

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Rabbi Sidney Berkowitz Project

Personal Experience

O.H. 1530

SOL E. NEWMAN

Interviewed

by

Matthew T. Butts

on

July 16, 1992

MR. SOL E. NEWMAN

Mr. Sol Newman was born on June 13, 1917 in the province of Moravia in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the son of Max and Dora Newman. After completing his primary and most of his secondary education in the newly created nation of Poland, Newman immigrated to the United States. He arrived in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in 1934, where he attended Philadelphia Central High School, night school.

During his high school studies, Mr. Newman worked as both a street corner and store merchant to help support his family during the dark days of the Depression. Shortly after the end of World War II, Newman arrived in Youngstown, Ohio. He was associated with Rose & Sons for 10 years. He opened a discount store called Fairway and later Sav-Mor, working there until joining the staff of Hartzell, Rose and Sons again. He retired to private life in 1991. Throughout his life in Youngstown, Mr. Newman remains an active member of the local Jewish community. He serves as an integral member of the local chapter of the Zionist Organization of America, the B'nai B'rith organization, the Jewish Federation of Youngstown, and Temple El Emeth.

Presently, Mr. Newman resides with his wife Beatrice at 3551 Cardinal Drive, Youngstown, Ohio. Mr. Newman spends much of his free time reading, walking, and swimming, and attends the college for the over sixty at Y.S.U.

--Matthew Butts

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INTERVIEWEE: SOL E. NEWMAN

INTERVIEWER: Matthew T. Butts

SUBJECT: Rabbi Sidney Berkowitz, Youngstown and the Jewish community, as well as its development

DATE: July 16, 1992

B: This is an interview with Sol E. Newman for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, on the Rabbi Sidney Berkowitz Project, including the Youngstown Community and the Youngstown Jewish Community, by Matthew Butts, at his residence, 3551 Cardinal Drive, Youngstown, Ohio, on July 16, 1992, at 10:10 a.m.

Okay. I think we're ready to go here. Tell me something about your childhood, [such as] where you grew up [and] your education.

N: I was born in Moravia, which at that time was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Actually, that came about because the Russians, who were advancing into our side of the country, were not necessarily very kind to Jewish people. The Kaiser, or the Emperor, of Austria-Hungary actually, on the contrary, was considerate of that fact and invited the Jewish population to move behind the lines of battle of the advancing Russians.

Consequently, my mother, who at that point was pregnant, gave birth to me in what is now Czechoslovakia, but was then known as Moravia. After awhile, of course, we moved back to where we originally lived. That was still part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. It was known as Galicia, which on the map would be defined

as the eastern, southern part and became Poland after World War I, in accordance with the Versailles Treaty. This didn't come about that easily. There was a conflict amongst the Poles and Ukrainians. There was always that ethnic problem. There was a civil war that actually broke out, and eventually the Poles prevailed. It became part of the Polish Republic.

So, my secular education was primarily in the public schools of Poland, but there's an interesting story to that. My grandfather came to the United States in 1910. After World War I, he realized that he would rather have his family here, so he asked his wife and four children, amongst whom my father was the oldest, to come to the United States. They came to the United States in 1920. However, my mother, with the three children, remained in Poland for two reasons. One, she did not have any family in the United States on her side. Second, it would have been too great of a financial burden on my grandfather to bring over the entire family. But eventually my dad brought us over, and I came to this country in 1934. I was 16 years of age at the time. At that point, I had attended the Polish schools. The reason I bring this out is my mother felt that the education that was provided in the schools there was not really that adequate in terms of what she would expect of the educational system, especially since the Ukrainians had gained what was known as cultural autonomy.

For instance, the first language that was started in the school system was Ukrainian in the first grade. Then, in the second grade, we would pick up Polish. So my mother resorted to private instruction, and we had an instructor who instructed us in Polish and German and Hebrew, and arithmetic. Her feeling was, since eventually we would come to the United States, some of the languages were not really that important for us to learn. I had a friend who was Ukrainian, and he enrolled in the elementary school system. That was required at the age of seven. When I heard about this, I was all excited. I wanted to be involved, and for a year I was hinting to my mother that I wanted to enroll.

So finally, on my own, at the age of eight I went to the principal of the school, and I said, "I want to enroll." He said, "I know that you are getting private instruction. I know that you're advanced, but you don't have the knowledge of the Ukrainian language." Indeed, I did have it, but from association with friends, not the literary aspect of it, such as the reading and writing. I said to him, "Well, yes, but I think I can overcome that, and I'm really particularly interested to be with my friends in the same class."

But at that point, my friend had already advanced to the second grade. He was in second grade. Well, a very unusual situation developed. He said, "Look, you know we cannot skip people, and you do have to have the knowledge of Ukrainian."

So, the final arrangement was that if I would indeed become proficient in the language, in terms of the literary aspect of it, reading and writing, he would promote me to the second grade. Indeed, that happened with an extra effort on my own part to the degree that I almost violated the Sabbath, because in Poland there was only one type of Judaism that was practiced, which was Orthodoxy. The degree of observance is what differed. Some people were more observant; others less. So on the Sabbath, the first grade would meet in the afternoons. We had six days of attendance in elementary schools in Poland.

B: Wow!

N: When we'd come home from synagogue and have our meal, which was the big meal on Saturday--it was in the afternoon--I would get away from home after we were through with the meal and rush to the school. I explained to the teacher that I could not be involved in writing, because that would be a violation of the Sabbath; but I would be sitting in on the classes, so I could gain greater exposure to the Ukrainian language. My purpose, after all, my intent, my vision was to proceed to the next grade, and they let me do that. What do you think, on the day that the principal came in to examine my proficiency in the language, it was the Sabbath!. But I was successful in passing the test. After about six or seven weeks of being in the first grade, I was promoted to second grade. That was my introduction to the elementary school system.

Eventually, I went into Gymnasium. Now, Gymnasium was really a system of education that was limited, unfortunately, to people of means. Not many in the general population were able to attend Gymnasium because it was so expensive in terms of the tuition and books. In the U.S., in high school, everything is provided for you; it's free. Not so in Poland. There was what is known as a government high school, which was located only in so many cities in Poland, and ideally, this was to have provided an excess of academically well-qualified students to enter these schools, regardless of your religion or ethnic background. It didn't work that way. It was mostly people who had the connection with the "officials," and most of them were really people who were actually in the medium range of economic competence.

But, really the poor people who did have the qualifications to get in, rarely got in. So most of the people who were attending Gymnasium were people who could afford it. For those who were really determined to pursue their education, their parents would sacrifice their own well-being in terms of pleasure to put these people through school. I was fortunate enough that my mother had the foresight to do that and my dad, of course, provided money by sending money to Europe, to my mother and our family so that we were able to afford it. So, I was fortunate in that respect.

Being a student in Gymnasium requires a lot of commitment, a lot of self discipline. I think the educational process there was such that it gave one a general background in the arts and sciences, and humanities. I had to board out to go to the school, as we didn't have it in our locality where we lived. Again, it was predominately Ukrainian. Even in the Gymnasium which was a municipally owned Gymnasium, we had to start with the Ukrainian for three years up to the point where we'd reach the fourth grade. Of course, there always was the Polish studies. Without question, it was the official language there. We had eight years of German, eight years of Latin, four years of Greek, and of course, Polish. Also, we had a system where religious education was provided. There was an instructor in each of the religions, which predominately were the three religions: the Ukrainian, which was not Catholic, but they recognized the Vatican--they were separate and apart from the Polish, which was strictly Catholic; and of course, the Jewish religion. We had our own instructor. So it was a good background. Because I came to the U.S. at the age of 16, my schooling was interrupted from finishing Gymnasium, which was at the age of 18.

The rigors of getting a diploma--we called it "matura,"--which comes from the Latin word "mature" in the English--was very difficult. There were oral and written exams. To prepare for that was really a challenge. The exam could have referred back all the way to the first grade of Gymnasium. Remember, this was an eight year course. It was really a rigorous exercise in getting the matura, the diploma, the graduating record. Of course, I did not because I was interrupted to go to the U.S.. However, my educational background served me very well when I came to America.

Now, even though I did not have any exposure to the English language--I have to admit I was a very frustrated young man when I arrived in the States. In Europe, especially in my town, I was sort of considered in the youth intelligencia, so to speak. I was multi lingual in Ukrainian, German, Polish, and Latin, which

of course is a dead language. I studied Hebrew privately and Jewish (Yiddish) at home. So here I was, a person who had a knowledge of about five or six languages, and yet I was completely foreign in the culture that I found myself. I couldn't express myself. So, this is also an interesting aspect of my education.

First of all, I made up my mind that I was going to learn English. There were two reasons. One, personally because I was determined not to be isolated. Incidentally, at this point, in 1934, the influx of immigration to the United States was very, very limited. The Depression was still rampant. The economic absorption capacity was limited, but especially if one was limited with the English language, I knew that I couldn't get absorbed by any kind of opportunity of employment that presented itself.

Also, my father, who all these years had a good job, lost his job when I came to this country. So, we were living with my grandparents, and the only one working in the family was my uncle. Although my ambition was really to pursue the academic field, I soon realized that it was not to be because I could not impose myself as a burden on my grandfather or my uncle, or indeed my father, although he said to me, "Go ahead." Yet, within my own conscience, I could not really resolve to pursue my schooling in that manner.

So, even for the classes that were offered to learn English--in Philadelphia, which is a big city, and where we lived, there was only one school all the way in the south part of town. I had come at the end of April, and I enrolled, of course, immediately. But that only lasted until June, because in June the school year was over. However, I did learn English on my own, with the help of my uncle and my father, during the vacation period.

Then I attended night school. My father said, "You know, maybe you should engage in some business venture." So, with \$50, we went out and bought some merchandise, and I rented a stand. Now, I don't know if you're acquainted with the New York scene or the Philadelphia scene. They had these stands and markets where people would sell their products that they dealt with. Some sold fruit on push carts. Some sold dry goods off stands, and this is what I engaged in, in the mercantile activities. This was about September of 1934. I continued in this until about January when things got very bad. I'd go out and open my stand, and incidentally, every day I'd have to take the merchandise down into the basement and then display it again in the morning. In January, it became so difficult that I was hardly taking in any money. "Economically,"

I said to myself, "I have to contribute to the upkeep of the house." To the limited extent that my business would permit, I would give \$3 to my grandfather for room and board, who incidentally refused to take it. But I insisted, as it gave me some sense of feeling independent. But in winter, it became apparent that, even to pay for my rent on the stand, the income out of this business was not adequate. So I decided to go look for a job.

Fortunately, I responded to an ad in the paper, and one of the qualifications was a knowledge of Polish because it happened to be in a Polish neighborhood. So, I responded to the ad, and indeed, I pointed out to the person that I had just come to this country. Of course, he could detect it as my English was limited. But, the fact that I knew Polish helped me to obtain that job. It was a job that required long, long hours, but I insisted that I wanted to continue my education at least in securing the knowledge of English. I pointed out to the owner: "Look, if you want me to be an all around man, you really need someone who knows English as well as Polish." Well, he wanted me to work an 80 hour week, without giving me any time off. I finally got him to agree to giving me two evenings off. Of course, he never let me off on time to be in time to go to night school, but I did prevail; and I did continue to go to night school. I was persistent enough that I wouldn't let just anything stop me in my determination to continue.

Gradually, of course, I became efficient in English to a degree. I remained in the retail field. Then I got a job in the wholesale field that related to the business, which incidentally, did not require as many hours. I had gotten one raise and felt I was entitled to another one. There was a difference of opinion, so I left him and went and got this job in the wholesale business. There's a story attached to this. The place was closed on Saturdays. The man that I worked for in the retail business got a hold of me. He wanted me to come back to work Saturdays for him, because Saturday was a very busy day in retail in those days, in our field particularly. The money that he offered me was so attractive that I couldn't possibly refuse. I think it was \$8 for the day only, whereas before I quit he was only giving me \$14 a week, and I had asked for \$16, which he refused to pay. So eventually, I found myself working seven days a week. Basically, I think that this is the background.

Now, I would like to tell you that as far back as the age of 13, I found myself active in the young Zionist groups. I was exposed to it and decided that I wanted to be part of it for two reasons. First of all, the

climate in Poland was not altogether that favorable towards the Jewish population. There was always anti-Semitism that was present, and that was on both sides, from the Ukrainian side and the Polish side. This is probably one of the reasons why, in our part of Poland, the Jewish population was able to somehow exist. Because during election times, for instance, both of these sections would want to get our votes, to the degree that the Jew was able to exist, but not what you would call in a free society like what there is in the United States. There was never that degree of democracy, although Poland was supposed to have been a Republic and a democracy.

So at my early age, I decided that Poland was certainly not going to be the place where I'd want to live. Already at that point, the rise of Hitler came about in Germany, and one mustn't forget that Poland bordered Germany. So while there was a very strong political argument going on between Germany and Poland--of course, Germany had designs on Poland. It was part of the western side of Poland that the Germans had gotten when Poland was taken apart in the 18th century. They had their designs on that part of Poland again, and to start with, they wanted Danzig.

So, there was political bickering and arguing. But also, with the philosophy of Hitler, anti-Semitism permeated Poland itself. There were quite a few Polish people who were anti-Semitic to start with. So it became evident that Poland was not going to be the place to remain, at least for the young Jewish people who said, "No, I don't want to be part of that set up."

And this was one of the reasons I joined the Zionist organization, because our hopes and aspirations were eventually to have a Jewish homeland of our own, especially in case of a catastrophe. For two reasons: ideologically and Biblically, we were connected to that land for thousands of years, even after Titus finally destroyed Jerusalem and the temple in 70 B.C. So it was that feeling, ideologically, once I started being involved in the organization, realizing my roots, that I said to myself, "Certainly, that is where I belong."

There was always the hope and the dream that my dad would bring us to the United States. And of course, it was wonderful because I barely had an image of my dad when he left, when I was about four years of age, not even that. When I came to the United States, I would have to say that I was primarily concerned, really, with getting myself integrated into the culture of the United States. After all, when I came here I was frustrated because of the language, and my literary knowledge of the English literature and history was limited.

So my emphasis was on getting integrated into the American scene. Even though I never lost that interest in the Zionist idea, it sort of took second place at that particular time in my life, in the United States.

But as time went on, I became more active. I was active in the young Zionist groups in Philadelphia. I had the rare opportunity of listening to two of the greatest leaders in the Zionist movement. One was Dr. Chiam Weitzman, who became the first President of Israel; and then another one, whose ideology I really followed, Vladimir Zobotinsky, whose orientation was somewhat different than Dr. Weitzman's. Both, of course, were great Zionists, great leaders. Zobotinsky favored an ideology of private enterprise, of securing Israel as it was defined by the Balfour Declaration, as it was spelled out in the Bible. There were differences of opinion, but nevertheless, I had the privilege in the United States to listen to both of them. I considered it a very great privilege, because in Poland, I did listen to Zobotinsky once. I was about 15 years of age at the time. I had to travel by horse and wagon all night long, and by the time we got to that place to listen to him, I was practically half asleep, because I was so tired out and I was still very young; but he was my idol even then.

Then when I came to Youngstown in 1946--I'm skipping quite a bit of time in between--I think that Dr. Berkowitz had already taken the pulpit at Rodef Sholom Temple. I was involved in Youngstown in a young Zionist movement called Masada. I don't know if Masada strikes a familiar name to you. That's before Christ in Israel. This was a young Zionist movement, and there were a few of us who were instrumental in getting it organized. We had quite a viable and active organization here. The reason I bring this up is because we invited Rabbi Berkowitz--this must have been in the fall of 1947--to deliver a talk to us. Dr. Berkowitz, as you probably know, in addition to having studied here in the United States and gotten his B.A. degree and at the Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati, where he was given the degree of Rabbi, also studied in England, both in Oxford and Cambridge, where he got his Doctorate degree. When he came back and he was addressing us, I had gotten the feeling that he was influenced somewhat by that English exposure. There was in the Zionist movement a great question mark as to the real desire of England to fulfill its mandatory obligation that was given to it by the League of Nations, which was to afford and make possible the establishment of a Jewish national homeland in what was then known as Palestine. As it happened, Britain turned out to be just the opposite. It really was a hindrance. The feeling amongst many Zionists was that England was not

fulfilling its obligation towards the Zionist Movement and the Jewish people. Indeed during the terrible Holocaust and catastrophe that took place in Europe with World War II, many Jews could have been rescued and been given the opportunity to come to what was then Palestine. Britain would not permit it.

The British intercepted many ships with Jewish refugees and transferred them to Cyprus, or some instances, turned them around back to Europe. And eventually these people perished. The reason I bring this up is because I had a feeling that Dr. Berkowitz, in addressing us, was somewhat trying to take a middle-of-the-road posture. Naturally, he was in favor of establishing the Jewish homeland in Palestine, but he also wanted to give us a feeling of how the British had to react to this whole thing. Bringing in, of course, the oil was always a big thing. The foreign office in London was always more concerned with protecting its oil interests in the Middle East than to establish a Jewish homeland. It was obvious.

So this was actually my first meeting, so to speak, with Rabbi Berkowitz. We were naturally impressed with his presentation, although some of us may have had some conflict of interpreting his presentation. But a great person he was; he was a very wonderful man. I think that my discussing Dr. Berkowitz would really have to come from the aspect of my association with Dr. Berkowitz that followed in the years to come. But of course, while I would probably accentuate that particular relationship, we never must lose sight of the importance of Dr. Berkowitz in the community in general. Because, not only was he a great spiritual leader and was able to emanate that spirituality to his own congregation, but I think that it carried over into the interfaith relationship of the entire community. For instance, his relationship with the Catholic bishop, Bishop Malone, was just absolutely like a brother relationship. They respected each other, not only personally, but in their own religious convictions. I think Rabbi Berkowitz was able to, shall I say, get the respect of a person of another religious conviction, and by the same token, project the same feeling to the other person in regard to his religious conviction, but always with a great degree of understanding and respect. I think that this was a very, very great contribution which Dr. Berkowitz made to the community. In terms of his involvement in this aspect, there are multitudes of organizations which one could mention. I have them right here if you'd want to go into details. I would probably say that there isn't an organization in Youngstown that Dr. Berkowitz was not participating in with his involvement.

B: Wow!

N: He played a role in each from the civic level, the religious level, the humanitarian level, and interfaith and interracial. I think it would take five to ten minutes to cite the various organizations where he was president, where he was vice president, where he was chairman of the board, or where he was just a member, and then the various recognitions that he received as a member of these organizations.

B: Why don't we touch on some of those?

N: I'd be very happy to. He was President of the Youngstown Interracial Committee, the United Nations Organization, InterGroup Goodwill Council, Council of Social Agencies of the Community Chest, the International Service Committee of Rotary International, Child Guidance Clinic, Mahoning County Advisory Board of Aide for the Aged, White House Counseling for Children and Youth, Mahoning County Mental Health 648 board, Mahoning County Chapter of the American Red Cross, Mahoning County Tuberculosis Association, Youngstown Rotary Club, and the Board of Rabbis of Greater Youngstown. He had also been Chairman of the Youngstown Health and Welfare Institute. He also served on the Executive Board of Central Council for the American Rabbis and was appointed to its own Conciliation Commission. He gave speeches denouncing bigotry and emphasizing the interrelationship between Judaism and Christianity. He was elected to a two-term Board of the Trustees of the Youngstown Civil Liberties Union. He also served as Vice President of his own Guidance Clinic and the State Chapter of Jewish War Veterans of Ohio. Incidentally, he was a chaplain in the United States Army, reaching the rank of major. He also was Vice President of the Health Systems Agencies of Eastern Ohio. He was a member of the Board of many organizations including: the March of Dimes, Legal Aides Society, Boy Scouts of America, Coordinating Council of Community Corporations, the Federation of Youngstown, Jewish Family and Children Services, Youngstown Community Relations Council. He was a former member of the Board of Ohio State's Citizen's Council of Health and Welfare, Eastern Advisory Board of the National American Red Cross, Mahoning County Society for Crippled Children, Executive Committee of Hebrew Union College, Ohio State Commission of Aging, Mayor's Charter's Revision Commission, the Governor's Task Force for Mental Health, Mental Health Association, Comprehensive Child and Adult Mental Health Center, the General Conference of American Rabbis, Board Governor of American Red Cross, and Board Overseers of Hebrew Union College. Other board memberships including: the Advisory Board of the St. Elizabeth's Hospital Medical Center, the School of

Nursing, the Mayor's Human Relations Committee, the Governor's Task Force on Rehabilitation, the Citizen's Advisory Committee to the Board of Education, Fair Employment Practice Commission, the Executive Committee of the Ecumenical Steel Coalition. And it goes on. He was a member of the Executive Committee of Health Systems Agency and Chairman of its Planning Commission. He was President of the Board of Trustees of Health Systems Agency of Eastern Ohio in 1982. He was President of Health Systems Agency, District 10, and Vice President of Educational Opportunities of Youngstown. In 1982, he was elected President of the Youngstown Zionist District. In 1961, he received an honorary degree of Doctorate of Divinity from Hebrew Union College, the Jewish Institute of Religion in Cincinnati.

As you can see, as I mentioned previously, I don't think there's an organization whether it was civic, religious, [or] interracial, that Rabbi Berkowitz was not involved with. To me, that is just a remarkable record. He came here in 1946. He passed away in 1983.

I have to also mention, and this is to me something very unusual. Dr. Berkowitz actually requested, I guess prior to his passing, that Bishop Malone be his eulogist. Now, that is such an unusual situation, because very seldom would one see a Catholic Bishop doing the eulogy for a Rabbi. And indeed, that's what happened. At the time, when the service was at the Rodef Sholom, I believe there was every representative of the general community in that service. That was, of course, due to his being involved in the various activities on behalf of the community in general, of course, and the Jewish community. He was a true leader in every sense of the word, civically speaking, religiously speaking. He was a great, great contribution, and I think, in my opinion, an asset to the community in general. Very seldom do we see people that appear on the scene that have these kinds of attributes. In devoting oneself totally to a community, and then taking the leadership and providing it to the community, Dr. Berkowitz did manifest that ability and proved it.

B: Excuse me for a second here. I have to flip the tape real quick. Okay. There we go.

N: Again, as I said, my aspect of being involved with Dr. Berkowitz was in the realm of Zionist activity. This was the reason I gave you the background of my early ideological commitment to Zionism. Dr. Berkowitz, at all times, was a Zionist. There was no question. In his early days in Youngstown he had to sort of take a middle-of-the-road stand, but I don't want to go into

details. Many people who are acquainted with the situation as it existed, particularly in Rodef Sholom, would know what I have in mind. I don't think I'm at liberty to go into detail.

**B:** Was there an organization that was formed though, an American Federation of Judaism? Was it opposed to the Zionist stake?

**N:** I'm very happy that you brought that up, because at that time, that's what I'm alluding to. It was called the American Council for Judaism. Rabbi Berger, who was a Reform Rabbi, was the Executive Director of it. There were people on the local level involved in it. One of them, as a matter of fact, was the Vice President of the National Organization, and I don't know if I want to mention any names. They were members of Rodef Sholom. So you can see what I have in mind.

Incidentally, the concept of the Council for Judaism was contrary to what all of our American presidents, all or most people in Congress, and most of the people in the United States generally thought of. But, their main argument was dual loyalty. "You couldn't be a good American and be a Zionist," was a totally false concept. Within the discussion of that particular item or ideology, I'd like to quote you what Supreme Court Justice Louis D. Brandeis said. And I quote, "Let no American imagine that Zionism is inconsistent with patriotism. Every American Jew who aides in the advancing of the Jewish settlement in Palestine will be a better Jew and a better American for doing so." So, if a man of the stature of the Supreme Court Justice Brandeis could fashion this statement in regard to what we were just discussing, you could see how wrong the Council of Judaism was in their concept. Personally, I am proud and very grateful to be an American, and yet, I am a Zionist.

Therefore, it was in later years that Dr. Berkowitz really became active in the Zionist sphere. Now, that doesn't mean to say that he was not active on behalf of the Jewish Federation here, on behalf of the Jewish Children's Family Service, on behalf of the Jewish Community Center. [He was] always very involved. Dr. Berkowitz exhibited a true spirit of leadership within the Zionist Organization. In 1970, he received the Louis D. Brandeis Award. We consider that the most prestigious award that a person can achieve in terms of his commitment, devotion, and activity within the Zionist movement. So, you can appreciate what I'm trying to say. Naturally, it was paying honor, appreciation, and acknowledgement of his involvement in the Zionist movement.

In addition to that, he had received several citations of honor at our regional conferences and one at the American Zionist formal dinner in Pittsburgh, which is really a very outstanding affair, where some of the greatest people in the United States, both Jews and non-Jews are the main speakers. At one of these functions, Dr. Berkowitz was honored with a citation of honor.

I might also add that, when I was selected by the Youngstown Zionist District to be an honoree, receiving the Brandeis Award--in 1975--Dr. Berkowitz challenged us to bring a prominent speaker for the affair. In doing so, he would offer his temple for the event. Indeed, we were able to get Brigadier General Marshall, who was the guest speaker at that time. The reason I bring this out is just the nature of the man to be able to motivate people to do things and accomplish things. This was Dr. Berkowitz.

Now, there was another aspect that he was connected with in the Zionist movement. This was the Jewish National Fund. The Jewish National Fund had one particular aspect of its existence and purpose, and that was to buy land in what was Palestine and later Israel. The fifth Zionist Congress in Vienna, in 1805--this instrument was created for that particular purpose. Naturally, this was strictly a fund raising type of activity, funds to provide for buying land in Israel.

Incidentally, the land that was bought by the Jewish National Fund could not be owned by any particular individual. It became the entity of the Jewish State. Even now, for instance, people who settle on Jewish National Fund land can only get a lease for 99 years. Then, it reverts back to the Jewish National Fund, and in essence, the property of the State of Israel.

So, Dr. Berkowitz was very much a factor here in Youngstown, in being involved in raising funds for Jewish National Fund. At one time I think he was chairman of that drive here. Again, another thing was known about Dr. Berkowitz. When he undertook a project, in other words, once he consented to be in the leadership role of a project, one knew one thing: it was going to be a success, because he gave it all he had. In addition, he was able to motivate and inspire people to work with him in a similar manner. That was the nature, the make up of Dr. Berkowitz, the character of Dr. Berkowitz.

So, I just don't find enough words that I can really describe this man in a total picture of the contribution that he made to this community. Now, I have to divorce myself from the Zionist aspect and come back to

the general nature of his activities which, as I pointed out before, involved the community in general. The inter-religious, interracial relationship that he was able to create was just wonderful, because when people learn to respect each other, no matter what one's background, no matter what your religious background, no matter what race, that means harmony. That means coexistence. That means respect for each other. And I think Dr. Berkowitz was certainly a great contributor in that respect.

I would also mention here, and I'm not going to go into detail, but on a personal level, Dr. Berkowitz was involved twice in our family lives, even though we were not members of his congregation. I'm a Conservative Jew; I'm not Reform. But, Dr. Berkowitz was there for us when we asked him for advice, for help. He was a wonderful person.

Now, to his leadership in the Zionist organization. . . . He was elected president in 1982, and unfortunately, of course, his demise came in 1983. But, I would say that his leadership was a cumulative result of his devotion and commitment to Israel. And in his heart, he gave it all that he had in his commitment, in his devotion, and in his integrity. Everything I know about Dr. Berkowitz points to this, and I'm sure that there are some things that I left out that could have been mentioned here. But, if you have any questions, I'll be very glad to respond.

B: Okay. One question that I'm asking is that, in your own words, describe the differences between the three branches within Judaism: Orthodoxy, Conservative, and Reform Judaism.

N: Well, I'll be glad to respond in the fashion that I can. Orthodoxy, of course, is the Jewish religion. There was no other type of religion. And, as I mentioned to you, in my youth it was only to what degree that the people were observant, some were more observant; some were less observant. But, there was no other type of Judaism. Now, for instance, with the expulsion of Jews from Spain, we have what is known as the Sephardic Jews. They were Orthodox Jews. There was a period in Jewish history there when it was known as the Golden Age of Judaism. Great philosophers, military men, cartographers, historians, poets, medical men were products of that "Golden Age" in Spain. Unfortunately, came the expulsion and the inquisition, which caused a big problem, and the estimate is that about 150,000

Jews were lost in that cause, some to the conversion by force. And the Moranos were people who on the outside were Christians, but on the inside they were practicing underground their Judaism to the degree that they could.

In further explaining Orthodoxy, there was only one type of religion. Call it "Orthodoxy". There wasn't really a name that you could attach to it because there was no other. In the Eighteenth Century in Germany, Reform Judaism started to appear on the scene. Now, when we say reform, it was only to a degree that it was trying to make it easier, so to speak, for a Jew to be assimilated within the country where he lived and still practice his Judaism, not to ostracize himself on the outside. So they accepted a more liberal interpretation of Judaism. Like for instance, we have strict dietary laws in Orthodox Judaism. In other words, we're not allowed to eat any pork products. We're not allowed shellfish. We're not allowed to mix dairy and meat products, but we have a separate set of dishes for both dairy and meat, and so on. The Reforms said, "Now look, some of that doesn't make sense to us." When this was initiated or requested, some of it came directly from the Bible, and some of it came as an interpretation by scholars and rabbis that followed. There's the Talmud, which expounds on the laws, not only pertaining to religion. It had civil laws in there as well as dietary laws. For instance pork, which was considered a cause of trichinosis could have created serious health problems. By boiling it and adhering to the hygienic and sanitary rules, it became acceptable to the reform movement. So for instance, they compromised somewhat on the dietary laws even though the Bible prohibited it. Eventually, they compromised, for example, on using only Hebrew in prayers. The movement introduced the language of the land, which in that case was German, as appearing quite a bit in the prayer books. So, little by little there were deviations from the accepted norm of what the Jewish religion was then about. They say that the birth of Reform Judaism took place in Germany, and eventually, spilled mostly into the western part of Europe. The eastern part of Europe was very, very slow to accept the ideology of Reform Judaism. As a matter of fact, hardly anything happened in terms of Reform Judaism. But it had an influence on trying to get a little bit more liberal, for the Orthodoxy.

In the United States, there was a great influx in the middle of the Nineteenth Century of German Jews. As a matter of fact, the Jewish aristocracy, as it later became known, were the German Jews. They, of course, brought with them the concept of Reform Judaism. And indeed in the United States, it rooted very strongly.

They created their own school of rabbinical study, which is the Hebrew Union College of Cincinnati. That's where Dr. Berkowitz graduated from. Their influence became, indeed, quite strong. As a matter of fact, I'm told that the first congregation that formed in Youngstown was Rodef Sholom. Just a bit later, the Children of Israel was formed, which was the Orthodox. So then, I think I've given you somewhat of a background of Reform Judaism.

Now, let's answer the question of Conservative Judaism. Conservative Judaism evolved primarily in the United States. And this was considered the middle ground between Orthodoxy and Reform Judaism. The premise was that Reform Judaism went too far from its source, the core of traditional Judaism, and that it accepted too many compromises and negated many traditions. However, it was time to accept some of the inevitable liberal approaches that were manifesting themselves in the United States. After all, it was a different type of a situation than what existed in Europe. Many merchants, for instance, were open on Saturdays here. They had to conduct their businesses to meet competition. Now, the Conservative says one still has to observe the Sabbath and abstain from physical work. They adhere to kashrut, which is dietary laws. But, in order for the average American Jew to be able to feel at home in temple, English was introduced into the prayer books so that the prayers could be better understood. To sum it up, Conservatism is like a buffer between the Orthodox and the Reform. I must add in all honesty that, today, we're seeing on the part of the Reform a trend toward traditionalism, not in the sense that the Orthodox expect, not even in the sense that the Conservative practice, but they're coming back to a limited traditional concept.

For instance, in Orthodox and Conservative congregations they all wear what is known as a kipa, a scull cap to cover their heads. In the Reform, it was taboo in its original appearance on the American scene. I understand in Europe they used to have it--they would wear high hats. Then again, they also stopped wearing those, eliminating a head covering altogether.

Now, during Dr. Berkowitz's tenure, no scull caps were worn. The current graduates of the Reform rabbinical schools are tending towards the more traditional ideology of Judaism, in a limited sense. What we're seeing on behalf of the Conservative Judaism, I think is almost a trend toward a more limited liberal acceptance of certain behavior. We're seeing definitely more English being introduced. In the Orthodox they are strictly staying within the boundaries of the Orthodox interpretation. The only thing is that there are some

known as the Hasidic sect who are strictly Orthodox, and they almost go to an extreme interpretation of their convictions. Now, I don't know if this is adequate.

B: No. This is very good. Thank you. Also, could you describe for me what temple Rodef Sholom looks like in your own words?

N: I think it is a beautiful edifice, just beautiful. One can't help but feel upon entering the sanctuary that there is a definite spirituality that will permeate within you. During Dr. Berkowitz's tenure, and with his initiative, the sanctuary was renovated. And that sense of spirituality overpowered one even more so. I've attended many, many, many functions at Rodef Sholom; and I am always inspired by its beauty.

B: Was there anything distinguishing about the building?

N: Yes. The building I think is of Moorish style. It definitely has a distinct architectural design.

B: How about the bima? Was there anything unique about it?

N: The pulpit, the bima? Well, the arc is also awe inspiring. In further remodeling, the covers of the Torahs have been hand designed with exquisite needlework. These are contained within the arc and add great magnificence to the pulpit. Incidentally, the artistry was done by the members of the congregation.

Now, talking about Conservative and Reformed and Orthodox, they had an organ at Rodef Sholom. For a long time, our Conservative temple had a big conflict of ideas as to having organ music during services. Of course, we would have vocal. We had a cantor, and we had a choir. That was when I was on the board of Anshe Emeth, which was going on for about 10 years. We wouldn't permit even the playing of a piano during services on Friday night, Saturdays, or holidays. Eventually, it was compromised. On Friday nights, we would permit the playing--the new El Emeth temple does have a piano and organ and we do permit it, if the cantor so desires, if he wants some accompaniment. So, as you can see, there was a progressive trend.

Yes. There's no question. The Rodef Sholom temple has a physical set up that is absolutely an inspiration to those who can appreciate it, and I think most of us do--not only the Jewish people, but most of the people, Christian and even Muslims. We've had evening services

where representatives from the various faiths, which

included Muslims, I think, also appreciate the features of the temple.

B: Okay. The university that Dr. Berkowitz was from. . . ?

N: Yes. It was both Cambridge and. . . . Now, the other one escapes me. (Laughter). Oxford and Cambridge. Yes. As a matter of fact, he was a scholar. He won, to get there, the traveling fellowship award while at Hebrew Union College. It was from Mrs. Henry Morgan's Ohio Traveling Fellowship Award, which enabled him to attend Oxford and Cambridge. I'm sorry this is not pertaining to the context of what you asked, but I just happened to think of it; and I wanted to correct it while I had it in mind.

B: No. That's okay. This is fine.

N: May I ask something about the temple? Could I ask about the dome, which is very unusual?

B: Yes.

N: And the stained glass windows, but I can't remember who designed them, but he's very well known for his work. Tiffany!

B: Wow!

N: Tiffany windows, that's it! They're exquisite. When you enter the sanctuary in particular, you're immediately impressed with the organ, with the part of the design of the bima. It's very elaborate. Actually, in its elaborate nature, it has very spiritual quality in its sense of simplicity.

B: Thank you. Many people that I've interviewed have talked about Dr. Berkowitz's ability to be a great orator. What made his speaking style so unique or mesmerizing?

N: I think, in my opinion, a person who is strong in his convictions and who has the background, I would think this is one of the qualities that permits you to express yourself in a manner that as you say might be defined by people as an orator. Indeed, he was a great speaker. There was no question about it. Whenever he'd deliver the sermon. . . . As you know, his high holiday services, particularly the Rash Hashanah, which is the Jewish New Year, used to be broadcast.

B: Wow!

N: Right. I don't know which of the radio stations. It could have been either one of the three, but I can't pin it down. But, they used to be broadcast over radio.

Incidentally, while I'm at it, I might want to point out a very significant event that took place in Youngstown. It was during my presidency of the Zionist organization, and the reason I mention it is because it involves Dr. Berkowitz. I don't want to stress in any way my presence in terms of this interview as far as the activities of the Zionist organization are concerned. It was in 1955. We had a memorandum come from the national office in New York that in November throughout the country we would have what was known as "prayers for peace". As you are probably acquainted, the terrorism and Arab hostility toward Israel never really subsided. Even when the Israelis were victorious in the wars that were provoked by the Arabs, the Arabs never reconciled to the fact that it was time to make peace and live in coexistence. So, we had this particular function organized, and Dr. Berkowitz was, of course, part of it. WFMJ broadcast the entire service. It was held, incidentally, at Anshe Emeth, not at Rodef Sholom, but Rabbi Berkowitz was a participant. The Vindicator carried the event of that service, the report, on the first page, the evening edition. It was in the Saturday edition of the Vindicator. Of course, I still have the clipping. So, I wanted to stress that Dr. Berkowitz was a contributor to that particular evening. He was a participant. In addition, there were all kinds of civic representation. Incidentally, it turned out to be a poor night climate-wise, but it was still well attended. As a matter of fact, it was Dr. Berkowitz who read the resolutions including the hope that there would be peace between the Arabs and Israel. In essence this was the purpose. So, this is just as I recollect, some of the events that took place where Rabbi Berkowitz was a factor.

B: How about the growth within the temple Rodef Sholom the whole period when he was rabbi there? Was that from the force of his personality, or his personality drew a lot more congregants?

N: I would definitely have to answer to the fact that Dr. Berkowitz had that kind of personality. He was able to affect people by his, I would say, conviction of his religious orientation and as a person also. That person--one on one, he could reach you, and you responded accordingly. So yes, definitely. It's in the positive. He had that ability, and the congregation indeed grew quite a bit. There was that particular aspect of his leadership. As I told you, he had an

element within his congregation that didn't necessarily see it his way, although he tried to subdue himself so that the congregation would become more of a united congregation. And indeed, I think he was able to accomplish that. There was not too much of a rift, at least on the outside that could be noticed. So that, indeed, is something that we can be thankful to Rabbi Berkowitz, that he united the congregation that spoke in a voice that didn't spell out any disagreement. I suppose there's always--somewhere along the line you'll have someone who doesn't entirely agree with you, but yes, generally he was that kind of leader. He was able to--what should I say--bring out in people the best.

- B: Two more questions here. Could you describe for me, physically, what he looked like?
- N: Well, I think, to me, he appeared always to be a very well dressed and I would say to a detail a very well dressed person and presentable, always giving a good appearance of himself, always. As a matter of fact, there was a time there when I worked at Hartzell's. Dr. Berkowitz was very particular about what he would buy to make sure that it was the right thing because, yes, he put some stress and importance as to his physical appearance. So I would say, yes he had a commanding physical appearance.
- B: Was he short?
- N: Medium built.
- B: Also, most of the other interviewees I've done spoke of his humor. What type of humor was it?
- N: It was a healthy humor. You know, the Jew in general has a capacity to laugh at himself, because all of the years of persecution that the Jew went through in the 2,000 years of the Diaspora, he was able somehow to laugh at himself. The joke was always on himself. So, I think Dr. Berkowitz really had that ability. He had a wonderful sense of humor. Yes. And it was a healthy sense of humor, not offensive, and not degrading to any particular ethnic group or religious group. I term it healthy. In other words, you were able to laugh, laugh with him or laugh at yourself, but he was able to create that kind of an atmosphere.
- B: Okay. Is there anything we really haven't touched on that you think we need to add?
- N: In summation, all I can say is he was a great person and he's missed very much by the community. In all these years--and we're talking now nine years--he's still missed by the community, like in the general and

in the Jewish community especially, because he was a leader and because he gave of himself and created a wonderful, wonderful relationship of people to people and religion to religion, of ethnic groups to ethnic groups. In general, just the kind of a person that will be missed for a long time.

B: Okay. Thank you very much for your time. This was a very good interview.

N: You're welcome!

END OF INTERVIEW