

**CELEBRATING OUR STORIES**  
**Jewish Life in Ann Arbor**

**Beverly and Art Gershowitz**  
**Recorded April 21, 2013**

**2:05-3:38**

*Beverly:* There were very few Jewish people. There were very few residential areas. The whole city has grown. Living here all the time, you see it grow gradually, but your sisters, your three sisters, have always commented, when they come back to visit, after they moved out, how much the city has grown. You must've noticed it, cuz you lived in Chicago and Boston area.

*Art:* You moved here from New York, and then Los Angeles, so coming to Ann Arbor in the '50s, I imagine the Jewish population wasn't quite as big, and being Jewish here was quite a different experience from in those places.

*Beverly:* Yes.

*Art:* Looking for housing, and the people that you meet.

*Beverly:* That was one reason that we tried to join a synagogue. In 1953—well, it must've been 1954, because you were born in June, and we moved here four months later. Some time probably in the spring, daddy and I went down to the Hillel building on Hill Street. That's where the synagogue met. They were all in one building. We decided, the best thing, when you have children, is to join a synagogue, so we went down there and your father got very involved. I didn't get involved at the beginning, but he did.

**3:44-6:14**

*Beverly:* Phil Seymour got him involved, and told him that it was not a difficult job to be religious, chairman [*laughter*]. You know what that turned in to be.

*Art:* That was kinda the foot in the door.

*Beverly:* Yeah. He never stopped. He started probably in '57 or '58, cuz we were still not living where we are now. That's when he became involved. Susan went, she was three when we moved here, and we enrolled her in—we couldn't enroll her—Beth Israel had a nursery school then, and we couldn't enroll her in that. It was full, so I

kept her home, like a little prisoner. You never went to nursery school, no. It was a very small community. I joined Hadassah.

*Art:* When was that?

*Beverly:* Hadassah was—

*Art:* No, when?

*Beverly:* When? I'm trying to think. I lived on Wines Drive already. We moved to Wines Drive.

*Art:* That would've been about '61, thereabouts.

*Beverly:* Probably very late '50s, '59, '60. Margo got me involved in Hadassah. Margo is my oldest living friend in Ann Arbor. You know that. My mother met her. My mother, you knew grandma, she was a lovely little—she was under five feet tall, which I am now.

*Art:* She was visiting from LA, right?

*Beverly:* She was visiting from LA, and she would go out and take a walk every day. She came home one day and she said to me, "I met a Jewish friend for you." I thought, oh my God, what is it with mothers, really [*laughter*]? She says, "You have to meet her." She took me the next day. I probably took you in the stroller, and we walked up the block, and Margo's been my dearest friend ever since. She got me involved in Hadassah, which, at that time, was the—it was the only Jewish women's organization in Ann Arbor.

**9:50-10:29**

*Art:* Changing gears a little bit, do you wanna talk a little bit about Sue and Sheldon's wedding here, and what that meant for the community and for us?

*Beverly:* Sue and Sheldon, they grew up here, both of 'em. They were the first couple to marry here. It was like the whole Jewish community—

*Art:* The first couple from Beth Israel, where both were in Beth Israel.

*Beverly:* From Beth Israel. They met when they were in second grade. Susan came home and she said, "I met the cutest boy today." Sure enough—

*Art:* Didn't she say, even back in second grade, she said—

*Beverly:* She was gonna marry him.

*Art:* - "I'm gonna marry this guy."

**10:43-12:06**

*Beverly:* . . . When they got married, it was like the whole community erupted, cuz it was the first marriage of two Jewish people from Ann Arbor. I think both of us, not having large families come in, most of the people that we knew from the Jewish community came. I remember, at their wedding reception, the caterer, who was very sweet, she wanted to serve chicken soup with a dairy meal, and we had to tell her that you can't do that. That's another thing. Do you remember Sundays in Ann Arbor, when you used to go to Sunday School?

*Art:* Sure, and after Sunday School, we'd go to Ralph's Market—

*Beverly:* On Packard.

*Art:* I remember they had, it was a little market, kinda New York style little market, and they had these huge pickle barrels with different types of pickles in 'em. Then they had seven-layer cake, I think up by the cash register. I would always get some seven-layer cake, which kids love to eat, cuz it's really sweet. If you wanted to get a bagel in Ann Arbor back then, you could get a bagel, what, once a week at Ralph's Market?

*Beverly:* Once a week at Ralph's Market.

*Art:* That was it. There were no other bagels in town. . .

**13:35-15:01**

*Art:* . . . On the high holidays, I remember doing a lotta things with dad on Hill Street, where, as the congregation got larger, there wasn't enough room in the sanctuary for one service on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, so we would have a service upstairs and a service downstairs. I remember coming here for quite a few years and helping dad set up the chairs, and putting the books out. A few years—at least one year, maybe two—we went over to the Frieze Building, the University of Michigan building, and we had services there. I remember hearing that, when we had the split services, the

rabbi would do the service upstairs, and dad would be responsible for the service downstairs. The rabbi would give him the sermon, and he would read the sermon with some ad-libs in it *[laughter]*. He would kind of embellish, or take it where he wanted to go, and kind of make it his, I guess.

*Beverly:* *[Laughter]* I didn't know that, although I'm not really surprised. When daddy became involved in the synagogue, he never became uninvolved. He became involved, and he just stayed involved. Then, when they began to plan a new building, he became building chair. . .

**15:27-16:06**

*Art:* . . . I remember him riding his bike to this site. As they were building the synagogue, he would ride over here. Sometimes he'd ride down to work, and then, after work, he'd come here and monitor as the building was going up. I remember him laying the blueprints out on the kitchen table, and going over all of those, and working with the architect.

*Beverly:* Do you remember him bringing home the upholstery, so that we could try it out?

*Art:* Yeah, it seemed like a couple of years that he was working on that.

*Beverly:* It was a big building. He was so proud of that building. He always said it's not the building. The building is just a symbol for what's in it.