

ROCHESTER ORAL HISTORY PROJECT (Rochester Jewish community 1925-1975)

Interviewee Meyer M. Rasnick

Interviewer Brian Mitchell

Date(s) of interview June 24, 1976 (1)

Setting (place of interview, people present, impressions)

The interview took place at Rasnick's delicatessen on a typical business day. My Rasnick was friendly and accomodating. Our interview was consistently interrupted in order for Mr. Rasnick to serve his customers. His customers seemed to genuinely enjoy his company and he radiated a sincere friendliness towards them.

Background of interviewee

Mr. Rasnick has owned his variety store/delicatessen for nearly 26 years. He is an invaluable source on the changing character of Park Avenue. He also made valuable comments on life on Joseph Avenue and anti-Semitism in Rochester.

Interview abstract

We discussed his early recollections of Rochester. He went into great detail on the Park Ave area of the city and felt that the section was deteriorating. Mr. Rasnick also explained the problems of being a small variety owner and stressed the importance of the "personal touch". He offered a number of comments on anti-Semitism and on a variety of contemporary problems.

Interview index (corresponding to tape numbers, sides of tape, and casset recorder numbers)

<u>§</u> Social history	<u>**</u> Jewish community
<u> </u> Family	<u>***</u> community relations
<u>***</u> <u> </u> Demographic/residential	<u> </u> Religious life
<u>**</u> <u> </u> Economic	<u> </u> Jewish education
<u> </u> Political/civic	<u>**</u> Anti-semitism
<u> </u> Zionism/Israel	

Interview log

- corresponding to tape numbers, sides of tape, and casset recorder nos.
- including references to others in the Rochester community

--see following page(s) --

* I. born in Russia; left when he was 5 yrs old; parents were from Rumanian Russia; born 1907

a. came directly to Hermann St, tailor; close-knit family
b. brother went into dry-cleaning; sent Russian relatives money

1. 3 brothers, 1 sister; always keep in close communication; 2 remaining are in California;

2. held a variety of jobs until he opened the deli

* c. parents lived by themselves until they died; married a Becker whose father was "the most religious man in Roch"

1. spoke Yiddish at home; Mr Rasnick fails to comprehend it

* d. married in 1933; her father went back to Palestine where he died; her parents from Russia

1. wife was a law stenographer until married when she gave up work

2. married at 23; remarried after his first wife died

* II. children -- one son, tax dep't at Lincoln First who helps out occasionally; 2 grandchildren; frequent contact

a. presently married for 17 years., 2nd wife originally from Pittsburg; also Jewish, worked in Star Market

1. brother-in-law arranged a match to meet her

* b. believes that you should try to prevent intermarriage; actually, so long as "they're happy, what's the difference?"

*** III. Likes Park Ave very much, but its changed, it isn't the same; younger people coming in, more hippies, they don't think anything of credit

** a. had deli for 25 yrs; deli founded because he saw the opening for a deli as he lived in the neighborhood

1. actually a variety store, cut down on the kosher products

** b. 25 years ago the neighborhood wasn't as active as it is now, the increased activity has helped business

1. cut out the deli/kosher aspects because the neighborhood has changed

2. Jewish people are moving out of Park Ave to Brighton, Irondequoit, Henrietta

** c. lot of area young on welfare; more of an apartment area "they're making more out of these big homes"

1. 25 yrs. ago a much more fashionable section, more retired, they still kept they're own homes, more settled

a. today; robbed quite a few times (3 times this year), shot at

1. it's getting to be a tough neighborhood

** d. pessimistic about the future of Park Ave; homes are deteriorating; people had owned their own homes, now they're rented...

1. does not approve of the communal situations that exist in the area

* IV. Joseph Ave --- very pleasant, yards, not much money but very happy, clubs were formed and many cousins lived nearby
a. Joseph Ave changed for the worse--- gave the colored people a chance

** V. there is no personal life when you run a variety store, my home life isn't what it should be; originally worked the shop seven days a week

a. don't "give green stamps but I give a personal touch" everyone is an individualist
-1. the only thing I have going for me is the personal touch

* b. when Star Market first opened would undercut Star sales just to show that he could be competitive

1. when they weren't opened nights, it was better for me because I could charge the extra 5¢

a. thinking about retiring, would like to travel

* VI. religious --- kept a kosher home, belongs to Beth-el, doesn't go regularly but does participate, "I pay my dues but I don't go out of my way"

a. finds the dues to Beth-el and the JCC activities rather expensive

b. went to Hebrew school feels that he got the fundamentals out of Jewish education

** c. was fired from Woolworths for taking off on the holy days, no explanation was ever given

1. finds no trace of it in the Jewish neighborhood of old Park Ave.

*End of
part I*
* VII. Rochester has been very good, little in the way of active social life

a. felt blacks had no business rioting, "colored people" have given him trouble periodically

1. does not approve of a variety of questions, for example, Nazi holocaust, Russian Jewish refugee problem,

a. America has been very good to his family

2. has strong feelings on crime, his wife refuses to go into the Joseph Ave section

* a. asks for protection based upon his friendship with the neighborhood police

VIII. belongs to Knights of Pythias (only active membership) too busy with the store

* IX. contributes to Israel, buys bonds; without Israel would not be the same goal, feel you have something, a stake

a. thinks that Keating did a lot for the Jewish people

* b. thinks that Rochester, and the Jewish community are in good shape

1. feels that Park Ave is getting too commercialized; too tough to start up the variety store today

a. sold many items that Star didn't have, thinks that his store had been good to him

**

Aside:

1. in a subsequent conversation, Mr. Pasnick related that during WWII, he was one of the first Jews to work at Bausch and Lomb

Interview I
Tape I
Side A

- Q. Interviewing Mr. Meyer Rasnick on June 24, 1976 in conjunction with the University of Rochester oral history project. Now what I'm gonna do is I'm gonna start with a few basic questions about your. . . where you were born and so on and then get into Park Avenue and so on a little bit later. First of all, are you a native Rochesterian?
- A. No, I was born in Russia.
- Q. You were? OK. When did you come over?
- A. I. . . when I was five years old, that's in 1911.
- Q. 1911, OK. Where were your parents from then in Russia?
- A. Russia Poltarika Russia, Romane.
- Q. OK. Can you give us a general area where that would be near? Is it in the Ukraine or is it. . .?
- A. It's in Rumania.
- Q. In Rumania, I see. OK. About when were you born?
- A. 1907.
- Q. 1907. When did you come to the United States then, when you were five, so that would be. . .?
- A. 1911.
- Q. 1911. Right. Did you come right to Rochester?
- A. Yes, we came right to Rochester and we moved right into Herman Street.
- Q. Into Herman Street.
- A. Was a tailor.
- Q. Is that the reason you came to Rochester because of the tailoring trade?
- A. No. There was a war goin' on down there and . . . (Transcriber's note:

tape is distorted due to a malfunction of recorder.) . . . my two brothers and then my sister and my mother.

Q. Did you all come over together?

A. Yea, we came over. . . (Note: malfunction continues for several minutes of tape.) And we went there and then of course we graduated junior high and my brother went into the dry cleaning. My brother worked for Amdursky, the butcher . . .

Q. Right.

A. . . and my brother had the Flower City Dry Cleaning, the two brothers. Close-knit family. We all worked together, we pool it.

Q. I see.

A. And we still send money to Russia.

Q. Now do you still have relatives back in. . . ?

A. We have relatives in Russia, yes. My. . . my mother had brother, sisters. . .

Q. Were your father and your mother from the same area?

A. Yes.

Q. Now you have three sisters and a brother?

A. No, I had one sister. . .

Q. One sister. . .

A. And I had three brothers.

Q. Three brothers. I knew it was one way or the other. OK. Now do you still keep in close communication with your brothers and sisters?

A. Oh, yes. Two are in California and two brothers passed. . . one brother passed. . . two brothers passed away, the oldest and the youngest. And my sister just passed away a year ago.

Q. So you're the only one in Rochester now?

A. I'm the only one in Rochester, right. The other two are in California. And

A. (Continued) one is still a dry cleaner, the other one is in the butcher business.

Q. In California?

A. In California. They just retired a few years ago.

Q. OK. Right. Well, what happened then after you went to No. 9 School?

A. Well after I went to 9 School I . . . I worked in a broom factory. I worked as a tile setter and I worked five to a dollar store for the enterprise. And then I worked for Daw Drug Company for several years. And then I . . . I worked . . . then I opened up this store and I've been here 26 years. The Rasnick's Delicatessan Store.

Q. Right. OK. Now have your parents passed away?

A. My parents passed away, yes.

Q. Did they . . . did you live with them? Did you move out at any time?

A. Well, when I got married I moved out.

Q. OK. When they got older were they able to live by themselves? Did they live with you?

A. No, no. They lived by themselves. They retired. They . . . they were all right, they were in good shape. We helped them out a little bit.

Q. Sure. Sure, of course.

A. And I married. . . married a girl, a Becker girl, whose . . . who her father was the richest. . . the . . . the most religious person here in the city.

Q. Was he Orthodox?

A. Becker was the name, see. And he went to Palestine, he passed away down there. He had seven sons and I married the only daughter.

Q. OK. Well, I'll tell you what, I'll ask you a couple more questions and then get into your wife's background, OK?

A. Go ahead.

- Q. Do you remember any languages that were spoken at home? Did they speak Yiddish?
- A. Well, we. . . we spoke mostly Jewish. Yes.
- Q. Could they speak Russian?
- A. They spoke Russian, but mostly Jewish. They could read and write.
- Q. Can you do that?
- A. No. I could talk a little Russian, but not too much.
- Q. Well, don't feel bad. I'm Irish. I only know one Gaelic phrase, open the door. Do you remember if they got any Jewish newspapers or periodicals?
- A. Oh, yes they. . . he got the Forum.
- Q. Forum.
- A. That's right.
- Q. OK. OK. When were you married?
- A. I was married in 19. . . 1933.
- Q. And can you describe your wife's family? You said you married a Becker girl.
- A. A Becker girl from Rawber Street. And had. . . had seven sons and one daughter.
- Q. I see.
- A. And very religious man. Very well-known.
- Q. And then he went to Israel.
- A. And, yes, he used to blow Shofar at the . . . what shul was that? I forgot what shul it was. Hanover Street shul, too. And then he went to Palestine. Passed away down there.
- Q. OK. Was your wife from Rochester?
- A. Wife was from Rochester?
- Q. Where were her parents from? Were they. . .?
- A. Wait a minute now, they were from Buffalo. They weren't. . . but they lived

A. (Continued) here a long, long time.

Q. Came from Buffalo to. . .?

A. From Buffalo to Rochester.

Q. Were her folks from Russia?

A. Her folks were from Russia also.

Q. OK. Did your. . .did your wife . . . wife ever help you out here?

A. Yes, yes.

Q. Did she have any jobs before that?

A. Oh, yes she worked in the law offices, law stenographer.

Q. I see.

A. Yea, she was very good.

Q. So she worked in a law office, helped you out when you needed help?

A. No she. . . when I got married, she quit.

Q. Oh, I see. I see.

A. That was before. Then 'course I worked. . . she was working when I bought the store, she wasn't working anymore.

Q. Oh, I see. OK.

A. She helped me out in here. Struggle along.

Q. Did she ever go back to work?

A. No, no.

Q. OK. How old were you when you got married?

A. I was twenty. . . about 23 years old.

Q. As old as I am.

A. It was a struggle, believe me. (Note: some distortion on the tape follows.)

Q. Well, I remarried. I was married 24½ years. I have one son and I have two grandchildren now.

Q. OK. First we'll get into the children, then we'll backtrack a bit.

A. Go ahead.

Q. You have one son?

A. One son and he helps me out here. And he's. . . he's with Lincoln Rochester Bank in the tax department.

Q. Tax department.

A. Right.

Q. OK. So he lives in Rochester?

A. He's in Rochester.

Q. Do you have any grandchildren?

A. I have two grandchildren, boy and a girl. The boy's twelve, the girl's eight.

Q. Are they going to public schools in Rochester?

A. Going to public school.

Q. They live around here?

A. Shepard Street.

Q. Shepard Street. OK.

A. He was in the Armed Forces, in the Air Force.

Q. Do they. . . do you keep in touch with them pretty frequently?

A. Oh, yes. Oh, yea, very knit family.

Q. OK. Now when your first wife passed away you remarried.

A. I remarried.

Q. How long have you been married?

A. I'm married now 17 years.

Q. 17, wow. Did you also marry another Jewish girl?

A. Another Jewish girl and her name is also Fanny.

Q. Isn't that something? I guess so. Pretty good. OK. Where is she from? Is she from Rochester?

A. She's from Pittsburgh.

Q. Pittsburgh.

A. Yea.

Q. How'd you meet her then?

A. Well, she lives here. She was living here over. . . oh, about thirty years or so. She lived here about 15 years before I married her, living with . . . she was workin' the Star Market.

Q. Oh, I see. OK.

A. And my brother-in-law went on a vacation, sort of made a match. See, had me meet her down there. That's how it was.

Q. Gonna ask you a question. What do you think on intermarriage? Well, would you have married say a non-Jewish girl?

A. No I wouldn't.

Q. What do you think about that?

A. Well, today it don't mean anything. If you can prevent it, it's better.

Q. Did your son marry a Jewish girl?

A. Yes. Keep a kosher home, very nice.

Q. Do you think, suppose. . .

A. Both of 'em do.

Q. Suppose your son had married a non-Jewish girl, would you be upset?

A. Not very much, no. As long as they're happy.

Q. That's good.

A. That's the main thing. Long as they're happy, what's the difference?

Q. Sure.

A. They could be very unhappy marrying their own religion.

Q. That's true. OK.

A. That's the way I look at it. Now my brother married a Gentile. At first he married a Jewish girl, very nice girl, had two. . . two children. Then he

A. (Continued) a Gentile and he's, I think, happier with the Gentile than he was with the Jewish girl.

Q. Fine, yea. What do you think of Park Avenue? Do you like the neighborhood?

A. Park Avenue, I like very much. It gave me a living so why shouldn't I? But it. . . it's changed. The trend, it's isn't the same.

Q. OK. What was it like Mr. Rasnick?

A. Well, it seemed that the people were more friendly. Now it seems that there's younger people comin' in and there's more. . . more . . . well, hippies and you know what I mean? How would you word it?

Q. Yea, well, I know what you mean.

A. You know what I mean? Altogether different. They don't think of anything, give me bad checks, they don't think of anything. Credit and I'll pay.

Q. They're not as considerate? OK. How long have you had the deli here?

A. Twenty-five years, twenty-six years.

Q. What made you come here? To this particular. . .?

A. Well, I lived around here and it just happened that it was in my field and so I had the opportunity and I. . . I took it.

Q. Was it a hard situation trying to set up a delicatessan?

A. Well, I called it delicatessan, but primarily it was a variety store because I have packaged goods. And I have dairy. I sell radios and all kind of sundries and all that. My background is five to a. . . you know, five to a dollar.

Q. Sure.

A. So it should have been really a variety store instead of a delicatessan. I tried all that. I've had, you know, kosher meats and herrings and all that stuff, but I've cut down on that. I like children. And I have a lot of things for children like penny candy, hardly any store has it. I have it. Have a lot

A. (Continued) of variety.

Q. When I was young it was always the variety store you went to.

A. So I have that. I. . . I have a lot of friends that they've moved away from the neighborhood but they still come in. And our relationship is very, very good.

Q. We'll backtrack a bit. It's 25 years ago and you looked out of your window. What would you have seen on Park Avenue when you first came? What was the neighborhood, the physical part like? Was Jines across the street?

A. Not it wasn't. It wasn't as . . . as active as it is now.

Q. Park Avenue

A. Park Avenue is really gettin' busy.

Q. Has that helped the business?

A. It has helped. There's no question about it.

Q. You were talkin' earlier. You said that you opened a delicatessan section of your store that has kosher food and so on.

A. Well, packaged goods. A little bit more than I have now, see. I cut out a lot of it. I used to have pastrami and corned beef. And I don't have it anymore.

Q. Is that because the neighborhood's changed?

A. Yes, right.

Q. I see.

A. I still. . . still have my bagels and rolls, rye breads and pumpernickel, but all that. Same stuff.

Q. Do you think the neighborhood is segregated in any way?

A. Yes I think the Jewish people are. . . are movin' away more and more.

Q. Where do you think they're goin'?

A. Well, they're goin' to Brighton. A lot of. . . a lot of 'em went to . . .

Q. Irondequoit?

A. Irondequoit.

Q. OK. What did . . .

A. Henrietta.

Q. Was it originally a Jewish neighborhood?

A. Yes, it was.

Q. Is that one of the reasons you looked into here?

A. That's right.

Q. When you first started was your clientele Jewish?

A. Mostly, yes. Now. . . now it's less.

Q. That's interesting, sure. OK. What do you think. . . we touched on it earlier. What do you think of the Jewish young couples and single people and so on coming into the neighborhood? They bring children for one thing some of them.

A. Right, that's true. Well, I'll tell you, personally, what I see is a lot of 'em on Welfare in this neighborhood.

Q. Because it's a nice neighborhood you wouldn't think that.

A. That's right. But there is a lot of 'em on Welfare.

Q. OK. We were talking about how the neighborhood's changed. You were sayin' a lot of people were on Welfare.

A. Yes. There is quite a few of 'em. For some reason or other, why I don't know.

Q. Are there more apartments now than there used to be?

A. Yes, there is more apartments here.

Q. Seems to be a lot of them.

A. Yea. There is more. They're makin' more out of these big homes on East Avenue here. They were on Park Avenue, too. They're makin' bigger apartments.

Q. Twenty-five years ago when you came here it was a pretty fashionable section?

A. Yes. It was much. . . much more fashionable. The people were. . . were. . .

- A. (Continued) they . . . they seemed to be more settled. They . . . they seemed to be more sure. There was . . . there was a lot of 'em that . . . that were in business. See? Businessmen. There was a lot of people that . . . that were retired, but they had their own homes.
- Q. They still kept them up?
- A. That's right. They kept them up.
- Q. Did you live in the Park Avenue section, around here?
- A. I . . . I did live on . . . on Edgerton Street.
- Q. Yea.
- A. Now, then I had a home on . . . on . . . off of Monroe Avenue. Now I'm in apartment over on Elmwood Avenue.
- Q. On Elmwood, sure.
- A. Yea.
- Q. Are you glad you moved out of the neighborhood?
- A. Yes, in a way I am. I was . . . I was robbed quite a few times. I was held up once.
- Q. No kidding?
- A. And shot at. My son was in . . .
- Q. This . . . was this in your home?
- A. Right here.
- Q. Oh, wow.
- A. In the store. Right in the store.
- Q. How many times have you been robbed?
- A. I've been robbed, well three times this year.
- Q. Three times this year?
- A. Right. I went . . . I went to the mountains and I came back on Friday. Saturday morning they got in. Sunday morning they got in and Monday morning.

- A. (Continued) They took the whole casing, the windows, pulled it right out. But they didn't get much. 'Cause they didn't get into the store proper, they just got into the stockroom in the back.
- Q. That's an unbelievable. . .OK.
- A. But, it's gettin' a tough neighborhood. But most of these people moved out that were tough around here.
- Q. What do you think about the future of Park Avenue? What do you think will happen to it?
- A. I don't know. I tell you the truth. I. . . I hope it gets better, but I can't see it. As. . .as myself, I can't see it. Because I notice that some of the homes around here on Vassar Street and the rest of 'em, they're gettin' already dilapidated. They're . . . they're not lookin' the way they should be, you know what I mean?
- Q. Was it a neighborhood where everybody looked after their houses?
- A. That's right. They had their own homes. Now they're rented. See, that the difference. They don't give a damn. And the landlords don't care, although the. . . the prices are higher, see?
- Q. Do you think it's gonna. . .
- A. The only thing is that the stores are doin' the business more. The merchants are doin' the business, see?
- Q. That's one of the questions I'm gonna get into in a second, but I'll . . . I'll ask this question back to it, OK? Do you think it's gonna turn into like a. . . a hippie section? A section for young people?
- A. That's what I'm afraid of. See? Where they're gettin' the money I don't know. But they're gettin' the money.
- Q. When did the change start? When did young people start moving in?
- A. I'd say around two years ago.

Q. Just. . . just around. . .

A. Now you take a lot of people I know are going to college, these young fellows and. . . and they're gettin' help. They got food stamps. . .

Q. Yea, sure.

A. And they're gettin'. . . gettin' help, Welfare, how I don't know how they're doin' it, but they are.

Q. Wo they move out here, right.

A. And another thing is, they go ahead, there's about two, three couples. They rent one. . . one or two bedrooms and there's about three, four couples living in the one place. Living around Joseph Avenue. We all had big yards and we used to . . . in the old country brought us some of ours, you know? And we didn't even have to go to park. We all got together. We used to have like clubs, resident clubs. The cousins used to get together and call the Class Club. And we used to get together and have a picnic right in the back. And it. . . it we didn't have much money and all that, but we were very, very happy.

Q. Was it tough gettin' by in those days?

A. Well yes and no. But we. . . we. . . we weren't worrying about what the Jones have like today. See, that's all the trouble. Whatever we had we were satisfied.

Q. A lot of your cousins live nearby?

A. Yes, we all. . . we're all together.

Q. Probably chums with your cousins?

A. That's right. That's right. And if one didn't have, we'd always help out the other one.

Q. Sure.

A. That was one good thing, see. Today it's different.

Q. What do you think of Joseph Avenue today? What do you think of the area?
Have you been down there?

A. Well I go down there for baked goods. I don't think much of it to be frank.

Q. Really changed, huh?

A. Oh, yea. What a big difference.

Q. Well, then, do you want to say how it's changed for the tape?

A. Well it hasn't changed for the best. It. . . it's too bad because they gave the colored people and the . . . people a chance when they had the Chadam Gardens and all that. But it seems to me they didn't take advantage of it. I understand they broke the . . . the . . . the toilets and the . . . the walls and here and there, so you see it's too bad. Because they could have done something with that.

Q. Sure.

A. Because we didn't have the best, we had to go ahead and. . . and suffer and work hard to accomplish what we did. Our yards we kept good, we hadda paint although we didn't have it, if you know what I mean. We did it ourself. See?

Q. Sure.

A. They. . . they go ahead and they hire somebody today.

Q. That's the difference.

A. There's the difference.

Q. Yea. I have a question that came to mind about Park Avenue. Young people you said started moving in only a couple years ago. Why do you think they came here? Why this particular section of town?

A. Well, the rent was still. . . still cheap, see? And I think the. . .the cost of living was. . . was cheap here.

Q. Do you think a lot of the big houses were broken up into small apartments?

A. That's right. That's number one and number two, you were gettin' already your

A. (Continued) . . . your . . . your . . . your. . . your. . . your. . .
your big Star Market.

Q. Oh, the supermarkets.

A. The supermarkets. See, were coming in here already. So naturally they were
a little bit cheaper than the others, so naturally they were comin' around here.
And the other. . . the people that had it already were movin' out.

Q. And that left space. . .

A. That left space for the other people.

Q. Was Park Avenue, say fifteen even ten years ago, a commercial street do you
think or was it residential?

A. No, it was residential.

Q. It was?

A. It was residential.

Q. Only like in the past ten years.

A. Just the last about 10 years I'd say. Yea, 10 years. They're beautiful homes
around here, right here on Vassar Street.

Q. My wife and I go by here all the time.

A. Do you live here?

Q. Park and Culver.

A. Oh, you live on Park. Oh, you see the difference. Well, of course, in a year
you wouldn't know the difference. But if you lived here three, four, five
years, you'd see the difference. See, you'd see the difference.

Q. I wanted to ask you another question. What's it like to run a delicatessen, a
variety store?

A. Well, I'll tell you, number one, there's no. . . there's no personal life.
There's no . . . my. . . my home life wasn't. . . isn't what it should be, see?
I was always workin' from. . . from seven in the morning till eleven at night.

- A. (Continued) Now I work from six till ten. I used to to it myself. Now I have help. I'm off six o'clock I go home, five o'clock I go home. Sunday I don't work, see?
- Q. You're open seven days a week then?
- A. Seven days a week. Started I didn't. . . didn't have any. . . borrow money. . . The only thing that I have, I don't give Green Stamps, but I got a personal touch, see? And that's the only thing that I got against 'em.
- Q. Raises a good question. Now I've noticed as we've been conducting the interview. . .
- A. See how people are?
- Q. An awful lot of people have been coming in. You're doin' pretty well.
- A. That's right.
- Q. Why would you say that?
- A. Every person is an individual with me. One person I can say "Hello, how are you?" Another one I can say, "Well, how the hell are you, this and that." See, everyone's an individual, you got to know, see?
- Q. Right, right.
- A. Now a woman'll come in and I'll say "Hello." Well, you heard it. "How are you dear?" Another one I just gotta say, "nice weather." Something like that, see?
- Q. You have to really get to know people pretty well.
- A. That's right.
- Q. You're pretty perceptive about it.
- A. That's right. And that's the only thing I have against the. . . with me is that personal touch. Now another one was short a nickel, I give it to him.
- Q. You've done that with me. I know. I know.
- A. See, there's your. . . there's the difference.
- Q. OK. How. . .

A. Somebody else might have got in here, they couldn't make it, see?

Q. You've been pretty successful, it's a successful variety store.

A. Yes, yes. I can't. . .

Q. Star Market's right across the street. How come?

A. You know when I first started I used to go in there and buy stuff, like if they had a sale on tuna fish. . .

Q. Right.

A. Say three for a dollar, I would buy it and I would sell it for 31¢ a can, just to get 'em in. Just to show that they ain't cheaper than I am, see? You know things like that. I'm just giving you a little difference, see?

Q. Sure, sure.

A. So. . .

Q. Still do that now?

A. Once in a while I do.

Q. Yea, well let me know when the sales come up.

A. I had to do that. I had to. There are a few things that are more than they are, but not too much.

Q. It. . . it's a store that has a variety of all sorts of different kinds of stock.

A. That's right.

Q. How do you keep track of it all?

A. It isn't easy. Now another thing, when they weren't open nights, it was better for me. Then I could get that nickel more because they. . . I was entitled to it. But, God was good to me. I sent a kid through college. 'Course my first wife had ulcers and spasm in colon. She passed away with a tumor in the brain. And that kind of put me back.

Q. Yea, I can imagine.

A. Did that go off?

Q. No I think it's still working. Yes, it is. We're all set.

A. Now, I'll tell you.

Q. Has . . . has your business changed, the volume of business changed, are there more people coming in now? Or less?

A. No, there. . . there's more people comin' in, see?

Q. Probably more successful than ever.

A. It's. . . it's successful. I got a chance to sell and all that. I'm hoping to get out of it. I'm pushing. . .

Q. You gonna keep it up?

A. I'm pushin' my sixty-eighth birthday. That's enough.

Q. Reitre? Do you think you probably will?

A. I will.

Q. Would you miss it?

A. I think I will. See? I don't play golf or anything. Of course I belong to JCC and I can go ahead and have my workouts and all that. But, I want to travel. I haven't travelled enough.

Q. Have you been to Israel?

A. No, and I'm hoping to go, yes.

Q. Would you consider going? Yea, sure that's be nice.

A. I've been all over. We go to mountains a couple of times a week, go to Florida, but that's about all.

Q. OK. I'll ask you a couple of questions on religious views and so on, OK?

A. Right.

Q. Let's see, what do we have here? OK. Do you belong to a particular synagogue?

A. Temple Beth El.

Q. So you're Conservative?

A. Yea. For years.

Q. You've belonged three years?

A. Ever since I'm married.

Q. OK. Why did you choose Beth El? Did you have Conservative background? Were you brought up Orthodox or . . .?

A. Why I don't know. I tell you the truth. Well, I'll tell you. I was religious in a certain way. We kept a kosher home and all that, see? We never ate non-kosher food or anything in the house. We. . . in fact, outside we didn't, just the last few years.

Q. That's pretty good. Yea.

A. Thanks, but we had all our friends and naturally we. . . as time went on we just had to go with the time that's all. That's how we got in there.

Q. Do you actively go to the temple or just go in high holydays or do you go pretty regularly or. . .?

A. Well, no, I. . . I won't say I go regularly, but I do go to the. . . to the holidays and for the. . . for yardsite, that's when people, you know; . . . Let's put it this way. I don't go out of my way. I pay my dues, I don't go out of my way.

Q. OK. Do you notice any changes in the congregation? That's a pretty nice building. Is there any differences, is it pretty much what it was, what you remember?

A. I think it is.

Q. Yes.

A. Well the only think I could say is . . . gee, I don't know how some of these youngsters keep up with the. . .with the dues. I honestly don't.

Q. They're really pretty high, huh? Are they really?

A. Same thing with the JCC. You know, you . . . you pay a couple of hundred dollars a year and you . . . say my youngster has two kids and for everything they're in, the Boy Scouts, he takes art, she takes ceramics, she takes dancing, everything is separate.

Q. Wow.

A. I don't know how they do it.

Q. Unbelievable. (Note: Distorted conversation in background follows between Mr. Rasnick and a customer.) Did you educate your son, did you send him to . . .?

A. College, yea.

Q. OK. Where did he go to college?

A. Buffalo.

Q. Buffalo. Did you give him any form of Hebrew education, send him to Hebrew school?

A. Oh, yes. He got all he wanted, and he's pretty good at it.

Q. Did you go to Hebrew school?

A. I went to Hebrew school, Talmud Torah. Over on Baden Street.

Q. On Baden. Sure, OK.

A. Yea, and that was a Rabbi Amdunsky I think it was, yea.

Q. Do you think you got out of Jewish education what you should have?

A. I think I did. I got the fundamentals, that was the main thing.

Q. What about something like say Jewish philosophy, Jewish history?

A. I think I got that from my parents.

Q. That's a good answer. Yea, from the . . . sure.

A. My parents maybe didn't have the education but they had very good philosophy.

Q. They were good story tellers.

A. Right.

Q. Yea.

A. And, of course, when I went to . . . to the . . . to the temple on . . . yes. . . Saturday night, they used to have, you know. lectures.

Q. What about your grandchildren? Educated?

A. Oh, yes.

Q. Are they still going?

A. Oh, yes.

Q. Do you think that's changed? Do you think they're still getting out of it what you did?

A. I don't think they're as interested. I don't know why. I don't think they're . . . they're interested as much as we were. I think once they get Bar Mitzvahed that's it.

Q. That's it, right.

A. They're done. Some reason or other, why I don't know.

Q. What. . . what do you think Jewish education would have offered say your son and your grandchildren? What were you looking. . . you mentioned before. . .

A. Their heritage that's about all.

Q. Yea. I'm gonna ask you a question on anti-Semitism, OK? Did you ever experience it, ever been any problems you've encountered? For instance, were there any job occupations that Jews didn't go into in Rochester or anybody ever give you a hard time?

A. I got myself a job in Woolworth's. And when I went down there, this fellow, I'll never forget his name, Mr. Harold, he was charge of the warehouse. He says to me, Mr. Rasnick, you're Jewish aren't you? I said yes. Well, he says look, if anybody should ask you your religion, why just evade it. I said I wouldn't evade it.

Q. You're proud of it.

A. That's right.

Q. Sure.

A. Well it happened that after workin' there about five, six months I . . . the high holidays came up and I took it off. And do you know, the next day when I got my pay I had an envelope. In my envelope I had a pink slip, service is not required.

Q. Did you ask why?

A. Well I went over and I asked him, I says, is it because I was out for my holidays? Well, he evaded the question. I says well must be that's the only reason because my work is all right, never said anything about it before. So I still think 'cause I was a Jew that I was let out.

Q. But they wouldn't actually come out and say it?

A. No.

Q. No kidding? What about when you went into business for yourself? It was a Jewish neighborhood, it shouldn't be too much of a problem.

A. Well, my brother, had it with my brother-in-law originally this place. Then they sold it out to another Jewish fellow by the name of Rock, see? And then I bought it from him and he had it 18 years. So, there was a big difference there. So naturally working for Daw Drug Company, Assistant Manager, over on East Avenue, Monroe Avenue, I knew all people.

Q. You knew 'em pretty well before you . . .?

A. That's right. Lot of 'em came in here, oh, Rasnick, you own the place, hey Mel, hey it's wonderful.

Q. Yea right.

A. And now they call me Mel, see my first name Meyer Melvin Rasnick. Down on Joseph Avenue they all knew me by Meyer, see? And anybody I haven't seen for years come over here, they say hello Meyer, how are you? And you know then I knew it was an old timer, see?

Q. Yea, right, right. Right.

END OF TAPE I, SIDE A

Interview with MEYER RASNICK
June 24, 1976
By Brian Mitchell

Interview I
Tape I
Side B

A. Now we won't be interrupted.

Q. Great. OK. So you were saying it was a pretty good neighborhood? Outside of that one experience you really haven't come across. . .?

A. I used to keep my doors open and everything, never was touched. All the years that I was here until the last few years.

Q. That raises an interesting question, Mr. Rasnick. What do you think of Rochester? Has it been good to you?

A. Rochester's been very good to me. It's a very friendly city, wonderful to bring up children. As far as activities and all that, there isn't, you know, much. You know, like you see a lot of operas and all that stuff. Here you don't see it. It's just the last few years that it's pickin' up. You got the Town and Country now.

Q. OK. Let's hit a couple . . . Ten years ago there was riots in the black ghetto.

A. Right.

Q. What did you think of that? What do you think caused it?

A. That was very, very bad. Shouldn't have happened. We. . . we. . . we Jews had. . .had a pretty tough swim too, but we never did all the killing and rioting

A. (Continued) and all that the way they did.

Q. Why do you think . . . ?

A. I had people come in here, the colored people come in here and they'd grab a six-pack of beer, hey charge it. I couldn't do anything with them. I had one fellow come in here and he said, he's got a knife in his hand, he says hey gimme your money. I says why. So he saw I was changing color. So he says oh never mind, I came to get your car out from. . . from Ray's and Ned's, see? That's a joke to him, right after the riots.

Q. Yea.

A. Naturally I says why, out. Don't come back here. Now what. . . what kind of a joke is that?

Q. Right, that's not funny.

A. That wasn't funny. So there you are.

Q. What about. . . you said the people in Rochester were friendly. But you said this area has changed for the worse. Do you think Rochester in general has?

A. No, I don't think so. I think just certain sections, certain sections. Listen you. . . you'll get a bad apple in a basket no matter how you. . . or how they say a bad egg in a. . . in a dozen eggs or whatever it is.

Q. Yea. Apple in a. . . or something else, right.

A. Apple, bad apple. Bound to.

Q. Right. OK. Another question I had on anti-Semitism. When you were growing up did you ever listen to Father Kaufman or Henry Ford or anybody like that who was known to be anti-Jewish?

A. Oh, yes.

Q. What do you think of all that?

A. Well, I. . . I think they were right in a way to a certain extent. 'Course it all depended what they dwelled on, see?

Q. Sometimes it was just too much?

A. That's right. That's right.

Q. OK. Let's see. Oh, another question I wanted to ask you. OK. It's World War II and you're living in Rochester, right? Now the Rochester community, Rochester Jewish community when you heard about what the Nazi regime in Germany was doing to the Jewish, what was your reaction to it?

A. It wasn't any good.

Q. What was the reaction of the people in Rochester? What do you remember about it?

A. Well, we. . .we started having meetings I remember at the. . . at the temple and we were writing to our Congressmen and all that stuff. Oh, yes. We were very disturbed about it, very much, very much.

Q. Another question. . .

A. You see, they. . . they go ahead and they. . . like Italy, they help out. Right away, now that should have never happened.

Q. Oh, the Communist elections?

A. Should have never happened. What they did in Germany killing all those Jews. Never, never. They should have butted in. Right away. That was bad. 'Course I didn't have any relatives out there.

Q. Your relatives were in Russia?

A. Russia.

Q. Do you still send money once in a while to Russia?

A. No, now we don't. We don't hear from them. We don't know if they're there or not. We don't.

Q. So you have no idea. . . what was the last you heard from them? Were they alive and well?

A. Oh, this is fifteen, twenty years ago, that's the last we heard. We haven't

- A. (Continued) heard anything. That's it.
- Q. What do you think of . . . of the problems the Russian Jews are having trying to get out of the country?
- A. Well that's . . . that's another thing. I think that's bad. Shouldn't be. They want to get out, they should get out.
- Q. They don't like Communism very much.
- A. No, no. And yet you know there's a lot of Jews that would go back to Germany.
- Q. They really would?
- A. I mean it.
- Q. No kidding?
- A. I've talked to some . . . some of the Jews that came from Germany and they would like to go back if it was under a different regime, not the same one, see? They would like to go back.
- Q. Do you think America has been good to the Jewish people?
- A. I think they have, very good, yea.
- Q. Think it's the land of opportunity where you can . . .
- A. Right.
- Q. . . . act as an individual?
- A. Right. Although you can't get gold off the streets like they said we would.
- Q. Is that what . . . do you think that's what your mother and father thought coming over?
- A. No, no they didn't. They figured it would be easier, you know what I mean? They didn't have to worry about being with a gun in their home or, you know, the like . . . like down in Russia you weren't sure if somebody was gonna come in and pull 'em out, see? Here was freer, you know. Knowledge it's safe to go out now at night. Let's face it, see? My wife won't go out. We used to go down to the park, it ain't even safe to go to the park. Now it isn't even . . .

- A. (Continued) Now I go for my baked goods Sunday mornings, 4:30 in the morning, see? Now my wife in the afternoon if we gotta go down that way, see, we have friends down there. She won't go through Joseph Avenue, not even St. Paul. Goes down to Cliff. . . down to Culver Road, down to Ridge. . . Ridge, we got a lot of friends on Ridge Road. We go that way.
- Q. I see.
- A. Instead of going St. Paul or Joseph Avenue.
- Q. Because you just go to avoid the area completely?
- A. That's right. Won't go that way. And yet there's. . . there's the . . . the New York Bakery there, there's Boltner's there, see?
- Q. Do you think there's a lot of crime in Rochester? Do you think it's any worse off than any other city?
- A. I don't know how much there is in the other cities. I personally think there's more than there should be.
- Q. You've experienced. . .
- A. That's right.
- Q. Make you wonder whether you should be an individual proprietor when somebody hits you or somebody holds you up, sticks you up, make you ever wonder whether you should. . .?
- A. That's right.
- Q. OK.
- A. That's right. It's tough.
- Q. Question about. . .
- A. I'll tell you something, there's many a times I. . . I'm sort of scared to come in the store, but I have a friend of mine, a policeman, who is around here all the time.
- Q. That helps.

A. So that helps me.

Q. He looks out for you.

A. That's right. And at night too I ask him to please, when we close up, to be around here about 9:30, 10:00. So he sort of patrols around.

Q. That's good.

A. See? I. . . I'll tell you another thing. I think the youngsters today are too belligerent. They. . . they don't give a damn about. . .

Q. They don't. . .

A. Isn't like it used to be.

Q. No?

A. That's another thing, they don't give a damn. I. . . there's a school over here and especially the coloreds, they'll come in here and grab a bar, not a package, but a whole box. And I'll go up and I'll say hey, how about puttin' that back, paying for it. Don't worry I'll pay for it. I'll give you the money tomorrow. I says until you have it, please put it back. Hey man, don't . . . don't push me. . .

Q. Unbelievable.

A. That's what I got. I called up the school and everything. This integration is the worst thing they ever did. To my belief, yes, 'cause these kids don't want it.

Q. Is this school the product of an integration?

A. Yes.

Q. Half of it is?

A. Yes.

Q. Rochester integrated its schools a while. . .

A. That's right, it is. Only three school is. My kid went to 23 School, one of the best schools in the city. Today, no good.

Q. No kidding?

A. That's right.

Q. That's something. OK. Do you ever use anything like the Jewish Community Center? Or the gym or anything like that? Do you ever make use of it?

A. Well, yes I do, yea. I belong to it.

Q. What. . . are there any organizations that you belong to other than the JCC?

A. I belong to the Knights of Pythias. I used to belong to the. . . to the Odd Fellows, but I had to cut it out. I have no use for it, see? B'nai B'rith, I belonged to.

Q. Is it that you're so busy here that you don't have time?

A. That's it. I have. . . But the Knights of Pythias is the only organization that I belong to.

Q. And you actively participate?

A. I'm active.

Q. That's good. Do you use the JCC for its gym?

A. That's right. Gym. I'm a senior citizen, yea. And we . . .

Q. That's good.

A. . . . go on trips with them. In fact we went on. . .

Q. What were some of the trips for?

A. Well, we went. . . now we just . . . we just went down to Pines, we go to Brown, we go to Kushner's.

Q. OK. (Note: Mr. Rasnick has a brief conversation with a customer.)

Like to ask you a couple of questions on problems that are heppening today.

What do you think, do you support Israel? Do you think that was a good move?

A. Very good. I think it's very good.

Q. Do you contribute to the defense of Israel, things like that at all?

A. Well, when they come around, I contribute my share.

Q. Sure, OK.

A. Oh, yes. I buy bonds. I got quite a few bonds.

Q. You know, we were discussing earlier, when you retire, if you do sell the store, you'd like to travel to Israel.

A. I like to travel.

Q I see.

A. That's one place I'd like to go.

Q. Anyplace else? Where else would interest you?

A. Well, I went to California for the first time see my brothers. I'd like to go again, I am going. But I'd like to take a cruise.

Q. Just generally take it easy, like kind of a vacation.

A. Like to get in my car and just drive. There's plenty to see right here in America. Go into Canada a few times. But I like to go to Nevada and Colorado and California and those places.

Q. Let me ask you another question. Do you think there could be a Jewish survival in general without a survival of Israel? In other words, suppose the Jews had to leave Israel, what do you think would happen to Judaism, the whole world?

A. Well, they. . . they'd. . . they would still cling on, but I don't think they'd . . . they'd have that goal that they have. . . that we have in Jerusalem. We have a goal. That's our goal. See? Just like the Italians have Italy. Just like you have Ireland. Am I right or wrong?

Q. You're right.

A. See?

Q. How'd you know I was Irish?

A. You know, it don't mean anything of . . . to you, but yet you feel that you have somewhere where your parents were born and. . . and you have a state.

Q. A place to call your own, to go back to.

A. That's right. That's the way I look at it.

Q. OK. Do you think Israel is in military danger? Do you think it could be defeated?

A. Listen there's no such thing as . . . as anybody insoluble. Let . . . let's put it that way. There isn't. Even America. You think America is insoluble? Germany thought that they were insoluble and you see what happened to 'em. Let's face it. So . . .

Q. What do you think of people like Golda Meir?

A. I think she's a wonderful person.

Q. You . . . you really . . .

A. I think she did wonderful.

Q. Yea, I see.

A. I think she did wonderful.

Q. Did you . . . did you . . . She came to Rochester . . .

A. As . . . as a woman I've seen her, I've heard her talk on T.V. and I think she's a wonderful person. Especially for a woman. I shouldn't say this, for a woman, like that or you'll . . .

Q. What do you mean by that?

A. They're . . . it's all right.

Q. OK. What do you think about the United Nations? How do you think they've treated Israel? They just branded Zionism as a . . .

A. Well, they . . . they've done a lot, but I . . . I don't know. 'Course I don't know too much. Lot of 'em say that Kissinger could have done more. I personally feel that maybe they should have put somebody else but a Jewish man at that job. See? Like I remember Keating. He did a lot for the Jewish people.

Q. Sure.

A. That's right. He did a lot, see?

Q. OK. I'll ask you three questions. First of all what do you think of Rochester's future?

A. Of what?

Q. Of Rochester's future? Do you think Rochester has a good future?

A. Oh, it's a good future, yes. I think we're gettin' up there. We're not goin' down. We're not goin' backwards. We're goin' forwards. There's no question about it. We're goin' forwards.

Q. And another question. What do you think of the future of the . . . of the Jewish community in Rochester? Do you think it'll do pretty well for itself?

A. Oh, yes I think we're goin' further. We're goin'. . . there's quite a few Jewish philanthropers, put it that way. One, there's quite a few still religious Jews here that they care. And there's a lot of Jewish people that do still care, you know what I mean?

Q. Sure.

A. There's still. . . they still want a Jewish. . . still want to believe in Jewish faith. No question about it.

Q. OK. One last question.

A. Because otherwise we wouldn't have a Jewish JCC like we have.

Q. And things wouldn't be doing so well.

A. That's right.

Q. Yea. OK. What do you think about Park Avenue? What do you think will happen to it?

A. I don't know. I . . . I still think Park Avenue is . . . is gettin' too commercialized, what I think. Maybe I'm wrong.

Q. You liked it better when it was a neighborhood?

A. That's right.

Q. Yea.

A. I think people more friendly, it wasn't dog eat dog.

Q. Do you think you could, if you came into Park Avenue today, and it was 25 years ago, but you came today, would you set up a variety store/delicatessen?

A. Did it now?

Q. Do you think it would make it? Do you think you could be successful?

A. Be too tough. Unless I had a lot of money, see? But with the money I had I don't think I could make it.

Q. Did Star Market. . .

A. I worked hard, but. . . huh?

Q. Did Star Market hurt at all?

A. No, no. I did it as an individual. All. . . my operation was altogether different. I wasn't tryin' to compete with them.

Q. Think it was the personal touch. . .

A. The personal touch. I try to get merchandise that they didn't have at that time either. Lot of things I didn't have, that I have here. Like for instance, common pins, safety pins.

Q. That's right.

A. And all that stuff. They didn't have it, see, I did. See? Lot of little stuff that they. . . now they got it, house furnishing. Where I used to have a rack that they used to give me, see? But I didn't have to pay 'em for runnin' it. They'd . . . they. . . they'd put in say \$300 worth and then when they put in some more, I'd pay for that. So it was more of a . . . of a concession.

Q. Do you think you made the right move operating this particular store?

A. Oh, yes. Yea.

Q. It's been good for you?

A. Yea, it has been good for me. I . . . I personally think somebody else wouldn't. . . wouldn't have done it. I think I did.

Q. OK. Well, thank you, Mr. Rasnick. This will end Side 2.

A. Well, do you. . . I. . .

Q. . . . of this tape it probably should be noted that at the close of our interview we were discussing various jobs that Mr. Rasnick held. He noted in particular that he was the first Jewish. . .

A. One of the first. . .

Q. . . . one of the first Jewish to work in a particular department of Bausch and Lomb.

A. During the war, during the war, 1944 wasn't it? I worked in. . . I worked for Daw Drug Company during the morning up to two o'clock and then from two till one in the morning I worked at Bausch and Lomb. And it wasn't easy there because there wasn't very many Jewish people workin' there.

Q. Did you come across any problems? Any. . .?

A. Well, I did. They were a little bit against me, why wasn't in the Army instead of. . . instead of workin' in a factory.

Q. You tried for the Army right? Wasn't your problem.

A. I was National Guards for nine years. There's your answer.

Q. OK. I guess this should probably officially close Side 2.

END OF TAPE I, SIDE B