

A TEI Project

Interview of Zev Yaroslavsky

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SEVERAL

This is Michael Several today is March 11, 2009. I am with Zev Yaroslavsky in his conference room and we are going to conduct a oral history of his involvement with the education program at the Pasadena Jewish Temple and Center. Some basic background information I would likely get. What is your date and place of birth?

YAROSLAVSKY

Los Angeles, California 1948.

SEVERAL

Okay. And where did you go to high school?

YAROSLAVSKY

Fairfax High School.

SEVERAL

You graduated from Fairfax High School in what year?

YAROSLAVSKY

1967.

SEVERAL

1967. And then you went to UCLA?

YAROSLAVSKY

That's correct.

SEVERAL

How did you get connected to the Pasadena Jewish Temple and Center education?

YAROSLAVSKY

Education director, Leonard Cohen was looking for a teacher and he was an acquaintance of my father, who was in the Jewish education field, and somehow the two of them were talking and Len called me and my dad

suggested he call me and asked me if I wanted to teach and as I said I don't have any teaching credentials, I was a college student, was actually early of my college career. He said that it doesn't matter, if you are interested, we will work it out and I asked him how they pay me and they paid quite well. Jewish teachers by the hour got Jewish educational teachers got paid very well by the hour and I accepted and it was 1968 that I started teaching at Pasadena Jewish Temple and I taught there for eight years.

SEVERAL

Eight years? Wow.

YAROSLAVSKY

Yeah till I became a city councilman and actually until I was elected in 1975 and that's the story.

SEVERAL

So when you started working there, you had not completed any teacher training or anything?

YAROSLAVSKY

No.

SEVERAL

And your mother was a teacher though right?

YAROSLAVSKY

Both my parents were teachers and I had gone to Hebrew High School and I was well versed in Jewish studies both through my personal upbringing at home and through my studies and I taught a course, my first course there was, I forgot what it was called, it was some current events kind of a course that really didn't require PhD and you know one thing lead to another, I ended up during the course of the years teaching Hebrew which I speak fluently and during the weekdays and Sunday school, I taught more generic social action type of class and it worked out well.

SEVERAL

So during the eight years, you taught both Sunday school and the Hebrew school.

YAROSLAVSKY

Yeah first it was just Sunday school, later it was Tuesdays and Thursdays if I remember certainly correctly.

SEVERAL

When you were teaching at Hebrew school, did you also teach at the Sunday school at the same time or was that?

YAROSLAVSKY

Yes.

SEVERAL

So you had three days.

YAROSLAVSKY

I had three different classes yes, two classes, one weekday class and one Sunday class.

SEVERAL

Now the Sunday class I have some document here from 1970, I think it was from the Flame, temple newsletter that you were teaching 7th and 8th grade and when you were teaching the Hebrew class, what level was that?

YAROSLAVSKY

The elementary school grades. It was younger kids.

SEVERAL

Yeah. So when you went in there, did you have a curriculum or syllabus?

YAROSLAVSKY

Yes of course, they had a text that was Jewish social action was the name of the class and they had a text and it came with a syllabus and a curriculum and a lesson plan kind of thing and I made up my own lesson plan and I kind of tweaked the class to my own interest and try to make it relevant to the kids and talk a lot about Soviet Jews at that time which was a major issue for the Jewish community in the world at large and I think generally, the kids liked it for 7th or 8th graders to remember you 35 years later and many of the kids at Pasadena are still around and see me every now and then and remember the class fondly as a great gift because most of us who went to Hebrew school did not want to be in Hebrew school. Most of those who went to Sunday school did not want to be in Sunday school. There are a few weirdos who did, but my challenge was to you know once they were there, to make it worth their while and have them feel that it was worth their while and I think for the most part, I succeeded.

SEVERAL

Just as a footnote, I interviewed some yesterday, whose daughter was in your class, Vicky Vigel and she remembers you very fondly.

YAROSLAVSKY

That's good.

SEVERAL

She remembers you as being passionate. Passionate she said.

YAROSLAVSKY

I was and I am.

SEVERAL

Now was it your wife also taught there right?

YAROSLAVSKY

Yeah she taught for a couple of years, I don't know exactly how many but Betty Fishman drafted her in to the teaching program on Sundays is when she taught so we made a good living in Pasadena between my wife and myself I think it was 8\$ an hour, it was good money. It was almost triple what I made as

a union maintenance man during the summers for the film industry so I am not complaining.

SEVERAL

Did you have a choice of classes?

YAROSLAVSKY

I don't think so, I took what was handed to me. I was happy to be employed.

SEVERAL

Where did you learn Hebrew?

YAROSLAVSKY

At home. My parents were both Hebrew teachers and they raised both me and my sister on Hebrew, that was my first language actually.

SEVERAL

Oh really?

YAROSLAVSKY

Yeah.

SEVERAL

Does the religious school integrate in any way into the temple in anyway? Did they have programs? Did you recall any, how the school fitted in with the temple or may be...

YAROSLAVSKY

You know I don't remember. There wasn't a lot, it's not the way it is today where the schools have projects you know skits or themes that they bring to the Friday night service. It wasn't that way back then. You know may be once a year the class had some activity at a Friday night service but it was not something that was omnipresent during the course of the year. For me, it would have been very difficult in any case to go from UCLA to Pasadena on a Friday evening on top of everything else what had been difficult so but today, the nature of temple education, Jewish education in a temple setting is to integrate the classroom more with the synagogue activity and vice versa.

SEVERAL

Now who did you report to? Did you report initially to Cohen?

YAROSLAVSKY

Yeah Len Cohen was the education director, he was my boss and Betty Fishman I believe took over for him at some point and because Len went to another temple in the San Fernando Valley and so I reported the education director.

SEVERAL

Did you remember Rabbi Mindick?

YAROSLAVSKY

Not really. Rabbi Galpert is the one that I dealt with.

SEVERAL

Oh yeah. Did Rabbi Galpert teach anything? I mean, was he involved in any teaching of the bar mitzvahs?

YAROSLAVSKY

I don't know.

SEVERAL

In your Hebrew class, what was the gender of the students? Was it primarily boys?

YAROSLAVSKY

No it was a mixture. Yeah as far as I can recall.

SEVERAL

Yeah and pretty equal mixture of that yeah.

YAROSLAVSKY

It wasn't a big class but there were boys and girls in the class.

SEVERAL

The reason I am asking is because I am trying to trace the history of the bat mitzvahs our congregation.

YAROSLAVSKY

Yes I can't help you.

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