

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Rabbi Sidney Berkowitz Project

Personal Experience

O.H. 1549

SAMUEL ZLOTNICK

Interviewed

by

Matthew T. Butts

on

July 22, 1992

DR. SAMUEL ZLOTNICK

Doctor Samuel Zlotnick was born on April 23, 1915 in Youngstown, Ohio, the son of Abraham and Deborah Zlotnick. Growing up on the South Side of the city, Zlotnick attended school at Princeton Junior High School and South High School, graduating in 1933.

Following high school, Zlotnick attended Ohio State University, achieving both his Bachelor of Science degree and his Doctorate of Medicine degree by 1942. He then returned to Youngstown for a short period of time before being called for service in the United States Army Medical Corp. Zlotnick served across the United States while serving in the Army. After his discharge in October, 1946, he returned to Youngstown where he opened a private medical practice. Zlotnick served as an active member of many local organizations, including the American Medical Association and the Ohio State Medical Association.

Presently, Dr. Zlotnick is enjoying retired life. He resides at 3502 B. Somerset Drive, Youngstown, Ohio. He continues to be an active member of the congregation of the Temple Rodef Sholom and the Squaw Creek Country Club. He spends much of his free time golfing and reading.

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INTERVIEWEE: SAMUEL ZLOTNICK  
INTERVIEWER: Matthew T. Butts  
SUBJECT: Rabbi Sidney Berkowitz, Rodef Sholom  
DATE: July 22, 1992

B: This is an interview with Dr. Samuel Zlotnick 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, 3502 B. Somerset Drive, Youngstown, Ohio, on July 22, 1992.

Okay. Tell me something about yourself, as far as where you were born [and] what street you grew up on.

Z: Well, I was born in Youngstown, Ohio. I lived at 612 Scott Street on the North Side of Youngstown. My first school was Covington School. I was there for the first three grades, and we moved out on [to] the South Side in, I would say, about 1923 or 1924. [I] attended Princeton Elementary School for three years and was transferred to Sheridan Elementary School for a half year and returned to Princeton, which became a junior high. Upon graduation from Princeton, I went to South High School, where I completed the last three years of my Youngstown schooling. This was during the height of the Depression. I graduated in 1933. I was unable to attend college until the following year. I entered Ohio State University in 1934 and received my bachelor degree in 1938. [I] entered medical school the same year and graduated with an M.D. in 1942. I took my training in Youngstown Hospital Association in the north and south units. I went into practice for one

year in 1943 and entered the Armed Services in 1944. I spent my Army career in hospitals state side and returned to Youngstown in 1946 and reopened my office. I had several colleagues and continued practicing internal medicine until I retired in 1983.

B: What was your education like at South Side?

Z: Well, looking back there, I thought I had a fairly good scholastic education. I had no problems. I made National Honor Society. I had no problems at college. I was able to get through with a good scholastic record, both undergraduate and medical. So, I had excellent teachers in elementary, junior high, and high school. A lot of changes occurred with the composition of our city during the war, of course. A lot of blacks came up from the South to work in the mills during the war. I think, at that time, we had probably some change in the local schools. I can't speak with any authority on that, because I was away at college at that time.

B: How about the street where you grew up? Was it an ethnic street? Were there a lot of different [ethnic groups]? Was there Italians?

Z: Well, I think we were the only Jewish family on the street, as I remember. I remember my best friend lived across the street from me. His name was Buddy Hubbard. I haven't seen him since I moved away, and I was nine years old when I moved away. But surprisingly, I had a patient who was a nephew of this Buddy Hubbard. I never saw Buddy Hubbard, but I took care of his nephew. As I remember, he told me something about his uncle. I said, "Gee. That sounds like the guy I used to know." I don't know what's happened to him. I know he was an executive over at the steel mills in Youngstown.

B: How about some other parts of the city? Were there any other immigrational or ethnic enclaves when you were growing up?

Z: No. I think in the area that I lived in, even on the South Side, our family was the only Jewish family that lived in the immediate vicinity. Particularly when I went to Princeton or Sheridan, or at South High, I developed some friendships with a couple men, boys I should say, at that time. In fact, one of them was my roommate for a short period of time at Ohio State, but he dropped out because his father died, and he had to come back to Youngstown to run his father's business, the Ohio Notion Company on Boardman Street. His name was Max Harshman.

As far as the ethnic composition of Youngstown, there were a lot of families that were immigrants. I remember the one youngster in my class was from Wales. I think it was junior high that he came into our class. I think his family had just come into this country from Wales. There were a lot of Italians. There were a lot of Slavs, Poles. A lot of these people worked in the local steel mills. The neighborhood I lived in on the South Side was solid middle class. I remember the people next door. The man was a pharmacist who had a couple drug stores. In that particular family, the older boy, C.H. Bloom, the family Episcopalian, became a pharmacist and took over his father's business. He later on--this was after I was away at school--they moved away, and he became a physician. In fact, I think he went to Ohio State and got his medical degree two years after I received mine. The last I heard of him, he was living in Florida. He was two years older, and I'm sure he's retired by this time.

B: How about, physically, what did the city look like? The down town area when you were growing up?

Z: The down town, of course, was very, very busy. Are you a Youngstown native?

B: Right. Yes.

Z: Well, Youngstown's down town area was busy from, I would say, the old Basin Street--I don't know if you know what the old Basin Street is--down at the end of East Federal, all the way through the square and over to as far as where Westlake Crossing used to be. There used to be a department store at Westlake Crossing. The large department stores in Youngstown, of course, were Strouss' and McKelvey's. We had streetcars running up and down Federal Street, all over the town, and those were replaced by trolley buses. This was back around the 1930s and 1940s, I would imagine. Most of the shopping was done down town. That was in the days before malls. If you wanted to buy something, you had to go to the department store to buy it. We had "Five and Tens." I remember a Woolworth down town on Federal Street. Our theaters were there. When you went down town, you had the old Strand Theater. You had the Liberty Theater. And of course, when Warner Theater came, I think it was one of the last theaters down town. There was one after the Warner, and that was the State Theater. Don't see those anymore.

B: No. Do you remember any specific streets or anything that some of these theaters were on?

Z: The ones I mentioned down town, [the] Strand Theater was on the square. Liberty was right off the square.

It was on Federal Street. The State was on Federal Street. There were a couple of theaters on the East end. I remember there was one up on Himrod Avenue. That's on the East Side. There's one at East Federal. There's one other old theater, Park Theater, on East Federal. There was a burlesque on one of those side streets, but I can't remember the name of the street. I think it was one block off of the square, about one block east of the square. Then, I think that burlesque theater moved into the Park Theater, and then eventually, it was closed. I was never there. I was too young at the time. Of course, the first theater that I usually went to was one that was built not too long after we moved on the South Side and it's still there, the Uptown Theater, right near Hylde [and] Market Street. I think it's used for some private showings or something.

B: How about the area? Growing up as a child in Youngstown, what did you do for entertainment? What were some of the things that you did?

Z: [I] played football, baseball. On the corner lot [I] played there, from where we lived. On Hillman at Hylde, there's a big corner lot, and we used to play baseball during the summer and football during the fall. We used to roller skate. I remember I had a bicycle, and one of my friends had a bicycle. One of my good friends when I lived on Hillman Street was a fellow named Paul Lafollette. His father was a Methodist Episcopalian minister of a church at Oakhill and Indianola Avenue. We were friends until that family moved away. Then, I saw him a number of years later. This was shortly after I was married. I got a call from him. He was a physician. He was a radiologist. We went out to dinner and to a Mahoning County Medical Society barn dance at that time. I saw him one time, and that was the last I saw of Paul. I remember him moving away from Youngstown quite a long while ago.

B: How about the area around Idora Park? Did you go there a lot?

Z: No, I spent more time in Mill Creek Park than Idora. Idora was a place we went to on July 4 and watched fire works. In fact, you could see fire works at Idora Park--we used to go up to the attic of our home on Hillman Street and watch the fire works on July 4th. Most of the time, I know during the summer, when my brother and I would go out and spend the day out there, my mother would pack us a lunch. We'd go out there and spend a day and come back. We had a great time. We would fish and never catch anything. We used a hook and a worm. There wasn't much fish around there, but we'd go out anyway.

B: What do you remember about the steel industry in Youngstown?

Z: Well, you know, I never knew too much about the steel industry. My father was in the building business. He was a carpenter, and at one time, it was like he contracted several of the houses in some sections of the city. But, I know all the fathers of my fellow students at school were all steel workers, and the area we lived in was a middle class neighborhood. We had a lot of steel workers, but all I know is that we had a lot of soot in this town at one time. We don't have any more, but of course, we don't have any industry here any more.

B: Right. Okay, how about, are you a member of Rodef Sholom?

Z: I was after I got back from the service. I married a woman whose family had been members there for years.

B: Is that when you met Dr. Berkowitz?

Z: Well, I met him very shortly after I came back from the service and he accepted the pulpit at Rodef Sholom. Actually, he had some intestinal problems [that] he developed in Okinawa, and our office treated him. That's the first time I met him.

B: What was he like, like his personality?

Z: Oh, he was charming. We developed a friendship. We started to play bridge. Two of my fellow physicians, Dr. Berkowitz, and I became friendly. We used to meet regularly. We played bridge. I was married and I think one of the other fellows that played was married about the same time when we got back from the service. And this friendship continued until he died. That was in 1983. We started this group in 1946 when I got back from the service, and we used to meet regularly. Of course, all of us were married, and our wives were acquainted with each other. They played canasta.

B: You weren't a member of Rodef Sholom growing up?

Z: No, not growing up. I belonged and my parents belonged to an Orthodox temple, Emmanuel, which eventually joined to El Emeth and it's now El Emeth. Anche-Emeth and Temple Emmanuel were fused sometime around 1950 or so. It presently is located on Lincoln Avenue.

B: Where was Temple Emmanuel located at?

Z: Originally on East Rayen Avenue. In later years, they built their temple on Fifth Avenue.

B: Were the majority of congregants from any specific part of Europe?

Z: Well, I'd say Eastern Europe.

B: What's the difference between an Orthodox temple and a Reform?

Z: The Orthodox is more traditional. It would be hard for me to describe. I wasn't too interested in Orthodoxy. I can tell you that. I liked the services that we had at Rodef Sholom. Even that is changing in recent years. They've sort of shifted toward more traditional services, and I don't particularly care for them. You don't have to quote me on that.

B: Okay. How about the services with Rabbi Berkowitz at Rodef Sholom? What were they like?

Z: His sermons were usually very interesting. He used to speak on current topics. I'm trying to think of the proper word to describe his services. . . . I'm trying to think of a term that I used before, and I can't even think of it. I was going to say "refined," but I guess all religious services are refined. That isn't the term I wanted to use. I'll have to think about it for awhile. As you can see, I'm not very good at this. But, I enjoyed his sermons. They were informative and timely.

B: Could you describe, physically, what Rodef Sholom looks like, for me?

Z: Have you ever been to Rodef Sholom?

B: Yes.

Z: Well, it's a beautiful temple. Architecturally, I can't describe it too well. I'm not familiar with architecture. But, it's relatively plain and has a beautiful pulpit that was remodeled several years ago. Our front entrance has also been remodeled. It's a large center domed temple. I don't know the capacity of the sanctuary. It has a balcony. The decor, I think the carpet and the seats are all blue. That's about all I can say about the physical appearance. I'm sure other people can describe that more adequately than I can.

B: Do you know if Dr. Berkowitz had any other hobbies? You mentioned bridge. Did he play golf or anything else?

Z: We used to play golf, but he got so darned busy. When we played, it took too much of his time. I used to play golf with him. We usually played on Saturdays. He was a good golfer. He was well coordinated, physically. I understand, in his youth, he was a good ping pong player. I don't know about tennis. I don't know whether he ever played tennis or not. But, I know he was a good ping pong player. He was a good golfer. He used to hit real good shots. I always enjoyed playing with him.

B: Can you think of anything we haven't touched on that you think we need to add?

Z: Well, basically no. The composition in this town has changed. Where did you go to?

B: Well, I was actually born in Salem, but I grew up just south of Boardman and North Lima.

Z: Of course, you're young and you haven't seen the Youngstown that I saw.

B: The first time I remember coming up here was right around 1978 or 1979, when the steel mills just closed. But, not too much before that. A little bit of the up town area.

Z: There's an area that I spent from the time I was nine years old until after I was married, the Uptown area. And that's changed, too. It used to be a very nice place.

B: No. My father grew up on Kenmore Avenue.

Z: Well, he knows a lot about the South Side, because Kenmore is probably near St. Patrick's Church. In fact, I think St. Patrick's is around Kenmore, somewhere around there, maybe a block or two [away]. I don't remember the exact street, because it's somewhere down in that Oakhill area, a long time ago.

B: His father ran an Isaly's establishment on Elm, I think. It's now a soul food restaurant.

Z: It wasn't Glenwood at Warren Avenue, was it?

B: I think it may have been.

Z: Because I think there was an Isaly's on Glenwood and Warren.

B: I think that probably was it. Yes.

Z: See, that was near the South High area.

B: Definitely. Yes.

Z: Your dad could tell you a lot about Youngstown. How long was he there?

B: He's going to be 56 this year.

Z: Did he go to South?

B: Right.

Z: So, he graduated probably back not too long ago, if he's 56.

B: Yes. In 1954, he graduated and went into the Army right after that.

Z: In 1954.

B: Yes.

Z: See, I graduated in 1933, so there's quite a difference there. I'm sure South was a lot different at the time he graduated.

B: Yes. He has a couple stories. Well, thank you for your time.

Z: You're welcome.

END OF INTERVIEW