

A TEI Project

Interview of Harold Minovitz

Contents

1. Transcript

1.1. SESSIONE ONE JANUARY 13, 2000

1. Transcript

1.1. SESSIONE ONE JANUARY 13, 2000

MINOVITZ

I'm Harold Minovitz. I was born in Pasadena, September 3rd 1926.

FINGERHUT

But before we go any further, let's just say this is January 13th 2000, and we are at the Minovitz home. Now go on.

MINOVITZ

You got that in?

FINGERHUT

I got it. I just wanted to make sure I got that in.

MINOVITZ

Did you get in what I said?

FINGERHUT

Yes.

MINOVITZ

And I've lived here all my life, born here, still living here, raised my children here, gone through public schools, elementary school, gone through junior high, high school, a year of junior college, was drafted in November 1948, spent two years in the army, spent most of my army life in Pasadena at the General Hospital which used to be called the Vista del Roy Hotel. So I spent my nights at home mostly when I was on duty there, so I didn't get out of the country.

FINGERHUT

Let's go back to when you were born and where you were raised. Do you have any memories of your being raised as a child or any memories of your early childhood?

MINOVITZ

What kind of memories?

FINGERHUT

Things, games, people, school, even before that do you remember...uh...
Where did you live?

MINOVITZ

Oh we lived on... Our first house we lived on was on the corner of Pasadena Avenue and Walnut, and I think there is a picture there. It was a little duplex. It was owned by Mrs. Brown, and Mrs. Brown was Erwin Brown's grandmother. She owned a little bit of property at that time the other duplex...

FINGERHUT

Wait. Wait a minute. You just want to just identify Erwin Brown so that...

MINOVITZ

Erwin Brown was born in 1927, September of 1927. He was a year younger than me, and he was also born in Pasadena. His folks had the Star Furniture Company and previous to that...

FINGERHUT

That was on Raymond, wasn't it?

MINOVITZ

That was on Raymond, and previous to that his grandmother was here I think. She must have been here, got here in the 20's, I am sure early 20's, and was in the furniture business, and she owned the house we lived in at that time and the Libels, Daniel Libel's mother and father lived in the duplex next to us, with us, and my folks had a grocery store on Pasadena Avenue at that time, and uh....

FINGERHUT

What do you remember about growing up at the time? Got anything that stands out? Did you play baseball? Did you hang out with....?

MINOVITZ

I was 5 years old.

FINGERHUT

Five years old?

MINOVITZ

No...

SEVERAL

Hahaha...

MINOVITZ

No...

FINGERHUT

Do you have any photos?

MINOVITZ

Well, on the street we always played games. We always played football on the street when we get people together, kids together. We always managed to do

these things when I was a kid. Nobody could afford a football, but we used a tin can, empty tin can, to play with... I remember that, and

FINGERHUT

Tin can, what was that?

MINOVITZ

Just a tin can, and then...

FINGERHUT

Kick the can?

MINOVITZ

No. no, no...We played that too, kick the can, but no, we used an empty tomato can, tomato soup can, Campbell soup can, whatever we had to play...

FINGERHUT

And that was the football...

MINOVITZ

That was the football. I don't think anybody afforded a ball in those days, and actually going to Sunday school, what I recall is, we would have uh we would meet on Hudson and Walnut street, and the classrooms, I remember, was two rooms there, the Vestry room and the room for the...the main room there and I remember each classroom was in each corner of the room. So there might be four or five classes in each room. There would be each corner was a class, and in the middle was a class. In the next room, there might have been two or three classes, and they would always have a recess I remember, and we would... That's when we'd go outside at recess time, and the guys would all play football, touch football, and that's when I remember we were using...

FINGERHUT

Where was that? At Hudson Street?

MINOVITZ

Hudson Street. And I remember using a... We'd pick up a tin can out of the garbage can, and we would play football during recess, and ...

FINGERHUT

What do you remember about public school?

MINOVITZ

Public School?

FINGERHUT

For example, how many Jewish kids were there in your class?

MINOVITZ

There wasn't too many of them. The only ones in elementary I remember, I remember Shirley Hoffman being there and Bernice Orlaff at that time. Shirley was Shirley Berman of course. Who else was there? Mary Ann Goodstein at the time. She was in and out. I think she lived in Los Angeles quite a bit, so she wasn't...

FINGERHUT

Did you enjoy elementary school? Did anybody pick on you for being Jewish or anything like that?

MINOVITZ

Not really. I think I had one teacher that hit me over the head once maybe in the second grade because... he hit me over the head with a ruler, and I was very quiet...there was no reason for it, and it was because I was Jewish, but I had no other instances, and I remember when I was maybe 5 or 6 years old, sitting by the sand box, and a Mexican kid took a knife and cut my fingers, no, he cut me a little bit, but no other really instances. I was in, it was called "open-air", because I guess I was underweight and was for the asthmatic and the people with problems. There, I was in there from the first year to the 6th grade they put me, and I remember Jack Siegel was in that class too although he was 3 or 4 years older than me.

FINGERHUT

Was that a physical class or...physical education?

MINOVITZ

It was for the under, unhealthier people, and Jack Siegel you'd think was there because of his respiratory problems, and then we'd eat there. They'd cook dinner, cook lunch for us there. Mrs. B was the head of that. And they'd cook lunch, and then we would have a rest period for an hour. We'd have cots and beds in there and rest for an hour, and it was just a combination. The classroom was a combination of maybe six different classrooms. Everybody's learning something different in that classroom, but I had no problem with anti-Semitism, except that one teacher, I remember hitting me on the head...

FINGERHUT

If you look back, taking like say like 10 as an excellent, 0 as miserable, growing up in Pasadena, what would be about 5,6,7,8, 9, 10, 0?

MINOVITZ

I think it was very pleasant. I enjoyed Pasadena. I'd give it an 8, sure. It was a good place...

FINGERHUT

What did you like most about it? Looking back and seeing the way other kids and other families were raised, what did you like about growing up in Pasadena?

MINOVITZ

Well, as far as I was, I really didn't push to join anything, so I don't know about being refused maybe it's... I don't think the Jewish kids in those days tried to get in any clubs or mingled too much. We played and stayed among ourselves. What's that? I had a lot of friends that weren't Jewish. They were all... None of them were Jewish, except one Jewish fellow I became friendly

with was Walter Stern, and he was an immigrant from Germany who had came here in the late 30's. I understand that he was killed in Germany in the infantry after that, but the rest, he was the only Jewish one I was friendly with, and back then, I'm thinking this was our friends, there was a Jap, one Japanese and no, not too many blacks kids we were friendly with in those days. They seemed to be uh...

FINGERHUT

When you played football, it was with whoever lived in the region?

MINOVITZ

No, I mean that, I almost...

FINGERHUT

Play on the street or so ...?

MINOVITZ

Oh on the street, we were just a lot of street, uh, street kids. We grew up, when we left that area, that house on Walnut and Pasadena Avenue, we moved over to Rosemont, and that was a friendly street. Then we found the Bermans lived on that street, and the Bermans knew the whole street, everybody knew each other.

FINGERHUT

Rosemont and where?

MINOVITZ

Between Walnut and Orange Row, that section in there. In fact there was the Roosevelt School is there, and I think it's a school for handicapped people today, but I remember my sister, who was six years older than me, went to that school before it turned in to that type of a school, and we'd travel. We went to Lincoln Elementary, which was on Lincoln Avenue. We would walk there, and uh... But on Rosemont, everybody was friendly, the whole street knew each other. It was really quite a street, and then we moved over to Pasadena Avenue, and we'd still go back to Rosemont to play, you know, it was really a neighborhood, wonderful neighborhood, everybody knew each other..

FINGERHUT

Looking at your family, what business was your father in?

MINOVITZ

My father and mother came from Europe. They came into Ellis Island. My mother came in 1905, and my father was 1907, and my mother went to live with friends and her sister. She and her sister came in, Dorothy, which is Dorothy Favish, and they lived in New York for a while, and then she was sent up to Winnipeg to live with her brother who was there earlier. My father came into Ellis Island in 1907, and I think it was the Baron Rothschild Society there, shipped them, there were trying to get all—there was too many Jews coming in, the way my father said, and they were trying to get them out of New York,

some of them. They sent them up into the wilderness up in Saskatchewan as a farmer, which he never did before he worked for a German farmer up there, and they tried going into the grocery business up there, and that failed. It was in a French, up in the French area, and if you didn't speak French, there was no chance at all. I think it lasted, he said, about three months, and he was broke, and he met my mother up there in Winnipeg. They lived in Saskatoon. They came into Pasadena in 1923. My sister was born in 1920. She was born in Saskatchewan, Shonovan I believe it was, and so when she came and they came down here, she was three years old, so she was not a citizen. She had to take out her citizenship papers later on. My folks both became citizens in the 40's, and I was born in 1926, three years later. My brother was born in 1927, and about in the 30's, they moved to the corner of Walnut and Fair Oaks at the grocery store, and that remained until the end of 1946, and I think I remember there was always posters in the store with the events that was going on in the temple, and you know, they cooperated pretty good with the Jewish community, and I think at that time, as I remember, my father told me they even made him a sisterhood member because he was always involved with the food and all that, and we had the kosher butcher shop, and he'd go in every morning to Boyle Heights to bring in fresh bread every morning. Seven days a week, he would go in. Things you could get away with in those days, you couldn't get away with today. I remember we had the kosher symbol on the window and everything. They had the mashgiach come out and check to see if everything was kosher and all that, but still they were open on Saturday. Today, you couldn't do that in a kosher. The meat was kosher. Everything was kosher in there, but still they worked on Saturday because in those days you had to make a living.

FINGERHUT

Did all your family cater to more than just the Jewish members of the community? Did they also have non-Jews?

MINOVITZ

I would say 95% were Jewish, but there were non-Jews there. I remember a Swiss family, Burkhardt, used to come in from Burkhardt and Cole, a nursery up there. You probably recognize the name, Delphiniums I think, yeah, and he used to come in, they come in for the bread because the bread was so, like they had from Europe, and I remember a German family come in, and I remember a Mexican man would come in every week and buy ____ 13:45, and we had 5% non-Jews, but my father delivered, get in a little truck and delivered to people...

FINGERHUT

Over the course of years, I heard different stories about your father, how your father carried families during the depression. Can you tell us about that?

MINOVITZ

Well, I do not know. I think the Bermans helped them out. There were people that gave them some credit, and of course in those days things were so cheap that if they owed you \$20, it was a lot of money. Bread was 10 cents a loaf. Milk was 5 cents to 10 cents, and even cigarettes, you could buy two for a quarter. I remember Camels were so cheap, so if somebody ran up a bill of \$20, they weren't that many. Most of them were paying. I remember there was one family here that had babies, the Newman's. They had a, the Newman brothers, had a tire shop on El Molino and Walnut, and when they had the Eva Herta-Newman had a couple of babies, couple of boys, and they would need bacon, you know they always in those days the doctors would tell the families with babies that the kids, feed them bacon I believe. So instead of that, my father would save her lamb chops especially for her, and during war, when meat was so scarce, he would save her lamb chops. I remember that part.

FINGERHUT

As a kid, did you work in the store?

MINOVITZ

Yeah, well not really. On Saturday, I think my father I remember, well we'd be going to school so on Saturday when my mother and father they worked day in and long hours, seven days a week they worked there together, and we'd, my brother and I, Donald, would come down there on a Saturday, and my mother would give me a dime to just get rid of us to go down to the theater, 10 cents a piece, and a little later we started working for them. They worked so hard, my folks working so hard that my brother and I was working, and we'd keep track of the hours we put in, and we would charge them 5 cents an hour, as I remember we were charging them...and ah....

FINGERHUT

Later when you started going to work yourself and you uh... after you finished junior college and the army, and so on, did you go into the store too? And....

MINOVITZ

Well when I got out of the army in 1946, late in 1946, my father had had it with it...he says I got to get in to something else, and we decided to get a liquor license, and turned it into a liquor store. So that's what we went into, actually. Even in that we would have bread because these same people would be coming looking for the bread. Everyday we would go to Boyle Heights and pick up bread until it slowly dribbled out until there weren't anybody wanting it anymore, but we had a lot of customers around there that were... A lot of Jewish people lived around there that wasn't even known to the community, but they were Jews because they would come. They were uh, what are they gastronomic? Is that what you call them, gastronomic Jews? They bought the food. They came in for the bread and the meat and the.... Well, all the Jewish

food, which we were able to give them, lox and whatever we had. And there was dozens of Jewish people in that neighborhood. They've never...never built a temple...never... there was a Levine there I remember a block away, Abraham Levine. He was probably a commun... no a lot of these people were socialists, communists. I guess you'd call them socialists in those days. The _____ they belonged to. But there was two parts to the _____ there was ah...the left and the right and most of them belonged to the left around there. They were in the junk business, mostly. A lot of these were. Abraham Levine used to go around and peddle junk, I remember, and there was Jacobson...Jacobson was, what, Helen. You know Helen, Helen Jacobson? Helen Friedman was her name. And she married David Jacobsen you know him, you know. You know Seiver? And her father was a junkman. Then we had Moesha Shure. We had Moesha Shure who had a horse and wagon, and he drove around the city hollering for junk, used papers, metal, anything, and he was quite a character around Pasadena, Moesha Shure, and one day, he wanted to be a citizen, and my father took him to somebody in Boyle Heights to get him to be a citizen. He didn't know how to write his name, so I don't think he ever became a citizen. They had lawyers, special lawyers in Boyle Heights that would handle these immigrants. You would go to these guys, and they would arrange to become citizens. I think my father and mother went through them, but Moesha couldn't write his name. I remember taking care of the store. This was when were in the liquor store, and Moesha Shure lived a couple of blocks away from me, and he'd come in the store and play casino with me. And... then I'd put the cards down and go wait on a customer and turn around I could see him peeking at my cards...hahaha...I never accused him...hahaha

FINGERHUT

This store, where was it located? Was it still around...?

MINOVITZ

Yeah that was on the Walnut and Far Oaks. We turned it into a liquor store then, and he was quite a character though. He used to come on Chavez, Saturday morning. I don't know if could read Hebrew or not, but they used to serve a lot of herring and good bread on Saturday morning. A lot of these people go just to have something good to eat on Saturday morning. And he was one of them.

FINGERHUT

Let's look ahead to you as you got older and you got married. How did you meet your wife?

MINOVITZ

Oh we gotta go through the boy scouts first.

FINGERHUT

Oh well, we will come back, apparently, we got to go through boy scouts first?

MINOVITZ

Well! Let's go...well. Let's see, I was Bar mitzvahed in 1939, and Rabbi Halevy was the rabbi at that time, and let's see, Cohen was here before him, I think. No, Cohen joined after Halevy. So when Rabbi Halevy I was Bar mitzvahed by, and he liked uh, I was pretty good at Hebrew there. I was probably one of the better students. He had me teaching others, like Erwin Brown who was a little slower. I had to teach him something of a brother, and he'd always give me a nickel, and go down the corner, there used to be an ice cream store, down at the corner of Lake and the Northeast corner. He'd give me a nickel to go buy ice cream, Rabbi Halevey. Then, I was in Sunday school at that time and going through Hebrew school. That was when I was thirteen, but a couple of years later I continued at the age of 15, then the AZA came along. And the AZA, of course every Sunday, they would have sports. It was football season...

FINGERHUT

AZA was a Jewish teenage?

MINOVITZ

That's the boys B'nai B'rith, AZA. They were every Sundays involved because when football is in season you got a whole league to play, and then when basketball starts that is another one...and baseball...it takes up the whole year and then track season...So my folks...and say I wanna go and play with the guys. I was fifteen, and I was just getting into the AZA. So they said, "Ok. You can quit Sunday School", and I was never confirmed. There was a picture there with the rest of them. Most of the girls were confirmed, and my brother and I were never confirmed because the folks said, "Why you were Bar mitzvahed, you had enough". I remember uh Louie Presswood was the _____ 22:28 which was the president at that time, and you need a basketball team. You need five, so he'd pick up five in his car, and we drove close to Boyle Heights, and one of the games, he picked me up once. We went into Boyle Heights, and five of us and then Boyle Heights. They were all players out of Roosevelt High with _____ Strauss AZA, and at half time, the score was 66 to 6, and the five of us, Louie looks at us, and Louie Press, that's Miriam's uncle, he looks at us. We look at each other, and we all get in the car. We left. We didn't say one word. It was 66 to 6. So we were always put in this league in the Boyle Heights, which was a problem once you have Minoris City Terrace and Nathan Strauss, and these guys were, you know, they were from Roosevelt High. They were athletes. And so I think when we finally got out of that league and played around Glendale and Los Feliz, which was made us happier. That was the AZA, and that was a good time in my life. That was very good until the time you get drafted, when eighteen.

FINGERHUT

(Unintelligible)

MINOVITZ

The boy scouts, I joined it when I was 12 years old, and we met at the temple on Hudson, and Dr. Louis Basken, he was a dentist, was the scout master and Harry Levi assisted him. He must have had, may be Seivert can remember a Big troop! It was troop number 36. It was troop number 36, I think it was called. Double high I guess, and...it must have been at least 40 in that troop. We'd line up in that hall there, the social hall, and we lined up the whole hall. There were so many of us, and it was quite a troop. We were active in everything, and I believe that the flag, if I remember, had a _____ 24:38 on it. I think it did, and that was, well that goes from when I was 12 to about the age of 15, and it was a great troop. And in the troop we were supposed to be a Jewish troop, but uh we did have two or three non-Jewish in there. There were no problems with them. You know they wanted to be part of the troop, and everybody got along fine, and that was a great part of my life in Pasadena. But everything that I was involved in was mostly all Jewish, the Jewish Boy Scout Troop, the AZA, and so I never did try to get in anything that maybe would have kept us out of it you know. So I did not have those kind of problems.

FINGERHUT

How about dating socially with young women or girls and then ultimately with meeting your wife?

MINOVITZ

Well the AZA was very social and athletic was the whole thing. In fact think about that, I remember Les Spearman. I hate to... well maybe I shouldn't say it, but you know, he wasn't quite one of the boys at that time, and he wanted to be _____, and they really did not want him to be _____, and he wanted it badly. So they made a deal with him that if you become _____ you've got to tend Sunday morning all the athletic events. So he said fine, and he did that. So he became _____. He was a good _____, and also in the social they would arrange socials with other BBG. The BBG's where the B'nai Brith girls, and on Saturday nights, I think it was almost every Saturday night, they had one arranged where we'd go to Culver City or we'd go to Huntington Park, we'd go to Glendale, travel all over, and had these parties with the other girls and there are two or three dates I'd met a girl, a couple of them in Culver City, and it didn't last long. And after the war, they organized the BBYM, the B'nai Brith Young Man and that's when I met Nikki. She was a member of the Glendale group. She was in the Glendale BBG too. Then we had a dance one night in Pasadena and in Wohlmann Hall there. It was called, it wasn't called Wohlmann Hall then.

FINGERHUT

Kirschner.

MINOVITZ

Kirschner at that time. And I started calling her, dating her, and that was it. A year-and-a-half later, we got married in 1949, January 15th of '49. That's where we met and lot of the kids met that way.

FINGERHUT

So you were mostly oriented to Pasadena rather than going into LA?

MINOVITZ

Sunday nights we would go into LA. There was Plummer Park in Hollywood. There were Jewish groups that got together, and in Boyle Heights, on every Sunday night there was a dance right in Boyle Heights which was just 100% Jews there, Plummer Park, but some of the clubs themselves, BBG's and AZA's would sponsor these dances on certain nights, and they would send out notices, and we would go to those. But we never really mixed with anybody who wasn't Jewish in those days. I don't, I can't think of any of my friends or anybody. They seemed to stick to Jewish girls, and we'd just want...

FINGERHUT

They did that voluntarily?

MINOVITZ

Oh yeah, nobody's telling them to do it. They knew that they were more comfortable that way, I guess. They are more comfortable with their Jewish partners and...

FINGERHUT

Looking back on the period when you were growing up, and let's say you got married and so on, uh, has life changed much in Pasadena here? How would you characterize it?

MINOVITZ

Life in Pasadena? Well, we got older (laughs). I don't know. I think it has. I see the...now we see the mixed marriages, which we wouldn't see in those days. These things have changed. It was impossible in those days...uh... One other thing I might mention when we were, I think I've mentioned it before, when we were 13 or 14, we would go down to uh Brookside to the swimming pool, and uh one day we went down there and with Sidney Friedlander and my brother, Donald, and myself, and we went there, and we wanted to get in to the...uh... get into swim. It was a Monday. Monday or Wednesday or something, and they let my brother go through and I go through, and they stopped Sidney. Sidney happened to have a dark complexion and black kinky hair. They said you "You cannot come in. You only can swim on Tuesdays." Tuesday is International Day, so we had to convince the fellow at the gate he's Jewish! He's not, he's not, he's not Negro, and we finally convinced him. They let him, but in those days Tuesday was International Day. What they would do is on Tuesday it would be for the Spanish, and the Asian, and the blacks only on those days.

They weren't allowed to swim on any other day. And then that night they would drain the pool out and have fresh water until, until (laughs) Tuesday night again. But I remember that Sidney Friedlander they, they stopped him, and we finally convinced them to let him in though. I just...that is one of my things I remember.

FINGERHUT

You started a family, started with your life, your working in a liquor store. Anything that stands out in your memory in terms of, that you'd like to relay, in terms of starting a family and raising a family here in Pasadena?

MINOVITZ

Well, of course we have 5 children, and our kids followed us our ways. Mark, the oldest went through the same thing. They went through the Boy Scouts in Carey, but they didn't have a troop in those days, the Jewish troop at that time. They had to go through a church, or maybe they did. We were living on the other side of town. We were living over by like maybe it was too far to come over to the temple so we went to a local one. So they went through the Boy Scouts, and then when they were old enough they both joined the AZA, and Lori joined the BBG's, and Sherry became the president of the BBG when she became old enough. So they really followed, we didn't push them or anything, but they seemed to follow what we did through our life. At least three of them married Jewish mates, and two of them aren't, but I guess we're lucky to have three of them at this day and age.

FINGERHUT

In terms of your business, the store, most of your customers probably were not Jewish. How did you relate to the...

MINOVITZ

Where? What store?

FINGERHUT

The liquor store.

MINOVITZ

The liquor store? I had no problem. We just had a few holdups but glad to get out. We ran about 25 years before we...brother, wanted to get in to something different. We had three stores, and he kept trying to get into something different, get out of this business.

FINGERHUT

(Unintelligible)

MINOVITZ

He investigated and got into this school. It was called the MTI. It was a marketing training institute and it was a franchise, and he got in and opened up cold turkey, started hiring help, and we stayed in that for the next 27 years and retired from that in 1990. Did well in that.

FINGERHUT

That was downtown LA.

MINOVITZ

That was 7th and Broadway, it was upstairs. I remember one instance in the army I might...in the army I went in, of course, I got drafted when I was 18 and went through down to Fort McArthur like everybody else, and they asked you what you want to go into Marines, Navy, or Army. I said the Navy, and they put me in the Army. I think those who said they wanted to be in the Army, they put in the Navy. You know. Then we went up to Camp Roberts for 16 weeks of basic training, and then we're sent up to be shipped out at Fort Ord, and I got I got we're swimming at night, and it's an open swimming pool, and up at Fort Ord, you know the weather in January, and I got a cold or something and put in the hospital and with a high fever. I remember this young doctor coming around looking at me probably just out of med school, wherever he was, he was a 1st Lieutenant. He came over to me and looked at me, and he says, "You know, you Jews are always goldbricking". You know here I am, I am a just, you know, the lowest that there can be in the Army, and here's an officer, I wasn't supposed to say anything to him. I couldn't do it. That's one thing I'll never forget, what he said to me that day. You Jews are always goldbricking. So that was one thing that stood out...

FINGERHUT

That's one thing. Let's go back at Pasadena and in relation to the people in Pasadena, the economic activities of Jews here, is it true that many of the Jews here were in the retail business or were involved in stores? How did many of them make a living?

MINOVITZ

I think most of them were in the retail business. There were 2 or 3, the shoe repair places. There was, on Felix alone, there was Phil Pepper and his wife had an open front fruit stand there. There was a Rosenberg. Rosenberg and ____ they both had shoe places, and there's the shoe man up the street that was Jewish and there was I Press...

FINGERHUT

_____. I Press was his father.

MINOVITZ

And he would, whenever they needed minion, whenever they needed minion they'd meet at his store there, and of course if they were short, they'd call up...

FINGERHUT

Where are most of these stores? Where are most of these stores? ____?

MINOVITZ

Between Colorado and Walnut there are a lot of stores. There's 2 or 3 furniture stores too. Steinberg had a store, and Abron had a furniture store, a

haberdashery store. Steinberg had a furniture, and there was, you might say, two or three shoe men and the fruit stand. There was another shoe man up in ____ there, and so when I Press was, when Isidore Press needed a minyon, he'd go up to our store and called my brother and I, and we would go down there, and we would go in this back where, and you know there's a cloth there, and the people would, where they would change their clothes there, we would go back there and they would buy from there, and facing East and you could always see if somebody would come into the store, but, always had a minion when it was necessary. I guess when somebody at Yorkside, he could always call together, and I've never seen anybody go in the store. I don't know if he made a living there or not. But they used to, him and his wife, Rebecca? I forget, Rebecca I think her name was. She was quite a person. She would put on these Yiddish plays at the temple. You know, comedies and skits and all that, and they had that for quite a few years. She ran that, and I know my folks were in it, and they all spoke Yiddish in the those days, everybody, and that was a lot of fun in those days, but they would always have this going on, and Miriam's grandmother was always the ____ 37:59 that was all the instigator that put that thing together and...

FINGERHUT

Before you turn to a little bit more about religious life in the temple and so on, is there anything else that you would want to add about life in Pasadena in general and life in the community?

MINOVITZ

Like I say, I never really pushed myself into anything. I know there's places that didn't allow Jews. I'm sure the university club, I guess, many years didn't allow. I think Dave Goldman became a member there, finally, but now things have changed. They don't have these restrictions anymore except for maybe Annandale Golf Club and San Diego Golf Club, and even there you might have one Jew over there. I know of one Jew who belongs to Annandale. He actually married a...

FINGERHUT

Were there any Jews in politics? Local politics?

MINOVITZ

I think the only one I could remember would be Dave Press who became a... was he the prosecuting attorney or city attorney? I can't remember any of them. We had ones in gambling. Gambling, I remember, a couple of the owners. I remember one of them had a beauty shop on Colorado, and in the back room he had a steel door, and they crashed in there one day and got him for holding gambling there but...

FINGERHUT

It's hardly getting involved in politics.

MINOVITZ

I don't know...there were many merchants were Jewish. Many of them ____ 39:33, the Sanders, George Berger, a couple Hellinger, they had a pharmacist there ____ 39:43 and many. There were all in business in those days. Very few professional people.

FINGERHUT

Let's look at the synagogue and religious life if you would. Divide them into two parts: the social that you started to talk about with you mother, and then the religious, and then the governing of the temple or the temple administration. Let's look at the social life first. What do you remember about social life at the temple back at that time? This will be the Hudson River, oh, Hudson Street.

MINOVITZ

Well, as for as I was concerned I think everything was centered at the temple. The Boys' Scouts were centered at the temple. The B'nai Brith and the AZA had their own hall at the time on the corner of Chester and Colorado. So in 1943, when they did buy that property up on Altadena Drive, they asked the B'nai Brith to go on and make that a center up there. So the B'nai BRITH gave up their quarters on Chester and Colorado and moved in to the temple up there, but it did become the center. That was your social center.

FINGERHUT

So what other kinds of social activities? Did they have dances? Parties? card games?

MINOVITZ

Card games, you wanna hear about?

FINGERHUT

(Laughter)

MINOVITZ

In B'nai Brith, we used to have a lot of card games. We even used the, there's so many people, we used to play in that cottage in the back. What is that a nursery?

FINGERHUT

It is a nursery.

MINOVITZ

And after the meeting, it must've been, we had 40 -50 people there members in those days. In those days, the B'nai Brith would actually train these leaders even, and they would graduate from learning from the B'nai Brith and move up to leadership in the temple. The B'nai Brith actually was a training ground for the temple at that time. I guess they had good meetings, you know going to Robert's Rules of Order, they better knew how to conduct meetings and how to, it was good training there.

FINGERHUT

Did many of the young men stay here, or did most of them leave when they became adults? I mean, you obviously stayed, and you can mention other names...

MINOVITZ

You can see how many around here, quite a few of them. I know Nikki was brought up in Glendale, and there's not one person in Glendale left from her BBG experience or her temple experience, and yet in Pasadena, you can name many and many of them, the Trudy Gantrick, the Helen Jacobson, and so many of them, Miriam Schwartz.

FINGERHUT

Stayed in Pasadena or around the immediate center?

MINOVITZ

But in Glendale, not one of them stayed there, but in Pasadena, for some reason, they remained here. Siebert remained. If my kids, I got 5 children, not one of them stayed, but it must be something in the past you know that so many of them remained in this area, and I think that's a compliment to the area really.

FINGERHUT

Anything else that you can think of about the social life of the synagogue that stands out?

MINOVITZ

Well, that's probably one thing that they haven't done for many years – have those plays. I remember going back 20 – 25 years ago forgetting, the Yiddish plays went back before that, but I remember when Gene Rothmann was active, was in Pasadena, and lived here. He arranged some beautiful plays and you and other people Those were good. I don't think they've had anything like that for a long time. But years ago, they had many of those before you were even here. Gene Rothmann, he was really a director. He'd have big spotlights and train, you know, really nice productions. I don't think they've really had it. I don't know if people are going in for that for now. Maybe they're going in for more orchestration music and stuff now.

FINGERHUT

Let's enter your religious life in the temple. Would you consider your family as you were being raised and your family now as traditional or as more leaning more toward the liberal realm of Judaism?

MINOVITZ

No, my mother was a, my mother was very religious, but she moved away. My father wasn't, but he went along with what she wanted. She kept a kosher house. Of course, she had to work long hours. It was very difficult, but she'd come home on Friday night, always light the candles, and we would go to, Fred and I, and would be driving to the temple every Friday night. Every Friday

night, we were there on Shavas, and we'd sleep there, but we were there every Friday night. (Audio gap)

MINOVITZ

I'm thinking it was just expected of us. We just...we were expected to do certain things. We were expected to go to Sunday school. We were expected to be Bar mitzvahed. We were expected to do these things. I believe today that the parents, so many of them, are just too lenient. They let the child make up their minds what they want to, and today the difference between then and now, now the kids have so many activities that they get involved with soccer and football, baseball. There are so many other things that it conflicts with their religious duties really.

FINGERHUT

There are very few of the sports that you were involved in, and the games were organized teams...

MINOVITZ

Oh no...

FINGERHUT

...except for the AZA which was within the temple so that the temple became your way of life.

MINOVITZ

Oh that was, we had a good time there. I am trying to think of what I was going to say.

FINGERHUT

I'm sorry...

MINOVITZ

It was all expected of us and I can't turn it off...I was just thinking of it...I was compare, I wanted to compare what, what we studied then and what they do now. We didn't learn a 10th of what these kids are learning today. I go to these Bar mitzvahs today, and it's amazing what these kids are being taught today. They can run the whole service. We couldn't. We were just taught the _____ and they would give us the...to memorize the Haftarah. That is what I comparing then and now. They're so much more educated today than...of course in those days, everything was voluntary when we...at Sunday school the teachers were all voluntary...volunteers and a little different from today. Of course, in those days, there wasn't any money to spend and...

FINGERHUT

You mentioned that you were a volunteer.

MINOVITZ

Oh I was just helping. I remember I went down with this berukhah. He was having a little difficult time or something.

FINGERHUT

So you read a Hebrew, and you did Hebrew?

MINOVITZ

When I even went out at my Bar mitzvah, I guess I was a favorite of the Rabbi Cohen even had me recite my speech. I had a speech in Hebrew to say that day too I remember and nobody else did that though. I guess that he felt that I could handle it, but these kids today, it's remarkable. Even in our temple, we went to my grandson's Bar mitzvah last Saturday and Friday night, and he didn't do half of what the kids in Pasadena do and were taught. I don't know why, but these kids in Pasadena are really being trained. It is really wonderful.

FINGERHUT

Over the course of years, your working in the temple and your being in the temple and so on. Do you want to talk about your work and your ... what you have done in your temple and what you feel that you have accomplished or...?

MINOVITZ

What have I accomplished? I have had, mostly, been on most of the committees, and been on the boards since Frank Ackerman was president.

FINGERHUT

That would be what... the 50's?

MINOVITZ

I don't know when haha?

MINOVITZ

I was on the board many years after that, I held executive vice presidencies, and I've held vice-presidencies. This time I have been chairing the Dues Committee for, I don't know, maybe seven or eight years now. That keeps me busy. I enjoy that. I don't mind doing it. I don't know if they still want me. Maybe they want somebody younger to come in there, but nobody seems to be taking over. I've held most of the offices in the temple.

FINGERHUT

Over the years, you have been involved in many relationships of the many groups. Are you relatively satisfied with the way the temple was developed as a social group, as a, as a larger family, or do you see divisiveness and... friction?

MINOVITZ

Well there are always different groups that I... There just seems a lot of friction today. I don't know. There's different groups there, but now it's... now I'm 73, it's a little difficult to answer a question like that. Maybe the ones that are 40-years old today can know what's going on internally there. We got our own, you know... our own friends now. We really don't mingle too much, but I think with the intermarriages, it sure makes a big change today in the temple.

Whether the temple is going to make any changes in that field or not, I don't know.

FINGERHUT

Have you ever gotten outside of Pasadena to move into an eastern area or moved out in consideration of...

MINOVITZ

No I never moved. No, I am still sticking to Pasadena. I don't want to go any further. That's it.

FINGERHUT

Well, just to conclude one last thing. There've been a lot of personalities that have been involved, you know, from Rabbi Levi, then there's Rabbi Vorspan, Rabbi Galpert and others, any people like Frank Collins or Helena Goldman or any people that you can remember?

MINOVITZ

Ah...when ah Max Vorspan was a Rabbi, he was the one who married us in 1949. I don't know...

FINGERHUT

Any personalities you come across or meet with them or did you ever get to know any of them or...

MINOVITZ

Well I knew all of them, but, you know, these people you name here were a lot older than me too. They are in another generation. A lot of them were my parents' generation, and I really didn't have to...

FINGERHUT

Well you smiled before when you said that you had been involved with Frank Ackerman. You wanna to talk about that?

MINOVITZ

Well, when we...when Frank Ackerman was President, there must have been...we have 60 to 70 people in the meetings they had. He kept naming...trustees or directors deputy directors. We'd have maybe forty directors in those days, but I don't know if I should say this on tape or not, but I remember the night that we voted on not continuing with the Rabbi Galpert's stay here. His five years is...is...it was up. The five years was up, and they were very unhappy with Galpert. The reasons were I think that holidays would come, peysekha came, and he was gone with his kids, and he went to the beach, or something like that, and they were unhappy with a lot of things with him, and they voted it that time not to give him a contract, and most, most of the people voted that way...not to extend a new contract to him. That was after five years. So it was a funny thing, he gave it to Lou Silver at that time to be the in-between man. You go talk to Rabbi and say we're not going to do it. Lou Silver said I'll take care of it. Then he got a hold of Rabbi Galpert, and they got a group together and fought this and of course, Rabbi Galpert stayed another 25 years, but it was...Lou Silver was supposed to go and talk him and tell him we will not hire him, and he went on the other side and got the guys like Paul

Gordon and a whole vociferous group there that they fought and kept the Rabbi for another 25 years.

FINGERHUT

This is...this is a split that Frank Ackerman kinda led a group that went with Ackerman over to the Foothill Temple. There was another split back in the 1930's over the issue of reformed Jews. Could you...

MINOVITZ

Do I know of them?

FINGERHUT

Yes, it does. Could you tell us about some of these splits in the congregation with them?

MINOVITZ

I really...I heard about that. I don't know anything about that really, and I remember you mentioning it in one of your letters 8 or 10 years ago that you've...somebody told...I think you were interviewing Dave Goldman, and he said that they had a Board of Directors meeting in this and this guy came in with a gun and he was...haha...and so...then I found out later who it was. I don't know if you...they knew who it was. As far as I know, Al Levi knew. Al Levi knew. It was Marie Karsch, I think, came in with a gun and was gonna shoot Levi because he owed him some money for gambling or something, but...

FINGERHUT

That can lead to a succession of a temple?

MINOVITZ

No, no it had nothing to do with that...

FINGERHUT

_____ 55:54 No.

MINOVITZ

I don't know.... I.....

FINGERHUT

In the 50's, in the 50's when...

MINOVITZ

50's? I'm 4 years old. I think that was at that time that they wanted the reform. Roy Melvin was for reform. He was brought up in, I think he came from Chicago or something...he was an orphan, and the YMCA, I think, helped him a lot when he was...that's the way he told his story, and since then, he was such a big backer of the YMCA, and he had no religious upbringing more, and so, of course, he was more on the, more of the liberal reform more or less.

FINGERHUT

I _____ that group came back I understand...

MINOVITZ

Yeah...I think there was other things...

FINGERHUT

And what happened in the 50's, when the people left to go to start the Foothill Temple?

MINOVITZ

Frank Ackerman, he was like a dictator. Yes, he was like the president, what seven, eight years in a row, 10 years in a row, and he finally put in Aaron Mohair. As president, he thought Mohair was one of his followers or something, and then Mohair when he took over the presidency kind of went against Frank Ackerman in some of his, what he believed. I don't know what Frank wanted, but I guess Frank lost a lot of his voice. He liked to be the big man or something. I guess Aaron kind of put him down, and then he didn't take too many with him. He took two or three people at that time. There was no big split there. He only took two or three. ____ there, and there was another couple or couples there, something like that. He didn't. He didn't. I don't think he took too many.

FINGERHUT

Well, the congregation just continued to go on with about the same amount of people, close to 400 members and so on. Any closing comments or anything that you'd like to say that we haven't gotten into?

MINOVITZ

I think years ago, I think, when somebody was a member of the temple, they were very conscientious temple members. They weren't just there because of their children. I think today, there's too many of them there that are joining and there because they want their children to have a Jewish education and once its over, we lose them. They're gone, and I think years ago, you're seeing more support, but today, as you get older, it's so expensive. It costs you about \$1600 - \$1700 a year for a couple that do not have children, and it costs that much. It costs Eugene \$1600 - \$1700. You don't have any children. Your children aren't here. Your grandchildren aren't here. You're one of the unusual that are still supporting the temple, but I think that the majority of them I see that once their kids are out of the 16 year old confirmation, if they go that far, I think we're losing them, and they just aren't willing to support. People supported them when they were struggling along, but they're not willing to support the younger ones.

FINGERHUT

Your conclusion then, you're also one of those who stayed on.

MINOVITZ

Yeah! Absolutely, but I think that somebody's got to...I just, the future I think that things are so expensive now. Everything. The temple is spending so much money that I think that while I'm chairman of the Dues Committee, I can see

that more and more are asking for special dues because they can't... The temple comes as such a low priority in that basket of bills, you know, and more and more are asking for special dues, and I think that the temple is eventually going to be a special dues temple, is what it is ending up to be.

FINGERHUT

Well, we have been talking for about an hour, 45 minutes or so, almost an hour. Harold Minovitz, today is the 13th of January the year 2000 here in Pasadena, and my name is Gene Fingerhut, and I was conducting the interview as well as I could.

MINOVITZ

Very good.

FINGERHUT

With that, we'll close the interview.

[Parent Institution](#) | [TEI](#) | [Search](#) | [Feedback](#)

Date:

This page is copyrighted