

CELEBRATING OUR STORIES
Jewish Life in Ann Arbor

Daryl Hafter, Moroe Hafter, and Bob Green
Recorded April 23, 2013

6:58-9:52

Bob: I came here in the fall of 1958. I'd accepted a position at the faculty at the U and the VA hospital, and my wife and I came to look for housing for ourselves and our three little girls. So I got to the phone book and called up Beth Israel Congregation, which was in the phone book. Got a hold of the rabbi, Rabbi Julius Weinberg and said, "Where's the Jewish neighborhood?" Having come from the east, *[chuckling]* I presumed that there was a Jewish neighborhood. The rabbi was not particularly helpful, but he did say to me, "I suggest you call a Mister Osias Zwerdling He knows all about the town and everything."

So we looked up Mister Zwerdling's phone number in the book and called. Mister Zwerdling heard our story and said, "Come right over." He lived at 1056 Baldwin in a lovely neighborhood in a town called Burns Park. He invited my wife and I. He took us to his little back porch. He and his wife, Hannah, sat us down, served us tea, told us about Ann Arbor, told us about Jewish life in Ann Arbor, told us about real estate, recommended a realtor—it was a wonderful, warm, unexpectedly warm welcoming to both the town and to the Jewish community, which turned out to be prescient in the sense that that's the way we found it too, living here so many years.

I remember Mister Zwerdling also said, "You will join the congregation," *[chuckling]* in a way which suggested that I probably didn't have too much choice. *[Clears throat]* In fact in Westchester County from which we had come we had not joined our congregation, but at the time our little girls were ready for things like nursery school and Hebrew school and in the next year we did join Beth Israel and have been very proud of our membership ever since. When did you guys get here and when did you join up with Beth Israel?

Monroe: Fifty?

Daryl: No. We arrived in 1960.

Monroe: I'm so off.

Daryl: One of the questions there is how long after you arrived did you join the Jewish community? [*Chuckling*] I thought, “Well about five minutes.” [*Laughter*]

Bob: Good for you.

Daryl: We had come from Massachusetts, western Massachusetts. The closest synagogue was in North Adams. You had to go over the mountain to get there. The idea that there was a synagogue in town you could actually [*chuckling*] walk to it.

11:04-12:06

Bob: Harold Shapiro was a young and even younger looking

Daryl: Mm-hmm. [*chuckling*]

Bob: as you remember, faculty member and a member of Beth Israel congregation. Shortly after he was made president of the university we had a you know, a social evening, a dance of some type. One of our congregants had her mother visiting from New York. This congregant said to her mother, “Look ma, you see that man? He’s the president.” The woman seemed singularly unimpressed. The woman said, “Mom, you know, I mean that’s really something to be president of the University of Michigan.” She said, “Oh the university. I knew he was too young to be president to the congregation.” [*Laughter*] So that was always one of my favorite Beth Israel Harold Shapiro stories.

14:08-15:40

Bob: . . .One interesting aspect, however I think, was that there were town Jews and university Jews here, as you may remember.

Daryl: Mm-hmm.

Bob: Our congregation at the time was on Hill Street. It shared a building with Hillel, the campus organization. Hillel owned it and we kinda rented there. We were not affiliated with any Jewish movement, Orthodox, Conservative, or Reform. We just kinda served everybody, but the town Jews of whom there were many, and business on Main Street and elsewhere, and many of the university Jews didn’t mix too much. At least it seemed that way to us. Shortly after we got here we joined a bowling group out of Beth Israel. Bowling was not something that we had done, but

that's where we met some of the people like Phil Zold who was a grocer in Ypsilanti who became a good friend of mine, and began this mixture of people. One of the most, one of the handsomest and most articulate fellows I knew was Maury Friedman.

Daryl: Yes.

Bob: Whom you guys will remember. It was at a party one evening where this one was in Economics and this one was in Surgery. I said to Maury, who I had just met, "What department are you in?" And he was a junk man. He had the junkyard [*chuckling*] in town.

20:46-21:28

Daryl: I'm thinking of what Saul Hymans said to Monroe. A few years ago Monroe had been doing the, leading the service for the Rosh Hashanah. For the two days I think of Rosh Hashanah, am I right?

Monroe: First day.

Daryl: First. Just the first day? Well, Monroe was saying something about maybe it's time for him to stop and Saul Hymans said, "But Monroe you know all of the children in our children's generation for them you are Rosh Hashanah, [*laughter*] so you can't stop." Was very sweet.

Bob: And a well-deserved remark.

29:11-29:55

Daryl: . . . for Jewish children who grow up here in the Midwest I think that they see that if they want Judaism to continue they have to choose it. That is to say if they were in the middle of New York City the Jewish life, Jewish things would be there. There's no, they wouldn't have to bestir themselves to do anything. But it seems to me that there is a kind of understanding when they grow up enough, so that they're no longer unhappy about having to go to Hebrew school and so on.

36:58-38:11

Monroe: It's a question of self-consciousness and consciousness. It's nice to be Jewish in Ann Arbor because you see yourself, and you see this healthy, happy, I mean happy in the Jewish sense, a congregation and community. It's no problem and that is a wonderful thing. So they continue and with the present rabbi

there's so many activities going on. If it's not a dinner here it's a picnic there. It's a something here, a dance, a this, a that, a concert. There's always something going on and so that, son of a gun, it's fun to be Jewish. *[Chuckles]*

Bob:

Yeah we have a critical mass of Jews in town. It's not only Beth Israel congregation, not only the Reform congregation, but there's a Chavurah, there's a Reconstructionist group, there's an Orthodox group at Hillel, there's a Chabad house. There's a group which doesn't believe in G-d, but does believe in being Jewish. I mean the variety of Jewish life here because of the critical mass we have is just wonderful.