YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

YSU Rabbi Sidney Berkowitz Project

Personal Experience

O.H. 1542

VIRGINIA SOLOMON

Interviewed

by

Matthew Butts

on

June 29, 1992

VIRGINIA SOLOMON

Virginia Rosenbaum was born on March 14, 1918 on the Northside of Youngstown, Ohio, the daughter of Lewis and Nettye Rosenbaum. While growing up on the Northside, Rosenbaum attended school at Hayes Junior High School and the Rayen High School, graduating in 1936.

Following high school, Rosenbaum worked and helped take care of her family after her mother's death. She married Mr. Norman Solomon in 1938. Over the next twenty-four years, Mrs. Solomon stayed home to raise her two children, Norman and Kenneth. Unfortunately, in the early 1960's Mrs. Solomon's husband died. She soon entered Youngstown State University, achieving both her Bachelor of Science Degree in Education and her Masters of Science Degrees. In 1968, Solomon took a teaching position with the Youngstown Board of Education. She would continue to work there until her retirement in 1983.

Presently, Mrs. Solomon enjoys retired life. She resides with her sister, Mrs. Lucille Rudick, at 991 Powers Avenue Youngstown, Ohio. She continues to be an active member of the congregation of Rodef Sholom. She dedicates herself to a number of charitable organizations, including the American Red Cross and the Heritage Manor Nursing Home. She spends much of her free time taking part in the activities of the Sisterhood of Rodef Sholom and serving as a professional volunteer.

B: This is an interview with Virginia Solomon for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, on the Rabbi Sidney Berkowitz Project, by Matthew Butts, on June 29, 1992, at 991 Powers, at 2:15 p.m.

S: Our area is very historical.

B: As far as ethnic history, too. There is no place in the United States that could compare with the ethnic diversity.

S: A real blue collar city. In fact, the first time I taught in 1968 and 1969 was in Jackson School out in Brownlee Woods. They were all blue collar workers out there. We had many diversified families that came there to bring their children. They were very fine and upstanding families.

I taught at Jackson for a year, then I switched to Morris Abramowitz. He was a secretary to Robert Pegues who got a grant proposal for a program for the emotionally disturbed. He felt that I was a very good candidate to teach in that program because I had taught his son who has had encephalitis. He had an operation at Miguel University in Toronto where they removed scar tissue from his brain. His son was a very difficult boy to handle. I seemed to be the only one who was able to handle him in those days. He adored me, and I was very fair with him. I taught him in Sunday school.

Morris came to me and said, "How about coming into the program for the emotionally disturbed. You are an excellent candidate for this school." So I was one of the teachers that piloted the program for the emotionally disturbed in the city of Youngstown. The other teacher was Ruth Burnes. She was a seventh grade teacher at Jackson and I was a sixth grade teacher at Jackson. Anne Davis was the principal out there. She nearly had a fit, "They took two of our best teachers." We had a good time, though. I had a good time teaching sixth grade.

B: It takes a very special person.

S: At that time I remember Nigeria having a lot of trouble. I did a social studies program on that. The kids just loved it. We made all kinds of things and had arts, crafts, and music from Nigeria. In fact, I even brought my electric roaster in at the end of the year and invited the parents and made a complete dish for the kids and their parents. It was just a taste, but I cooked up an original dish that they served in Nigeria. It had spinach, peanuts, and everything in it. We had a good time in that class.

B: That sounds very interesting. Tell me a little bit about yourself as far as your childhood and early education?

S: Oh man. If I told you about my childhood, I would have to write a book. First of all, my mother died when I was four years old. She left three children. I remember how devastated my father was. She was 39 when she died from a hysterectomy. They had no

penicillin in those days. She left my sister Lucille who was eight, my brother Louis who was two, and I was four. My grandmother and a maiden aunt came to Youngstown at the time of the operation and when she passed away. I remember how the Jewish community was devastated because she was so young. It was one of the first things that happened to the community at that time.

My grandmother and my aunt that raised me went back to Richmond, Virginia. That is where my mother is from. They broke up the house and brought what they wanted to Youngstown and moved in with my father. My grandmother died sometime after that. I think I must have been eight years old when my grandmother passed away. She died of diabetes because they did not have insulin in those days.

They had to take off her leg and bring in a hospital bed. I remember going up there and asking her for chewing gum. She would break a stick of gum in half and give me half of a stick. Things were really rough in those days. My father was in partnership with Thomas Naughton. He was a clothier and they had a big clothing store on West Federal Street. In 1929 when there was the crash and everything went to pieces Tom lost the business. Today it would have been worth a million dollars. In those days it was worth $250,000. Things have tripled plus one since then. It would have been a big business. My father did not know what to do so he sold insurance for Marcelle Dreyfus. He worked for Commonwealth for some time.

I graduated from Rayen in 1936 and had taken the academic course. I had also doubled up in my junior and senior year and took shorthand and typing. I figured I would never get to college. My father did not have the means to send me. When I graduated, I went to work for George Freed in the Merchant's credit bureau. I think I did switch every job that there was in the credit bureau. I was an out of state reporter. I did courthouse work. I did everything in there. I learned every single thing that was supposed to be in the credit bureau. I worked there for four years.

In the meantime, I had met my husband when I was seventeen. The aunt that raised us died when I was seventeen. My sister, who was 21, sort of took over the family. Together the two of us were there running the household. When I was 21, we got married. We did not have any money. Kids just did not have any money to get married. Nobody went to college.

My husband had gone to college in Geneva. He was from New Castle, Pennsylvania. He had gone to Geneva for one semester because he had to quit and help support his family who lived in New Castle. His father sold fruit out of a cart. As I said, nobody had any money. Then along came the war and the draft. He was drafted, but he had an abdominal ulcer and they would not take him. He stayed home and we lived with my dad. We had a six-room house. I had a room and my sister had a room with her husband. We just took care of my dad at that time. I had a brother, but he went out to Phoenix, Arizona, to work. He wanted to see what the west was like, so he took off. Everybody comes back to Youngstown. He came back some years later and brought a wife and settled in Youngstown. He worked for 40 years for Lustigs Shoe Store chain. I had Norman in 1941. Norman is going to be 51 in September.

I started teaching religious school for Rabbi Berkowitz when Norman was about

six or seven years old. I taught for him for twenty years. What a man that Dr. Berkowitz was. He was a wonderful man.

I remember when he first came to town and gave his first sermon, there was not a dry eye in the congregation. He was a very dynamic speaker. We became very friendly with Pauline and Rabbi Berkowitz. When their son's Larry and Roger were born, I remember at one time they wanted to go to England. Just at that time Pauline's brother Godfrey married Bessie Anderson. Anyway, they turned the kids over to Godfrey and Bessie, but we felt sorry for them because they were newlyweds. One weekend we took Roger and Larry for them to give them a chance to be alone. Rabbi and Pauline were in England. We took pictures of the kids and sent them to England because they knew this was the first time they had been away from their kids and they were very lonely for them. So we sent pictures over to England. Pauline still talks about that. I saw Roger recently at the 125th anniversary. He turned into a very fine, young, handsome man. He remembers us.

I taught Hebrew for Rabbi Berkowitz on both Saturday and Sunday during the time I was going to college. I lost my husband in 1965. Kenneth was fourteen and Norman was 22, but Norman was already married and out of the house. Kenneth also graduated from Rayen. Both of the boys graduated from Rayen.

Kenneth won the Deford scholarship. Sarah Deford paid two scholarships to every high school in the city. She had a trust fund from her father, John Deford, who was a judge. Kenneth was picked as one of the students at Rayen that would get this scholarship. He wanted to be a rabbi. He had written an essay and got references. His grades were way up high. He got the scholarship and he chose Cincinnati. He went to H.U.C. for a year, but he dropped out because he said he could see the handwriting on the wall. He was seventeen at that time and he said, "I do not want to be in a fish bowl." He did not want to be a public figure.

Norman became a letter carrier. He went to Ohio University for a year and could not make it because he did not have the academic background. He fooled around in school and did not get the grades. All he wanted to do was play golf. (In fact, he is still playing golf.) He dropped out after six months and came back to Youngstown. Marv Levy said to him, "Why don't you take a post office examination? It is a good civil service job. You will get a pension. It is for you." Norman went down and took a postal examination and got in just like that. He has been in the post office for 25 years. He is all set. I do not have to worry about him.

I got Kenny through college. He went two years to Cincinnati and I said, "What are you going to do, Kenny?" He said, "Well, I have to finish." I helped him finish and he did everything to get through school. He slung pizzas and worked in a box factory. He even washed down a meat packing plant. He did all kinds of jobs, but he got through Cincinnati. Then he met a girl down there by the name of Barbara Robbins and they got married. Skipping off through all his turmoil and getting through all his universities, he now has a B.A. Degree in Psychology, a Masters in Education, a Masters in Computer Science, and almost a Masters in Business Administration. What do you think he is doing now? He is a financial director in a private school for gifted children in Marietta,

Georgia. He always said he was not going to have "latch key" kids.

Getting back to Dr. Berkowitz, the whole congregation was shattered when he passed away. He had been with us for 30 years. He was a very compassionate man. Your problems were his problems. He helped me out a great deal when I had a very ill period during my life. I would go in to see him and get pastoral counseling from him, and he was everything. He was behind our whole family all those years. What else can I tell you?

B: You were speaking about his first sermon being very powerful. Do you remember what that first sermon was about?

S: I think it happened to be about a Chinese servant or something like that. It was too far back for me to remember to tell you the truth. Maybe Pauline has it. She might have saved it, I do not know. It was a very dynamic sermon.

The funny part of it is that I have a feeling our family was responsible for bringing him here. Let me tell you why. My father's brother was Sam Rosenbaum. His wife's name was Alice. They used to go to a warm spring place in Pennsylvania. They used to go to Martinsville to take the sulfur baths and everything. When they went there, they met Sidney Berkowitz's parents. They were there playing cards together. The Berkowitz's said, "Our son is looking to change his pulpit. He would like to get into another pulpit." They said, "Bring him to Youngstown. We have an opening for a Rabbi." So Rabbi Berkowitz came to Youngstown and was interviewed by the board of trustees and they grabbed him because of his background. Of course, Alice and Sam were behind him and everything, too. They were influential in the congregation. That is how he came to Youngstown.

B: This is a great interview. What did Youngstown look like growing up? How is it different that today?

S: When I was born I lived on Scott Street. Scott Street today is the slums.

B: Is that on the Northside?

S: Yes, the Northside. Scott Street was down near Arlington which is where the university is. All those streets are gone now because the university was built up around there. Gypsy Lane was a suburb in those days. I lived on Lora Avenue as a child, and also Ohio Avenue on the corner of Thornton. These places are boarded up now because they are all inner-city; I would not call them the slums. There is a lot of drug trafficking and shooting that goes on there today. They have just gone down hill.

The outlying historical Northside; Wick Park, Crandall Park, Fifth Avenue, and up around there is still pretty good territory. As you move down Belmont and Fifth Avenue, even in the university area you have to be very careful. A girl does not walk around there at night by herself, believe me. They have an escort service, now. They did

not have escort service in 1968 and 1969 when I was going to school. We did not have to worry at that time.

Can you imagine what has happened to the city of Youngstown since 1968 and 1969? It is just awful. It is shattering to know what has happened in this country today with the inner-city. I taught predominately black children at Covington School when I taught. After I left the program for the emotionally disturbed, I went to teach reading for Covington School which is right in back of St. Elizabeth's Hospital. It was about 60 percent black at that time. A better class of black children lived there. Herb Armstrong was the principal of Covington when I taught. What a man, a black man, but what a man. One of his own people, a woman, tried to come in and shoot him while I was there because she said he did not do right by her child. The thing was, she did not do right by her child because her child was a little retarded and she wanted to mainstream him. He could not learn, despite what the teacher had done for him, so she was blaming it on the system. Primarily, this is what parents try to do, blame it on the system. We were doing our best to teach these kinds of children who should have had special teachers. They needed to have special teachers.

When I was teaching reading, by the way, I got my Masters in Reading Supervision. I taught most of my years for federal programs under Jim French at the board of education. We just started to hear about dyslexia in those days. Now, the word is out in the open. Now they have programs that you could buy, Phonics programs. I was teaching Phonics in the first grade when I was at Jackson School about 24 years ago. I was teaching the Phonic method. The board of education switched. The educators switched. They go from the "see-look" program to Phonics. They have to stick with Phonics because that is the only way to go.

When I was at Y.S.U. I had a very marvelous professor by the name of Dorothy Fisher. I do not think she is down there anymore. She was a real reading teacher. Do not ask me how I got through Youngstown State University at the age of 47 because I did what all the other kids did. I had kids to my home and we studied together. I said I was going to take 75 hours, then I am going to finish because at that time if you took 75 hours they let you start to teach on a temporary certificate. Then after that at night you could come and get your degree. I got the 75 hours and I had a year and a half left to go and I said I was going to finish and get my degree.

When I first started in the Education class 501, I had a professor by the name of Howard Miller, bless his heart. He said, "You will never finish. You will never get your degree." I thought to myself, "You son of a 'b'. I will show you who will get their degree." When I got my diploma I marched into his room after class one day and I said, "Howard, here is my diploma. I just want you to know I got it." I was so happy. Professors have to be very careful of what they say to students. It was not a challenge. It was a "putdown" because some professors do not want older students. This is the trend today. I was one of the first that went back to college. After I went, loads of other women started to go back late in their life after they have had children and everything. Mine was out of necessity. I had to make a living. I had always been a teacher and I taught nursery school for nine years prior to going to college without a degree, without

anything at the Jewish Community Center. I had a ball doing it.

They just did not have a charter. I could not get any life credits for the nine years I taught. I went to Mrs. Braden and they did not have a charter at the center with the state of Ohio. If they would have had one and I would have taught up there, I could have gotten life credits for the nine years that I taught. I would have had a kindergarten certificate. I did not have time to get a kindergarten certificate. I took nineteen quarter hours on my last quarter at Y.S.U. for my B.S. Degree. I had to get permission to do that.

I had fun going to college. I advised a lot of the kids. I remember one girl came up to me once in the cafeteria and said to me, "Virginia, tell me something. What should I do? My mother and I are having troubles." I was always advising the kids what to do. I said, "Never leave your mother. You have to be more understanding of your mother. Remember, she was born in another generation." I talked to these kids like a "Dutch uncle" to a lot of them to help them get through school. They were going to drop out, skip around, and not stick to their studies. They fooled around. I had a good time.

B: What was the downtown area of Youngstown like growing up?

S: The downtown area was the center of everything, not like it is today. Today it is dead. That was the center when Strauss', McKelvy's, Lerner's, and all the Five and Ten's were down there. Their problem was parking. The downtown area had a parking problem. Years ago they built the Strauss' garage right across from where Strauss' used to be. You know where Phar-Mor used to be? Right across there they put in a three tier parking lot. McKelvy's put in a lot, too. That helped a little bit. I am so sorry to see the downtown disintegrating.

All they have down there are office buildings now. I guess it is that way in every city. They should not have made the center of town like it is today. It is not open anymore. People could not park there. They prettied it up, but they prettied it up for the bums. I do not know what could have been done, but if they would have come and consulted me I would have told them a few things about it. I think the wrong people decided what was going to be done with the downtown of Youngstown. We talk about it quite often. I have a friend by the name of Anne Zoss. She said, "If they would have come to me, I would have told them what to do with it." I do not think they should have done that.

B: How about working with the ethnic history and the ethnic neighborhoods of Youngstown, was the Jewish community centered in any particular part of the city?

S: Yes, mostly on the Northside. Then, gradually a few started to move out to the Southside. The Jewish community mainly lived on the Northside. I worked for all the temples. I worked for Rodef Sholom. At one time I worked for Anshe Emeth which merged with Temple Emmanuel and became El Emeth.

One of the wealthy businessmen in the city, Monte Friedkin, gave the land for both Rodef Sholom and El Emeth to build a temple out in Liberty. El Emeth went ahead

and did it. Rodef Sholom did not because Rabbi Berkowitz wanted to preserve the historical being of Rodef Sholom. The board of directors decided not to do it. We kept the temple and kept refurbishing it.

We still have the land out in Liberty if we ever wanted to build out there. He gave the congregation the land. Anyway, El Emeth paid off their mortgage by having bingo. Rodef Sholom's charter would not allow gambling, bingo, or liqueur in the temple. That was one thing they would not allow. Rabbi felt that we would benefit more by staying where we were.

Right now the congregation--to show you how time has progressed--is working on getting an elevator for the elderly people. We have a predominantly elderly congregation now. They are not getting any younger. They are getting older. Our president last year, Larry Heselov, started a program to get an elevator in there. It is not too far off, I think. We have some pretty dynamic people in running our congregation. Berkowitz brought us a long way. One of his right-hand guys was Murph Rosenblum. He is now ill, I am sorry to say. Nate Monus was another one who helped him a great deal. Nate Monus was also Rabbi Berkowitz's right-hand guy. They worked together very closely. Rabbi Berkowitz had to go to the "money" people because they were the support of the congregation. Whoever has money, you have to more or less befriend and have on your board of trustees. He worked hand-in-hand with all these businessmen. He was a businessman himself, otherwise, he would not have kept the congregation going.

He went in with several different businessmen and bought land where Burning Tree Lane is out on Logan Gate. He bought a lot of land out there. In fact, I think that is the land his brother-in-law Godfrey built on. Godfrey Anderson built some hi-rise condominiums out there. Pauline is living in one of them now. They lived on Madera Avenue for years. As I said, the Northside was the center of the Jewish community until they all started to move out to Liberty. A lot of them still live on the Northside. Do you know Dr. Spiegel?

B: I am interviewing him next week for Chemistry.

S: He lives up on Selma Avenue. Do you know Alex Rosenthall? Alex Rosenthall is connected with the Northside coalition. He lives way up on the Northside. Bruce Lev, who is also a member of our congregation, started building condominiums down here. My sister's son, Dr. Richard Rudick, is head of the Melon Center at the Cleveland Clinic. She will tell you more about him. He said he wanted us to get out of the inner city. He bought this condominium for us and shipped us out here. We like it. That is about my story. I have to leave something for Lucille to say.

B: I have a few more questions here.

S: If you cannot get it from me, get it from Lucille. She knows as much as I do about the whole family. In fact, I know some stuff for her to tell you about the family.

B: How about when you were growing up. What was Rabbi Philo like?

S: He was a very stern and serious man. Rabbi Philo was never an ordained rabbi. He had a Ph.D. I never knew this until much later, but he was not an ordained rabbi. He was a very dynamic man. When he preached, he was "hell, fire, and brim stone". He was one of those guys that gets up and always castigated the ones that came to the congregation on Friday night for the ones that did not come. He should have been talking to the ones that did not come. He gave us hell every Friday night. I think every religion has had this problem about getting people to come to church or getting people to come to temple. We did not have Bar Mitzvahs in those days. It was strictly German Reform because he was way back.

I was married by Rabbi Philo and confirmed by Rabbi Philo. He was a task master. He was likeable. I liked him, but I was scared of him, even a little bit in awe of him. That is the appearance he gave to the congregation. When he passed away, they got another rabbi. I did not really know Rabbi Fineberg that well. He was only with the congregation a short time anyway when he died of cancer.

Rabbi Philo used to drop his daughter Anne off at our house on a Friday night when we were little. We would play dolls until he was through, then he would pick her up on his way home. He lived up on Selma Avenue, too, in those days. I know that his daughter Fritzy Wasburn is up at Heritage Manor now. It is a shame. She has Alzheimers, now. It is a devastating disease. We had a real good relationship in those days. What else could I tell you?

B: Was your family always members of the Rodef Sholom?

S: Always.

B: Was there also a Conservative and Orthodox temple?

S: Yes. My grandfather, my father's father came to Youngstown and he belonged to the Orthodox. He was what they called "rov". A rov is another word for Rabbi. He died when he was 67. At the time, that was old. He had a long beard and mustache, and wore a hat all the time. He got up in the morning and put on phylacteries and laid what you call "tfillin," like Jesus did in the old days. He put the leather thongs around his fingers. He had a half hour ceremony in the every morning.

My grandmother took in boarders because he did not work. He was too religious to work. To me it seems so funny. That was the way they were in those days. He was up on Myrtle Avenue at the old shul. They called it the old shul in those days. The men came, and all they used to do was study the Talmud. They studied the Talmud which is the five books of Moses. The takeoff on the Torah was the Talmud. They would sit around, drink whiskey, and study the Talmud. I think they were lushes, myself. (Laughter) They would come to him for advice and what he thought about this and what he thought about that.

I have to tell you something funny. There is a portion in our prayer book that is the "ethics of the fathers" which comes from Ecclesiastes. My father had his own "ethics of the fathers". He would say to us when we would go to him and complain about this or that, he said, "Write it down. I will read it when I have time." Then he used to also say to us, "Do not worry about it. One-hundred years from now you will never know the difference." Those were his "ethics of the fathers". We got a great legacy from my father. My father was a solid man. That is all I could tell you.

B: I do not know how familiar you were with Rabbi Berkowitz and his activities within the community.

S: He was very active in the community. He was active with the Red Cross, United Way, and Rotary. He was with everything. They thought as much of him in the gentile community as they did in the Jewish community. He and Bishop Malone were like this. He cemented relations between the ethnic groups of the city, and the Jewish groups of the city. He tried to cement relations so there would not be as much anti-Semitism as there was in previous years.

I remember going to school to Rayen when I was fourteen, fifteen, when certain Catholic families used to call us, "Dirty Jew, dirty Jew." I can remember that as a child. He tried to stem the tide of the anti-Semitism in the communities by being familiar and bringing them into the Jewish Passover holidays, and bringing their priests in for the breakfasts and lunches they would have in the congregation. I was a kid then and had to work, so I was not connected to the sisterhood, but I am totally with the sisterhood now. In fact, I am very close with the sisterhood. I do a million jobs for the sisterhood at this point.

B: I was speaking to Arlene Brewster today, and she spoke about the cross?

S: Arlene Brewster is a very fine woman. In fact, I think she is a member of our sisterhood. She came and talked to the sisterhood about Rabbi Powers and how the congregation must learn to accept a younger rabbi, not withstanding that Rabbi Berkowitz was with us for 30 years. She spoke very dynamically about what a loss like that meant to the congregation, and how we have to let the younger people come in and teach us new things. She was right. It was a faction in the temple.

I liked David Powers. I thought he was a wonderful, wonderful man. I felt he was not as much a rabbi as he should have been a professor. That is exactly what he is doing in Cleveland now. He is a professor. He is a brilliant fellow. He can talk like you would not believe, vocabulary and everything. He could not relate to the older members of the congregation. They got up a group to try to hold him. I do not know what went on because I was not on the inside of things. I did not know what went on, or what he did or anything about it. The board of directors would have known that because I was not that close to know what went on day by day. They did not renew his contract after seven years. They did renew his contract once, but they let him go. They did not renew it later.

Then they pulled in Rabbi Jonathan Brown. At first the congregation did not like him either. There are still some of them that do not like what he does. He is trying very hard, and he is a very compassionate man. He is trying to cement the Jewish and gentile community. He is getting more and more integrated. That is my story.

B: I have a couple more questions. Something about Rabbi Berkowitz's personality, how would you describe his personality? What were his attributes?

S: He was so busy and so emersed in the congregation that personally, I did not think he had much time to be a father. He was not the kind of man that would go out and play ball with his kids or take them ice skating. He was too busy and he was too emersed in the congregation. He should have had an assistant to give him a little more free time. That man did not have any free time. In fact, I think he killed himself for the congregation because he died when he was 71 of a heart attack. He had another one prior to that. He ran, ran, ran, all the time.

His office staff adored him if that is any indication of anything. He was "easy does it." When it was time to clamp down, he knew how to clamp down in a way that did not offend anybody. I do not think he had an enemy in the world, to tell you the truth. I do not think he did. He was soft when he needed to be soft, and tough when he needed to be tough. He knew how to put somebody in their place without offending them. You would love him one minute and hate him the next if he called you on the carpet for something. He never called me on the carpet.

I will give you a very interesting thing. I do not know whether he was trying to challenge me, and I am sure he was challenging me. When my husband died and I went in to see him a few weeks later, he said, "Well Virginia, what are you going to do?" He knew we did not have any money. He knew my husband left me very little insurance. I was not a wealthy widow. He knew I had to go to work, so he said, "What are you going to do?" I said, "Well, Helen Lester, Babby Roland, all said I should go down to Y.S.U. and get a degree. I think that is what I am going to do." He looks me in the eye and says, "You will never make it." I walked out of his office and thought to myself, "I will show you who is going to make it," and I did.

When I graduated, I think I was one of very few people that he sent a gift to. He and Pauline sent me a gift. He gave the benediction at my graduation. I felt pretty good about that. That was Rabbi Berkowitz. He would not let anyone call him Sidney, either. He wanted to be called rabbi, or doctor. He did not mind being called rabbi, but he did not let anyone call him Sidney. Somebody I was with once on a Friday night went up to him and said, "Well, Sidney." He stopped him in their tracks just like that. He said, "Rabbi, if you do not mind." That is the kind of man he was.

He wanted to be known by his title. He was a brilliant man. Do not forget, he had a Rhodes Scholarship. He had gone to England. That is how he met Pauline. He went over to England on a Rhodes Scholarship and brought back an English bride. She was very reserved and shy. I got to know Pauline very well because I was in school with her. She was teaching French down at Y.S.U. to some undergraduates when I was going

to college. She knew one of my professors very well and we used to stand in the hall between classes talking together.

When Pauline was pregnant with the boys, we used to go on picnics with her and the rabbi. We used to go to Churchill to the picnic grounds. We would go on picnics and have fun. We always loved the kids growing up. It was hard for them coming to a strange town. I do not know how they did it. It is very difficult. I do now know if I could go to a strange town and fit right in. People were very good here. People in Youngstown are very warm. I do not think strangers have too much problem coming into the community.

B: Everybody I have spoken to about Rabbi Berkowitz has spoken about his humor.

S: I did not think he was funny. He thought he was funny and other people thought he was funny, but I did not get a sense of funniness out of certain things that he said. Sometimes it was "true words spoken in jest", if you know what I mean. I did not think it was particularly funny. That is my own personal opinion. I did not think he was funny. He tried to be funny. Let me put it this way, he tried to be funny, but it did not always come off. That is all I could tell you. I am telling you the truth.

B: Could you describe to me how Rabbi Berkowitz would run a service at the temple?

S: He did not want the kids running around. He did not want disturbance in the congregation. I know nowadays kids run up on the pulpit. I have seen them. He wanted decorum and he got decorum. He would not allow the congregation to come in and sit down if the Torah was out of the Ark. The Torah is the five books of Moses. When they read the Torah it is a sacred book. When the scroll was out, he had the ushers keep the people outside until they put the Torah back in the Ark. You were not allowed to come in and sit down. They were not allowed to seat the congregants. In the high holy days if they had the Torah out the people waited out in the lobby until the Torah was back in the Ark. Then they could come in and sit down. He was very strict about running his services.

B: Was he very prompt?

S: Absolutely. He had one hour. If the board of directors said, "We want services from nine to ten," it was from nine to ten. If it was eight to nine, he was through on the dial at nine. He had everything timed perfectly. He was meticulous about the services that way. Brown does not care if he runs over fifteen minutes of a half an hour. They would call him on it many times. I remember Dr. Dick Shapiro was president before Larry Heselov. He was having a fit because Brown would start at 8:00 and God knows when he got through. He would talk, talk, talk, not Rabbi Berkowitz.

He had everything down to a science. It was a science with him. He had a cantor, Larry Ehrlich, who was a wonderful musician. He had him limited as to what he sang.

He told him what he was to sing and everything else. He and Larry got into it quite frequently, I imagine. Larry wanted to be a little more than he was. Larry had a tremendous job to do, too. He had to run Sunday school. That is something this cantor does not have to do. He just has charge of the music. Larry had to run the Sunday school, be the cantor, do all the B'nai Mitzvah boys and girls. He had a big job. He was over worked.

Rabbi Berkowitz was over worked, too, because at the time he had the congregation we were up to 700 members. He was only one person trying to handle all of that. He had a tremendous job. If he said he was going to be there at 2:00, he was there at 2:00 to have an appointment. Do you know who you ought to interview about Rabbi Berkowitz? You should interview Josephine Glassman. She worked for him. She was his secretary for years.

B: Her name is on my list, but I have not been able to get hold of her yet.

S: You cannot get hold of her?

B: I do not know if she works.

S: Call her in the evening. Josephine is on a cross country trip with Michelle. Her daughter took her on a trip. How long do you have to do this?

B: I will be going to Kent in August, but somebody else will take over the job. Hopefully, by the next week I will get the majority of them.

S: She ought to be back the end of July. Try her the end of the last week in July, or the second week in July. She would know a lot about Berkowitz. She worked for him. She has a different perspective.

B: Is there anything you would like to add at this time?

S: I told you so much. Why don't you talk to Lucille and get her ideas because we grew up together and lived together all our lives. She might fill in with something I have not filled in with.

B: One quick question I forgot to ask that is real important. Did Rodef Sholom grow during Rabbi Berkowitz's tenure in numbers?

S: Yes it did. Why? Because the birth rate went up. I will give you a "for instance." Our sons had a class of 42 in the confirmation class. There has been a steady decline since then. These were war babies and war families. More and more poor families came into Youngstown, had children and settled here. It blossomed. Then there was a steady decline as these kids grew and went away to school. The parents sometimes moved with

them to the Reform temples.

B: Did the Conservative congregation also see a similar increase, or did Rabbi Berkowitz's presence draw more people to the Reform temples?

S: I think the Reform drew more people. They got so low at one time that the Conservatives and the Orthodox had to merge. They did not have enough people in either temple to carry the temple forward. Anshe Emeth and Temple Emmanuel merged to become El Emeth. That was a Conservative temple now. A lot of the Jews moved out to the Southside. They formed their own temple there called Ohev Tzedek. Strictly the people on the Southside comprise the Orthodox temple. A lot of them were sons and daughters of the people that just wanted to go south. They either moved out to Liberty or they moved out to Boardman. The Boardman Jews are the Orthodox Jews. I would not call it strictly Orthodox. I would call it Conservative. It was Orthodox at one time, but they have changed since. Mitch Kornspan was a Northside boy. He became a rabbi and came back. He is now the rabbi at Ohev Tzedek. He grew up with my son.

B: Would he have been confirmed by Rabbi Berkowitz?

S: No, I think he would have been confirmed by the Conservative rabbi.

B: He went to the Conservative temple?

S: Yes.

B: Is there anything else you would like to touch on we did not cover?

S: I think I have had a pretty good life as it goes. I have had a good background. Let us leave it at that.

B: Thank you very much. This is a good interview.

S: You are welcome.

End of Interview