

Many activities, were very important in my life—religious observance, the work ethic, the desire to fit into mainstream America, education, and civic activities. The most important elements of Jewishness that our family practiced were the traditional observances of a Jewish home, keeping kosher, family observance of holidays, going to *shul*, showing respect and support for our mother and for each other, showing concern and consideration for those less fortunate than ourselves, maintaining family solidarity, desire to complete higher education and to “make something of ourselves,” etc.

When we were grown, we left our town and struck out for the “big city.” My mother held on to the store through the war years. She finally sold it in 1946 and joined my sister, brother, and me in Philadelphia. My sister held a responsible government position in Philadelphia, my brother completed medical school, and I had completed nursing school (My other brother was living near Pittsburgh where he had been working as a metallurgical engineer).

I have fond recollections of my life in a small town. I believe that the Gentiles in Plymouth had great respect for the members of the Jewish community. The town, I believe, was not entirely free of anti-Semitism, but overall my memories are positive and, in fact, I hope some day to try to put together a history of the Jewish community of Plymouth.

✦ DR. AARON CAPLAN—ELLWOOD CITY, PENNSYLVANIA

I, Dr. Aaron Caplan, was born in Ellwood City, Pennsylvania on April 23, 1909 to Jacob L. Caplan and Gertrude L. Caplan (nee Goldman). My father was born in and came from Kroke (Kovno) Lithuania, and my mother was born in and came from Taurog, Lithuania. My grandparents also came from these respective communities. My paternal grandparents remained in Lithuania. My maternal grandparents migrated to the United States in 1908 and settled in New Castle, Lawrence County, Pennsylvania. My parents had three children: myself, a sister, Bertha, and a brother, Milton.

My father came to the United States in 1900 via South Africa and settled in Ellwood City, Pennsylvania. He came with his cousin and a very close friend, Phillip Friedman. Phillip Friedman settled in Slippery Rock, Pennsylvania with his brother, Jacob L. Friedman. My father's older brothers had already settled in Ellwood City. I presume that they first came here as peddlers. The town was founded in 1889 as a steel producing community.

My father had four brothers and two sisters. The oldest brother, Czemash, remained in Europe with his parents. Harry was the first to settle here about 1890, and he was followed by his brother, Morris.

Harry eventually became a grocer and Morris a butcher. A good number of relatives settled in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. My father became a grocer. Uncle Harry came to America just after his *Bar Mitzvah* to avoid military service. My grandfather, of sainted memory, made a deal with a friend or relative in America by paying a certain amount of money for my uncle's care. Uncle Morris settled without any difficulty since he had served in the Russian Army. My father's brother, Max, came to America in 1909 along with his sister Fagel and the remainder of my mother's family. They arrived about a month before I was born. Another sister, Chasel Oswald (Usvalk), came with her husband and two children, Florence and Louis.

My mother came to the United States in either the year 1907 or 1908. She came with her sister Sarah. They lived in Pittsburgh with their Uncle Rov Moshe Sivitz. Rov Sivitz arrived in the United States in 1886 and settled in Baltimore, Maryland. He served as rabbi until 1888, when he moved to Pittsburgh and founded the *Share Torah Shul*. My mother and her sister lived with him until they married in 1907 or 1908.

Ellwood City was formed around three villages between 1827 and 1833 and was incorporated as a borough in 1892. Through the years it developed into a thriving farm community and eventually became the home of the Shelby Steel Company, with the production of the first seamless steel tube invented by Mr. R.C. Stiefel.

The first Jews settled in Ellwood City in 1890. The families of Isadore Kraus, Morris Keller, and Benjamin Keller were the pioneers. They were followed by the Caplan family and over the years, other Jewish families settled here. In 1950 we had a total of about 80 families. The men were predominantly merchants.

The first Rosh Hosannah service was held in a hall in 1894. This was the beginning of Jewish religious life. In September of 1910 the cornerstone was laid for our first synagogue. On October 1919 the Tree of Life synagogue was incorporated. In October of 1922 the mortgage was burned. This was truly an Orthodox congregation. The Jewish education for the children was, however, intermittent. No teacher, or melamed, remained long and each succeeding instructor would always start from the begin-

ning. Consequently our education was piece-meal. A number of us learned from our parents by rote and by observation. My mother was a learned woman, having lived with the Rov, and we learned from her.

Most of the Jews lived within a radius of about one-half mile from the synagogue. A goodly number lived on Park Avenue about one or two blocks away. All were within walking distance. Minyan were conducted by individuals. High Holiday services were conducted by family members who were educated in the liturgy and procedure. *Bar Mitzvah* boys were taught by local elders or itinerant teachers. Our town's total population reached 15,000.

As the community grew there became a small division in the observance. Some were Orthodox, some Conservative, and a few Reform. However, we were a unified group. In 1950 there was a reorganization, and a new modern synagogue was built, and we began to engage a full-time rabbi.

In the early days, although a good portion of the families lived close together, we all had a good rapport with the non-Jews. Catholics, Protestants, Italians, Slavs, Poles, etc. There was little anti-Semitism. Occasionally there were "kid gangs" from other sections that would harass us or settle around the synagogue and throw stones or shoot BB guns at the windows. But we liked our neighborhood and, to this day, Jews and Gentiles who lived in that area—in that environment—recall lovingly their childhood days and families. We were close with men who became priests and ministers. Some of us served in the military together, and I would say that a close bond developed among those that are still living. We reminisce about our families and those long gone.

There were bad times during the Depression years, but no one was ever turned away from our door: strangers, hobos, black, or white.

Our Jewish family had good interactions with the non-Jews. After our new synagogue was built, we had a large recreation hall. We would have two or three major dances a year. New Year's Eve especially had a great attendance, and our women put on a terrific meal. Some of us would provide a little home talent entertainment.

In our town we spent a lot of time with our relatives visiting back and forth, or with other Jewish families. In a three-block street there were about twelve Jewish households, and a street away there were others; when good travel became available, there were Sunday visits to relatives in Pittsburgh, New Castle,

Slippery Rock, and the Beaver Valley. All were within a radius of fifty miles. There were also relatives and friends in other communities or cities at a greater distance such as Erie, Pennsylvania and Buffalo, New York.

Religious holidays were observed; Saturday morning services were intermittent, but a Yahrzeit service was always available, if not in the synagogue, it was held in a store room in the business section. Our home in particular was usually a “stopover” for the collectors of the pushkas. Also on holidays our home was always a stopover. Some of our members were either on the city council or the school board.

Today things have changed since our grown children did not return, and we had no new ingress of Jewish people, others having “passed on” or moved away. Our census dwindled to about thirteen families. We could not maintain our synagogue. We attempted to sell it to a selected buyer, but had no “takers.” Therefore we gave it to our hospital for civic use. The provisions of this gift were that the Tree of Life name would continue in perpetuity, that a small sanctuary be kept for our use, where we could have a minyan when needed, a Yizkor service or a Friday evening service once a month, and that scholarships be granted by the hospital to deserving students in the name of the Tree of Life each year.

This has been carried out. The main sanctuary has been converted into a lecture hall for community use; the basement has been refurbished and used as a Wellness Center, and we maintain our “chapel” with our Torah. This has been well received by the community.

For High Holiday observance most of us have joined a synagogue in Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania, which is about fifteen miles, or New Castle, Pennsylvania at the same distance. Some of us go to our children who are in far away places, such as in New York or San Francisco.

I am grateful that I remained in a small town. My children and I have had a good education. My children attended top-notch colleges and universities. Because of the difficulty of getting into a medical school (being Jewish) in my early days, I studied in Glasgow, Scotland, where I met my wife. I practiced for five years before entering the military service in 1941. After almost five years service I returned and began medical practice with my brother.

We have always maintained a kosher home, and when we could not get our kosher food here, we went off to Pittsburgh or other communities that

had kosher butchers and bought enough to stock up our freezers. My uncle, Phillip Friedman, who was living in Slippery Rock, was quite pious and he became a ritual slaughterer for his own use.

I have been well recognized in this community. I was president of the Chamber of Commerce, our local hospital board, and county Medical Society. I have served on many community projects; I served along with my wife as chair people for our sesquicentennial celebration and was voted the Outstanding Senior Citizen. My hospital, state medical society, American Legion, and other civic organizations honored me on reaching fifty years of medical practice in 1985. All in all I have had a good life in Ellwood City, Pennsylvania.

I regret the loss of our Jewish community and certainly the loss of population and major industries. We are, however, making a comeback in business and industry. The 1930s were a difficult time for my parents when I was away at school.

World War II took me away from my family (including one ten-day-old infant) for almost five years. The non-Jewish friends were very supportive. They were aware of the Holocaust.

My children had a good growing up period. My son, the eldest, played baseball and basketball. He was valedictorian of his high school class, went on to Swarthmore College, Columbia School of Medicine, and was a resident in Case Western Reserve University Hospital. He moved on to Stanford University and is a practicing psychiatrist in San Francisco.

Our second child, a daughter (who was ten days old when I left for overseas), graduated from Chatham College, got her Masters in Art History at Columbia University, taught at underprivileged schools in the ghettos after a year at an exclusive private school in New York City, spent several summers in Israel, and is now married to an Egyptian Jew, living in New York City, and has one daughter who goes to the Flatbush *Yeshiva*.

Our youngest daughter also went to Chatham College, but followed her brother to the West Coast. She graduated from the University of California at Berkeley. After teaching for several years, she became co-director of the Bay Area Writing Project at Berkeley and now is in a supervisory position in the educational system. Our children have remained Jewish, and we try to be together at family gatherings, Passover, *Seder*, or *Succoth*.

In our community there have been intermarriages. I must say that we, as Jews in a small community, were always respected. One merchant and his brother observed the Sabbath and kept their stores closed. Merchants kept their businesses closed on the High Holidays.

My sister, Bertha, attended a business school and worked as a secretary for Warren Brothers in Pittsburgh. My brother, Milton, graduated as valedictorian of his high school class, attended Geneva College for two years, and entered the medical school program at the University of Pittsburgh, from which he graduated in 1940 with both Bachelor of Science and M.D. degrees. After his internship, he entered the military service in July, 1941, and was in the first U.S. Army group to go overseas to Iceland. He served there for three years.

We entered medical practice together and for forty years were partners in a most enjoyable practice. He retired after fifty years of practice, and we both keep ourselves aware of what is going on in medicine and help out other doctors and work with the hospital.

✦ **MARLENE B. DENENBERG—HANOVER, PENNSYLVANIA**

I did not start life as a small-town Jew, having had the privilege of growing up in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. This afforded me many opportunities which I have since learned are often not available to my co-religionists in non-metropolitan areas or are, at best, available only through much effort and at great expense (both financial and time-wise).

As I was growing up, *Yiddishkeit* was an integral part of my home life. My father passed away when I was barely five years old, and my mother and I, along with two “bachelor” uncles, resided with my grandmother in a row house in a “mixed” neighborhood—the mix referring to Jewish, Italian, Greek, Irish, etc. The black people lived in their own neighborhoods, with the dividing line several blocks away. No one crossed it. My *Bubbe* went to *shul* every Saturday morning and on all the holidays. Our home was strictly kosher. We observed all the festivals and events, but I never attended a religious school. During the 1940s it was not deemed necessary, in most families, to so educate the girls. My *Bubbe* did feel, however, that I should learn to read the *Siddur*, so she engaged the *Gabbai* of the *Shul* to come to our house on Sunday mornings to teach me to read Hebrew. This lasted, as I recall, about a month as he was not really a teacher, had no