

Transcript of Interview with Eileen Yacknin
Bet Tikvah Oral History Project
Call Number:

Rauh Jewish Archives
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Pre-interview Notes:

The bar described as being at 23rd and Jane was actually at 27th and Jane.

Transcribers Notes:

Eric Lidji conducted this interview on March 5, 2018. Not March 6th, as stated in the recording.

Words not known will be marked: ---

Words with unknown spelling will be marked as highlighted text

Transcription:

Eric Lidji: Today is March 6, 2018. I'm Eric Lidji with the Rauh Jewish History Program and Archives. This is the Bet Tikvah Oral History Project. And I'm speaking tonight with Eileen Yacknin, and we are at the Heinz History Center. So Eileen, if you wouldn't mind, start by telling me, kind of where you grew up, and how you grew up?

Eileen Yacknin: Okay. Well, I moved around a lot. I was born in Chicago, I'm sixty-five right now, so that's a long time ago. And, I had a— My parents help found a Reform Jewish congregation in the small— It was a newer post-World War II housing development, housing plan in Chicago. And, they actually didn't, they've told me since, that they were not raised, as being observant of holidays, and so they developed a community of people wanting to raise their children Jewish and have the synagogue. And so, I grew up with a strong identity, and we moved from there to a small town in Illinois, for a couple of years. Where there was not a synagogue, we had to go somewhere else, and my parents didn't like that the area, where they were living. My dad lost his job, so we— He found a job in Puerto Rico, and we moved to Puerto Rico when I was around ten years old. And, there was a very Conservative/Orthodox Jewish community and synagogue there, but not a Reform synagogue, so my parents helped found a synagogue there as well. And so that's where, I also got my involvement in Judaism from that synagogue and from my parents. That was very important for them. So, and I kind of always been interested in being involved in Jewish activities, stuff, even more than, more than really the spiritual aspects of Judaism. Especially, I think I was very attracted to the social justice aspects of Reform Judaism, especially. I also, when I went away to college, I got— I became quite involved in the, in an organization that had been started, had been around, when I was in college called the Radical Zionist Alliance. And then I actually saw this on the, when I was looking today online, I saw a 2016 announcement of our thirtieth reunion for the New Jewish Agenda, which also was a Progressive Jewish organization. And they were doing reunion in 2016, so I remembered, that I was part of that too in my college days. These, you know, Leftist-Progressive type of organizations that were addressing social justice issues in the United States and also at that time, Israel. Israel, there was a lot of more hope, about what Israel was, how it was governing and trying to make peace and good relationships with the Palestinians, and moving towards that. And so, those are the things I was involved with in college. So, then I went, I went to college at Oberlin, and graduated there in '74, and then went to Boston for law school. And I don't recall, I really, publically, wasn't involved a lot in any Jewish— I don't remember any Jewish organization stuff. Well, when I came here, when I moved to Pittsburgh in '77, I guess, when I— So, I can't remember though if I— If I, came out first as a lesbian before I decided to get more involved in Jewish stuff or had gotten more involved in Jewish stuff first. Probably the former. I had a couple of really close friends, who were Jewish, and lesbians, and I also— One of my friends and I had, we used to talk about Jewish stuff a lot, and we discovered that there was a group, at that point there were a number of radical feminists, Jewish women in the Northeast, who were getting together. We'd learn that there was, there was one, I don't know the name of it, but it was a, not the group I started to become involved with, but a first group of very progressive Jewish women, not necessarily lesbians. Who were getting together once a year, having a retreat, and I know there were a lot of very prominent, B'not Eish, that's what it was called, B'not Eish.

EL: B'not Eish?

EY: Yeah, actually that means “Daughters of Fire.” So I don’t know— Sisters, Achiyot, so the one I became involved with, was kind of like a spin off, because that was a more of a closed group after a while, but it was an annual retreat, and so it was an annual retreat for this group that we learned that was out Northeast Pennsylv— Philadelphia area, then spread around the area called Achiyot Or, Sisters of Light. And so, my friend Faith and I, we went there about three or four times. It was a once a year thing, and also they were, I think if you were anybody were to read about feminist Jewish analysis and history and stuff in the ‘80s, early ‘80s, these women who were in these groups, were, became those people who did the academics stuff, around in the history and stuff. And so, as a result of that, Faith and I decided, we got kind of inspired going to these meetings and they really were, they were not, not everybody was lesbian, but they were definitely lesbian people. A lot of them were rabbinical students in the Reconstructionist movement. There were several women, who were like very, very Orthodox, women who came to these retreats, because they were finding things difficult, but wanted also to remain Orthodox, but they were finding the restrictions to be too antithetical to feminism, and it was a very fascinating group of people. And we decided that we were going to try to put together a— our own little Jewish lesbian group in Pittsburgh. And we called it Daughters of Lilith. And so we invited the friends we knew who were Jewish and lesbians to come to that group. And we started to meet, regularly, and we— It was a lot of— It was a kind of support group too, but we would have topics that we would discuss. And we would read books, and that— That this was in the early ‘80s, mid-80s, and there were quite a number of books being published then, like— I think it was a book called *Daughters of Lilith*, and there was a book called *Different Daughters*. There was a book called *Beyond Acceptance*, and something else about gay and lesbian Jews also, so. Quite a number of books. But also at that time, I also, there was also, maybe this was a world: Jewish Gay and Lesbian Congresses is that, I don’t remember.

EL: The World Congress—

EY: —of Gay and Lesbian Jews. Okay. And, I was aware of those organizations. And, I, okay so that’s what happened. I was aware of those organizations. That organization. And I did attend two or three of those annual conventions, which were also very inspiring and uplifting, but mostly men. And was very interesting to me, and I wondered why. I thought a lot about why that was mostly men at those organizations. Those types of conferences. There was much more— There were workshops and it was— There were a lot of good workshops, but there was also, lot of spirituality there. That the men were really drawn to that, I could see. And, you know, I went to those things, just the services and stuff like that. But, I— During our discussions and also thinking about that a lot, it seemed to me that, women, you know gay women, at that time, had developed their own social networks, pretty easily. Like in Pittsburgh there was a women’s bookstores and there was a women’s restaurants.

EL: Can you think of the names of any?

EY: Well Bloomers. Bloomers was the second name, I think, of the restaurant. Can’t remember the name of, names of— There were— There was one original bookstore, The Birmingham Booksellers was the lesbian, was the gay and lesbian bookstore. Then there was another one that came after that one had closed. Something bought and down. Bloomers was the reincarnated

name of this restaurant that did open up as a different— I can't remember now, the name, the original name of that women's restaurant.

EL: Do you remember what part of town?

EY: Yeah, the South Side. There was actually this little restaurant on 23rd and Jane, I remember that. It was before, even was the women's restaurant and bar, it was Wobbly Joe's, which was like a lefty progressive type of bar, and they held you know, talks, and they had dances, and they had— It was a bar. And then the women's restaurant people, the people took it over, or they bought it out after Wobbly Joe's was closed, closed down. I went to all three of those a lot.

EL: What was the third? Bloomers?

EY: Well the third was, the third was Bloomers, and I— And then also, it was a different. A certain group of women purchased the Wobbly Joe's, and made it—

EL: Something.

EY: Damn, I cannot remember the name.

EL: So there was Bloomers, Wobbly Joe's, and something. And Wobbly Joe's became something else.

EY: Wobbly. Originally Wobbly Joe's became something else, and then it was bought by another group of women, and became Bloomers.

EL: All in the same location?

EY: Yeah.

EL: At 23rd and Jane.

EY: Yeah.

EL: Okay.

EY: Yeah, you can probably find it. But, so there was those— And just women get together, more— It's easier for men to get together socially, I thought, at least creating organizations, informal groups to get together. And, but men, had— So they found the camaraderie, and the collegiality that we were having in other places, they didn't have. They had— There were bars, but that was not quite the same thing. Gay men bars.

EL: Why was it easier for women?

EY: I just think women are more, because I think women are more naturally able to create these collegial and friendship type of group togethers, and communities, and they did by, I don't

remember any men's bookstores in Pittsburgh. There was, I think eventually there was a gay bookstore, that— Pleasant Present, in Squirrel Hill, for several years, but that was way after this. And this was a time— So there were the gay men's bars. And there were also several women's bars, too. But, gay women's bars, but a part from the bar, but that's all there was for men with the bar scene. And, there were these other types of ways that people got together. There were— There was also in Pittsburgh, but all over, when there was a lesbian community there were also like women's music, was coming, was very big, like a whole bunch of different. There was a record label, several record labels that had women's, women who, feminist, lesbian, or just feminist recording artists and very popular. And there was a group of people who would, who got together to bring those, those performers into Pittsburgh and the women would get together for those performances.

EL: Who were some of the artists?

EY: Like Meg Christian and Cris Williamson and Holly Near and let's see— Oh darn, my mind's a blank. Those were the premier ones, I think. There were a whole bunch of others too. So, it just became— It was more, it was more of a community. In fact I, actually, around the same time, and I did this for many, many years, I kind of organized a women's Seder. First it started off being just a small group of people in my house. But then I started— Then I started— It got more popular, people started asking me to come, even if they weren't Jewish. So then we started having to rent space. We rented space at the Unitarian church on Ellsworth to do that for a few years. And then we finally had a several times, this huge, women's Seder in— We rented space at the J&R, where the day camp is in Monroeville, until finally it became, I just got tired, too tired of doing it. It was a lot of work. But anyway, so, yeah, we just, the women's community was always differently organized in that sense than the men's community.

EL: You had said something before I want to make sure I understood. You think that the men were more drawn to the spiritual stuff than women were more drawn to the communal stuff?

EY: I, well, no. I think— I think that the spiritual stuff that the men were drawn to was because it was a way of being communal, of relating communally in a way that it was not like a, not like a consciousness raising group or something like that. I wasn't aware of men— There were I guess men, who did that, but I wasn't aware of that. But, that's where they could have their community. The men shared something more than just, the other ways that they often— Gay men were relating through the spiritual stuff too. Getting together in a congregation.

EL: So the spiritual stuff fostered a community for the men.

EY: Yes.

EL: But the women had a community that occasionally did spiritual things, and occasionally did other things?

EY: Yes. And that's why I think that there were always far more men at these World Jewish Congresses because there was that opportunity for men to have nice communal time together in a way.

EL: And then on the Seder, why a Seder? Why were you compelled to have a Seder, considering all the different kinds of things you could have in the world?

EY: Oh, well that's because Seders are always very important to me, as we've always had a Seder growing up (phone ringing in the background). Oops. Growing up. And, right, so that was a very, important tradition in my life. And, I wanted to have a, I wanted to make that open, I wanted to make that available to my friends, and then it just grew and grew.

EL: Were there any changes or alterations that you made to the Seder at that time?

EY: Well the very first Seders, like maybe the first couple of years it was a co-ed Seder, but it was, but then I decided to mostly do it with women. You mean alterations to a traditional Seder, you mean? Or alterations?

EL: Like the orange hadn't started yet, had it?

EY: Well yeah, that started in the mid-80s, so yeah, we did do that. And we would have, how I suggested to everybody, get to know, not get to know each other, but there were a lot of people so what we would do is have everybody go around, and we'd say their— Have them introduce themselves, by saying the names of their mother, their maternal lineage. So that was kind of— So: "Eileen the daughter of Rosalie, the daughter of Gus, the daughter of Pearl," go back, and go back as far as you can do, then light a candle, so that went around the whole place, and everybody did that. And everybody lit candles. I actually, yes, so, yeah now that your asking. Yeah, so, also at this time, when there all this feminism stuff coming around in Judaism, in Jewish circles too. There were a lot— There were a number of Jewish women's Seders that— Or Haggadahs, that are created, by different people, and I kind of put together a— I melded together different types of these Jewish women's Seders that I found and put it together. So we had our own little Haggadah, that was the Jewish women's Seder, and then— It wasn't— I didn't create it into being a lesbian Seder, but we incorporated, you know, like the Four Sisters and had— We feminized it and we included language, inclusive language about gays and lesbians to in the Seders.

EL: Did you write that or did you find that language? That inclusive language?

EY: Well both. It was both. It was both.

EL: Were there, so there were people writing, they were Jews who were writing, starting to write in that vein?

EY: Yeah. This was, I guess all in the '80s, it was really, yeah that was happening a lot. I don't know if I still have— I have a box of old Haggadahs. And I might still have one of the ones that we used to use, I don't know. But, anyway, but that was— So that's was, so that what we were doing. So and at the time, I don't know how the word got around, but there was, there was some people who were talking about starting a gay synagogue. And, I think a gay congregation. And so I do remember Mark Friedman being one of the people who's really involved in that. And I

must have gotten to know him from just political-social circles, I guess. And, I don't remember who else. I don't think Avram was involved originally, and I don't— Maybe he said he was, I don't know. But I don't remember him. I actually know Avram because, he and my, I have a twin sister, and they went to college together. And one day I was walking on the streets of Pittsburgh, and this guy comes in and says, "Ellen, it's so wonderful to see you," and he hugs me and all that. I knew he must be— He must have been— Whose friend he must have been, but that's how I met Avram. So, but anyway, so, so I— The several women in Daughters of Lilith, started to meet with these other men, who these other people, who were interested in starting the congregation. So I finally got to Bet Tikvah. And at that point, I probably was involved with a woman, who I've been together now, for a long, for thirty years too. So, but we didn't have children. We had children since, but we didn't have children, and so, so that— Which ultimately is the reason why I stopped being involved in Bet Tikvah. But I do remember getting together and finding, and wanting very much to create a congregation, and—

EL: You had that desire?

EY: Yeah. Yeah I felt it was really important to do for us, and I, I had gone to, I hadn't joined any congregation before hand. I'd gone to, like, High Holiday services at various synagogues, just going, you know, and just nothing, invited really.

EL: What did it feel like to go to those mainstream congregations?

EY: Well, you know, so at the time, even the Reform Jewish congregations really didn't have inclusive, even language including women in the prayer books. So they always were kind of alienating to me, and even the Reform Jewish congregations. I didn't feel like there was any—I wasn't out openly as a lesbian, so I wasn't like I would go and feel excluded in any way, just because I was only going for High Holiday services. But it felt really good to me to be able to go, to think about the idea of going to a synagogue where our community would be happily, you know— That was our community then and right, it was part of our all of our identities: Jewish and gay. So that was really important to me, and to the people in my group, and my little Daughters of Lilith. And we didn't do things, we didn't say we were going to stop doing Daughters of Lilith, but we— I guess one thing even about the Daughters of Lilith, I got us even more involved, because we had, what we— One year we would had a conference— We had our own little conference in Pittsburgh, where we had workshops, and we showed a movie, and it was; it was a really, it was a very nice thing and it attracted a lot of women too.

EL: Where did you have that?

EY: Well we, we hold it at Pitt. I probably, I think it was at the Law School, that we had that, our thing it was nice.

EL: Was this the one, where the author came in?

EY: The author? No, but we, no. It was, let's see. It's terrible that I cannot remember things, but there was a really great movie that we showed that was about two women who were lovers. One was Jewish, and one was not, in Germany during the beginnings of the Holocaust, and this whole

story was about, how they— Basically the story was how, the Jewish woman was, she didn't, she went kind of underground, and it made me realize that there were a number of people, who just tried to pass as not Jewish, and some succeeded in that. And she did for a long time, and then the story got bad. You know she did, she got caught in the end. But it was very interesting, how she and her partner helped make that happen, that she passed for not being Jewish. It was very interesting. Anyway, so we showed that movie, and then we had, you know talks, speakers come, stuff like that.

EL: And this was something that was sanctioned by Pitt?

EY: So I don't remember. I remember it being at Pitt, I think there was, must have been somebody in our group, who, but I don't remember who it was, who obviously had some relationship with the University and so we were allowed to have the—

EL: But it was, like, advertised, and publicized in print and everything?

EY: Yeah.

EL: Huh.

EY: So they, nobody at that point, nobody, they didn't care. So that was good. That was a nice a fun thing. So anyway. So when we went into— I will say this, that even though I was very happy, and we did a lot of work to help create Bet Tikvah, it was, you know— When there're a lot of men together, who don't have a lot of experience working with women. It became a little bit more sexist, than I, the way the things became, developed, than I, we, any of us really appreciated. But, we continued anyway, and so like when the things about creating the prayer book to be used and stuff came up, it was— There was, a lot of— Anyway, there was— That was kind of taken over by the men in the group. And, so, it was okay, maybe, because it was such an important thing to have developed, but it was something that I didn't find as, personally for me, something that I didn't— After things started becoming established, and they were. I didn't stay, as involved in helping, organizing after that. Keeping it organized. But I went to services, regularly then. And, did people say— Did Beth Shalom, I mean Rodef Shalom. Has it always been at Rodef Shalom? I don't remember it being somewhere else.

EL: I don't think it was ever at another synagogue.

EY: Yeah.

EL: But I think they might have met in people's houses originally?

EY: Right. Okay. Yeah, right. And it was a wonderful thing that Rodef Shalom accepted and has continued to allow Bet Tikvah to be there. That's a wonderful thing.

EL: So it was always at Rodef in your experience?

EY: Well, I remember being in people's houses too, but, but it would float. And then women who, who got involved in Bet Tikvah, who had not been involved at Daughters of Lilith, became, there was some who became very, very involved in—

EL: In Daughters of Lilith?

EY: No they became— People, women we knew who were not, who we came to know, but who were not part of Daughters of Lilith. Many of them, became, really, really, involved for long periods of time, with Bet Tikvah. So.

EL: So, you had this strong community? What did Bet Tikvah provide for you that your existing community did not provide?

EY: It was more traditional, with Jewish— Having a synagogue was a more traditional way of having a community, and I wanted to expand my community to be involved with other people who were Jews. In other ways too, not just my little, my Daughters of Lilith community. And so and it did— It was wonderful and the people— The people were great, are great in that community. And, it really. It is a very, was and it continues to be really welcoming, and warm, and people have good time, and stuff like that. When they get together for the holidays and stuff like that.

EL: Why was the traditional side important?

EY: Oh, because, I was. Because that's— When you grow up, and you have that in your life, and I wasn't somebody who rejected it, so I enjoyed that. I had. Yeah, it's comforting to be able to say, to celebrate the holidays, even if I'm not sure I believe in God. You know, it's a big comfort to repeat the tradition of your families. Unless you hate it so much, like your, that you just reject it. And I didn't so. So that was very important to me.

EL: What were the prayers like before there was a prayer book?

EY: We had also found other— We did find other, there were other gay, lesbian, gay synagogues around, and we were just borrowing those, using those. It was— We were able to get them. Even though there was no Internet, but we were, people had visited, and going to the World Jewish Congress, people had their prayer books that they had compiled. So, and I think we— And then I think probably the people, who did create the— So I don't even know what their current prayer book is like, actually right now. But the one that they compiled was a compilation, also kind of like what I had done for my Haggadah. Except that for some reason, the people who put it together: the original prayer book, that Bet Tikvah used, really loved Leonard Nimoy, and there're tons of, tons of quotes, which I'm not quite sure, but that's what they— Lot of him in there, in the prayer book. And then also it was quite fascinating to me that, there were several members who came, who were not gay or a lesbian, but just really were attracted to, maybe the less formal way of the services were. And in smaller congregations, I think it's always, it seems common that people are very friendly, in much easier to be friendly to people. Newcomers, then, there're a big congregation. And people were very welcoming in. There were so many people, who became members, who just loved that part of it too. It's again the communal. You know.

Acceptance is part of a small community, everybody feels, accepted. And, I'm sure it's still is that way too.

EL: Did you feel like there were leaders of the congregation, or did people seem to be—?

EY: No there were people who took on leadership roles and I— After it became established, I was not part of that. But Nachum and Steve, Golan was one of their names I forget the other. They became, they very quickly became, one of the leaders. And I don't remember their last names, but two women: Terri and Pat, also were, became very big. Terri especially, Terri was Jewish, Pat was not, but she was part of Bet Tikvah. But they—

EL: That Terri Starrett?

EY: Yeah. Terri Starrett. She passed away a few years ago.

EL: And it's Pat McQuiston?

EY: Right. No, Pat died. It was Pat who died, and Terri's alive I think. Yeah. And they, Terri also became a big leader. Leader meaning, helping organize the services, and helping lead the services as well, and stuff like that. So those were the people that I was very much involved with, aware of who had done that, and I don't, I'm sure there were others too. But, I don't know if you know of others. If people mentioned others.

EL: It seems like when Nachum and Steve and Terri and Pat showed up, there's— It's like almost chapter two of Bet Tikvah. How would you describe the difference between before and after, like whatever the congregation looked like before them?

EY: Well, I think that they helped, they created the structure that it needed in order to be able to continue, it was definitely more of a, not really extemporaneous, but not really being run in an organized way that would make sure that things get done for the next time. So they real— I think they really helped with making that move. That was pretty important, or else it was going to fall apart like other organizations too, I think, without them. So.

EL: There's a note here about Terri and Pat being part of a lesbian parent group?

EY: Yeah, so we, so I helped with organizing. There was another thing that came about. So, our daughter was born, our older daughter was born in 1991. But, around that time, also in the early '90s, it was a big flourishing of lesbians having children, and then, that was even before there were gay men having children, but— And there was— So we organized a group, a lesbian parent group. And they happened to move, they happened to live down the block from us. When they, they adopted a couple of kids from Russia. And, so yeah, we were, maybe that's even how I met them. I'm not even sure, but whenever Terr, Terri Starrett really became a big leader in Bet Tikvah.

EL: Did that group have a name?

EY: Yes. But, I don't remember what it was. Yeah, it was definitely not Flowitch, which kind of, that became more of a co-ed group, because there was more families like ours, I guess. Yeah, we had. I don't remember what the name of the group was. And, it, no it went around to different people's houses and stuff. And, sorry, I don't remember the name of that. [inaudible] So, but what happened for me is that, when my partner, I had apparently you had said you'd be interested in speaking to her too. But, she was not at all involved in, she went along, but she never was involved in anything to help organize, and it was stuff, and she didn't feel comfortable. But, although, she's in a lot of other archives, because she has a lot of, she's a huge interesting background herself in different things. But, she's— But so, when Leah was born, we stayed involved with Bet Tikvah until she was around five years old. And then, I kind of realized like, I really wanted them to get a Jewish education. So we joined Dor Hadash, a Reconstructionist synagogue then. She was five, I guess we had— Hannah was born when she was two-and-a-half, so we had the two kids then. And, I just couldn't stay involved with both types of congregations at once.

EL: Just for time you mean?

EY: Yeah. Yes, especially with having the kids, which is, yeah so.

EL: If Bet Tikvah had a religious school, would you've stayed there you think?

EY: I might, I think I might have. Although for a while I would have. I think in the end, I left Dor Hadash for the same reason I think I probably would have left Bet Tikvah eventually, which was that It didn't have a rabbi, and I also wanted more of that for Leah and Hannah to see, to not just— Dor Hadash didn't, still doesn't have a rabbi. So you have to depend on lay people for the congregation, which is what that is. Which is great, but I also, you don't have the people, you don't have those particular— What the rabbi can do, Bet Tikvah, still doesn't have, which is something, somebody you can go to for consolation, for advice, for helping do bat mitzvahs, and stuff like that. So, maybe they do do bat mitzvahs now and bar mitzvahs, I don't know. But, just to have more of the traditional way of doing those things too, so. So, I ended up leaving. We ended up leaving. And, I've only gone back occasionally, since, that was a long time ago. And it's hard believe it's already thirty years that it's been around. It's very nice that it is, and I don't— I talked about, my kids are not in the house anymore, so I would like to go back, and revisit Bet Tikvah now, too. And see whose there, and I remember at the time that we were leaving, Deb and her partner had just recently at that point become involved, and I thought they were great people to get to know. I know that they've been very active the whole time, since then Bet Tikvah.

EL: Yeah. Where did you go after Dor Hadash?

EY: Temple Sinai, so I'm there now.

EL: What was— What was the integration like then?

EY: Well, it's interesting because at Temple Sinai, there was one family, one woman with a child, she wasn't in our Daughters of Lilith group, but she was, she had been to Bet Tikvah. But,

she had a son, so she went and joined Temple Sinai, and told us that she thought it would be— There was the rabbi there, who, he was— I guess he'd only been there a few years, at that point, Rabbi Gibson, but he seemed to be okay. She said. She told us, that she thought Temple Sinai was the most liberal of all the synagogues here. So, we, and then she left, but at the time that we belonged, we joined at that point. I think we were the only, only gay couple with kids probably, maybe the only gay couple too, who had joined. And at the time, there were— There were two rabbis there. Even though he professed to be, totally welcoming, even Rabbi Gibson, at that point, would not have done a gay marriage. The other rabbi was even more concerned about gay involvement in temple. But it was, but they welcomed us, but nobody ever, so it wasn't without any acknowledgement about our being gay. And we didn't push it either, so you know this book that I mentioned before, was a very, I think the title says a lot, *Beyond Acceptance*. So they were very accepting, but it wasn't like welcoming. It was just accepting. And, but then, a few years after that, other lesbian couples who had been involved in our gay lesbian parent groups. I don't know. And they also had been involved in Bet Tikvah for— Oh yeah, they were involved in Bet Tikvah for a while too: Carol Krupski, and Eris Atar, I haven't heard their names I don't know—

EL: Yeah, they've come up on the list that people have mentioned.

EY: Okay, so they also joined Temple Sinai at that point, they had two sons. And, then our friends Barbara Milch and Etty Reut, which, who are— Etty's Israeli, and they, they were in our, she was in our, Barbra was in our lesbian Daughters of Lilith group too. And they started to— They joined Temple Sinai too. And so, then I think, the rabbis learned to be more welcoming on the— There're still some issues with that like Rabbi Gibson, two years ago, he started to acknowledge Gay Pride Week with a Gay Pride Service, and then he said, "I was the first," he kind of sounds like Trump in that way. "I was the first rabbi to have a gay pride service thirty years ago." Maybe he did, I don't know, I wasn't there, but he never had anything like that until two years ago. But by then, it was kind of too late, and like they started— They have a new rabbi, now, a younger woman, and she encouraged people to start a lesbian and gay affinity group when she started a couple of years ago, which I thought was a great idea. But, I think it also became too late, it was too late, because we don't need it now. And also— What happened was that the people who came, they were my age, and they were only a couple people, young people. And, it wasn't enough young people to make it. I didn't want to put in effort for old people, you know, so. But it's, I mean I'm still there, I still go to services, and I just— I 'm comfortable there. Barbara. I taught Sunday school there for eleven or twelve years, and Barbara still teaches Sunday school. One of her kids teaches Sunday school, Hebrew school now too. So, anyway. So, now Rabbi Gibson would marry us, but we ended up not. We ended up having just a very quick non-religious service, which I regret. But, we needed. Both of our— Our older daughter was not living in Pittsburgh, after she went away for college. And really want to have this wedding when she was home. And, at the time, that we were hoping to get married, there was only one weekend she was going to be home, so we just quickly did that it home. So I'm sure you know a lot more about what's going on with Bet Tikvah, than I know, right now. But.

EL: So one thing I want to— Well, continue what you were just going to say.

EY: It was a really good to, have that experience of working with the gay men community in doing something, because also at the time, there was very little social interaction between the

lesbian community and the gay men's community, that may not have been so true in the other religious communities, but the gay religious communities that were popping up all over, the Christian ones. I don't know about that, but it was nice. We met great people, as a result of that. And, we did have that feeling of creating an important community for ourselves. And, even though I'm saying that Temple Sinai, still, I think it's too late for Temple Sinai, there's no need anymore, I don't believe to have like a, a Gay Pride service. Socially anymore. But it's still is very nice that to me, that Bet Tikvah still exists, because people are still feeling some need to have that kind of communal identity, although I— It's like, things have changed so much, I'm not so sure, it's just really because, the more established community is exclusive anymore, I don't think it is that. It's just because it's just a warm welcoming community in and of itself.

EL: Yeah.

EY: And that's why synagogues, I think congregations are created anyway still like that because, you know how, there used to be, you know, Russian Jewish synagogues, and Polish Jewish synagogues, because everybody wants their own group, and they kind of, not died, but anyway— But Bet Tikvah still exists. So that's very nice, and I'm glad about that. So I'm hoping, too. So it was a really wonderful thing, that it got started in Pittsburgh. And a lot of cities didn't have that. Pittsburgh did. And it's probably outlasted a lot of these gay congregations that are probably come and gone by now too. So.

EL: So we went over this in the beginning, but I just want to make sure that I understand all the pieces of it. Would you mind one more time going through the progression from B'not Eish to Achiyot Or to Daughters of Lilith?

EY: I never. I never was involved with B'not Eish, but we—

EL: So what was it? Was it a regional Jewish women's—?

EY: Yeah, mostly from Philadelphia and New York. But they were feminist Jewish women, who had— I actually just read that their first retreat— They decided to start a retreat. And their first retreat was in 1981. And, it must have been in Philadelphia, or near Philadelphia, and they gathered some of the really, at that point, the foremost thinkers and academicians. And strong feminist people. They started his annual retreat. And, had been going for a few years, other people wanted to join it. But they couldn't— They didn't want to expand. So then this other group, Achiyot Or, was this— It mimicked what B'not Eish was doing.

EL: Simply because B'not Eish couldn't accept more members?

EY: Right.

EL: Or wouldn't accept more members?

EY: Right.

EL: Okay.

EY: And so Faith and I learned about that group, and we had learned that it was just starting because B'not Eish couldn't accept more members, and we decided to go to it. And there were not, like we were the only ones from Pittsburgh. And most of the people there are also with the same kind of very progressive Jewish feminist power people, as I would say. And maybe not, but whoever else heard about the group and they signed up to go, we went. And we went. So we went for about, we would go for about, three or four years. It was an annual, you know, three-day weekend thing. Different places, out there in the Northeast, some different places. And I don't when it was. It was maybe probably before the last time that Faith and I went to one of those things. But, we decided we wanted to organize this Daughters of Lilith thing, and that's what we did. And that lasted about four or five years too.

EL: Was Achiyot Or and B'not Eish women generally or lesbian specifically?

EY: Women.

EL: Just women. But, Daughters of Lilith was?

EY: We decided it was just lesbians.

EL: Just lesbians. And just Jewish lesbians?

EY: Yeah.

EL: And there was enough to start a group?

EY: Yeah. There was. Yeah, but I don't know how we rounded up these women. I guess most of our social circles were different— For, my at least, and I think for most people, were really nurtured at this, the women's— Wild Sis— I know I remember the name. It was originally called Wild Sisters that was the first name of the restaurant. And that became a big place for gathering for women, after maybe, in addition to, or substituting for the bar scene, but that's where. There was one. I can't remember the name of that— There was one bar, that was known for women coming on Thursday nights and getting together. Can't remember the name of it. So that's where I started to meet. That's where I first met my original group of lesbian friends. But then after that it was Wild Sisters, and so we meet quite a number of Jewish lesbians. And, it is interesting, maybe it has to do with heritage and history of being oppressed as Jews and also it's lesbians and you want to make those connections, and it's an important part of our life, and our history, so it's— And we were all feminists. So it was just really. It was an interesting time it was a lot of— It was fun to be together, with those people. Many of them are still around Pittsburgh, but I— We don't, we don't socialize. Because, I don't go to bars anymore, and stuff like that. There's no women's restaurant anymore, so stuff like that. So I kind of missed that, so maybe now Bet Tikvah is going to be, would be the focus again for a gay-lesbian Jewish community, even whenever, so. Anyway that was.

EL: Is there anything else we should talk about?

EY: No, I don't think so. I covered what I remember. Which isn't that much, but.

EL: Well thank you so much.

EY: Yeah, you're welcome.

(End of Interview)