

Interviewee XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX Louis Ouzer

Interviewer Maurice Isserman

Date(s) of interview August 25, 1976
~~September 7, 1976~~

Setting (place of interview, people present, impressions)

Interview took place in Mr. Ouzer's studio. Mr. Ouzer was friendly and cooperative. He did not, however, have all that much to say about the Rochester Jewish community, feeling very estranged from it.

Background of interviewee

Mr. Ouzer was born in Rochester in 1913 to immigrant parents. He grew up here and in Ithaca. During high school he developed a life long interest in photography, and opened his own studio in Rochester in 1946. Formerly a member of Temple Beth-el, he is no longer actively involved in Jewish religious or social affairs.

Interview abstract

Mr. Ouzer described his upbringing, education and career. He expressed repeatedly and at length his disillusionment with the organized Jewish community. He described his extensive collection of photos of the Rochester Jewish community, taken over the last two decades. Also of interest is his description of a trip to Israel in the immediate aftermath of the Six Days War.

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

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| <input type="checkbox"/> Social history | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Jewish community |
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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) --

LOUIS OUZER, INTERVIEWED BY MAURICE ISSERMAN, AUGUST 25, 1976.

Personal background--born in Rochester, 1913.

parents emigrated to Rochester from Russia.

moved to Ithaca at age 8--describes childhood as lone Jewish family in area.

parents' religious affiliation--Big Shul, Rhine St. Synagogue.

parents' difficulties in learning English--Yiddish spoken at home. Father always read Forward.

Attended Talmud Torah.

Public education--35 school, Washington junior high, Edison Tech.

No recollection of anti-Semitism.

Corporal punishment in Hebrew School.

Part time jobs while in school.

Baden St. Settlement--used medical facilities, attended meetings of Young Judea Club.

Merrimac St. home--problems of overcrowding.

Subsequent careers of brothers and sisters.

Homes lived in in Rochester.

★ Disillusionment with organized Jewish community, religion. Workmen's Circle.

During the Depression, worked as photographer's assistant--self-taught photographic and darkroom techniques.

Marriage at age 28, moved to Ave. D.

Army experience in WWII.

Went into business of his own on return in 1946.

★ ★ ★ Description of business--from weddings and portraits to photojournalism. Describes efforts to document Jewish community life in Rochester over period of 2 decades.

Fire at Temple Beth-el.

★ Description of pictures of Rochester Jewish community, including last Yom Kippur service at Big Shul.

★ ★ Trip to Israel after 6 Days War.

reactions to Israel.

Childhood memories of Rochester Jewish life.

Changes in Jewish community since then--less closeness, more competition.

Interview I
Tape I
Side A

- Q. This is Maurice Isserman interviewing Lou Ouzer on August the . . . what is the date today?
- A. Today? Twenty-fifth.
- Q. August the 25th, 1976 in his studio on Gibbs Street. Mr. Ouzer where were you born?
- A. I was born here in Rochester.
- Q. And when was that?
- A. 1913, March 11, 1913. In fact I was born on Hanover and Kelly Street.
- Q. So that makes you sixty. . .
- A. Three.
- Q. Sixty-three years old. And when did your parents come to Rochester?
- A. Well, I believe they came here. . . let's see. That's a good question. They were eighteen years old when they came here from Minsk. I don't know the exact year. I've been. . . I've been reading matter of fact World of Our Fathers by Irving Howe and trying to put certain years together with certain situations that were happening in Europe. I think the late 1890's.
- Q. And did they come directly to Rochester?
- A. Yes, they came directly to Rochester.
- Q. And why did they come here?
- A. Well, as I understand it the . . . one of the cousins was Barney Ruben, who later founded the Bond Clothing Company. And he came here. And in those days, I . . . I think what they did was they used to work and save \$40 for passage and send the money to their family or friends. And my mother actually escaped from Minsk, she came over the border at night with a group of townspeople. The

- A. (Continued) first time she was caught and was sent back. As I recall she telling me stories, she had to wear a special dress which identified her as a Jew. And I assume they came here because they heard about America, you know, a better land.
- Q. So they. . . they came over largely because they had family here already?
- A. Yea.
- Q. Came to Rochester?
- A. Yea. And then his brother and sister, of which he had. . . let's see she had two sisters and three brothers, they each in turn worked to bring each other over. Then they all got together and raised enough money to bring my grandmother over here.
- Q. Your parents were already married when. . .?
- A. No. No.
- Q. Did they both. . . did they know each other?
- A. No.
- Q. They just came both around the same time?
- A. Yea, both.
- Q. And both from Minsk?
- A. Yea, my mother's from Minsk. My father's from Radisker, Radisker is it? Yea, Radisker, small village that's a Minsk township.
- Q. It's interesting that you said that your mother's cousin founded Bonds's. I thought that most of the owners of the garment factories here were of German Jewish background.
- A. Yea, they were.
- Q. But he was the exception.
- A. Yea. But as far as I know because it was his idea at the time when I was a very small boy, according to my mother, I may be wrong now, childhood memories

- A. (Continued) aren't always that accurate. He didn't understand why a coat shop should be in one place, a pants shop in another, go back and forth. So he decided why not put it under one roof. There's no doubt the German Jews came here much earlier than the Eastern European.
- Q. Yea. Did your mother work in the garment industry?
- A. You know, I don't ever remember her working in any garment industry at all.
- Q. How about your father?
- A. My father was a . . . in Europe he was a winemaker, but when he came here he was a mason, plasterer, worked with the building trades. And he worked for Hopeman Brothers firm, the contractors here.
- Q. And so when were they married?
- A. I can get a lot of this. . . I can get dates from their sister who's the family historian, each one more accurate, you know.
- Q. That's all right. So you were born in. . . in 1913.
- A. Right, yea.
- Q. Where did your family live then?
- A. Right here in Rochester over on Kelly Street/
- Q. Kelly Street, which is. . . ?
- A. Kelly was the center of the Joseph Avenue, Nassau Street, all that area.
- Q. The Jewish neighborhood?
- A. Oh, yea, yea. Jewish neighborhood rimmed with Italians and some very. . . At that time as a child negro families who were, as I recall, beautifully . . . what's the word, manner of people who we never feared or we never thought of as . . . as you do today.
- Q. Did you live in that neighborhood for most of your childhood?
- A. Yea, matter of fact we lived there till I was maybe eight or nine years old, something like that. Then we moved on a farm in Ithaca, near a place called

- A. (Continued) South Lansing, for a couple of years. Then we came back and lived on Merrimac, which is off of Hudson Avenue till I was 28 years old. That's when I got married, when I was 28 years old.
- Q. Did you move to the farm because your father was a winemaker or. . .?
- A. No, he and another lotsman, friend of his from Europe, was a farmer. They decided to give farming a go. So we were one of the few Jewish farmers, Jewish farmers were very rare. And I was a boy alto and I remember going to our country school we had only four. . . four rows and the first row was first and third grade. The second row was like seven to nine. And I said boy when I get to the fourth row I'm gonna be a senior. And we used to. . . when everybody left we used to sit in the seniors' desks, having games that we were seniors.
- Q. Were you the only Jewish child in the school?
- A. Right. Well, my brother. . . I have two older sisters and the second sister is only about maybe a year, maybe about . . . matter of fact for a period of thirty days she and I are the same age, that's how close that was. And I have a brother who's a year younger and two younger sisters. My youngest sister was born on the farm, I remember that very well. And being the only Jewish boy in that. . . in the country I was a boy alto and I used to sing in the church on Christman eve and Christmas night. I remember asking my father if it would be all right. He was a very religious Orthodox Jew, and he said why not, you know.
- Q. So you didn't feel any conflicts separated from a large Jewish community at that time?
- A. No, as a matter of fact it's very strange because I think that that has been a big influence on how I feel about Jewish, you know, religion today. You know, the fact that you didn't have to be with . . . you didn't have to find yourself on a street with Jewish people or city in order to be Jewish. I thought it was

- A. (Continued) up to the individual, you know, more than the collective thing of a group of people. And I think the fact that I was brought up and seeing the Catholic churches and my father said it's all right, it's all for a good cause, rubbed off on me 'cause today my closest friend is Father Henry Atwell, who's a Catholic priest. And I've spent a lot of time with the Catholic priests. I've been in . . . when I went to Israel at the end of the Six Day War and did a documentation on the churches with Father Atwell, we stayed in a Franciscan monastery, south of Raman, Franciscan monks. They had a big influence on me when I was very young. And my father, although he was very religious, never forced his religion upon any of us children at all.
- Q. Did he belong. . . was there a shul to attend. . . ?
- A. Oh, yea, yea. He belonged to the. . . the Big Shul, you probably heard of that.
- Q. I mean when you were in Ithaca.
- A. Oh, no. No, I remember we had. . . we had. . . I remember our kosher meat was shipped in from somewhere. I remember they were . . . waiting for it to come in to put salt on it to kosher. . . The house was always strictly kosher.
- Q. So when you were at Kelly Street you attended the Big Shul?
- A. Well, we. . . yea, we attended the Big Shul 'cause I was a boy alto. And in lieu of getting money for singing, my father would get his seat free for Yom Kippur and Rosh Hashanah.
- Q. How about when you moved to Merrimac Street?
- A. Well by the time we moved to Merrimac Street he had. . . he had. . . he had left the Big Shul and joined the Rhine Street Synagogue, and he was there for the rest of his life.
- Q. Your parents were immigrants, so I imagine when they came to this country they. . . they didn't speak English?

- A. Not very well, no, no. Our house was strictly Jewish speaking all the time.
- Q. You mean when you were growing up?
- A. Growing up, yea.
- Q. And did you learn how to speak Yiddish, I guess you did.
- A. Oh, yea, yea. Matter of fact my sister still speaks Yiddish very well.
- Q. Have you managed to retain it or. . .?
- A. I understand it but I don't . . . I can't speak it anymore. I just haven't had the opportunity to practice it.
- Q. Did you receive Yiddish periodicals in your home?
- A. Yea, the Forward used to be the . . . the paper and then the . . . My Dad would always read the Forward, I mean you know, there was. . .
- Q. Did you receive other papers? Can you think of. . .?
- A. No, except whatever the . . . I think maybe the Post. . . maybe the . . . I don't know, the Journal American or whatever the English speaking paper was, that's about it. But I don't remember any magazines or books. Music was a big thing. My Dad as soon as he could save money bought a victrola and bought me a violin and bought a piano. You know, he. . . he introduced us to the arts very early age.
- Q. Did you have a religious upbringing?
- A. Yea, yea.
- Q. You attended Hebrew school?
- A. I attended Hebrew school. I attended Talmud Torah, which is the . . . the one on Baden Street. And I was turned off by that because I. . . that time I was going through a very bad phase of being a stammerer and a stutterer and I couldn't talk very well till I was seventeen years old. And both the English teachers and Hebrew teachers understood that for a stalling device or thought I was just putting it on. So when I stammer or stutter the became mad, boy.

- A. (Continued) You know, you can find the words, you can say 'em, but normally was very hard. So I went therapy and psychologic studies and it was sad. . . it was sad when you're seventeen. Because there were very few people around who tolerated a stutterer. My mother and father were beautiful people. They were lovely and tolerant, wisdom, you know, they were. . . they were really great parents.
- Q. And where did you attend school?
- A. Well I went to 35 School, which was up on. . . off of Hudson Avenue. After there I went to Washington Junior High School. And then from there I went to Edison Technical High. Because of my speech problem I was a very bad student. I was. . . I was not a scholar.
- Q. Were all three of those schools largely Jewish or. . .?
- A. Yea, yea. I think predominately they were. . . they were Jewish I would say. The Italians seemed to be around. Our neighbors were Italian across the street.
- Q. Was there ever any friction you can remember between Italian and. . .?
- A. No, no. We used to exchange food and, you know, we used to. . . we used to swap Italian bread for Jewish. . . Jewish bread. There was no. . . matter of fact Gentiles funerals my father used to go out with. . . always wearing a hat and a hearse would go by and I remember very distinctly he'd take his hat off. And there was a great amount of respect. I think as I look back at it, anybody with the same financial. . . they're all. . . they're all struggling to make a living and financially there wasn't any great difference in their wage scale, so they were all. . . See the Italian men had five or six kids and trying to make it through you know for his kids. And we never had any fights. We used to. . . as you got older you. . . you begin to realize that they weren't people that went to a shul so you. . .but thing that turned me off

A. (Continued) about Hebrew school was the fact that the Hebrew teacher, who just recently died. He used to. . . he used to slap my face so hard that it just because I wasn't learning the muster as fast as he thought I should. And everytime he slapped me, I just you know, had all I could do except hit him back. And I couldn't understand why a man of learning and God should have to resort to beating in order to teach something.

Q. Was it just you who was hit or were. . . ?

A. No, I wouldn't say just me. I think it was a general thing, we used to talk you know, and all of a sudden I mean a little slap in your face. Little, really hurts. And that bothered me a long time.

Q. So all this time while you were in high school and living in Rochester your father was a mason?

A. Yea, he's a plasterer, yea.

Q. Did you ever have part-time jobs while you were in school?

A. Yea, matter of fact as soon as we were old enough to count change I had a. . . a newspaper route in the evening and a Sunday morning route. And we were working, you know, everybody brought their money home to give to my mother. And she used to. . . between the six we got old enough, why there was enough pooled money. . . two dollars here, four dollars here, and we used to get a penny or a nickel a week just for you know buy . . . you know, corner store.

Q. So all. . . all your brothers and sisters?

A. Yea.

Q. Helped out?

A. Yea, oh yea. My sister worked in a corner store and there was never any feeling of starving or anything. We didn't miss the fact that we were so-called case histories for the Baden Street Settlement. We couldn't afford a doctor so we used to go to Baden Street Settlement and get a doctor. We used

- A. (Continued) sit in waiting room wait for a turn for a doctor. Look at your throat, say ahh, look at your ears and told you to go home and take a bath..
- Q. Did you ever use the Baden Street Settlement for anything other than just medical?
- A. Yea, yea. Matter of fact the big influence was I belonged to the Young Judea Club. And from that association there are still, oh let's see the child. . . three of us who are still alive and the rest have died but out of that came male friendships which developed all through our lives.
- Q. What. . . what was the Young Judea Club? I haven't heard of that.
- A. Well the Young Judea Club was ran by . . . I don't know who was responsible for it but it was a . . .I would say fourteen years old they'd leave you aside till you got about eighteen years old. You were much more informed about. . . it was just a club that made you aware of being a Jew and the responsibilities of a Jew, what your background was, your responsibility was to other people.
- Q. Run out of Baden Street Settlement?
- A. No, I don't know where that ran out, but we used to meet there.
- Q. Was it affiliated with any other group, any adult group?
- A. I don't know. It might be a . . . you might say it was a . . . a miniature Hillel. But it was an organization that . . . that never really forced any Jewishness on us, just the fact that, you know, any questions. . . we have speakers. And I still have a Young Judea thing that I made up of all the figures of our little troupe. You know, then like. . . I don't know if you know Abe. . . Abe Hollenbeck, he's at the University of Rochester.
- Q. No, I don't.
- A. He's in charge of the Guidance Program, principal of Monroe High School. Well Abe was a member of our Young Judea Club.

Q. How many members were there?

A. Well I think we must. . . we probably had about 10. And I used to come, it was a fantastic place because it was the first place that I ever went to as a kid. It was. . . teacher's name was Miss Dejohn.

Q. Miss. . . ?

A. Miss Dejohn. I'll never forget her name, fantastic. As I look back at she was probably a social worker going to school using that as a means of support and get her background or experience. She used to play music. It was a place to go to, you know, it was a . . . it was a place where you could meet your friends and you felt safe. And you could play basketball or whatever you. . .

Q. Can you think of other organized activities, classes, dances, things like that?

A. Well, I wasn't. .. I wasn't . . . they had all sorts of arts and crafts things and things on nature. They had. . . but I never participated in. . . in them. I was basically a loner. And I . . . because of my speech problem I wasn't making it socially. And rather than be subject to the taunts and. . . and laughter of all the other children around who would make fun of me, and I decided, you know, I wouldn't go anywhere. So I didn't go anywhere.

Q. How about your brothers and sisters?

A. Well there. . . they were a very outgoing, you know, they went. But I spent more time reading . . . reading than I did participating in life. In fact I was twenty. . . I was eighteen years old, nineteen years old before I discovered something, a major league baseball team. There was a . . . it was just the fact that we had this house on Merrimac Street. It had two bedrooms, a kitchen, a living room and a front room. And the front room had a big bed in it where my sisters used to sleep. Living room was where we used to eat for Friday nights. We had a folding bed and my brother and I used to wait for our uncles and aunts to leave at night and take the bed out of the corridor,

- A. (Continued) put it in the kitchen and we used to sleep in the kitchen. Which meant we had to get up early in the morning to clear it up, clean it up so my father could do his morning prayers and my sisters and everybody would figure out how to get dressed without being. . . as we were younger it didn't make much difference, but as you got older everyone became embarrassed by their bodies so they had to find ways and means of having schedules, see, you know, who got the bathroom, who got the bedroom.
- Q. Sounds like you had a very close family?
- A. Yea, close, yea, yea.
- Q. Did most of them remain in Rochester?
- A. Yea. They all have, yea.
- Q. What did they. . . what did they wind up doing?
- A. Well my brother wound up in . . . he's running a grocery store. Matter of fact one of his first jobs that he had was working for the Hart. . . Hart Food Stores as a delivery boy. And from there he became Assistant Manager. Then the war took four years out of his life and two and a half years out of my life. Then he came back and he worked for them. Then he had an opportunity to buy a store, so he's been a groceryman all his life. And he's done very well. And my sisters, one of my sisters is married to . . . you want names, would that help you?
- Q. Sure. You can give it if you like.
- A. Yea, yea. One of my sisters is married. . . she's one of the first Jewish girls in town to marry a Turkish Jew, one of the. . . one of the. . . gossip around town the fact that a Jewish girl . . . why did a Jewish girl marry a Turkish Jew, let alone a Jewish girl or boy marrying a Gentile, murder, you know.
- Q. Right.

- A. Right, yea. But they've been very happy all their lives. And they have. . . so my. . . so her husband and my brother are partners in this grocery store, which they've had, oh, about 35 years now. And my other sister's first husband was killed in World War II, so she. . . she remarried. And my oldest sister has never married, so on her became the burden of. . . of bringing all of us up. Being the oldest one she had the responsibility of putting us to bed and making sure we had clothes and I can always remember her working. So she worked all her life for stores in town and did some astute investments in Kodak and she's retired now and goes to Florida and back, has her own home. We've all done very well, you know.
- Q. So they've all remained in Rochester?
- A. Yea, they all remained in Rochester, yea.
- Q. Did any of them go on to higher education? Do they all have high school educations?
- A. No. Our family doesn't have any college graduates. There was a . . . that didn't happen until all of our children were. . . were born. But every one of our nieces and nephews is a college graduate.
- Q. Did your parents own that home on Merrimac?
- A. Yea, yea.
- Q. Did they own the home earlier on Kelly Street?
- A. No, no. That was. . . that was owned by a . . . don't know who he was. He was . . . we used to call him Mr. Haim. Haim was a close member of the family or a friend. And he owned the home on Kelly, which had a lot of people. In those days they had boarders and awful lot of people.
- Q. Did your parents stay in the house until they died, or. . . ?
- A. On Merrimac? No. No, on Merrimac Street. . . let's see now. I don't know when they moved. They moved to . . . to Brighton and my sister bought one house

A. (Continued) and my . . . my . . . my married sister bought a house in Brighton and my older sister, who wasn't married, and my mother bought a house next door to them. And I don't know just what year it was. And they . . . and my oldest sister and my mother lived together. . . my mother died when she was about 80 years old. We made kind of a vow that we'd never have Ma in the old home, and we kept it, you know, she never wanted. . .

Q. Your father died sometime. . . ?

A. Yea. My father died when we lived on Merrimac Street. He died, oh, thirty, forty years ago. I think he was in the early sixties or so. Both my father had a heart attack in the morning, he died that afternoon while I was in the Army. I was at Camp Krouter. My mother lived to be 88 and she died about the same time, six in the morning and passed away in the afternoon, which was always their wish was to go fast, you know, and not have to suffer. But, I . . . I got. . . I used to question the . . . matter of fact when we lived on Merrimac Street and then I got married, then we went to Bow Street then we moved on Shepard off of Monroe Avenue. And the first Yom Kippur year I used to walk from Shepard Street to Rhine Street, which is you know quite a walk. And walk back. And I used to fast every Yom Kippur and all sorts of things. But then I have a very rich cousins of ours who lived in Canandaigua, they used to ride in every Yom Kippur and Rosh Hashanah and park their car on the corner and walk down the street. And they did it for years. I used to question, you know, if God is what they're telling me what he is and he's punishing you for riding in. . . why is he punishing all these people who are doing all this riding and everything and then the hypocrisy of it all. And I began to question. So I found that the next year, you know, I . . . I take the car and I'd drive down Shepard Street to Rhine Street, park it on Hudson Avenue, go to shul and davad, and I wasn't stricken dead at all, so

- A. (Continued) I figured, you know, there's something about this. So I got curious about it all and found out that most of my life what I studied, I studied Hebrew and I never knew what. . . I never knew what I was saying. I just recited Hebrew words. And finally years later when we joined the Temple Beth El and I got the Hebrew and the English next to it, I started reading the English. After a while I was sorry that I read the English, I wished I could have just retained the Hebrew and remembered that 'cause the mystery was unraveled for me. I was so disappointed in the fact that some of these prayers sounded like Catholic prayers or Protestant prayers or anybody else's prayers. God, our Father. . . And I decided I'd . . . the magic of it has all been taken away from me.
- Q. But you've remained a practicing Jew all these years, haven't you?
- A. What do you mean by practicing Jew?
- Q. Well, I just. . . do you still belong to shul?
- A. No. I don't.
- Q. Do you attend services on holidays?
- A. No.
- Q. So, well, you've sort of seen a decline in religious piety in your own life then?
- A. Oh, yea, I. . . I. . . I have, you know, I have great respect for, you know, the Jewish faith and the background and I'm curious about it. I read. . . I . . . I read as much as I can about it. I keep informed about it. I look at it as a history of a people who have gone through various phases of a life, who have sacrificed and given of themselves for their ideals and their beliefs. But I also recognize the fact that other faiths have done similar things. So I have an open mind about it. I mean I have. . . I mean if it came to a . . . I mean if it came to a showdown where everybody would have

A. (Continued) to be counted, I would certainly be proud to say I'm a Jew, you know, I'd never leave the faith that way. But I got turned off by. . . course my son was Bar Mitzvahed and my daughter I gave her a choice, you know, she said no so I said OK. I think my son's was the fact that he's named after my father so I think emotionally I had this wish that he should go through the. . . so he went through school till he was 13 years old. They had Rabbi Karp as a matter of fact. And he didn't. . . and the. . . and then he did some post work after he was 13 and then he began to really enjoy it 'cause he had Rabbi Karp and the history of Jews was so fascinating that he became. . . he said, man I wish I'd known all about this years ago. He said, you know, why did they wait until you're. . . after you're 13 about what it's all about, you know, they string you along and all of a sudden they say well really forget what we taught you and now we're gonna teach you something else that has to do with something else, and the whole logic. And being a history buff, such as he was, and he loved it he became very upset about it. And in college he followed through also. And I'm excited about it, you know, it's a beautiful story and . . . and I look at religion as a respect for those people who've made it possible for you and I to be here today and talk about it. But when you're called up in front of a group of so-called rich men of the community as I was, they tell you how much you should give per year to be a member, and I have to stand up there and bow my head and say I'm sorry I'm a failure, I'm an artist, I don't care about money, I care about making beauty. I'd rather stay home and read poetry and I'd rather do these things. And I'm being penalized for not being a businessman and I can't afford to pay your dues. So they got pretty mad at me and said, you know, this is what it costs. And I really couldn't afford it. And if I couldn't afford it I'd be happy to be a member, matter of fact it'd be nice to be a member. . .

Q. Was this at Beth El?

A. Beth El, yea. And they just turned me off. And they weren't sure the rabbis, and being a photographer years ago I used to do a lot of weddings. And I used to get behind the scenes of seeing how the rabbi and the cantors work and they want their money on the line before they do a service and all that. That turned me off. And I figured, you know, they're makin' damn good money and they're gonna get paid for the wedding. Why not wait for after the service, you know, no one's gonna try to cheat them. But they're. . . they were so mercenary about the all-American dollar that I couldn't equate that with their faith.

Q. Let's go back. Do you remember. . . your father, was he a member of the Masoner's Union or . . . I don't know if there was such a thing. . .?

A. Yea, yea. There was one, yea.

Q. Was he an active union . . .?

A. No, my father was a very. . . he was delightfully passive guy. He was a. . . matter of fact, we had a uncle who was very active in the Arbeiter Ring, which was the Workmen's Circle, which was pro-Communist at that time.

Q. Well, I think it was Socialist, but. . .

A. Well, maybe it was Socialist, but we used to . . . my folks and my other uncles and aunts used to laugh and he'd say, well, you know, here comes the Communist. So. . .

Q. Your father. . .

A. My father wasn't that at all, no.

Q. He didn't belong to Workmen's Circle or. . .?

A. No, he belonged to a. . . well he might have belonged to Workmen's Circle, as a matter of fact, to save money so he'd have a grave I guess was one reason. That's one reason. . . that's one reason among a lot of others to belong to a

A. (Continued) shul is to get a grave plot.

Q. Were they buried out on the . . . the Britten Road. . . ?

A. Britten Road, right.

Q. Both your parents were?

A. Both my parents, yea, yea. Rhine Street Shul Cemetery. My father was a very religious Jew who would not work on Fridays or Saturdays; therefore, lot of jobs that were available for him to work he wouldn't take. And he. . . and he went to shul or prayed every morning and night no matter what, and we had to wait until the sun sets during the summers to have late suppers. We always had to wait for him. There was no eating before so we could get out of the house early on a summer night when the sun sets a little bit late and all the kids are out playing.

Q. Were your parents ever active in Zionist activities?

A. No.

Q. A lot of people told me, I forget what the little cans are called, but they had little cans in their homes put a penny in. . . ?

A. Oh, yea, yea.

Q. Someone would come around and collect it?

A. Yea, yea. We used to have. . . have those little. . . I don't know who they were for.

Q. I think it bought tools for workers in Palestine.

A. Yea, some. . . they come every once in a while pick up the cans.

Q. Can you remember what those were called?

A. I don't remember.

Q. Slipped my mind.

A. I can find out. In Rochester . . . Tillie is the. . . there's . . . is probably the most informed member of the family in terms of what. . . what

- A. (Continued) a fan. . . she's the brilliant . . . she's the most brilliant of our family. She's the one that really should have gone to college. And she is religious, more religious than my father was I think today. She married a man that's very religious also. As long as she enjoys it and is happy, that's all that matters, you know.
- Q. You . . . you graduated high school in. . . when was it 1930, 1931?
- A. High school? About '31, yea.
- Q. So that was really the pit of the Depression?
- A. Yea right. I. . . I graduated. . . I went to Edison Technical High School, right. I've always had a job I've never been out of work in my life.
- Q. And you found a job right after leaving high school?
- A. I worked right during high school, before. . . doing photography.
- Q. When. . . when did you first learn photography?
- A. Well photography was a . . . there was a man lived across the street from me, he was the violinist for the Philharmonic Orchestra, his hobby was photography. And he. . .he asked me one day to, you know, if I would go with him to the U. of R. which was just being built in his Model-T Ford and help him carry his camera. He was a sick, he was very sick. So I said sure. So I went with him in his Model-T Ford to the U. of R. with a big 8 X 10 camera case. And he set it up so I could look through the ground glass. And there was the U. of R. and the Rush Reese Library and the original campus. And I was struck by the fact that all this piece of glass in front, put a cloth over your head and you looked through the ground glass and you see in reverse, you know, what was going on. And at Edison Technical High School for a year in 1930 and '31, probably much more advanced than schools are today. It was a vocational training school where you went to school in the morning, in the afternoon you worked for somebody. So, a lot of the heads of industry and

- A. (Continued) establishments in Rochester today were formerly Edison Tech men who, you know, the man force. Like one of the highest Jewish employees at RG&E is an Edison Tech guy who learned drafting of sheet metal. He became a contractor and went into business for himself, firm in the city, printing houses vice presidents are former members of Edison Technical High School. All of our class.
- Q. So. . .
- A. And I took up lithography at Edison Tech. And I fell in love with. . . I fell in love with photography because it. . . it enabled me to continue my silence. I didn't have to talk or see people. And the learning of how to develop film and print was always loner work, it's you. And the idea of buying chemicals and mixing them up and seeing a print come up, and it verified a lot of my imagination. I was very fortunate I found it.
- Q. When did you first get a camera?
- A. Well, you know that's very interesting. For the first ten years of my photographic career I was a dark room employee. I never took a picture. I was just satisfied to come in and print and develop film. And it wasn't till the man who taught me photography died, when I got out of the service I came back and he died about a year after that. And that was the first time that I. . . I was. . . I was forced to take pictures in order to survive. I didn't have that need to use the camera. I'm a very slow learner. I always. . . it's like 63 I think I'm beginning to discover just a little bit about maybe what life is all about, you know?
- Q. Who did you work for when you attended Edison Tech? Who did you work for in the afternoons?
- A. Oh, his name was Joe Schiff. He was a. . . he was a great guy. He was . . .
- Q. He was a photographer himself?

A. He was an amateur photographer who, as I said before, played in the Rochester. . .

Q. That's right.

A. Philharmonic Orchestra. He graduated East High School. He was born in Russia. His father was a carpenter. And he . . . there's a very close kinship between musicians and photographers. There are lots of photographers who are interested and vice versa. Some day somebody should do a study on musicians. They are very close. And he . . . he . . . we did it by trial and error, you know. He'd go to the camera store and buy a book and I'd read about, you know, page 1, open up film box and, you know, partly darken room. You opened it up. Then it says, you know, insert the glossy side of the paper, put the negative in the enlarger and expose it, wait for it for a minute and a half, if it comes up too soon you give it a less exposure. And slowly by just doing it and keeping, you know, track. It also introduced me to mathematics which I hated, which I found a great love for. And introduced me to chemistry 'cause we had to weigh chemicals and get in grams and scales. And by the time I was through high school I wished I could have gone back to school and start all over again because now for the first time in my life I realized why the importance of math and English, so you could read and understand. And all that, but I never got that when I was in school, it was a hassle all. . .

Q. This Mr. Schiff had his own dark room?

A. Yea, matter of fact he started a studio on . . . oh, it was down 154 East Avenue, right on the corner here which is a parking lot now. And playing in the Philharmonic meant that he was . . . in the morning he had rehearsals. He had all afternoon off. And I had afternoons off. And a man by the name of Mr. Sprague who was a teacher at Edison Tech High, Mr. Bennett were introduced to me by my case history. And I used to run away from school. . . I used to skip school anytime there was an English exam or an oral exam where I had to

- A. (Continued) get up and talk, I couldn't make it. So I used to run away and not go to school. So for a period of three months I used to run away. And come. . . come to his studio, just hang around where I was safe. But truant officers after a while caught on, so they used to come for me. And I got another beating, you know. So, the more beatings I got the more I stayed away. . . I stayed away once for a period of three months.
- Q. When you graduated from high school where did you go to work then?
- A. For him. He was the only man that I ever worked for. I worked for Joe Schiff when I was sixteen years old.
- Q. Till. . .?
- A. Till I was probably 31 or 32 years old when he died.
- Q. So you didn't. . .?
- A. Then I bought his studio from the estate, and this in essence is the same.
- Q. So your family didn't have the same amount of problems that other families did during the Depression? Is that an accurate. . .?
- A. Yea, because I was working as, you know, making eight, nine dollars a week. You know, . . . my sister Nora at that time was working downtown as a bookkeeper. My brother was working in a grocery store. We didn't feel it. I was. . . I used to . . . I used to . . . I used to walk home for lunch everyday, you know, because from Main and. . . from East Avenue and Scio, we lived on Merrimac Street and it used to take about 15, 20 minutes to walk home. We never really felt it, you know. It wasn't anymore than what we didn't have before, you know. Yea, yea, yea.
- Q. I believe you said you got married when you were 28?
- A. Twenty-eight, 28 yea.
- Q. So that was in 1941?
- A. '41, '42, yea.

Q. And is that your wife. . .

A. Right. yea.

Q. Only married once?

A. Yea.

Q. And did you move out of the home on Merrimac Street then?

A. Yea, I moved out of . . . well I got married and we. . . we then . . . we moved on a little place on Avenue D, I think I was married about six, seven months when I was drafted.

Q. That was 1942?

A. Yea. Got in the service for a couple years.

Q. You were in the Army?

A. Army, yea.

Q. And were you overseas?

A. Yea, went overseas to. . . I was a. . . I was a topsecret map photographer for General Bradley's 12th Army Group Headquarters. I photographed the order of battle maps. And I had an easy job. I didn't. . . never. . . I don't think I heard a shot fired or ever saw any wounded or anything like that. I was never out at the front. I was always. . . we were very well protected, the 12th Army Group. We had an infantry company that protected us.

Q. So that was. . . was North Africa or. . . ?

A. No, no, landed in Omaha Beach and went to live in the Palace of Versailles for a while. Then we went to Verdonne in the barracks of Verdonne. Then went into a beautiful home in Wiesbaden. And then we came back to Fort Benning, Georgia about two months after the atomic bomb was dropped on Japan. Yea, I was. . . I was in England, France, Belgium, Germany. And I surveyed it through my . . . I tried to understand it as to why all of the things were going on. I was introduced to the Prophet when I was in Europe. You know,

A. (Continued) they. . . they had a lot of books for us. The Prophet was a little paperbacked book and I. . . I always loved to read, you know, that was my escape. I didn't understand a lot of things I was reading but I just loved to read. I thought any man who'd devote or woman who'd devote their lives to doing a study on anything and you can pick it up for 75¢ or 30¢ or whatever it was then in those days or bought and it was bound in pages and you could put it in your pocket and walk around with it and take advantage of all that study and knowledge. You know, I don't think you can beat books. And so that's about it. And still do. We have about 1000 books home.

END OF TAPE I, SIDE A

Interview I
Tape I
Side B

- A. Yea, then I came back on Lincoln Street, then we moved to Bow Street. Billy was born on Bow Street. Then we moved on Kemper Street, which we've been there ever since.
- Q. You own your home now?
- A. Yea. Yea.
- Q. And what year did you take over and buy the business from Mr. Schiff?
- A. Well, maybe in '45 somewhere around there, '46. I bought the business from the estate, which was very. . . a minimal amount of money in those days. And went in a whole world I never was trained for or brought up for, no one prepared me for, I just didn't know what. . . I didn't know anything about keeping books or tax structures or Social Security, unemployment and competing with landlords. Had to have a lawyer for a lease and all that. Just all foreign to me. And I didn't understand why. . . here I was thirty. . . thirty-four, thirty-five years old. I was so ill-prepared for what I was going to do. But my motivation and my love to my concern about photography is so great and it still is that I decided well to hell with all that, I can take good pictures. And, you know, I will do it that way, somehow all the rest will fall into shape. And that's what happened. I just. . . by. . . by not falling. . . by not letting myself fall into the trap of corporate world and by keeping my independence and by not going along with the crowd and not hiring the accountant, the lawyer and all that jazz. Just, you know, putting in sixteen hours a day for seven days a week for ten years, just doing it.
- Q. Has this been pretty much a one-man business?
- A. Yea, oh yea.

Q. Have you handled all end of it?

A. Yea.

Q. Never hired a bookkeeper or. . . ?

A. My wife takes care of all the books and departments and things like that.

And once in a while when we get in a jam I just hire an R.I.T. student.

Q. But primarily it's a one-man business.

Q. You take the pictures, you develop the pictures. . .

A. I take 'em and I contact the people. I go up to see 'em about the assignment.

I. . . I take 'em. I come back, develop the print, spot 'em, whatever needs to be done, then I deliver 'em. All for. . .

Q. What's the bulk of business consist of? Is it largely weddings or. . . ?

A. Oh, no. I don't do any weddings at all. Isn't any of that. I used to years ago.

Q. Yea, you mentioned that.

A. Huh?

Q. You mentioned having done them before.

A. I used to do weddings and Bar Mitzvahs and. . . oh, I did 'em for I think probably the first ten years. There was a time when after a while a year or so after I bought the . . . I bought the estate I had a man by the name of Len Rosenberg who also was a photographer. And he was a photographer in the Army in the Pacific area. And I went over . . . his studio was across the street. I went over across the street and went over to introduce myself to welcome him to the East Avenue photographers association, as we laughingly called ourselves, just the two of us. And I saw his work and I was intrigued by it. I suggested why don't we both starve together rather than individually. So he and I became partners. We were called known as Lou-Len's Studio for many years. And then he did the very fine. . . he still is a very fine

A. (Continued) photographer. He does illustrative photography, which I didn't have an eye for. And I do weddings and Bar Mitzvahs. And I enjoyed it. I . . . I enjoyed the challenge at first. But after a while it bored me to the point that I wasn't achieving my . . . wasn't achieving my visual goals. And I had something else in mind about what photography was all about. And then in working with managers and weddings are not the happiest days for the brides and grooms at all. It's a . . . it's really . . . got to be another way of getting married besides having all the big stuff that goes on. We ought to . . . cause it brings out the worst in people. And any man or . . . who goes to a wedding and marries the girl must really love her to take all the crap that goes on between families. And the disappointments of mothers and fathers as to who the girl's marrying and it wasn't their dream and vice versa. And the individual attitudes were things . . . and I . . . that motorcycle. . .

(Note: For the last few minutes of tape someone has been revving a motorcycle in the background which is becoming very loud at this point.) So after a while when I felt a little bit more secure about . . . about who I was, and as the children got older I decided to take a chance and quit all that world. And . . .

VOICE. I'll be back.

A. OK. And give up the weddings and all that and go into what I wanted to do ever since I could remember was be a photojournalist or a documentary photographer. And all the time I was doing it, I was documenting Joseph Avenue and taking pictures of the Big Shul and the Jewish lives, the old home that was going on, the morning services and children there to take a glass of Schnappes for the first time. And I documented through 20 years the inner City of Rochester, the negro. . . and I did a whole bunch of photographs of . . . of the way of life that really . . . that nobody cared about. And there

- A. (Continued) wasn't anybody. . . nobody around paid you for love. And I wanted to get paid for something that I loved to do and that doesn't work. And that's one of the frustrations, the fact that there. . . there's always enough money if you want to go out and photograph a bunch of people screaming and beating up each other, but there isn't a penny for going out and doing a lot of things that I wanted to do. So I documented the Al Segal Center and handicapped children and palsy and all the world. And . . .
- Q. This was. . . this was all on your own?
- A. All on my own.
- Q. Not an assignment?
- A. No, oh no. Nobody would give me an assignment for that. I did the. . . all . . . all on my own. At the same time I decided to do all the. . . like everytime Arthur Rubenstein would come here or Metropolis or dance people I would just do it all on my own. And I would . . . I would have assignments from various magazines. At that time I got an agent from New York City, those were the days before Life and Look folded so there was enough money around for a man like me in this area, 'cause I was the only one, who would furnish these pictures for Newsweek or Time or Business Week.
- Q. What was that just. . . ?
- A. Woman's Day . . . well a lot of different assignments.
- Q. Upstate New York . . . or. . . ?
- A. No, all over the world because. . . because I had by then . . . see the. . . out of the. . . out of these photographs of the Palsy Center and the things that I did just for free there was a book called These Are Our Children published and written by Pearl S. Buck, of which I have eight photographs in there. When that book came out with my name in it I had attained national reputation among agents who were looking for. . . for. . . and them to buy

A. (Continued) in this area, and I did a lot of assignments for industries, Fortune Magazine, for New York Times, I still do them.

Q. Were these mainly of children?

A. No, no these were . . . these were photographs of . . . well, if . . . how will I say it? Well, if a . . . see the world of photojournalism . . . it's very hard to explain. It's be like . . . well, I'll be like, you know, what I'm still doing. There's a . . . a man by the name of Dubrin at R.I.T. who's written a book on bringing up children. Woman's Day is going to be doing a story on him. So the agent calls me up and says spend a day on Dubrin, take pictures of him in his environment. And who is this man, so we can use it as a photospread in Woman's Day. Or go to Buffalo and do a story on the women's program that they have sponsored by the Public Broadcasting of a woman's show. They want a color spread for some pages for T.V. Guide. Or I do record jackets for musicians. Or I do a whole bunch of. . . or when Xerox was first built in Webster I spent about six months doing a photo story on the first building of Xerox which they used for a brochure. Then used them in annual reports, a lot of those. And recruitment brochures where you . . . where you go into a company and you spend about, you know, two, three weeks photographing young college graduates who've been there for a year or so and find out who they are from their environment and how they move and how they accept or reject. What I'm saying is you isolate and find out if there's something about the person that gnaws you or something about a person that excites you, you start taking photographs, which they like in college recruitment brochures. The company's going to the college, use these things. It's all P.R., you know. And all in that area. Like I do . . . I do a lot of work for the . . . the Eastman School, like their program development, all those figures there are all mine, you know. And

- A. (Continued) these things are all mine.
- Q. Right.
- A. You know, like the quartet, Bernie Schneider. And you try to approach it from another point of view. And that goes on and on.
- Q. What are some of the magazines that you've had photos published in?
- A. Oh, God, I've had 'em in . . . oh, I have 'em in Newsweek, Time, Life, Look, Businessweek, Woman's Day, T.V. Guide, Russian Magazine, U.S.I.A. in Washington, I did work for them. They call up and they'll have a . . . a Spanish-speaking program at the U. of R. or they want to, you know, show a foreign student's life in America, yea things like that. I've been published all over the . . .
- Q. And you mentioned that one book by Pearl Buck.
- A. Yea.
- Q. Are there other books that . . .?
- A. No, well you mean the . . . other books?
- Q. Other books that you've been published in?
- A. No. These are our chosen one. I have my pictures in the . . . in a lot of books, yea. Like Ford at the U. of R., the English professor, just made a present of some speciality. He had something special. He wished a book published in England which uses my pictures. I have in magazines. They're just all over. I don't, you know, they're . . . they're all up on the shelf there. I've done . . . I've done things for . . .
- Q. Get a better idea. . .
- A. Like . . . yea, here's one for the Huckstein Music School.
- Q. I see.
- A. And this is . . . this is one called . . . here's one for Kodak. It . . . it's a commercial camera and it's a . . . and it's a thing you see, here it says how to cover. . . and it goes on and on. And I'm primarily what they call a

- A. (Continued) . . . an idea man for other photographers. Like, for instance, this is. . . this is a trade here sent out to photographers and they will then copy a style and say gee there's no reason why I have to photograph the man at the podium, maybe I can get him as he's talking to somebody else, you know.
- Q. Do you see. . . do you do any business of any portraits or anything like that?
- A. Yea. I do a lot of. . . matter of fact I was originally . . . I was trained. . . I was originally trained as a portrait photographer. Joe Schiff himself never did anything that I'm doing now, you know, he was basically a portrait photographer, a very fine one. We used to. . . we used to work. . . we used to work for the United States Naval Academy for many years. We did Wells College in Orouke and Gaucher College in Baltimore. We worked for St. Lawrence College up in Canton, U. of R. yearbooks and like that. I got my basic training in . . . where. . . where you had to do group pictures and Presidents of college and architectural. . .
- Q. Do you think that shaped your approach and other things like that?
- A. Oh, absolutely, yea, yea. Yea, because the . . . see the fact that I. . . the fact that I only had a high school education, not apologizing for it at all, but I would have if you had talked to me twenty years ago, but I'm passed that. I made it between that point. . . all the insecurities not having a college degree, you know, was wiped out for me by a beautiful woman who was the Dean at Keuka College, forgot her name, but we were talking about, you know, you know I always felt insecure about that. She says next time anybody asks what college you graduated from tell 'em you haven't got around to it yet. And the minute she said that she cleared it for me, you know. God she's right.
- Q. So, it sounds like you have quite a record of, well, the features of this

- Q. (Continued) study of the Rochester Jewish community if you've been taking all those photos of the Joseph Avenue area.
- A. Yea, I've done it against the wishes of the Rochester community though. They don't. . . they don't. . . the . . . yea, like I have a . . . I was on an assignment doing an assignment for a player company once and it. . .and. . . and when I have assignments like that or I've done a lot of assignments for the police department, so I get hooked in on the fire calls or police calls. You know, one morning at about five o'clock the phone rang the fire department dispatcher says I think we got what you're lookin' for, we got a big fire on Meigs Street and Park Avenue. And I went down. It was the Temple Beth El burning up. And boy I had a hard time figuring out do I take pictures or what do I do with this thing. I finally took some pictures but then Cantor Rosenbaum and Rabbi Karp finally came up about a half hour later and Cantor Rosenbaum and I went in to the burning building of the temple and he took a Torah out and I took a Torah out. We both rescued them as the firemen were putting water all over and around us. As soon as we got out the thing caved right in. And it was a . . . it was a kind of a strange moment 'cause here Cantor and I were heros cause the newspaper guys came in, they had front page, you know, and the whole bit. And I had then asked permission to take pictures of parade that was gonna happen from there to the new lot and nobody would give me permission to take pictures. I don't understand these people, even today I don't understand them. I don't understand . . . and it's probably exposes my immaturity, I don't understand people who I know from my downtown experiences of 35 years who I do very little work for any Jewish person. I. . . I. . . I'm . . . I probably have a prejudice against it or something. But I can't understand why the. . . I would go into a synagogue and sit there and I'd look around at these people who are davading and praying

- A. (Continued) twice as hard as everybody else and saying to myself, why the dirty son-of-a-bitch, you know, he owns a house in the inner city and his wife ate off negroes and he's milking these people and taking advantage of all these and here he is being called up to the dais, he's leading citizen and giving more money than anybody else. And people would cowtow and bow to him, you know, play up to him. Then he'd go back to his office and . . . and just, you know, rip people apart and just ruin lives and there's no compassion there. I couldn't equate it. And I can't put it together. So I'm not saying all of them, but there's a few of 'em. There are more beautiful than there are bastards, but . . . but I . . . I . . . I . . . I guess he's entitled to his praying moments but they have nothing to do with his business moments. And I was hoping that sometime in our lives, you know, we could spill over into some compassion shown between nine to five that you show when you're praying. And this holds true for all the faiths.
- Q. Have your pictures of the Jewish community been published? Just the studies you've done on Joseph. . .
- A. Nope.
- Q. . . . Avenue?
- A. No. No.
- Q. Do you have 'em here?
- A. I have 'em. I have pictures of Golda Meir before she was the Ambassador to Russia when she came here to talk, I was a young man. And Elmer Louis, the original . . . the old Jewish Home before. . . I have 'em. I have 'em all over. I have . . . label some of 'em.
- Q. I see.
- A. Now that's the old Rhine Street Synagogue. This is. . . this is the Big Shul. This is the last Yom Kippur Service in the Big Shul.

Q. This one here?

A. Yea. This one. This is probably the most historic picture that I've ever taken. This is the last . . . I don't know how many. . . how many of these people are even alive today, but this is the last. . . this is the . . . where the Shofar is blown and they're all through and they stop and they just start to talk to each other. And these are old pictures taken in the Rhine Street of a morning prayer service.

Q. Have you ever done a showing of these?

A. No.

Q. Have you ever thought of. . . ?

A. No.

Q. 'Cause I think it's a really valuable record.

A. This is Rabbi Bernstein and this is Garson Meyer and this is Rabbi Goldin, who is the rabbi that married us. And this is Rudin, he was probably four years old. And here we have Rabbi Rosenberg, Vice-President Barclay, Golda Meir, the Mayor of Rochester. And this is just pictures of the old home. Keating and . . . and here's the original Jewish old home. This is a Seder. This is the old home. This is a building of something. I don't know exactly what. Rabbi Eaton and Rabbi Bernstein and Lowenthal. Yea, this, you know, this is . . . Irving Norry and . . . they're all . . . and the . . . the . . .

Q. This is nice.

A. Yea.

Q. Of the old home again?

A. Old home, yea. This is the. . . this is the Big Shul on Hanover and Baden Streets. And this is the Rhine Street Synagogue. This is the downstairs. And this is what happened during the. . . after the riots during the. . . they . . . they set 'em on fire. These are the burnt pictures of the shuls on

A. (Continued) Hanover Street.

Q. Oh, I didn't know that any were destroyed.

A. Yea. Yea, yea, they destroyed 'em all by . . . by . . . and this is one here where they put a lock on it, chained it closed. These are the old washing of the hands before you eat a Passover. . .this is the . . . this is the fire at Temple Beth El. I have a lot more. I mean, this is just, you know. . .

Q. Would you. . . if someone was to do a book would you consider making some of these available?

A. I don't think anybody would do it.

Q. Anybody would do. . .? A book? Or anybody would. . .?

A. I don't think anybody would use these pictures.

Q. I think some of them. . .

A. Huh?

Q. I think some of them. . .

A. Well, I don't know. I've had sad experiences about. . . because I have. . . I volunteered years ago to, you know, have one-man shows and use the United Community Fund and all these people. I don't communicate with 'em at all. They couldn't care less. I went to a. . . Israel in '67 and I wanted to get some background as to what, you know, what Israel is all about. And I talked to Rabbi Karp, beautiful person, about the only true guy I ever met in the rabbinical world. And he was very helpful. Then I went to Bernstein to try to, you know, get some background . . . he was very, you know, just turned off by it all. I found out later that he was going to Israel and take his own pictures and Kodak gave him a big T.V. show. And he was turned off by the fact that I was going, so I got no help. I'm not competing with Bernstein, you know, I mean he's a rabbi and I'm a photographer, you know. And this, you know . . . but I found jealousies on the. . . and the in-fighting, you know, I. . .

- A. (Continued) I just can't take that. And I just bug off.
- Q. Well Rabbi Karp asked me specifically to ask you about the photographs because. . .
- A. And I have lots more because I've spent, you know, and . . .
- Q. It is a valuable record.
- A. And I would . . . you know, like I have a record of twenty years of the way of life in Rochester between the whites and the negroes and I have a record of the Eastman School of 35 years. Martha Graham when she was a young dancer and Fritz Chrysler, Metkopolis, Morturis, Travinsky, the whole bit. And I always kid around tell my attorney how when I die burn 'em because . . . I used to talk to Elmer Louis about this for years and I got nowhere. And I don't understand why. I just can't. . .I've never been able to pinpoint it. Maybe because I don't belong to any synagogue or I don't give money to the United Jewish Appeal or. . .I'm just, you know. . .
- Q. Yea.
- A. I have no idea why. But, I wish somebody would explain it to me someday.
- Q. Well I have a few more questions I'd like to go through.
- A. Right.
- Q. You. . . you are not. . . you don't. . . you don't belong to any Jewish community organizations?
- A. No, not at all.
- Q. Did you ever. . .?
- A. Well outside of Young Judea when I was a youngster I belonged to the Temple Beth El for many years, 'cause my kid went there for a period of Bar Mitzvah time and I was. . . I felt foreign when I went there. I felt unwelcome. I felt I was from another world. I couldn't adjust to the . . . I felt the people were cold. They were more concerned with the social status and . . . I used to have a game, the fact that I was one of the few cars that turned

- A. (Continued) left going out of the parking lot, all the rest turned right. I don't know if you know the traffic pattern. . . ?
- Q. No, but I see what. . . see what you're saying.
- A. And . . . and maybe it's me. I mean, you know, I'd be the first to have someone tell me, but no. . . you know. And I used to try and go to meetings and things, but I used to look at the. . . at the big man here, the big man here and very articulate and . . . and very aggressive and they're over-achievers and they're . . . and they talk about just coming back from Bermuda or coming back from here or there. And here I'm knocking myself out, whatever money that I made I poured back into assuring a way of life 'cause I believed in it. And all I asked was for the same respect that I was giving them. And I never got it. And I still don't have it. So I'm probably the patsy of the inner city. I'm probably the sucker who's believed and. . . in compassion and honesty and trying to be good. I never was impressed by the bank balance or the bottom line. I was never impressed by the guy that. . . I was more impressed by the individual. And I accept or reject 'em on a one-to-one basis. So I. . . I can't go along, you know. So there's no doubt there's something about me that is wrong. And I'm. . . I can't figure it out because I'd like to know, you know.
- Q. You said that you went to Israel in '67?
- A. Right.
- Q. Was that your first visit?
- A. Yea.
- Q. Have you been back since?
- A. No, I haven't been back since. I'd love to go back.
- Q. Why don't you tell me a little more about this. . . the '67 visit.
- A. Yea. The. . . there's a man by the name of Father Henry Atwell who, in my

- A. (Continued) opinion, is probably gonna go down in local circles as the. . . as the sage of the Catholic faith. He's a beautiful person.
- Q. He's a priest at one of the churches here?
- A. Yea, he. . . he was the Editor of Catholic Courier and for years. The Catholic Courier still is published and printed over here on Scio Street, right around the corner from the studio. And by walking back and forth as we had for twenty years we got to see each other, got to know each other. And we found out that we had a lot in common, like, if you know he was fighting the. . . fighting the Bishop, fighting the Pope. And I wasn't fighting anybody 'cause I couldn't afford to fight anybody, I was just thinking. And you're penalized if you think the wrong way. So, . . . so he . . . he was very active in ecumenical movement here in Rochester. He and I thought it'd be nice to see if we can get the Catholic and Jewish together just to say hello, how are you, you know. So I brought him to his first Yom Kippur service at Temple Beth El, which was an event I'll never forget because I guess we got more stares there that night than the demi-God, you know, and we get a question, you know, who was God, you know. We kept looking at each other breaking up. And through the years he's been very active and he's. . . he's a very close friend of . . . of Karp and. . . and he's still very active in ecumenical. And we had a wild idea of having the Catholic Diocese send him and I to Israel at the end of the Six Day War to document the way of life that exists. It was the first time since 70 A.D. that the Jews had Old Jerusalem. And the Dome of the Rock had never been visited by Jews in 2000 years. So he thinks I'm the first Jew that ever went in the Dome of the Rock. We were there the. . . the first day at the end of the war. And we went under the auspices of the State Department 'cause we couldn't get in any other way. And we did a documentary on the three days, the Friday for the . . . see the Holy Days.

- A. (Continued) The Friday was the Moslems, I guess, Saturday the Jews and Sunday the Christian faiths. And we also, of course, fascinated by what happened to these people alone. So for. . . so for that week, that weekend, I have about 1000 slides showing members of the. . . of each faith and their families, the kids holding hands with their parents. They were all dressed up like they all took baths and put a best clothes on to make the best impressions for each other 'cause they wanted this peace to work, they really. . . I mean I'm convinced of, you know, the people are OK, the government gets in the way.
- Q. I remember some. . . some photographs in, I think it was in Life, taken at the Wailing Wall.
- A. Yea.
- Q. Some Israeli soldiers who when they first got. . .
- A. Right.
- Q. You were there right at that period?
- A. Yea, yea, yea. Then we. . . well we were there when the war ended. Like the first day that the Yaffa Gate was opened up 'cause we had to wait for our. . . for our car. But a bulldozer that, you know. . . you know, they get some of the rocks and cement out of the way so we could go in. And the idea of . . . of making it happen like that. And my mother had passed away about four months before I went, so I was stopping at every shul along the way to say kodosh. And Father would go with me, so you can imagine a priest coming into a little shul in Jerusalem, and he's very well informed, he knows the. . . a lot of the Hebrew. And so when we got back the Catholic Courier here was the first Catholic newspaper in the United States that had a full-page story about the end of the war, color pictures.
- Q. This must have been very quickly organized if you. . .?
- A. It was, yea, absolutely. As a matter of fact I think the whole thing was. . .

A. (Continued) we had lunch at the Town and Country one day and I think we left four days afterwards. We got our passports and visas directly from Horton's office who called up the State Department, and we got 'em. The special delivery came from Boston. And we were off. Yea, it was a . . . like, you know, Helen and I still talk about it, like four or five days and we were gone.

Q. So you arrived there on the day the war ended?

A. Yea. And we were there for a week. And we came back. Kodak had kept a shop open Saturday morning for us to develop all the transparencies, of which we worked all the Saturday night. Father and I edited it and we gave them to the Catholic Courier had photographs. The Times Union picked up some of the pictures, the Philadelphia Jewish papers picked 'em up and they went all over the country. And we . . . we spent time in a kibbutz. We went to the Holy Sepulchre Church and on the roof. Very few photographers have the chance to photograph the Catholic way of life, Russian Orthodox, they all had little rooms at the top of the church. And visited and saw the artist that makes the crosses and he in turn went into the synagogue and King David Tomb and . . . And then when I came back to Rochester I was criticized for leading Jews for going to Israel with a Catholic priest. How can you . . . especially if I . . . I stayed at the Terro Sotta, which is Franciscan monks monastery for six nights. In fact, I knew I was gonna be there so I bought a box of White Owls and took 'em with me and gave it to the guys there and I . . . everytime I think of Israel as far as I'm talking about . . . I see him at least once a week, very close. We break up the fact that we'd make a hell of a commercial. You see all of the Franciscans sitting around this huge table and they're all smoking cigars. . .

Q. White Owls, yea.

A. And we broke up because that's what we did. And it was a . . . it was . . . and I had come back and thought . . . so Father and I gave some talks for . . . and some of the Jewish groups like Hadassah . . . and I made a statement that, you know, I have heard so much about the Wall ever since I was a kid from my father and heard about it, finally got there. I looked at it and I couldn't cry and I couldn't identify with the Wall at all. But when I went to the . . . the . . . the place where they have the memorial for the seven million Jews in Germany, well that's when I broke down because I was in Germany and I . . . I had seen, I have photographs at home of the ovens and the prisons which I got being an Army photographer, which strange as it may seem nobody wants to see. And I broke down there and I was criticized by the . . . by the Jewish community for not saying that I wasn't moved by the Wall. How can you be a Jew and not be moved by the Wall? And things like that happen to me all the time. But I . . . I was . . . I was hoping that . . . to have a kind of a one-man show of the . . . of Old Jerusalem and the Jews and Mayor Sharim and all the things that I did while I was there just to show a way of life in Israel. But they wouldn't have it at all, they said no.

Q. What . . . it sounds as though you had a very positive reaction to Israel while you were there. Is that . . . ?

A. Oh, yea, yea absolutely. I wish I could go back. I didn't feel anything until I got into Old Jerusalem, till I got into the suits, what do they call the . . .

Q. I'm not sure . . .

A. The . . . the Old Jerusalem. Oh, yea, I had a great reaction to it. I . . . I spent time in a kibbutz and the . . . I wrote a thing called "The Wall is to Lean on, But it Needs a Door." On your way out you can . . . I'll show it to you. No, I was very impressed by it. I was . . . I'm . . . I'm . . . I . . . I . . . oh, they're great people, you know, the fact that they had . . . I

- A. (Continued) I think. . . I often wish that. . . that on the foot of hunger a little more often to get back to our sensibilities.
- Q. Was. . . was your feelings shaped by the fact that. . . that you were Jewish, Israel is a Jewish state, or was it more that, you know, that you were impressed by what they've done?
- A. No, I was much more impressed by what they've done because. . . because I'm not . . . like I really don't know how to. . . I really don't know how to say it without being insulting. I'm much more impressed by people on. . . on a one-on-one basis. I don't think of it as the Jewish race or the Catholic race or the Irish or the English or the Australians or Protestants, you know, Blacks. They're good and bad, you know, all people.
- Q. So you wouldn't really call yourself a Zionist?
- A. No, I don't think so. I. . . I have a . . . I mean Israel. . . if Israel was attacked, you know, and they ran out of soldiers and they needed money, I'd mortgage the house and sell my cameras to give 'em money to help save the land. And if it came down to a showdown, although I'm 63 and they would never use me, I'd go out there and fight for 'em. But, not because it's. . . not because there are Jews in Israel. I don't know if I make myself plain.
- Q. No, I understand what you mean by that.
- A. Because of the type of people that are there that happen to be Jewish and what they stand for and what they. . . what they signify, what they mean to the rest of the world for the safety of. . . of the rest of the world. And . . . and the Jewish people have a knack for that. So I consider the Jews against Ireland when some woman came from Ireland to America and she couldn't raise the little money to even help their. . . So, I'm sure that there's a confusion in my mind about. . . about . . .
- Q. Is there any other things we haven't touched on that you think would be

Q. (Continued) useful for someone trying to write a history of the Rochester Jewish community you know about?

A. I don't know. My first impression is that as a kid seeing my first Jewish funeral when. . . when they. . . there was a man that lived on the corner of Merrimac and Edwards Street. He had a little grocery store, the old penny grocery store they used to have in those days. And, you know, being very young he was to me very old, maybe he wasn't that old. But I remember his funeral was the first funeral that I remember, which they had. . . My father was a member of the. . . of the sect of men that used to wash the dead, whatever that was. And I got curious about it, so, you know, how do you wash 'em. He said well if you look outside of the house you can see the trough, the long trough, put the body on it and you just wash the man. So I went down to the corner as a kid to get groceries and look at the trough, try to visualize how a man naked and why would my father be doing this, and what is. . . why should he be washing the dead. Then I discovered it was a big honor and, you know, he'd sit up all night with the body. And there was a. . . a vivid memory. . . the other vivid memory I have is Saturday afternoon my father and I used to go to the shul, Leopold Street Shul, they used to have. . . bring in speakers. And they used to give you talks in Jewish about. . . Those were days when I was a kid lot more speeches and debates and things like that. Workmen's Circle was always busy with guest people and even in shul. Being the oldest son I was. . . besides, I was a good Hebrew student and besides being a member of the shul choir, I was looked upon as Mr. Ouzer's young son was a boy alto. I used to sing all the solos in the shul and do the crying and all that. And. . . and I. . . and he used to take me to all these, which I enjoyed, you know, it was nice being with my father Saturday afternoons. I was the only one that went with him, you know, I had a chance to be alone with

- A. (Continued) him. And he was a beautiful person, he never yelled, never raised his voice. He never hit any of us. And I've never hit any of our children, you know. We've never spanked. . . I would never spank the. . . He used to take out a little black book and say well you did something wrong, I'm gonna put this in the book, and never realizing he didn't know how to write. So, but anyway. But, these. . . but these speakers on a Saturday afternoon after a while I used to go back and I used to kind of stick it because they were sermons that had to do with like the Jewish race is just like a bunch of people on a ship, and there's a big storm that's coming and brewing, and it all depends upon the captain of the ship, if he knows his way, if you see God, why he can steer the ship to safety and landing and we'll be free. And that was the theme of a lot of talks. And I used to break up 'cause I said uh-oh, here he goes again with the captain of the ship talk, you know. But he was serious and that went on. . . and on the way back we used to talk about it and it was. . . I was more of an observer really of, you know. I had this knack which helped me in photography of being much more impressed by the words people omitted in a conversation than in what was said. Now I was always looking at the light, you know, seeing how the light hit the person and what film I would use and what the exposure was gonna be. And . . . and the acceptance or rejection of what people said always fascinated me. I was more of an observer than active participant. Like I can almost foretell the mood of what the shul was gonna be like, you know, if they were gonna get through fast or early or what.
- Q. Well as an observer how would you say that the Rochester Jewish community has changed over the years since you were born?
- A. Well it . . . there's. . . there. . . there's. . .there is not. . . When I was a boy the Rochester community was much closer, people were much closer

A. (Continued) to each other. Then I look at the economics of it, you know, if you wanted to or not forced you to be closer together. There was more compassion for each other. Today it's a one-to-one life. It's just people. . . it's a dog-eat-dog and they . . . they really talk about love and understanding but they don't practice it. In those days they talked about love and understanding and they practiced it. There's more of a . . . of a . . . of a snotty atmosphere. There's like. . . I know men and women that I grew up with who are millionaires today, don't even recognize me and say hello because in their eyes I'm a failure. In my eyes, I look up to them and say, you know, I'm glad that Moshe made it, I'm so happy to know he's living off of Ambassador Drive and he's made his two million and sold this or that. And I'm happy for 'em, you know, but. . . And yet I can't work with these people because I can never please 'em. They're never satisfied. They. . . there. . . there is a . . . there's. . . they have a false ego about their own importance. They. . . they all read the New York Times Book Review Section and they all talk about the same Book Review Section for the rest of the week. And instead of reading the book and saying. . . finding out for themselves if the book is for them. They're great quoters of articles that everybody else has read. And they can't talk to you until they've read Newsweek or Businessweek or something. There's no. . . there's a . . . it's like everybody's after the Pulitzer Prize sort of thing, you know.

Q. So you see sort of a general decline in the community?

A. Yea.

Q. Characterize it. . .?

A. Yea, because it's all. . . see the media has disclosed some of the manoeuvres of what makes synagogues run and churches run, you know. So they know about the fact that they. . . that the rabbi isn't the revered man and the man of

A. (Continued) the Bible that they really thought he was, you know. That he. . . that he. . . that he's a man who happened to major in theology and got his degree as a rabbi and he's up there giving you a sermon which most people are second-guessing him and going out, you know, breaking up and saying well he didn't use the right adjective and his very wasn't proper and he misquoted this because I remember this. You know, they aren't taking it for what it really should be taken for. They're. . . it's just an act of. . . there's a series of instantaneous criticisms that go on and on and on. And I, you know, I used to wonder well, what the hell is this all about?

END OF TAPE I, SIDE B