

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Rabbi Sidney Berkowitz

Personal Experience

O H 1545

ESTHER WEINSTOCK

Interviewed

by

Matthew Butts

on

July 18, 1992

ESTHER WEINSTOCK

Mrs. Esther Weinstock was born on August 7, 1921 in the city of Farrel, Pennsylvania, the daughter of Lewis and Sadie Newman Weinstock attended secondary school at Farrel High School, graduating in 1939 Mrs Weinstock arrived in Youngstown, Ohio shortly after her husband visited here during the early 1950's in search of employment Sadly, Mrs Weinstock's husband passed away in 1963 after a brief illness. She worked temporarily to help support her two children, Lynn and Dick Shortly after, Ester met Mr Marvin Weinstock. They were married on August 2, 1971 at the Temple Rodef Sholom

Presently, Mrs Weinstock enjoys retired life with her husband. They reside at 2281 Coronado Avenue, Youngstown, Ohio She continues to be an active member of the congregation of the Temple Rodef Sholom She spends much of her free time both golfing and playing tennis.

B This is an interview with Esther Weinstock for the Youngstown State Oral History Program, on the Rabbi Sidney Berkowitz Project, by Matthew Butts, on July 18, 1992, at 2281 Coronado Avenue, 9:30 a m

Could you tell me something about yourself, where you were born, where you grew up?

W I was born in Farrel, Pennsylvania I spent my whole childhood and schooling there. I got married and moved to Youngstown in 1954. My first husband had a home on Belmont We had two children, Dick and Lynn They went to Rayen. We belonged to the Temple I had a very happy home life. My first husband died when he was 48. I continued to run the business until I remarried Marvin Weinstock in 1971 My husband died in 1964 My son went to Ohio State and graduated from there He went to law school in California, and now practices law in Youngstown. My daughter lives in Youngstown. She is married to Peter Mendleson She has three children She makes me a grandmother of three My husband and I both play golf and tennis We love living in Youngstown We usually go away in the wintertime to a tennis club in Palm Beach, then back here in the summertime. I feel fortunate to have many friends here.

I feel badly about some of the things that happened here When I got downtown now, it is sad to see what has happened to our city As a matter of fact, when I was much younger, we used to come into Youngstown directly to do shopping in all the different stores here They were really beautiful, the downtown section, the restaurants, the stores, Strauss, Levingston's. It was a beautiful place to shop Now it seems that if you want to go to a theater, restaurants, you have to go to Cleveland or Pittsburgh. I feel very sorry for the working man today that used to work in all of our mills and had good jobs, and had a good living wage, a wage that permitted his children to be able to go to school Maybe his wife did not have to work at a job. Now it seems like there is no such thing anymore It takes two incomes for a man and a wife to raise a family The world seems to have changed in the last fifteen or twenty years

B. When did you join Rodef Sholom?

W This is strange. My daughter Gwen used to play with Dr Berkowitz's two children when I moved to Youngstown in 1954. My children were the ages of five and seven Dr. Berkowitz lived right around the corner from me on Selma I did not know Dr Berkowitz at the time I only knew the fact that when we lived in Farrel, I wanted my son to have a conservative education at a temple, at the kind of temple that I felt my children should grow up in I first heard of Dr Berkowitz from my daughter Lynn, who was six years old, that went around the corner and played with his two children, Roger and another that I cannot remember his name. I never met Dr Berkowitz Meanwhile, we had joined the Temple

The first time I met Rabbi Berkowitz was when my mother was still in the

hospital. Even though I did not belong to his temple he walked into the room and talked to her, and was gracious enough to visit her and see how she was, even though we were not members of his temple. Then when my first husband died I still was not a member of his temple. I still belonged to another. He came to my home and he visited with me. He even brought me a poem that he asked me to read, which was at a very difficult time, but he was there to try to comfort me. He was not my rabbi. My daughter still did not belong. My daughter was going to get married. She came home one day and said to me, "I want to be married at the Rodef Sholom by Dr. Berkowitz. I know him, I played with his children, I have been in his home. I feel much closer to him." The rabbi that was in the other temple, for all those years she felt attachment to Dr. Berkowitz.

That is what I did. I joined the Rodef Sholom Temple. She got married there. We went to services there. I felt I got more out of Rabbi Berkowitz's sermon than being there for two hours at a service than I ever did in any other temple. He was a really creative man.

B. Describe to me the area around Rodef Sholom

W: At the time, and even now, it has not changed that much in the last 30 years, geographically, by the way it looks or the feeling there. That is my opinion, although, people say that the section further down is bad. I was remarking to my husband when we were there last, if anybody had been inside the Temple, the way the seating is and the glass stained windows with the height of the ceilings, everything about the temple, it is not a contemporary. It is old. It has a feeling that is different.

MW: [Esther's husband] I would like to interject this if you do not mind. The Temple moved out into the suburbs and joined another temple. That is now the senior citizen center down there. The Temple is not all purpose senior citizen center now?

W: That is the one on Fifth Avenue. That was bought by I believe a black congregation, the one on Fifth Avenue they have built a temple in Liberty. That was not the temple that was taken over by the one on Fifth Avenue. There is a temple now on Logan.

MW: What I did want to say was if we are talking about the area, the Wick Park area which is where this is. Any other temples were right around there. For a while it became a dope area. There were several pick-ups and so forth. When we go to that temple now, there are guards and guard dogs so that when you leave the temple at night. The area and park area has been used. We have not heard anything in the last couple years. Several years back it was a big gathering for a lot of people dealing dope and looking for buys. Some of the area has become mixed racially. A lot of the homes out in that area and back behind the Rotatilm, is 100% black, or close to it. The temple is there. The structure of the temple is

really worthy of a good photographer. If you are writing a piece of paper, you want this because it is gorgeous inside

The other thing that I wanted to interject was the reform temple has an organ and a choir. The Orthodox have absolutely nothing like that. In between the two, you get to the point where you have an actual organ in the place it has to be reformed. They do not use this type of music. They do not use music at all. They did a change. They did not use a choir. This one has a choir. It has four or five singers to sing along. I am sure you know, there are assistant rabbis along with the guy that does the singing, the cantor. They do have a cantor in the Orthodox as well that does sing some of the prayers. This one also has a choir. When I first went there I was surprised by the organ and the choir.

B: What is the most striking physical characteristic of Rodef Sholom for you?

W: The temple itself, the stained-glass windows, the serenity, the peacefulness of the temple. The services when Rabbi Berkowitz was there were inspirational. You listened very intently to what he had to say because I felt he had a lot to say about things that were very important. That is how I felt about the temple and Rabbi Berkowitz. I thought he was a very unusual man. As a matter of fact, when we were going to be married, my husband and I went to him and he had known my husband previously because my husband had been active in different organizations in town. He told me something I thought was very interesting. He said, "Marvin is not a very religious man. I know him. Do not try to make him go to temple. When he is ready to go he will go with you." It was amazing. That is exactly what happened. I never forced him or asked him to go. One day he said, "I am going to go with you to temple." He was a very phenomenal person. He had a lot of insight in people, which is a difficult thing to find anymore. I thought he really cared about people. He made the temple somewhere you wanted to go. If you did not come to temple, there were 200 people in the congregation and he knew you were not there. You went because you wanted to go. The temple itself is different now that he is not there. It is difficult for anyone to step into a man's shoes like that.

B: Describe to me how he looked physically.

W: He was such a beautiful man that his physical appearance was not important. He was very neat, very clean, certainly not handsome. You never noticed that he was not handsome because you looked at him in a different respect than you would with a person that his physical looks were not important. It was the fact that he was the type of person that he was.

B: How was his ability to give a great sermon? What was unique about his speaking style?

W: Actually, I would not say he was a great orator. I think what he had to say held a

person's interest. We have had other rabbi's there since then that spoke more eloquently, walked back and forth across the pulpit and orated. It was what he had to say. Maybe he did have wonderful diction. I know he had a wonderful vocabulary and a very good sense of what he was saying and how to say it. To me the most important thing was what he had to say.

B: How often was he really involved with the workings of the temple, the day to day operations of it?

W: I really cannot answer that question. I was not there for the day to day operation. I felt that he certainly knew what was happening and was aware of what was going on. It was his congregation, which to me was more important than the operation of the temple. I think that would have belonged to people who were the president of the temple and who were taking care of finances. I do not know. That is my opinion.

B: What did he wear to services?

W: Just a robe, that is all -- a black robe if I remember correctly.

B: How about if you were sitting in the congregation. Where would he be on the pulpit?

W: Usually they had a pulpit on my right. He would usually be giving his sermons there. The cantor would usually be on the left on another pulpit. There are seats in the back part near the Torah on both sides with two pulpits.

B: What traits made his personality unique?

W: That is a hard question to answer. I just admired him. I will never forget one thing that I was very impressed with. We were at a cocktail party in someone's home. He was there with his wife, who was a lovely woman. I could tell that he had a lot of respect for his wife and a lot of love. That was very obvious to me because he was standing there talking to her and I was standing right next to him talking to somebody else. Someone walked up to them and were going to interrupt their conversation and he put his hand up and said, "Just a minute, please. I am talking to my wife. As soon as I am through, I will be glad to talk to you." In other words, I got the feeling that to him, what his wife was saying was the most important thing in the world, nothing else mattered. That, to me, was beautiful.

B: We covered most of my questions. Is there anything you would like to add that we really have not touched on?

W: Not really. I cannot think of anything else. Fortunately, my daughter knew him.

better than I did from the time she was six years old. It was her wish that really surprised me that made me join the Rodef Sholom Temple. I felt that was very fortunate for us. That is about all I have.

B Thank you very much.

W. You are welcome.

End Of Interview