."

IN: You lose that when you, when a building changes, or when a synagogue closes.

AP: You can't go back.

IN: You can't go back. I, I can't tell you how glad I am that we went back when we could in the way we went back.

AP: It's a marvelous, I mean, those are the kind of things you wish you would have done. But usually those are the things that you think of, that you wish you had done that you didn't think of doing. You're the rare person.

IN: Well, my daughter, my daughter.

AP: Uh huh. But then you (unclear) understanding ---

IN: Oh yeah.

AP: I mean. That's a story that most, you know I want to pick up where you were telling me that you get to go to a lot of small Jewish communities.

IN: Uh huh.

AP: And your sense is that they were different from or more similar...

IN: More similar.

AP: More similar?

IN: Oh, absolutely, absolutely.

AP: Did they generally tend to have a sense of a community that the larger ones don't have?

IN: But also they're losing their community. Fairmont, West Virginia, now goes to Clarksburg for synagogue. Warren, Pennsylvania, closed. You know I, I, Weirton just closed their synagogue.

AP: Really?

IN: Uh huh.

AP: You think of Weirton as a bigger town. (unclear)

IN: Yeah, yeah.

AP: And when you talk to these people you are always coming across a sense of loss, I'm assuming.

IN: Oh yeah, oh yeah.

AP: Which you can understand probably more (unclear) larger congregation.

IN: Of course, of course, oh absolutely.

AP: (unclear) can understand intellectually if not emotionally.

AP: Is your mother interested in talking to us?

IN: No, no, no. My mother speaks Yiddish.

AP: Does she read Yiddish?

IN: Oh, yes.

AP: Does she use one of the Yiddish prayer books?

IN: Oh no, my mother also came to this country young enough that her English is just fine.

AP: Uh huh.

IN: Yeah.

AP: So then when she would go to shul she would take something like a translation in the English.

IN: Exactly, exactly, that's right. My mother came to the United States about the same time as my father did, but she was a couple of years younger. So, she was about nine when she came, nine or ten when she came.

AP: You said your father, (unclear) pick up the little pieces, then I will let you go on to things that I missed. He was at the Chevra Kadisha. Did he ever wash the body? Or things like that?

IN: I cannot think of my father doing that in a million years. My guess is that when the Chevra Kadisha needed things done he did it for them and he attended meetings, and he, he, I, I know when we had to arrange my grandmother's funeral and he, it was at Blanks' and he knew Arnold Ryave very well. And he walked in, and the two of them were on a first name basis. And so I assume there were various things he handled in that way. My father couldn't have taken a splinter out of a person's finger. He just couldn't. Mrs.

Seiavitch washed bodies. My father, no. That was why when he said yes that he'd be remembered ...

AP: I know you said that. What did he? Did he go all that way... it was a very hard event to contemplate...

IN: I couldn't, no.

AP: But he stayed with that group for a long time? Did they have their own society, their own dinners and so forth?

IN: Yes, absolutely. My father did everything. My father was also the handyman who, because he was good at those things. He, anything needed to be fixed, my father went and did. My father was, I believe, the secretary of the congregation for a while.

AP: Se he was going to meetings while...

IN: Oh, oh he was, oh, my goodness, absolutely. Oh, absolutely, absolutely. It was a bone of contention between my parent.

AP: I was going to ask you.

IN: Absolutely, absolutely It was a very frequent subject of arguments.

AP: Did he, did he have some mixed feelings because of the fact that they, you, didn't live there?

IN: No.

AP:: No? So that wasn't a problem at all.

IN: No, that wasn't a problem at all.

AP: So he was willing to just get in his car and drive over there.

IN: Absolutely, absolutely

End first side second tape.

Begin second side, second tape

AP: This is tape two, side two, of an interview with Iris Stein Nahemow. Because there is some dead space on the front part of this tape, before the interview with Iris continues, I will use this portion of the tape rather the end of it to identify the project and participants, which is to say, this is Anne Shekter Powell interviewing Iris Stein Nahemow in August of 1993 in her office at the Jewish National Fund where she is executive director. We are conducting this interview for the Homestead Hebrew

Congregation Oral History Project of the Western Pennsylvania Jewish Archives of the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania.

I should just let you sort of wander because I want to pick up those pieces that come had to my mind. Before we go any further I wanted to ask you about, that we sort of got lost, I remember you saying that you, there were all these, that came to your mind, too, that I haven't asked you.

IN: Oh gosh, I've always been surprised particularly when I go to the cemetery now and some of the people that I see there and some of the connections. I didn't know the connection with you. But I've been there, there've been times when I've been there very early on a Sunday morning and the cemetery committee isn't there yet, and so I stand outside and I'm very fortunate. I have an opportunity to really know a very, very broad spectrum of the Jewish community. And, Hal Bigler is there and I, I remember one time that I said "Hal! Morning and how are you, and happy New Year." And I said, "What are you doing here?" and he said, "My parents are buried here." I said, "Your parents are buried here?" and he said, "Yeah, my mother was from Homestead." I'm just amazed at the number of people that there is a connection with.

AP: uh hum

IN: Absolutely amazing. Have you, have you found out anything that would, or is it just that Pittsburgh is so interconnected? It's just another interconnected....

AP: Why is that? I'm not sure.

IN: Yeah.

AP: No I hadn't figured that out. And it's true because I've been, you know, once people know I'm doing this project they would say, "Do you know so-and-so, and so-and-so." And you would say, there's all these little Homestead connections. People who lived in Hazelwood, went to Hebrew School there, Sunday school, there.

IN: And also used the cemetery.

AP: Right.

IN: And so Harriet Kruman's, who is the past president of Beth Shalom, parents are also buried there.

AP: Right.

IN: Uh huh.

AP: Right, I just went out there with her.

IN: Did you?

AP: Yeah, to go look at the cemetery.

IN: Isn't it beautiful?

AP: It really is. And people talk about the cemetery a lot.

IN: Well, because, you know, I've told Marshall that when I go, I feel I'm in the middle of the play "Our Town."

AP: Uh huh.

IN: And my children have made it a policy, they come with me all the time. I mean when we go, it is truly a pilgrimage. Now this year I'm not going to be able to go on the Sundays that the cemetery committee is there. So I will go and get the key and we'll go out, you know, some other afternoon. You know, those stones have faces, I know those people.

AP: Many of those stones don't have any English on them.

IN: Yes, they do, go around to the back.

AP: Oh!

AP: Well, there you are.

IN: See!

AP: That tells you a lot about my trips to the cemetery. I never thought of looking on the other side. Because there they were, just Hebrew on it, no English. (unclear)

IN: Uh huh. That's why I walk around the back when I have to find certain people.

AP: It's not that big.

IN: It's not that big. It's very it's a very pretty spot. A very pretty spot.

AP: I know it's an odd thing to say but that's true. It's a very pretty little cemetery.

IN: Well, it's comforting that it is.

AP: Uh huh. It is.

IN: You know, I go out to the Tree of Life Cemetery and I think “Oh it’s, you know, it doesn’t have that, you know that. Oh course, I’m going to the new cemetery not the old one.

AP: So that’s another thing, you feel connected to Homestead and you don’t have any, you don’t feel any connection to B’nai Israel, even though you went to Sunday school and were confirmed there.

IN: Actually I wasn’t confirmed from B’nai Israel because by that time my family had moved to Squirrel Hill. And I was doing the same thing at Tree of Life. I was a tuition student. But I feel a connectedness to a lot of places but nothing like this connectedness.

AP: What was that Sunday school at B’nai Israel and Tree of Life compared to Sunday school as you experienced it as a teacher? (unclear) It was certainly smaller.

IN: Oh! There were no classrooms, and I mean, I mean for starters. You know, did everybody was, did you have Hebrew the same way, which was in a big room downstairs?

AP: We had a little room. (unclear)

IN: The little room near the stage?

AP: (unclear) smaller one than that.

IN: Okay, okay, that’s right

AP: Do you think the children have a more of a sense of being connected to each other because of the....

IN: Absolutely, absolutely. And it was that the parents didn’t dump their children. They really, they were part of things. They came, and they cooked, and they were part of plays, and it really was a focus of the Jewish community there. And there was, there was, it was, it was a natural havurah.

AP: You know that’s great. (unclear) say so.

IN: That’s right, that’s right. It’s interesting. I’m trying to think if there is anything else. You know I really think I have shared the essence with you of what, what my memories are. It’s of good people, simple people. But isn’t it interesting how many of the children have gone on to, I think, be very accomplished in their own areas, which tells me that, you know, the immigrant generation nurtured and supported and set lofty goals and expectations.

AP: You’re right and you probably see it more in a little congregation like that that had its had its roots in an entire immigrant congregation, than you do in a larger one where it

is harder to identify these strains. What you're saying is true, that that progression remains being the immigrant and the child and the grandchild living that, the dream those immigrants came for is much more apparent in this congregation.

IN: Uh huh. You know, do we, are we going to be able to look at the results of all we've done in the same, with the same sense of pride. I fear not.

AP: No, I think that's all true. It's too bad.

IN: There is a man who I have gotten to know well through National Jewish Fund, not in Pittsburgh, who is very wealthy, very hard worker, very ambitious man, three daughters, and he says, shakes his head and he says, "I fed them too well. "

AP: You know there was a thing in that magazine when they always do their take-off and they did one on "The Fiddler on the Roof", it's called "Fiddler Made a Goose". It was the thing about what affluence has done essentially to the American Jewish family.

IN: This cousin that I've mentioned to you, that was visiting on vacation, a cousin of mine and a cousin of Marty's, two separate families, both on Long Island in New York, one living in Roslyn, one living in Port Washington. Both have two children, both husbands are trial attorneys, both wives are artists, one is a visual artist, the other is media, and through us they have gotten to know each other. A great deal in common. So we saw, we saw both of them on vacation and they were talking about, the one whose children had grown up in Roslyn was saying she had regretted it, it was too homogenous, it was too Jewish. And I said that's real interesting because I see no problem with that. I raised my children in a Jewish community, I'm frankly delighted that I did it. She said it a different community, she said, although Squirrel Hill is affluent, it's not like Long Island. She said you have no idea the distortions that occur out here, in terms of the materialism, and that is, she said, that's really what she was focusing on.

It wasn't there in Homestead, the people didn't have that money, people did not, people did not have a lot of money. The Reese family, Barry Reese's parents probably had more than most. His father was, I believe, a general surgeon.

AP: (unclear)

IN: At Homestead Hospital, But, it wasn't flaunted. Do you know what I'm saying?

AP: Uh huh.

To reiterate, this is Anne Sheckter Powell interviewing Iris Stein Nahemow in her office at the Jewish National Fund for the Homestead Jewish Congregation Oral History Project of the Western Pennsylvania Jewish Archives of the Western Pennsylvania Historical Society.

END OF SIDE TWO, TAPE TWO.