

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

Interviewee Joseph Noble

Interviewer Nancy J. Rosenbloom

Date(s) of interview August 10, 1976 (2 tapes but one interview)

Setting (place of interview, people present, impressions)  
I interviewed Mr. Noble at his home in Henrietta. His wife was also present although she did not intrude on the interview. Mr. Noble was relaxed and willing to talk about Jewish education although he was somewhat reluctant, at first, to talk about other subjects. Dr. Noble is a fund of information but busy. He would be willing to talk again (preferably to me) in September if we wish.

Background of interviewee

Dr. Noble arrived in Rochester from New York City in 1950 to become director of the Jewish Educational Association (now the Bureau of Jewish Education). He has a variety of qualifications and various work experiences in both secular and religious field.

Interview abstract

The interview covers the activities of the Bureau of Jewish Education during Dr. Noble's tenure, migration patterns of Jewish children during these years, the hopes and inadequacies of Jewish education, and a commentary about some of the current problems facing the Jewish community.

I think this is a good interview despite its present orientation.

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> Demographic/residential	** <u>  </u> Religious life
* <u>  </u> Economic	*** <u>  </u> Jewish education
<u>  </u> Political/civic	* <u>  </u> Anti-semitism
* <u>  </u> Zionism/Israel	

Interview log

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

--see following page(s) --

JOSEPH NOBLE

1 interview 2 tapes

Nancy J. Rosenbloom

Tape 1 Side A

- A. Background and arrival from New York City, to become Executive Director of the Bureau of Jewish Education. Training; Yeshiva University. Previous work experiences. (not complete)
- B. Brief history of Jewish Education in Rochester commencing with Judah Pilch and the Baden Street Talmud Torah, 1928.

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- C. Activities of the Bureau:  
Optimism that Hanover Houses would keep Jewish Families in the Joseph Avenue Area. Realization that migration patterns were out of that area and the impact on the variety of Hebrew schools along Joseph Avenue.

Development of Jewish community in the northern part of the city in the 1950's. Replacement of ~~Yiddish~~ Yiddish schools and other Hebrew schools by congregational schools.

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Recreation of schools in that area.

Inability of schools to coordinate their efforts, attributed to both urban-suburban differences and religious affiliation.

Recreation of Temple Schools; history of Irondequoit.

Rochester Hebrew School.

Yiddishkeit Schools.

Workmen's Circle schools.

1976 Situation of Hebrew schools on Joseph Avenue.

Greece.

Penfield-Temple Sinai.

Henrietta- Beth Am.

1970 Bombing of Beth Am,

Schools in Monroe Avenue Area

Beth El, B'rith Kodesh and Beth Shalom.

SIDE B

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- D. Quality of Education

Curriculum

JY Hebrew High School and the released time program.

Organization of Hebrew High School. "Flourished then diminished."

Adult Education - Institute Anecdote about Jerusalem Exam.

- E. Hillel School

Now accepted by community.

Hillel School community adapts to meet the needs of the families that it serves and has therefore changed over the years.

- F. Current Activities of Dr. Noble

Not on the Board of Jewish Education

Opinion of 1976 Federation Study:

Hebrew ~~remains~~ remains a holy language and therefore attempts to coordinate Hebrew education ~~is~~ are more than ~~a~~ question ~~s~~ of geography; there is an ideological difference. The school is ~~a~~ a large reason for the Temple's existence, take away their autonomy in that area and too much conflict would be generated.

TAPE 2 SIDE A

- G. What about lack of interest in education?

Vandalism.

Family-School conflict over values and the parents have final say; this causes a real problem for Hebrew educators.

Changes in community values: "Need for community feeling"; problem of education not really one of money or efficiency but of values.

- H. How to define American Jewish identity:

JOE NOBLE

Interview 1 Tape 2 Side A

Nancy J. Rosenbloom

Zionism

Is there unity among Rochester Jews? Their contribution to Zionist cause holds them together.

Intermarriage

Parent-Children relationship and the importance of Kashruth.

Tape ended on a ~~private~~ private continuation of the above discussion between Dr. Noble and myself.

Interview with DR. JOSEPH NOBLE  
August 10, 1976  
By Nancy Rosenbloom

Page 1

Interview I  
Tape 1  
Side A and Side B

Side A and Side B of the first tape are completely blank. Refer to the interviewer's notes, attached.

Interview with DR. JOSEPH NOBLE  
August 10, 1976  
By Nancy Rosenbloom

Interview I  
Tape 2  
Side A

- Q. Wait. This is the second tape, Side A. Today is August 10th, and this is Nancy Rosenbloom interviewing Dr. Noble at his home. OK. You were talking about education.
- A. Right. And there was some thoughts that were not recorded on the other tape, maybe we could bring it up to date a little bit. You mentioned something about . . . I don't know whether it was a report on Jewish education about what's going on in the schools, lack of interest. . . Am I right? Indicate . . . this is what you said, not I. Lack of interest. . . am I allowed to use the word "vandalism?"
- Q. Sure. I didn't realize that.
- A. There is some in the schools.
- Q. OK.
- A. But, a little bit of destructiveness. OK. However, you know, I work for the city school district.

Q. Currently?

A. Yes, that's one of my jobs that I do besides the Temple Beth Am. But, I could tell you of vandalism there that would make your hair stand up. This is just . . . what shall I say? This is part of our society. In other words, this is what's happening all over. The schools cannot be any better than what our general society is. We have. . . our society is out to enjoy itself. Really. I mean, people are very destructive. They just. . . I'm gonna use the colloquial, they just don't give a damn. How many people really care with all the bottles that are thrown around and the empty cans? People empty their ashtrays all over in parking lots and throw everything out of the windows of their cars. We don't care. Where children are brought up in a society, in a society that does not care, why should they have any regard for anything? See, my generation was brought up that a shul, a synagogue, was holy. It was treated with respect. A religious functionary. . . I'm using that term, rabbi, cantor, teacher. . . they were treated with a certain respect which . . . whether they deserved it or not. . . gave the child the impression that he was entering a . . . a synagogue, a sanctuary, a holy place. And that respect rubbed off. Today, we as adults in general don't show that respect for the institution called synagogue. And, of course, we don't show the same respect to the people who work therein.

Q. And in turn the children . . .

A. Yes. . .

Q. Why. . . why would the vandalism . . . astounds me.

A. No, no. People are just out to destruct. This is a very . . . a society that's out . . . not only. . . as I said it's gone. . . they destruct everything and ultimately they'll destroy themselves. There's a lot of fun in destroying, you're having fun. And this is what they see all the time. I

- A. (Continued) mean very few parents care.
- Q. OK. Well, then maybe that is. . . maybe you can correlate that then with the attitude towards Hebrew education and religious education in general.
- A. Do they have any greater respect for the school in the afternoon than they have in the morning?
- Q. I don't know . I don't know.
- A. Well, our society today in general, we, have little respect for the schools, you see?
- Q. The public. . .
- A. The public schools. And a school is a school, so it's carried over in the afternoon. The teacher in the afternoon, the same type of teacher in the morning. One teaches history in the morning, one teaches mathematics, and the other one teaches Hebrew in the afternoon. And so what difference does it make?
- Q. Well, I guess. . . I guess the point that I was trying to get at before on the other tape was that if you have an interesting subject, and if you have a good teacher, trained in. . . in the particular field that he or she is in, then won't you have the student's interest? So, therefore. . .
- A. No.
- Q. . . . does it not make much. . .
- A. No.
- Q. It has no. . .
- A. You . . .
- Q. It's too altruistic.
- A. You stop the average child coming out of a high school classroom and say what did you learn today? And he'll say nothing. The average child will tell you. . .

Q. All right.

A. One word about his entire high school experience, it's a day-by-day experience plus a four-year experience, it's a very famous word. It's "boring." Everything in life suddenly became boring. The services are boring, math is boring. But the difference is this, a teacher is not gonna challenge. . . I'm sorry. A parent is not gonna challenge a teacher through the child and say what kind of garbage is this you're teacher's trying to tell you? Three plus four equals seven? That's the baloney. I mean, a parent is not going to argue this way.

Q. Right.

A. But the parent is going to say I don't care what your Hebrew teacher told you, in my house I'm gonna do it this way. We've had some children tell us, you know? I once . . . I once told a parent it's an old. . . it's an old line, there's nothing original, I said I'll make a deal with you, if you don't believe everything your child tells you happens in school then I won't believe everything your child tells me happens at home. It's the old line. It's so true. Now we have children that come to us and complain. . . I'm not talking only of Henrietta, please, I'm talking. . . 'cause I've been around the whole city. I've been a community man all my life, I still believe in it. My mother wouldn't let me light the candles. Now what good . . . what effect could a teacher have? I have. . . we teach the child for example to eat matzoh on Passover, not to have any bread in the home. And the parent just said to me recently, well I serve my children bread. What good is all the education? You can get the best teacher in the world, what good is it? Here again, there's no respect. If a. . . if that parent does not believe in removing bread from the house, then he should not send his child to a school that's gonna teach something that will contradict his own

- A. (Continued) philosophy. One of two things, either he goes along with it because he sends his child to the school, or else find himself a school that will agree with his philosophy. What good is the teacher training, the teacher background, the best. . . when we cannot get the school and the home to agree on what is to be followed?
- Q. OK. Now is this. . . would you say that there's been a change in the past. . . I assume you've been around the field. . .
- A. Yea.
- Q. . . . for at least twenty-five years.
- A. A little longer. A little longer.
- Q. All right. OK. Now have you seen a marked change from the 1950's to the 1970's? Or from earlier? I mean, at one time did the schools and the congregation and the family all support each other and produce responsible children? Or . . . I mean. . . I mean if . . .
- A. Yea, it's a good question.
- Q. Historically, for example, if you go back to the turn of the century, all right you have immigrants coming in with conflicts between public schools and family. . .
- A. Yea, I think I'm reading a book now, what is it. . . The World of My Fathers.  
Yea.
- Q. And I used. . .
- A. Oh, boy.
- Q. That this was probably the way it was. . .
- A. Well, let's look. It's natural. Let's put it this way, I imagine that when the home was Jewish and the environment was Jewish and everything around you was around. . . next door was a synagogue, and you had nothing to do and you couldn't get out of your environment. And in other words, before the car was

- A. (Continued) invented. With the horse and buggy you couldn't get out of your environment. So everybody lived around the schools. Everybody lived around a place where you didn't have to rely on communication, you see? And there was no telephone, no car. Then I would say, yes, everything was in agreement because they had nothing else. The car revolutionized everything. Once you could go out of your own society and within five minutes you can go to another temple. You don't have to live anymore. . . and. . .
- Q. Yea. OK. So then isn't there a contradiction there that. . . that given the fact that supposedly the community is no longer closed, then why couldn't B'rith Kodesh and Beth El and Beth Shalom and everybody all get together and coordinate their efforts as far as their education?
- A. Because . . . well, you see. . .
- Q. Now, I'm not. . .
- A. Number one. . . no they. . . once they. . . well, you will find rabbis will get up and say, rabbi, president and so on, who will say I'm sorry we are . . . well you mentioned Beth Shalom . . . we are an Orthodox institution, I don't want my children to be told that it's perfectly all right to ride to services on Saturday, the way they're told at B'rith Kodesh or. . . or so on and so forth. You see?
- Q. Yea, but. . .
- A. So there you. . . in many cases you cannot separate between education and religion, it's the same thing. What are you gonna tell a child?
- Q. OK. OK. How about if you have a class in Yiddish. . . not Yiddish. . . Hebrew literature or Shalom Aleyhem stories or something like that?
- A. Well, . . .
- Q. Offer it on a broad spectrum like you would any class.
- A. Well, I'm sorry but you are already talking high school level.

Q. All right.

A. Yea, high school level, OK. Your child understands. When I talk to a teenage group, for example, I tell them again since I am community-minded, I want my kids to know in a Hebrew school what the Orthodox Jew, what the Conservative Jew, what the Reform Jew. . . I mean if there is a difference.

Q. Right.

A. Or any significant difference. And to have respect for the other one's point of view and type of observance. I want them to know it. But how many schools teach that? You see?

Q. Well, that. . . and that seems to be part of the problem. . .

A. It could be done.

Q. And I guess this is was the point that we were at that got cut off with in terms of the budget also given . . .

A. Yea, yea, yea.

Q. Redistribution of money. Is that inspire any comment on your part? That. . .

A. No, I just said that before the tape was cut off that apparently whatever it's costing today is being covered. So the money is there. Now will we save money by having the community schools. . . I'm not interested in the money right now. I'm interested in one. . . in. . . in. . . in a school. A child cannot feel that he's in a school if there are forty, fifty kids in a school. He's not in a school, he's getting private lessons. I want him to feel that he's in a school. That there is an assembly. I want him to feel that he's part of other children within the city of Rochester or Monroe County, anyway you want to put it. A part of . . . I want him to feel he is part of it and not just a little tiny speck. And even the larger institutions, I want him to know. I want Jewish boys to meet Jewish girls from. . . from thirty miles away and vice versa.

Q. Right.

A. See? We need that. The small congregations cannot provide, especially on a teenage level, any type of social. . . social I mean also educational, religious, why not, functions. I want all types of social events.

Q. Do you see that need in Rochester? I mean I hear. . .

A. If it doesn't. . . if it doesn't it could be for the wrong reason. One, the big congregation would say to the small ones, we can do it on our own we don't need you.

Q. Right.

A. Well, what are the little ones gonna do? You see?

Q. And the. . . and the little ones. . . yes. They're forced out to independent. . .

A. Merge? Go in with the big ones?

Q. Would it solve the problem? OK.

A. You see? There's a certain amount of good feeling when you belong to a small congregation pray with us not only, you know, Sabbath and holiday services, but Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. We have our children in with us. The other congregations are too big. The teenagers have their own. Fine. That's wonderful, they can have their own services. You might say they can have it on their own level, that's beautiful. But, some might argue, well look what it's doing, it's breaking up the family.

Q. You know, it's exactly. . . this is it. They are. . .

A. Well, there are arguments in both directions.

Q. See, and then in the big synagogues rebreak into what they call either families. . . or rebreak into peer groups or rebreak into. . .

A. Right, now the havurah or whatever you call it at Beth El. I understand it's quite successful. What they do, they break up into small clusters of families because the congregation is so large. And what happens on Rosh

- A. (Continued) Hashanah and Yom Kippur? You have to break up the family again. So the . . . one of the advantages of a small congregation like mine is we pray together.
- Q. Yea.
- A. I . . . I don't say we pray more. Maybe we pray less.
- Q. Well. . .
- A. But. . . but excuse me for interrupting I just want to finish. Today the problem is, you see, you pointed out Jewish identity, you want. . . you want to talk about that?
- Q. OK.
- A. Go ahead. Go ahead.
- Q. OK. We were at the point. . . because you were saying how the synagogues retain so much of their religious. . . their religious aspect. And I guess I said something about then is Jewish identity, you know, how do you redefine it in order to fit America, 1976? Or answer to a generation that's not either . . . I don't know whether the majority of Americans have aspirations toward Zionism, if anyone could even define Zionism anymore in the younger generation.
- A. Well, what is uniting us now as a people?
- Q. Let me ask you. Because that's. . .
- A. Really.
- Q. Because that's. . .
- A. That's one of the things, for example, in the book by Stuart Rosenberg on the Rochester Jewish community. He seemed to see this continual trend towards community feeling. Now up to 1926. Now one of the things I don't see is such a united feeling. I see either large synagogues, or I see a lot of smaller congregations. I don't see a unified educational system. I

Q. (Continued) don't really see. . .

A. All right.

Q. . . . this Jewish Community Center that's inspired a great Jewish. . .

A. Good. Good.

Q. . . . identity in Rochester because. . . So I guess what I. . . what I want to ask you is how do you think Rochester Jews, American Jews define their identity? Well, you say you're a community man, well how can you mobilize the community to a community feeling that I don't think exists regardless of what Stuart Rosenberg has said.

A. Yea, well look, he wrote up to 1925. We were so community-minded in those days.

Q. OK.

A. But it's disappearing.

Q. And. . . and people will. . . will give the answer that after the Holocaust . . . it. . . it was the experience of the Holocaust that brought the American Jew. . . Jew back together, the Jewish community back together.

A. How. . . how'd it bring 'em back? What. . . what brought 'em together? What was the unifying force? Israel?

Q. Well, I think fear of anti-Semitism as it was known in Europe. Now whether or not that's something that an American Jew of my generation or even your. . . I'll say your generation of people other than those who experienced anti-Semitism in Europe, whether or not that's something that holds the American Jewish community together. I don't know. Or Israel, you know. That . . . I didn't get into those questions with you, but. . .

A. Well, all right. Let's. . . let's analyze it.

Q. OK.

A. All right. It's true that Israel is, quote, holding us together.

Q. Are you a Zionist personally?

A. Everybody is. I. . . If I. . . I pray for Jerusalem.

Q. OK. Zionist I guess in the sense . . . OK. See, that is the answer I've been getting. Zionism has become generalized. Zionism as it was defined, what, twenty-five years ago though was more like membership in Labor Zionism.

A. All right. That's what I want to ask you. Zionism today . . . well, I've said it now. Let me put it this way. Israel is the one unifying force that combines all Jews of Rochester, all their. . . their. . . how many. . . how many anti-Israel Jews are there today? But there were many before the State was established.

Q. I don't know how many anti-Israel Jews there are, but how about if you get an American Jew who is more or less assimilated but who still considers himself Jewish but who disagrees with Israel. . . with Israeli foreign policy?

A. So do I. I disagree with. . . with. . . let me take on somebody. . . some ridiculous. . . something ridiculous with this foreign policy, of which I know absolutely minus zero of such a thing.

Q. OK. But then. . .

A. I'm not gonna tell Israel how to run its. . .

Q. Its government but then how do. . . then in turn how would Israel hold Jews together any more than Switzerland?

A. All right. Israel to me is more than a Switzerland or a Czechoslovakia or some. . . or. . . or Trinidad or something.

Q. Right. Uganda.

A. Israel to me is a history of three, four thousand years. I followed it. . . well, shall I say, from the time of Abraham? It wasn't Israel in those days but OK. It's a culture. It's a land that's drenched with blood and tears.

A. (Continued) It has meant something to my people. I'm not talking religion. I'm talking geography. I'm talking culture, which . . . which is more than . . . than religion. I share something with that. . . with that culture and with that geography. I also want the State of Israel to exist because part of me is there. If I'm part of that culture, and there are people living there that have a bond with me and I with them. I will not tell them how to run their government just as Beth El has no right to tell B'rith Kodesh how to run its government, you see?

Q. OK.

A. But, . . . but I am pro-Israel. I want the State to exist. There are people that, again, that share my culture. It does not mean that I am even considering ever moving there.

Q. Do you think that part of that is related to the Holocaust experience?

A. No.

Q. Or any kind of. . .

A. I always felt like that. No. In other words related because it was a natural place and we were thankful there was a place on G-d's earth, a place Jews could escape?

Q. Yea, and that. . .

A. As a result of the Holocaust?

Q. Yea, and that the fear of anti-Semitism is something that inspires Jews to keep the State of Israel alive.

A. Just in an emergency?

Q. Yea.

A. Well, you can go back to the early days. Russia offered the Jews their bijan at one time. What if we were. . . what if we were offered a hundred. . . a hundred million acres, let's say, of. . . of South Africa or something.

A. (Continued) or something. Would we take it instead of Israel? Would we?

Q. Well, we didn't.

A. We didn't what?

Q. We did not.

A. OK. If somebody offered it to us today. Said, hey here, for free, take a hundred million acres, your own country, would the blacks take it if we. . . if we offered them, let's say. . . let's pick on some state, New Mexico. We'll say here you can have your own country, set up your own teams or president or what. Do you think they would. . . you know. . .

Q. Well, but some blacks might.

A. It's a. . . excuse me, it's a very bad analogy.

Q. OK. It is.

A. I admit.

Q. All right. But given. . . given the situation of a generation of American Jews that are even one generation further removed from European ancestors. . .

A. Yea.

Q. That may have gone through Jewish education but may not have retained a good deal of Jewish education, the Jewish community seems to be very fearful of intermarriage and of losing its young.

A. That's again because. . .

Q. And educated American Jews that might . . . might be able to rationally figure out well Israel is just a land. You know, let's not move Israel away from. . . Israel but might not have as much of a mystic connection partly because of the difference in education or the difference in feeling or the difference in upbringing.

A. That would depend on the education that we give our children. For example I cannot conceive of any type of education, religious education, without

A. (Continued) Israel.

Q. I just guess. . . I guess what I'm asking is whether or not. . . one of the questions I'm supposed to finish with, but it fits in here, is the future of the Rochester Jewish community. I just. . . I just have no feeling of where Rochester Jews are at. . .

A. You're right. You're right.

Q. . . . today.

A. You're right.

Q. You know, what is holding them together? You know, is it giving. . . they give a lot of money to UJA. They give a lot of money. . .

A. Yea, well that doesn't mean anything to me. That doesn't mean anything.

Q. But their children still seem to come to Hebrew schools, you still seem to get the objections from the Hebrew school teacher that the children are disrespectful and they're not very observing. . .

A. No, I don't want. . . I don't want to leave with the opinion that children are disrespectful. Some.

Q. No, I'm not quoting. . . people have told me that.

A. Yes.

Q. This is a change, you see.

A. I'll put it to you this way, if a child is disrespectful to a teacher, to a cantor, to a rabbi or any religious functionary, that's the society we live in. And the society we live in is made up of people, and I blame the child's parents or somebody else's parents for that attitude. For that disrespectful attitude. It does not mean that these people cannot make mistakes, but it's the way people are treated. It's that. . . it's that disrespect for individuals to an institution by an adult, you're gonna get it by the child. Now the parent today does not respect the institution, the rabbi, or any religious

A. (Continued)           functionary. The parents do not have respect. It's a very bad, broad statement to make. But we don't have it in the same . . . well, shall I say fear that two generations ago had? I . . . I don't believe that we should have that type of fear, but where there is conflict between. . . I want to point that out. The disrespect came about as I look at it when there was a conflict between temple, school and the home.

Q. And the home won.

A. What?

Q. Do you think the home won?

A. The home has to win because the child lives home, he gets his money from home. His father will buy him a car if he stays home, the rabbi will not buy him a car. And the . . . and the child has to do what his father says. Now, if we teach our children certain religious values in the school. . . now if that child is not going to find these values at home, there is the conflict. And the father will say, hey, and in the school you learn about kashruth, that's right. Yes, that's nice. We don't keep a kosher home and that's it. Now it all depends how it's done. When I teach the kids in the Hebrew school I say traditional Judaism has laws of kashruth, and I will teach those laws. Some Jews observe them, some Jews don't. And then I give the various degrees and types of observance, well not kashruth. Let's say some other particular Jewish laws. What I try to do is not to bring about the conflict between home and school. I tell these kids in advance that not all Jews observe the same way. Work shall not be permitted on the Sabbath. I explain what is work to the traditional Jew and what is work to other people down the line. But, if the father is going to assume the attitude, I don't give a damn what you're taught in school, in our house we don't have kashruth. And by the way I'm not exaggerating the way I put it.

A. (Continued) Some parents have no regard or respect for what is being taught in the schools. They could care less. If they're influential people with money, you have to keep them in the school. Now the . . . well, the parents. . . why do the parents send their children? Well, you've gotta have a Bar Mitzvah. In some societies the type of Bar Mitzvah you have, the amount of money you spend will give you a certain social status in the community. That's very important to some people, you see? But, they will argue and they will come into the temple and why. . . why. . . well, I'm a Reform Jew. Why can't I smoke on the Sabbath? You know? Disrespect. Thank G-d not all people have it. But the ones that do have that attitude, you know, they kill it for the rest of them. And their children learn very fast.

Q. Well. . .

A. There was a respect, for example, our. . . our Hebrew book was always called a safur, it was never called a Hebrew book, a safur. And when the book dropped down on a number of these kids there was a certain reverence, maybe too much, but something rubbed off. Today the child does not see that respect for a book or learning or temple or religious values. What do you expect from this child?

Q. Well. . .

A. Nothing. It was a bust. I. . . I. . . I have. . . I have kids who come to me who said . . . recently I had a . . . a boy came around, he wants to get married, the girl is non-Jewish, will I marry them? You know. And in the course of the conversation he said to me, you know, I was brought up in a home, I went to Hebrew school. I was Bar Mitzvah. I said I always went out with non-Jewish girls, my parents never said anything. Frankly I never thought it mattered to them. All of a sudden I tell them I want to

- A. (Continued) get married, and all hell breaks loose. They never said anything all these years. Now this is not an isolated story. Parents are afraid to express themselves. What is wrong in saying I don't like this? I don't like this shirt on you. I don't like this dress on you. I don't agree with your going out with non-Jewish girls, boys, whatever it is. It doesn't mean that the child will always listen to the parents, but a parent has a right to express an opinion. To say, well it does matter to me.
- Q. Yea.
- A. Now you might not listen to me, and . . . and that's up to you but I just want you to know, yes, I do care. We don't say that.
- Q. So. . . so I do. . . would you agree that there is a definite change that . . . I don't know when it happened or why it happened, but there is a definite change from let's say the 1950's. . .
- A. Well, it's a new generation.
- Q. New generation. Have you ever heard the expression the lost generation?
- A. Yes.
- Q. In terms of Jews, specifically I think the Jews in Jewish leadership in Rochester. . .
- A. Well, it's used in Jewish education. I don't know how accurate I am, but the lost generation is usually referred to. . . I'm not through with the book. . . what's that book? World of Our Fathers? I'm reading it here and there. But, just picture the immigrant that came to this country who was very busy making a living, starvation, sweat shops, wages, seven days a week.
- Q. Right.
- A. For the religious Jew six days a week. And nights. Everybody working and he neglected the education of his children, you see? This is called the lost generation.

Q. Or also the Depression children who would be the children of supposedly leadership age, in their fifties, in Rochester. I heard it referred to I guess in reference to . . . I guess there is an older leadership and then there's a younger leadership. . . you see I've heard it referred to. . . Every generation I think refers to. . .

A. In other words it was not a continuous. . .

Q. I don't know. I don't know.

A. Yea, well in terms of Jewish education, we refer to that. That the father was too preoccupied and he davad his three times a day, but he was too preoccupied to give his child a Jewish education. Jewish education was not organized. You had the mulamet going around giving private lessons, running through the streets. I remember myself in New York. The home was still religious, observant, all traditions were kept in the home, but remember the child was already going to the American school, and the child was picking up the American customs from his friends. The neighborhood was no longer 100% Jewish, and if it was 100% Jewish he could see the non-Jewish neighborhood three blocks away. So, there was a clash already of culture, the introduction of a non-Jewish idea.

Q. Now in Rochester that may be what. . . I don't know what's happened. But like in the 1950's. . . was there a lost generation? Or. . . or was it. . . were parents very willing to send their children and encourage their children to go to school?

A. Well. . .

Q. I don't know if that question makes sense.

A. I'll tell you. At that time, let's say '47, '48, '49, I told you we used to have surveys to find out Jewish child. . . in some cases we had to convince Jewish parents to send their children to Hebrew school. When I came here in

A. (Continued) '50 I used to. . . I put out a leaflet, after we got the list of the children who were absent on Yom Kippur, and we realized were Jewish children, and we got the list of the children attending religious school. And through process of elimination came across the children who were not attending at all. And we sent them a lot of literature. But they. . . you don't have to do it. Today it's this way. The parent who wants to send their child to Jewish. . . to Hebrew school will send them, whatever the reason is. It could be Jewish identity, that magic word you mentioned, or it could be for Bar Mitzvah or Bat Mitzvah, but they send them. They wake up to their religious or social feelings or both. And they're gonna have to Bar or Bat Mitzvah some of them, you know, they lose that feeling again. And then what happens to. . . all right, what happens to the average child, you say, lost generation. A kid is Bar Mitzvah, if he doesn't continue his high school, he goes off to college, he doesn't need a temple, he doesn't need Jewish education. He doesn't even need religion. You know, depending on his background. And then he gets married, he still doesn't need any of these things. Sometimes when he has a child he'll wake up and say, gee, you know I have a boy maybe I need some religious something there, a girl, a name, somebody reminds him. Maybe there's a Jewish name involved, OK. So he wakes up and then he goes back to sleep again until the child is of Hebrew school age or Sunday school age, then he'll join a temple, you see?

Q. Yea.

A. So we have these lost years. This is the trend today, as I see it. The trend today is they stick with their parents, of temple affiliation, of course through high school. College, you know, they come home for a holiday or a Sabbath, they'll attend the service, yes, and then you lose 'em until . . .

Q. Their children. . .

A. . . . they have children and they go to the Hebrew school. I hate to say this is the average, but it is. It is. You mentioned before we give a lot of money to Israel, that's beautiful. Money buys many, many things. I want besides the money some feeling. I want an attachment. I want. . . that's the one word. . . I want a commitment towards Israel, towards Judaism. I want a commitment. I don't say I want an observant Jew. But I don't want a Jew who's going to create a conflict with his child and drive that child away from Judaism because he's gonna say my father or my mother are hypocrites. You see? This is what bothers me. We try very hard in our temple to give the children a Jewish identity and to show them that the. . . that the. . . that at our seder we don't eat bread, we don't eat this, we don't eat that, but the Sephardic Jew will eat corn and beans at his seder, we don't. And yet that Sephardic Jew is, quote, more observant than many the other way. That's their custom. We don't do it. Again, you don't laugh at us, we don't laugh at you. We respect each other. But we have too many parents who. . . who totally disregard what is being. . . I once had a parent ask me, not from Temple Beth Am from another school when I was director of the Bureau. I had a parent said to me, am I creating a problem in the mind of my child when I serve him bacon and eggs for breakfast and then send him off to religious school? Now it was at some sort of a parents meeting. I don't know, very few parents would have the guts even to ask a question like that, but it shows you that the woman had a problem. She knew what is being taught in that school, you see. Am I creating a problem in the mind of my child because. . . The first thing I told her is that she's got the problem.

Q. Yea, but. . . but on the other hand at least that's a parent that. . . that recognizes. . .

A. Do you really think so?

Q. I don't know.

A. Here again we come back to the old question again. That child is gonna grow up and say my parent was a hypocrite, my parent never cared for religion. I learned one thing in school and she gave me bacon and eggs, and all of a sudden I want to go out and marry this. . . this Catholic fellow and look at the fuss she. . .

Q. Right. . .right. . .

A. You'd think the world was coming to an end.

Q. That's a very. . .

A. What kind of a garbage is this? This is what bothers me. You see?

Q. OK. And I guess. . . I guess the point. . . the. . . the question is that if you're given the situation, where I don't know what, they don't keep kashruth, that and at least in some homes they might have bacon and eggs for breakfast before they go to Hebrew school, that. . . that may be part of. . .

A. Of course I'm not. . . I'm not gonna argue about your statistics. Go ahead.

Q. Oh, well I'm just. . .

A. Go ahead. Yea, all right. OK.

Q. That maybe. . . maybe what people need is a different way of. . . a different way of defining their Judaism. I mean this has nothing to do with. . .

A. How do you feel about. . . about a parent. . . about a mother who serves bacon and eggs for breakfast? Do you think a parent like that should belong to an Orthodox congregation?

Q. Orthodox congregation?

A. Yes.

Q. No, but I don't see any contradiction between doing that in a Conservative. . .

A. Oh, you don't? Well, I'm sorry to disagree with you because Conservative

A. (Continued) Judaism definitely says we must stick to the kashruth rules.

Q. OK. So given this. . .

A. And you will find, excuse me, that what they teach in Beth El is 100% the rules of kashruth.

Q. OK. Now given that they teach that at Beth El, and given that the child all the same is gonna eat bacon and eggs for breakfast. . .

A. Why?

Q. Because that's what the family eats for breakfast, he's gonna eat bacon and eggs for breakfast. That when that child. . . I mean that child is faced with two alternatives, either reconciling it with himself, being part of the Jewish community and going on. . .

A. Well, but what kind of Jewish community?

Q. His. . . his. . .

A. How would you feel if that child intermarried?

Q. How would I feel? Or I should say. . . or saying I'm an assimilated Jew.

Kashruth doesn't mean anything to me, Israel doesn't mean a whole lot to me.

A. And therefore Jewish identity doesn't mean anything, therefore I could marry a non-Jewish girl and have non-Jewish children, and good-bye Judaism, right?

Q. That's right. So therefore, if. . . in other words. . .

A. And where did it all start from? It started because this guy had bacon and eggs for breakfast, right?

Q. Well, if. . .

A. So you would agree. . . so you would agree that this is where it started?

Q. All right.

A. And that's the end of Judaism.

Q. No, no. So all I'm saying is that it could either be the end of Judaism or is. . . is there perhaps a different way of defining it so that in order to

Q. (Continued) . . . to keep that type of American Jew, which I think is probably representative of a fair amount of young . . . young Jews from completely assimilated families. That's all I'm asking. I just. . .

A. Well.

Q. I mean I could give you my personal opinion. . .

A. No, no, I. . . I enjoy listening to. . . to you, you know and. . .

Q. Here, wait. . .

END OF TAPE 2, SIDE A (Interview 1)