

CELEBRATING OUR STORIES
Jewish Life in Ann Arbor

Betsy Yvonne Mark and Malverne Reinhart
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7:15-10:49

Malverne: Ann Arbor was just a little bit different, but in very good ways. Number one, there really weren't any neighborhoods that were specifically identified as Jewish. I mean, Jewish families lived anywhere in the city. It is true that in the school, because even as a beginning teacher, I didn't even recall having—maybe there were two kids in the whole school of 600 that might have been Jewish, but I really never encountered prejudice. I always think that's the one thing that always bound people together protectively into neighborhoods. Ann Arbor was really open in that sense. I didn't feel it when I came in '54, was after World War II. Barriers were being broken down all over.

I know that my first principal—cuz I was a new—there was a new school built in Ann Arbor, Haisley School, in 1954, and I had student taught under that principal, and she was guaranteed that she would have the new school when it opened, and she did. I had met my husband and we were going to be married, so I applied to Ann Arbor and she hired me. Now, I know that she probably knew very little about Judaism. She was from the western part of the state and she was a very, very religious woman in her religion, but I never felt any prejudice. That included on a brand new teacher. Religious holidays, unfortunately Yom Kippur came out on the opening day of school. *[Laughter]*

Betsy: *[Laughter]*

Malverne: She was very gracious when I explained that I did not—was not able to come to school. The one experience that I did have was with my carpool. There were about five of us that rode together to the school, and I had to tell one of the teachers—or I had to tell the driver, one of the drivers, that they didn't have to pick me up on such and such a date. Of course, everyone said oh, are you going to the doctor? Are you sick, whatever? I said no, no. It's a religious holiday for me, and just total blanks. What kind of a holiday? It's September. *[Laughter]* Who has a holiday in September? I explained what it was, and this one young woman looked at me and she was very serious. She said *[gasps]* you're a Jew! She says I have never met a Jewish person.

Betsy: *[Laughter]*

Malverne: She was maybe 24, 25 years of age. You know, here you come from a very impacted area, so to speak, to that kind of an experience to meet someone that had never met anyone Jewish at 25. But it wasn't in the form of prejudice, which is always what you want to hope you don't come across.

11:40-13:10

Betsy: I came to Ann Arbor in '65. I was 26 years old and I go to Jackson to teach and again I'm in a community with very few Jews. The Jewish children always identified with me, and it was kind of an immediate affinity for one another because we knew the holidays that we celebrated. My first year, I did not take the Jewish holidays off. I didn't take Rosh Hashanah or Yom Kippur. It wasn't in the contract.

Malverne: Oh, so you had—yeah.

Betsy: I was afraid of losing my job or anything else.

Malverne: Sure.

Betsy: I was brand new. What I ended up doing the second—I was very uncomfortable working those days and I knew that I couldn't do that again. I applied—I had to apply for personal leave days the second year. That was an interesting situation. The assistant superintendent was Jewish, but he informed me that they couldn't give me the days other than by taking personal days and, in fact, they could dock me pay because it wasn't in the contract. I thought that was a real eye-opener kind of thing from a gentleman who was Jewish who, in fact, lived in the Ann Arbor community and was telling me I could be docked pay for not working on one of my holidays. I suggested the ACLU might get involved, and there wasn't another question about it. Five years later, things were much different there.

19:56-22:47

Malverne: . . . Then in early 1966 my husband, Mel, spotted an ad in the *Ann Arbor News* that there were a group of people that were interested in the formation of a Reform congregation in Ann Arbor, and anybody that was interested, would they come to—

Would they come to a meeting about this? When Mel saw that it was just *[laughter]* Eureka! *[Laughter]* Off he went, and he came back so excited and thrilled that there were a group of people that—and really, other than one or two that we may have known from Beth Israel, they were just people in the community that did not feel comfortable with Conservatism and consequently either traveled to Detroit or elsewhere to go to services and wanted very much to have a Reform temple. So throughout the summer of 1966 there were many, many meetings and a great deal of effort, and we officially became one of the nucleus, one of the 40 families that were founding members of Temple Beth Emeth.

Betsy: I wanna thank you for that.

Malverne: Oh, well thank—you're welcome. [Laughter]

Betsy: Because—seriously. When I came to Ann Arbor, I said that I had been involved with Hillel, but just on the surface. I didn't go to services other than for the High Holidays. My parents followed me to Ann Arbor in 1966 and for their backgrounds, they both came from homes where they were pretty "conservadox" and they kept kosher. My parents chose not to keep kosher, but my grandparents all did. My parents came to Ann Arbor. They knew that Beth Emeth was beginning, but they joined Beth Israel. In 1969 when I was a 22 year old brat, I really was dissatisfied with the services. It didn't have any meaning for me. It wasn't anything that really meant anything to me, but I had cousins who had gone to services and who had belonged to Beth Emeth. So I went in July of '69 to a service at Beth Emeth and fell in love with Bruce Warshal, the first rabbi.

Malverne: Right, the first rabbi, right.

Betsy: And eventually told my parents, after that experience, that if we were gonna go to services as a family, they'd probably have to come to Beth Emeth because it's where I was comfortable. I didn't think they would, but they—

Malverne: They did.

Betsy: - got very active and they did.