

CELEBRATING OUR STORIES
Jewish Life in Ann Arbor

Saul and Eileen Hymans
Recorded April 23, 2013

5:19-6:21

Saul: So we were involved in Beth Israel early in our years here, and met other couples with little children, contemporaries of our own who would come here for the same reason. They came here for the medical school. They came here for the university in general. They came for industry.

Eileen: We sought each other out because we didn't have family. We sought each other out, especially around the holidays time. That's, for us, how we came to our wonderful group of friends. We started meeting. We were invited to—a seder. We liked the people. They liked us, and we sort of expanded it. This is a wonderful group of six families that we met through Beth Israel and we called ourselves—we call ourselves the Tichels.

9:34-10:14

Saul: Five years ago we—at the upcoming occasion at the time of what would be the 40th anniversary Tichel Seder since we started at Passover, and the seder was the first get together. We have always regarded that as the most important function for the group. We put together our own Haggadah, which is the Tichel 40th anniversary Haggadah and that's the way we go through our seders now. A month or two ago when it was Passover in 2013 was our 45th anniversary Tichel Seder.

22:58-25:31

Eileen: Don't forget, in those years the Jewish community was not like it is today. I mean you go—I mean this has—it's like a big city, New York or Boston compared to what it was in Ann Arbor. There were no, there was one place where we could go get bagels, and that was Ralph's Market on Packard and State. Every Sunday morning they would bring in huge, tall, brown bags of different kinds of bagels and rolls. We used to—

Saul: And breads—

Eileen: And breads, and we used to go every Sunday morning to buy.

Saul: This entrepreneur, Ralph, used to drive in in the wee hours of Sunday morning.

Eileen: Not Jewish, not Jewish.

Saul: He was not Jewish, but he drove into the wee—in the wee hours of Sunday morning, he'd drive into the Jewish neighborhoods of Detroit where he had connections with one of the major bakeries and he'd pick up these enormous quantities of bagels and rolls and breads and so on.

Eileen: You'd just put your hand in the bag and pull out whatever you wanted.

Saul: He set up his grocery store as a—was like a New York, Boston style store in those days where you went in for bagels and lox and cream cheese and that sort of thing for Sunday brunch. There would be long lines of primarily Jewish people, and/or Jewish kids who were from the University of Michigan who came from the east coast as well. We were there every Sunday to bring the stuff home, so we could have a real Sunday breakfast.

Eileen: The kids liked to go. You were the one mostly that went. The kids used to like to go with you because the kids got a free whatever. Steven used to get a salt stick. The kids—the girls used to get a bagel. You could get a free bagel, that was a treat.

Saul: It was amazing. This guy on Sunday, Ralph, was dressed like one of the guys in the stores that I grew up knowing about in my neighborhood in Boston. He would have a big—he would have a white shirt and a tie and a apron, a white apron. It was the most—for the most of these people who were from Chicago or the northeast areas living in Ann Arbor, it was like being back home every Sunday morning. We got this stuff, and it was just wonderful. It was all part of the community.

27:02-28:23

Saul: There was also another thing that was special about Beth Israel that as a community, the Beth Israel congregation was very fortunate on several occasions of hiring a rabbi for the synagogue. When we came the rabbi was Harold White. Who—every rabbi has been different in many ways, in a personal way. Harold was, communicated very well with the founding member generation of the community, as well as with the younger people. He was a—no

rabbi has 100 percent popularity—ever—but he had a lot of strong popularity. We bonded with him. We felt very good about him. He made people who came in feel at home and so on and he was terrific.

Then he left to become a Hillel director at Georgetown University in Washington, I think it was. Then we had an episode that wasn't quite as pleasant, but then we hired another rabbi, Allan Kensky.

28:32-29:10

Eileen: But we also had Rabbi Krickstein way at the beginning.

Saul: Well as a--

Eileen: Interim.

Saul: As an interim rabbi, that's true. But, Allan Kensky was just—was a very different guy from Harold White. He was a very scholarly person and one reason he left Ann Arbor was he wanted to—he really wanted to be scholarly in his activities. He went back to the Jewish Theological Seminary, became ultimately the dean at the Jewish Theological Seminary, and did sort of—he was a wonderful pulpit rabbi, but he wanted to pursue his scholarship, which he did. He was a terrific rabbi for a congregation that had a very big contingent that were university people.

29:56-31:34

Saul: All felt a warmth that was really terrific. That was very important for the community to have such a person as their leader, as their spiritual leader. But he went off, and then we hired another young man, Robert Dobrusin as our rabbi. And he is about to celebrate his 25th anniversary in Ann Arbor at Beth Israel. And he is very different from Allan Kensky in his attitude, in his—

Eileen: His own ways, mm-hmm.

Saul: You know, in his appreciation of things are different than Kensky's, but valid, and something that so many of the community has been able to associate with. Maybe us especially because he happens to have been—to be a native of Boston as we are. He's even a bigger Red Sox fan than I am. He talks about things like that, and puts ordinary things of life, the ordinary, routine matters of life into his Judaism, into his intellectualism, into his teaching.

Again, not exactly the same contingent, but a contingent of people for whom he has been a wonderful rabbi, people delighted that he's here for a quarter of a century.

Eileen: And we're so lucky to have him.

Saul: Right, right.

Eileen: Yeah.

Saul: Right.