

**Transcript of Interview with Lenore Swimmer
Small Town Jewish History Project
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Transcription:

Eric Lidji: Today is September 3, 2015. This is the Small Towns Jewish Oral History Project. I'm Eric Lidji, I'm talking to Lenore Swimmer in her house in Uniontown. We're going to be talking about Uniontown.

Lenore Swimmer: Yes.

EL: So, when did you move to Uniontown?

LS: I moved to Uniontown in 1959. I married in 1959, and my husband is from Uniontown.

EL: So you grew up in the city?

LS: I grew up in Pittsburgh. I grew up in Squirrel Hill.

EL: How did your family get to Pittsburgh?

LS: When they came, when my father and mother came to this country, they just landed here. I never, we never really got much into that.

EL: Yeah. But they were, you were first generation.

LS: My father was from Romania, my mother was from Russia. I'm the, my sister and myself were the first generation of being born in America.

EL: What were your parents' names?

LS: My mother's name was Rose Rivkin. That was her maiden name. My father's name was Emmanuel Hirsch.

EL: What did they do in Squirrel Hill?

LS: Well, my mother was a housewife and brought us up. My dad- [phone rings]

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LS: My dad was a printer. He worked for the Pittsburgh *Post-Gazette* and the Pittsburgh *Press*. He was a typesetter, he was sort of the head of their typesetting department, which nobody does anymore. It's all done automatically. But you know, he would make sure there weren't any

mistakes in the spelling and the grammar and sentences and stuff like that. He was very good at it. He did that for, until he retired.

EL: Was he part of the typesetters union?

LS: Yes, the typographical union, yes.

EL: That's interesting.

LS: Which became extinct when they, I guess their money was all used up by the wrong people in the union. But it was a very strong union at...

EL: Wasn't there a big lawsuit or case or something involving the...?

LS: That's what it was.

EL: Yeah.

LS: Interesting, I won a senatorial scholarship by writing an essay on what organized labor means to America. And it was sponsored by the typographical union. And there were four winners. I won one of them. I went to the University of Pittsburgh as an undergraduate, the scholarship was nine hundred and fifty dollars. It paid for all four years of tuition. Can you believe that?

EL: No.

LS: Anyway, but that was a wonderful thing that happened for me. I would have gone to college anyway, but it would have been a little harder.

EL: Do you remember what your essay was about?

LS: It was what organized labor means to, I have it, I have it upstairs in fact. The funny thing is I was just digging stuff out the other day. I talked about the Social Security Act, three different pieces of legislature that went through that helped organized labor. Now that was before organized labor became, a little bit, it was about that time that organized labor became very powerful. It did a lot of damage to a lot of business in the United States. So anyway, but I grew up, I went to Taylor Allderdice High School.

EL: What was Taylor Allderdice like at the time? We're talking about the forties?

LS: Mm, no. Well, late forties. I graduated in '53.

EL: What year were you born?

LS: 1935.

EL: Okay.

LS: I'm eighty years old. Mostly Jewish. There were some students that were bussed in from Homestead, from Glen Hazel, from Munhall, I don't, another area. But mostly Jewish. Very academic. I remember there was not only an orchestra, but a band. Five bands, five orchestras according to your ability to play, and you could work your way up. There was a chorus, there was things that you don't find in high schools now. Of course, you know, there's advanced courses now for kids, but then it was a pretty academic high school. A cliquish, kids in groups.

EL: What was Squirrel Hill like?

LS: Very Jewish. I remember there were several, five or six butcher shops, kosher butcher shops. Most of the small stores were owned by Jewish people. There were Jewish bakeries. It was just very, very small townish, Squirrel Hill. That was on Murray, once you got into Forbes Avenue, the stores got a little bit more sophisticated. There were some ladies' stores, that Little's Shoe Store, that's probably still there isn't it? Little's?

EL: Little's is still there.

LS: Yeah, I mean it was a nicer part of, but it was very, it was a small, interesting community. And that's where most of the Jews in Pittsburgh lived. That was before people started circling out to, I guess, there was a, I remember an uncle of mine moved to Stanton Heights, and another one moved to Monroeville, and that was early on. And then I guess after a while people started to move to the South Hills, that's after I left.

EL: Right. What did kids do for fun in Squirrel Hill?

LS: Well, let's see, I used to like to go bowling.

EL: At?

LS: There was a bowling alley right next to...

EL: On Murray?

LS: Yeah.

EL: In the C A West building building? In that building where the...

LS: Where Gullifty's, near where Gullifty's, there used to be a movie theater called the Beacon Theater too. Used to have like artsy movies and...

EL: And the other one was?

LS: Squirrel Hill Theater.

EL: The Manor.

LS: The Manor, there was a theater on Forward Avenue, the Squirrel Hill Theater.

EL: Right.

LS: They usually had double features. And then the Manor, the Manor had double features, too. The Manor now sort of has first run movies, but they, at that time they didn't. It was you know maybe double features. We'd go on Saturday, we'd be there all afternoon watching two movies, and shorts, and serials, and cartoons. And I went to Sunday school and...

EL: What congregation?

LS: I went to the B'nai Emunoh. Although I wasn't Orthodox. It was right in our, near where I lived, I lived on Lilac Street.

EL: So over in Greenfield.

LS: Yeah. So that's where I went. And I was confirmed. I didn't study Hebrew. I did that later on in my married life a little bit. I have a sister who lives in California.

EL: She's younger or older?

LS: Two years younger. She's been in California for a long time, unfortunately.

EL: So you, you graduated from Allderdice, and you get this scholarship to Pitt.

LS: I went to the University of Pittsburgh.

EL: And what did you study there?

LS: I took elementary education and...

EL: Were the option for women limited then? Even if it was just culturally?

LS: I don't think the options were limited, I think we didn't think of anything much else. In other words teaching was something that you could do and come back to and it was a safe... I wasn't particularly fond of the education courses. I thought they were poor and didn't help. I'm talking about the education courses you took at the end of your four years. I loved the University of Pittsburgh. I was very active in the student organizations, all the student organizations.

EL: Like what?

LS: Well let's see, the student congress, there was a group I belonged to called Quo Vadis, it took people around the Nationality Rooms. I was in a sorority.

EL: Which sorority?

LS: I was in SDT, Sigma Delta Tau. I was the president as a senior. I took part in Women's Self-Government Association. When I graduated I was named one of the, let's was it, twenty-four, twelve outstanding seniors in the senior class, which was a pretty big honor then.

EL: Was the University of Pittsburgh seen as a small school at the time?

LS: It was a city school. And it had professional schools. You know, there was an engineering school that wasn't even, I think they engineering school was up on the hill somewhere. And there was of course dental school, law school, those were graduate schools. But it was really a streetcar school, you know you took a bus, back then there were no buses, you took a streetcar. Or if you were lucky you drove, most people took a streetcar. And there were very few people that lived, came from out of town to live because there were no places for them to live. There were no dorms. And usually they lived in old sorority houses or apartments, and you know what they, you can imagine what they were like because they're still, they're still here! When I drive through Atwood Street or someplace like that.

EL: What was the sorority like at the time, it's a Jewish sorority, right?

LS: Yeah, it was then. I don't think any sororities are fully Jewish anymore, but it was. It was a Jewish sorority, it had a Jewish ritual. And it was a very good experience for me. I made a lot of good friends, a couple of them I still keep in touch with. It taught me a lot on how to get along with other people, other girls that were different than myself. It was a good experience.

EL: Yeah. It sounds like you made the most out of college.

LS: I did. I did. My four years were a very, very, very good for me. I also got a master's degree in social work, so I went on to school. I actually got a teaching job the summer I graduated and then I decided I just don't want to teach, my heart was not in it. So I called them up and told them I wasn't going to take the job. They weren't too happy about it, but and then I had already thought about, I had sort of enrolled in the School of Social Work, but hadn't really made up my mind. So about a month before, there's my son I asked him to come over, I thought maybe...
[doorbell rings]

END OF SECOND RECORDING

BEGIN THIRD RECORDING

EL: Alright, you were talking about turning down this job.

LS: Well I went on to graduate school. It was, my two years were spent in the school studying social group work. And that was an amazing experience for me, I really, really like that. That was a good field for me.

EL: And that was when social work was starting to change, right?

LS: Just very slightly into maybe outreach programs and things like that, but before that it was mainly casework and working with groups. I worked with the Girl Scouts, I worked at the 'Y' that was across the street. It was very, you know, enclosed. I had one friend who was working with community outreach, she was the only one. And I know through the years she did that as a, you know, a working throughout her career. But then it was casework or group work and it was a good experience. In the last year of my, I guess it was about the, the last part of my first, my last semester, I met my husband. And so...

EL: How did you meet him?

LS: Well I met him through a friend who went to school with me. And he had been going to school, and he was almost legally blind. So he, after a period of time, he really couldn't keep up with the work, so he just dropped out. He was a dear person. He went back, he lived in Morgantown. So every time he had some friend who was coming into Pittsburgh, he had them call me. And usually it was a disaster, so you know, but one day a friend called and asked, he was going to the I think Pitt/West Virginia game, it was in Pittsburgh, would I meet him after? And eventually I did go, and with him was a friend, and the friend is the guy that I married. And I had, and I introduced a friend of mine to my husband-to-be and we went out together, and that was how I met him.

EL: Is that how dates happened back then?

LS: Don't they still now a little bit?

EL: I don't know. But I just mean that people would say...

LS: Yeah, I mean these were guys that you know, friends of his that would come in, and I guess they were okay, but it was a waste, but it became a waste of time. And after about a year of going, you know, to these kinds of things I decided I, but I'm lucky that at that time I did go. My husband was ten years older than I. He was a, his degree, he was in science. He went to, he was in the Second World War, received a bronze star and another medal for saving some soldiers. He was a medic, he was a premed student. He went to the Army after his first semester in college, he was like eighteen years old. He was in premed so they made him a medic. So he was a baby, but he went through the war, he was in the Army for about two and a half years. And then he came back and went to Penn State and decided to study premed and couldn't get into medical school. It was tough at that time because I guess there were a lot of people who wanted to go to medical school and there was restrictions on your religion and so forth and so on. So, and he would have made a wonderful doctor, I'm glad that he didn't become a doctor. But he did go on to graduate school to study microbiology and worked for Merck Company and Eli Lilly. And then his, the family here in Uniontown...

EL: Wait, so you get married in 1959.

LS: Yeah.

EL: And you move down there.

LS: I didn't move right away.

EL: Was he from Uniontown?

LS: He was born in Washington, Pa., but he moved to Uniontown as a little boy. But I got, we got married in, the first day in January, but I was still in graduate school so we got an apartment here and he came in a couple times a week.

EL: Here meaning Uniontown.

LS: Yeah, he would drive in.

EL: And his name?

LS: Wolford.

EL: Wolford Swimmer.

LS: Wolford Swimmer. And so that went on for about four month until I got all my credentials together and wrote my thesis and so forth and so on. And I think it was May I moved to Uniontown and that's where my life started here as a young bride.

EL: What did you think of Uniontown when you first got here?

LS: You know I wasn't really happy about coming here. I liked Pittsburgh, and all my friends were there. You know, everything was there. The theater was there, the libraries were there, everything that I liked to take part in was there. But you know, at that time you didn't question, well hmm, I think I'm going stay here, you know. So we moved to Uniontown. And there was a nice Jewish community here. It was a pretty decent size. There were, do you want me to get into that? There were two congregations. There was a Conservative synagogue, which at once was Orthodox so it was sort of half Orthodox and Conservative when I came.

EL: And that was Tree of Life?

LS: It was Tree of Life, which is now out of business. Then there was the Temple Israel which was Reformed. And they somehow didn't get along too well with one another. It was you know, sort of silly through the years, but there were some, some very hard set people that were the leaders of both congregations. They sort of kept things from ever coming together, because we did try several times to do that.

EL: There were some very close votes on a merger, right?

LS: There was, yeah. It was very sad. My husband, who always went to the synagogue on Friday night, on Saturday, he was a very religious man. Not necessarily, he was ritually religious, not Orthodox. But he was a righteous, good man, I mean he lived a very good Jewish life. So he was very involved in trying to get the congregations together. And at the very last minute when, one of the last times we started, there was like a coup and some of the people that had originally said that they would, didn't. He, and that's the only time in his life that he just turned his back on the synagogue, not God and not his religion. He didn't go to the synagogue for a year.

EL: He was so upset.

LS: He was upset with the people that a part of the synagogue. I was really surprised that that happened. I didn't question it. And I guess when he was ready to go back, he went back. But he never, it hurt him, it hurt him, you know. And it ruined a lot of relationships, unfortunately.

EL: Why was he so in favor of the merger?

LS: Because, first of all, there just weren't enough people in both congregations. It was not so hard to join together, I mean we're all Jewish. People were, they were worried about the silliest things, like should we wear a yarmulke or should we not wear a yarmulke, do we wear a tallit or don't we, do we use the, this prayer book, the Silverman prayer book or do we use the Union whatever it is prayer book. It wasn't the real gutsy things we were worried about, I mean we're all praying to God, and so, it was sad because we could have had a really nice group of people together. Anyway, that's the story of that. But where do you want me to go from here?

EL: So you had said that he, that he was religious, what was the observance like in the home?

LS: In our home?

EL: Yeah.

LS: I keep kosher. I still do. I try, I mean I can't really do it as much as I used to because it's very difficult. Even the place I live in Florida, although a lot of the people are Jewish there, they don't keep a kosher kitchen. So, but I did keep two sets of dishes, two sets of pots and pans, two sets of silverware. I kept Passover, special dishes and pots and pans for Passover. Not that I was crazy about doing that, but it was something my husband wanted. He didn't demand it, he didn't say, "Lenore." He just said it would be nice. So I did. And our children went to Sunday school, and Hebrew school, not always happily. But and not, you know, they were all, the boys had a bar mitzvah and the girls did also. My oldest daughter didn't have one in the synagogue, she had one at a camp she attended as a, she was a counsellor there, head of the waterfront, and they had a group bat mitzvah together. And she was very, she's very good in Hebrew, she teaches Hebrew some-, used to teach Hebrew. So she had hers there in camp and the other three had them in our synagogue.

EL: They had bat mitzvahs at the synagogue though?

LS: Two bar mitzvahs and a bat mitzvah, yes.

EL: Okay.

LS: Here, at our synagogue.

EL: What was the synagogue like? Was it mixed seating?

LS: Not when I first came to Uniontown. There was, some of the women were still sitting in the balcony, and of course I, I wasn't even aware of that too much because even in the... I remember sitting in the balcony for the first Rosh Hashanah, and the men were downstairs and I thought, "Gee whiz, I'm not gonna sit up here." So I moved downstairs and sat beside my husband. And that was it. He never said anything, I mean there were a few women down there and gradually it all changed. Nobody was really Orthodox in our synagogue. Most people would eat things that were forbidden, I, my husband and I, didn't. I do outside now, because there's no way you can escape it. But Wolf didn't, all through his life no matter where he went, and he was very active in the community. Every time there was a dinner they would honor him or he would go to, they always knew that he didn't eat meat. So they would always just order fish for him automatically. So that was the life he led.

EL: And when you say community, you mean the larger Uniontown community.

LS: Yeah. Yeah. We, our family was very active in the community.

EL: What sorts of things?

LS: Well, first of all, do you want me to talk about our business and then sort of get in...?

EL: Yeah, let's talk about that.

LS: Alright. When my husband came to town after working in a couple pharmaceutical companies, his family had been in the cleaning business. They had like twenty-seven cleaning store throughout southwestern Pennsylvania, you know you dropped your cleaning off, only they went and picked it up and brought it back, and they did the cleaning in Uniontown.

EL: What was it called?

LS: Swimmer's Cleaners.

EL: Okay.

LS: So, in fact, for several years after I came to town, I would still get calls wanting to know if I still do, do we still do shirts. Anyway, I guess my father-in-law realized that that business was you know, going by the wayside. So they started, while they were in business they needed hangers, and the hangers that they could get were not very good, so they went into the hanger business and had a hanger manufacturing plant.

EL: Wire hangers? Wood hangers?

LS: Wire hangers. I still, in fact, I still have some hangers that they made years and years ago. They made coated hangers that were wonderful. I still have about three dozen of them. After a while all the hangers started being made in Korea and who knows where so...

EL: How big was this operation that they had?

LS: Well, it was, at that time, not necessarily that, we supplied hangers to a lot of people, businesses throughout the tristate area. I'm not really sure because I wasn't here at that time. I came to town when, three years after they started Cavert Wire Company. The wire company originally originated in Ellwood City. And my father-in-law became aware that this business was for sale, that's when my husband came in. So he asked Wolf if, if he would look into it and they decided, then there was another brother, too, so they decided they would bring the business to Uniontown. And it was called Cavert Wire in Ellwood City, so they continued the name here. And it was, we still made some hangers here, too, but in a different building, but this part of our business was wire. We manufacture bailing wire for the cotton industry, for scrap industry, for supermarkets, I mean little bit by little bit through the years, it became a national, a company that we did business all over the United States and in South America. A little bit in Europe, but that became too hard so we stopped that.

EL: So a cleaning business leads to a hanger business, which leads to a wire business.

LS: Yeah, a very large business, very successful.

EL: And the wire business again was called what?

LS: Cavert Wire.

EL: Cavert Wire.

LS: C-A-V-E-R-T.

EL: Okay.

LS: And my, our boys were both in the business. Josh was the head of sales, and my son Aaron was the plant manager. After a period of years, you know, they grew up in the business. When they were little boys, they used to scrape the grease off trucks, we had a trucking, a fleet of trucks that would deliver certain parts. Some, some maybe to the West Coast, and in southwestern Pennsylvania. And so little by little they worked their way up. They went to college. And have been very happy in the business, and they helped make it successful. And little by little my husband sort of retired to the background. He stayed there, but you know he gave me authority to the boys. There was another brother in the business who, we just had some family problems and caused some problems so extensive that we sold the business at that time.

EL: What year was that?

LS: 1995. It was sad, it really was. But you know a big conglomerate bought it, and it was sort of a, actually at that time my husband was ready to retire. But he didn't really want to retire that way, and the boys were left without anything to do. Josh was in his, I guess he was in his late-twenties and Aaron, they were both in their twenties. They're only seventeen months apart. And so Aaron eventually moved to Florida where he lives now and went to law school, became a lawyer, changed his whole career. Josh stayed here and did several things. He had a horse farm, raise Pasadena horses, raised them, bred them. But then decided that really you can't make too much money with a horse farm in southwestern Pennsylvania, you really have to be somewhere else. And then he went into, he, his wife is an artist so they, they went into the art business. They had an art warehouse in Hopwood, we owned a big building in Hopwood, and they made it into a warehouse, and they were very successful. But then that too wasn't anything that lasted, so...

EL: But this is a very different story than what we normally hear, which is, say for instance industry collapsing generally and then the side effect is hitting smaller businesses. I mean what you're describing is very different than that. It's a conscious decision to sell the business.

LS: Yeah. Well, we, it was necessary to do that.

EL: Right.

LS: So...

EL: But this gets to a larger issue, which is the general sense of decline in the community and where does, when does that start and what drives it?

LS: Well that was happening through the fifties.

EL: So you already felt it as soon as you got there.

LS: Oh yeah. [phone rings]

END OF THIRD RECORDING

BEGIN FOURTH RECORDING

LS: [cuts in] ...Doctor of Psychology, a psychologist. Anyway...

EL: So you were feeling a decline as soon as you got there.

LS: Oh yeah. I mean, you could see little by little bit a lot of the small business in town were owned by Jewish people. There were clothing stores, there was an Army Navy store, furniture stores.

EL: Do you remember the names of any of them?

LS: Hmm, there was Turner's Army and Navy Store, there was Opall's Furniture Store. You know Rosalie and Morty. There was, let's see if I can remember some of the others, there were quite a few others I just don't recall the name now. There was a bridal store. There was a jeweler, no there were no jewelers that were owned by Jewish people. There were clothing stores. But little by little they, well, the owners got old, they either died, moved away. People didn't necessarily go downtown to shop. The mall opened.

EL: Which mall was that?

LS: Uniontown Mall. And then other strip malls opened up. You know, when I first came to town there was hardly anything here. There were two department stores downtown and that was it. So through the fifties you could, I remember not so much the fifties as the sixties, you could just feel everything sort of drying up. And it was sad, you know, the theater, we had a couple of movie theaters, one of them closed up. The drugstores downtown closed up. The, it was just, it because very sad and depressed. And a lot of people on welfare. And it was one of the, it still is one of the poorest counties in Pennsylvania.

EL: Fayette.

LS: Fayette, mhm. Fayette and Green County next to it. And then little bit by little bit some people moved away. No necessarily when they were older, but you know, they just moved, Florida, to be with their children, just to get out of town. Maybe a couple, I don't even remember businesses being sold, I remember them just closing up. And then the decline of the population in the synagogue and temple of course declined too, less and less and less.

EL: When you got here were there a lot of children in the congregation?

LS: Oh yes. We used to have Seders with like a hundred kids, little, all, very busy. We had Purim carnivals and we had, you know when it was Simchas Torah we had a big celebration and Succos and Passover. We had you know the Seders for the kids, and it was a very active congregation with a very active women's organization.

EL: Tell me a little bit about that. This was Hadassah or ladies auxiliary?

LS: No, it was an auxiliary.

EL: Sisterhood.

LS: Which later became a Sisterhood. Well it was a support group to the board members. It was a ridiculous thing, we should have all worked together on the same board, which I kept on saying

through the years, but nobody listened. The men, they didn't listen. And so we continued having bake sales and rummage sales, and we supported, you know, took care of the kids parties, and raised a lot of money to give to the synagogue. And that was our, that was what we did. And then of course there were less and less women, less and less members. And then finally when there were not that many they joined together, which is what we should have done in the first place, but, or at least in a fair amount of years.

EL: When you say "they", you mean the Sisterhood and the Brotherhood?

LS: Yeah. We were all one group, why did we have to work apart? There were some men on that board that were awful. I mean, they were tyrants and not necessarily smart, but just loud, and yeah.

EL: Yeah.

LS: And the decline in the whole town was awful.

EL: When you say the decline in the synagogue, was this just children who went to college and didn't come back, or families actually were leaving?

LS: Yeah, kids went to college, they grew up, none of them came back.

EL: Because there was no opportunity.

LS: There was nothing to come back to. Our kids went to college and came back because we had a business here.

EL: Do you think families, more kids would have done that if their families had had...

LS: Depends what the business was. If it was a little clothing store that was just a mom and pop store, why would you want to come back? But our business was large and successful and because of our boys, became more successful. I think after they went to college and you know, got some experience it was wonderful, they loved it, they loved it. In fact, Josh, after two or three business, he went back into the wire business. He's not in the manufacturing part of the business, he sells wire for a large company in Houston. He has a big part of the United States and Canada that he sells to.

EL: Could you tell me a little bit about the JCC, because that's a unique feature for Uniontown.

LS: Yeah the JCC was a very active organization.

EL: What was the building like?

LS: Old. It was once a building that belonged to a coal baron, probably I think that's what it was. And, have you ever been there?

EL: No.

LS: No. Okay. So and in the fifties they built a pool so that was a big part of the community center because in the summer everybody gathered, went to the pool. Our kids grew up there in the summer. I mean it was just wonderful. It's only around the corner from us so it was very successful. There was a board of the Center, and I was the president of the board for a couple of years during the, I think, the eighties. My husband was president of the board, my father-in-law, you know all through the years were different people. And then little by little the same thing happened to the Center. You know, people stopped, people died, people moved, the kids grew up, went away. So we started taking in the summer non-Jewish summer members.

EL: And when did that start, roughly?

LS: Let's see, I think when my kids were in junior high or high school, which is in the eighties. The eighties. And that was successful for a while, but then all those kids started growing up and that was the demise of the Center. And now it's laying there rusted. I also had a wonderful experience. I ran a day camp for ten years at the Center. Our kids were little, there was nothing much for them to do when they were real little and I thought a day camp would be great. So I took my experience from college and got together some mothers and we put together a wonderful day camp.

EL: This is in the summers or during the year?

LS: In the summer.

EL: Okay.

LS: It was a couple months during the summer time. And we formed a board, and it was run like a regular camp. And I was the head of it for ten years while my kids were growing up. And it was a wonderful thing for them, they loved it. And at the end of ten years I tried to get somebody to take it over and nobody wanted to so it just folded up, but it was time for it anyway because our, all kids, Jewish kids, were gone already. It would have maybe just catered to other kids from the community. But it was a wonderful experience and a wonderful time for the kids.

EL: Were there a lot of things in Uniontown that were dependent on a single person? Does that make sense?

LS: Yeah. To keep it going you mean?

EL: Yeah, as opposed to there's general momentum and there will always be somebody else.

LS: You talking about the synagogue and the Jewish community?

EL: Well you had described the situation with the day camp where...

LS: Yeah, yes there were. There were always situation like that. Usually people who would stay with something for a long time because there was nobody else to take over or maybe they were so dominant a personality that people were afraid to take over. But yeah, that happened. I can't mention any specific.

EL: Right.

LS: But yeah.

EL: Were there any memorable rabbis?

LS: Yes there were many memorable, but memorable rabbis not necessarily on the positive side.

EL: There was a lot of rabbis, right?

LS: We had a lot of rabbis. But you know, you're a small town and you're not gonna get rabbis that are going to Temple Emanuel and New York City or going to the large congregations everywhere. So we had a couple rabbis that were decent. We had a rabbi, a couple rabbis that one was a criminal. One was, one was a deviant. I guess you've heard these stories. Did you hear these from other people? And you know there were some that were just awful, awful. I don't recall any...Oh, there was one rabbi that I cared for that they only stayed here for a couple years and left.

EL: What was his name?

LS: Arnie Fine. I haven't heard from him in a long time. I tried to get in touch with him a while ago, but I wasn't able to. And but the rest of them just went by the wayside.

EL: There was a Federation, too, in Uniontown, right?

LS: Oh yeah.

EL: That's very interesting.

LS: There was an Israel Bond Organization.

EL: What did the Federation do?

LS: They collected money. Had a dinner once a year, you know. Israel Bonds did the same thing. Wolf was the Israel Bond Man of the Year, or was it the Zionists, I can't remember. I remember we went to the dinners in Pittsburgh. There was a National Council of Jewish Women for a period of time then they went out of business. Hadassah, that's about it.

EL: Was there a lot of partnership between organizations in Uniontown and like Brownsville or...?

LS: Well, by the time, by the time I came to town, the congregations in Brownsville and Masontown and Connellsville were gone. And any people that wanted to, could come here, some of them did, some of them didn't. Some of them moved from those towns because their families had been in those towns. So, but there was not much in any of those towns. Maybe a few people in Brownsville, a few people in Connellsville, that's about it.

EL: Yeah. Could you tell me a little bit about when it became clear that the congregation was gonna have to close?

LS: Um, maybe two or three years ago it was just getting smaller and smaller. It was just hard to get a minyan together. We had no rabbi. We tried bringing people in from, we had a man who came in from Pittsburgh who was a lay leader, Perry Haalman, I don't know if you knew who he was. He's gone now too. He got sick and moved to be with his son, so he came in on Saturdays, for funerals, and things like that, but after a while it was just us. And the Opalls, Rosalie and Morty, usually did the service for us. And it's been about three or four years, we knew. And we've been getting prepared for that, it's I mean, they did a good job. Everything is taken care of. And the synagogue now belongs to another congregation, a black organization who's keeping the same name, which is nice.

EL: Yeah. You had said your husband was very involved in community things, what sort of larger, outside of the community?

LS: Well he was involved in the Chamber of Commerce and the industry. They had a Private Industry Council, he was the head of that. He was, like I say, in the Chamber of Commerce, he was, you know what, do you want to look at these? Or do you want to maybe...

EL: Yeah.

LS: Let's see what I have here. Now this has, there's another part of our story, too. You know, I don't even have that stuff as far as the Chamber goes, but I have some other stuff about Penn State that we can give you. But he was very active in the industry part of town, there was a strong group of industrial leaders in town. And we had a lot, we had Fruehauf, we had Rockwell Meters, we had our business, there were about five or six, seven large industries. And down maybe in Connellsville there was Anchor Hocking, you know there were, they're all gone. In fact our business was one of the last ones to leave. He was, he was active in the, in the, oh God, the senior citizens. They have a big building downtown. It was our building, we donated it to them. So he was on their board for a period of time. He was active in the Easter Seals Organization, he was one of the state board directors. He was the, the chairman of the board of directors of the Penn State Fayette here, and very active at Penn State. He was a Penn State alumnus so he had, we have a hall on campus that's named Swimmer Hall. We donated a large, large amounts of money to the campus. Scholarship money. Money for the physical plant. He got several awards from the main campus at Penn State. He was just a well-liked, very smart guy who everybody called up for advice. He was always busy giving advice or people would come to him.

EL: He never used the microbiology degree.

LS: Sure, he used that all the time.

EL: He did.

LS: Yeah. I mean in our business, I was thinking about that for a while. Sure, you use science in your, in the kind of business we were in, absolutely. And maybe not in laboratory or in a teaching facility. But then after he retired, I don't know if I mentioned, he wrote a book.

EL: No. What kind of book?

LS: You know I have them all packed away, I would let you see, but there's, I think there's one in the History Center, Heinz History Center. It was about a murder case that took place in 1936, when he was a little boy. And he had read about it as he, through the years, and it sort of intrigued him. It was a national case and drew national attention, it was part of the trial was in Pittsburgh, part of it was in Washington, Pa. A very well-known lawyer from Pittsburgh who was nationally known was one of the lawyers. Anyway, it involved some politicians from town. It was, there was a murder, so he wrote about it.

EL: This was just a work of history?

LS: This was true, yeah. And of course, some of the same people that were, families that were involved in that, parts of their family were still living you know, through the generations. It was a very touchy book. A lot of people weren't too happy about it. It created a stir.

EL: Huh.

LS: We sold about three thousand copies, it was a very successful book. It was called *Screams from the Courthouse Basement*, something like that. It was a very good book. So he spent a couple of years writing that with a professor from Penn State, she edited it and he wrote it. So he always kept busy. He, unfortunately, developed kidney failure as a result of a heart bypass operation, so that's what he finally died from at the age of eighty-two, which was about eight years ago. And so that's his story. Part of it anyway. What else?

EL: Is there anything here you'd like to get on tape?

LS: Okay, now this was a book that some guy published years ago. He came to us and wanted to know if we would take part in, there it is, there's something here, you can take that with you. It's, there's some stories, there's something about the...

EL: And this is him?

LS: Yeah. It's not a very good picture of him. He came to our house, the picture of the Brownsville synagogue, it tells a little bit about it, I think there's something about the other synagogue, the temple, about the Silvermans, they're a long gone family. So you can have that.

EL: Okay.

LS: Let's see what's in here. These are just some, Israel bonds, these are some, you know what, here's some pictures, old pictures, from the synagogue. I collected them, found them the other day. You can have them.

EL: Okay.

LS: I don't know where they'll, I hope you don't destroy them, maybe you can give them to the archives at the-

EL: Yeah, that's what happens. They go to the archives.

LS: This is a certificate. Let's see, this was an award my, that son, won from Penn State. Both of our sons are very active. Although Josh didn't go to Penn State, as a result of our family being very involved, he's now head of, we have a large scholarship fund at Penn State, so he heads that. There was a story, here's a picture of our son in Florida who also got... They all got awards here because they were all very active in the Penn State school here. Take these with you if you want to. What is this? Oh, this was an article that they had in the paper about Wolf when he died. I have other copies if you want them.

EL: Mhm.

LS: You can get information from that, too. This was an award that my oldest son got. I think that's... that's about it. That's all that I...

EL: Okay. Alright, well thank you very much.

LS: Okay. Is there, I'm trying to think if there's anything else I missed. I will tell you this. My in-laws were, were really wonderful people, and I think instilled in my husband and their children a wonderful way of life. And they were very important members of the congregation years ago, too.

EL: What were their names?

LS: My father-in-law's name was Meyer Swimmer, and my mother-in-law's name was Gertrude Swimmer. Old, you know old-time. But my father-in-law was a very bright guy, very smart. Didn't have a college education, but was very, very bright. And he was this influence behind all these businesses and a very important part of his children's lives and how they you know, came, went through life and became successful. I thought I'd mention that.

EL: Thank you.

LS: You're welcome.

EL: Thank you so much for your time.

LS: You're welcome. It's nice meeting you.

END OF FOURTH RECORDING
END OF TRANSCRIPT