

Memoir #J-3
Butte Historical Society Oral History Project
Memoirs of Samuel Rafish

interviewer: Janet Eisner Cornish
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Where were you born?

Warsaw, Poland.

Your parents from Poland?

My parents were there.

What year did you come to the U.S.?

1906.

Did you come with your whole family?

No. My mother and 2 sisters.

Why did they leave Poland?

Well, they lived in London, England. My parents originally came from Warsaw, Poland. My mother went home when I was born.

Did you return to England before coming to the U.S.?

Yes. I was just a baby in Warsaw. Probably a month or 2 when they went back to London. They came here from London.

In 1906?

Yeah. My dad was here in 1905. He came a year before.

Why did he come?

He had a brother that was married to a girl whose family moved to Butte. I don't know where they came from though. Her name was Kenoffel.

And he came to Butte because of this?

My dad had a brother here. All of our family lived in London, England.

Do you know why your father's brother came to Butte?

Well, he married a young lady whose parents lived in Butte. They were here in the early 1900's.

How did you travel from London to U.S.?

By boat and RR from NYC to Butte.
(railroad)

What did your father and mother do? Were your parents employed?

My dad was a tailor. He had a men's furnishing store here. And after that there was 3 brothers here.

Did he go into business with his brother?

No. His oldest brother was the first one here, and my dad came, who happened to be the youngest of 3 brothers. Then the third brother joined us afterwards. You know Fannie Gordon? Her father was the middle brother of 3. There was Sam Rafish, who was the oldest. My dad was the youngest, and Harris Rafish...well, Mel's father, Mel Rafish, do you know him? His father, he came over after my dad.

So they were in the tailoring business. Were they always?

Not my dad. The other 2 were tailors as long as they were here. My dad had the store right down here on Wyoming and Park. A men's furnishing store.... Haberdashery the name's still engraved on the floor.

What was the name of the store?

On the tile floor. Judd is in there now. Phil Judd's place.

Occupies the same store that your father did? In general, where did many of the Jewish families that came to Butte come from?

Oh, I'd say almost every country in Europe. Russia, Germany, Poland, England, Spain. Oh, there was quite a mixture.

Mostly from Europe? Were there any that came from other parts of the country?

The only ones I recall were all from Europe.

When did they come?

Boy! I couldn't say that. They were here in the 1800's, a lot of them.

Do you know why they came to Butte?

I guess because of the notoriety it had as a mining industry. It was a growing community...the only reason I have.

What were they generally?

Oh, when I came to Butte, I can recall them and they were all self-employed people. There was one store...Symon's store which was a large general merchandise mens' store. Siegel and they left here and went to Salt Lake. There were pawnbrokers, jewelers, shoe makers, liquor business, express men, well you name it....clerks, shoe dealers.

Were there any Jewish miners?

I doubt whether there was anyone working underground in those days. There were a few after that. You're speaking of Jewish?

Yes.

There was the Genzberger family who worked for the Anaconda Co., but he didn't work underground. He was kind of an accountant for them. There was a fellow named Sam Spiegel who was very prominent athlete here. He worked in the mining Co. I worked on the Hill and there were several after that. Not many. I don't know of one that worked underground.

You worked on the Hill?

Yeah.

What did you do?

Surface work and then I became assistant in the Secondary Areas Department for the Butte and Superior; and I was time keeper.

The Secondary Dept.? What was that?

The mill of the Black Rock mine, where they crush the ore. And I worked in the Assay Department before I went away to school. I worked up there a year and then I came home. My first year after school, I also worked at the Berkely Mine before it was a pit.

What did you do there?

Timekeeping.

Were there a lot of people who would do that on their summer vacations from school? Pick up jobs?

Quite a few, but not many Jewish people.

Why was that, there weren't many Jewish people here?

They were all merchants here. They had positions in the stores, worked for their parents, a lot of them. The junk business was very active among the Jewish people here...and the expressmen moving baggage and stuff like that. And they got into the furniture business. Shiners was here when I came here. They and the tobacco business, liquor business, shoe business, jewelers, pawnbrokers, furniture, of course, clothing, tailors, shoemakers. I would say that over 50% of the merchants in Butte were Jewish.

When people came here, you said Butte was a prospering town. They came here to take advantage of that boon, didn't they? Did they hope to make their homes here?

They all did. They lived here for years and years. I would say that they lived here up until, well,...most of them are old people. They died. Get the record of the cemetery. They've got a large Jewish cemetery here. They had 3. Two Orthodox (?) and a Reformed Temple in Butte.

Where were the 2 Orthodox? We know that the Reformed is on Galena.

One was on Silver Street and the other, they conducted services in the K. P. Hall which is on Main Street.

Do you remember the addresses of those two?

Oh, sure. The one on Silver St. which was the largest Orthodox, would be in the 200 block and the other would be in the 200 block on Main St....South Main. The other was in about the 200 block on Silver St.

West or East Main?

West.

Why were there Orthodox congregations?

There was a number of people here, factions.

Can you think about what differentiated them, was it where they came from in Europe? Traditions?

No. That had nothing to do with it. Just personal things that arose between people. The original Orthodox people had broke away from that for personal reasons, started one of their own. There was a family problem, come to think of it. There was

one family here, a very prominent family, that decided they wanted to run things and they broke away from the other group. Now this second group, this is my version, they were the more sporting element, some of whom lived off of the prostitutes here and the gamblers that came into town. That was a group that didn't establish themselves in business and they set up their own religious group.

Was this the group that was on Main?

Yeah. But they were here for a good many years. They had a Rabbi who lived here. He had quite a family. And he was Ehrlich. They didn't go along with this other group... that was so very active...the group of Jewish people. Then it got to the point where this second Orthodox group that was on Main St., as times progressed, business slowed up, they closed the red light district and that group seemed to fade out of town. So then they had this Orthodox group on Silver St. Then they moved when a mine opened up down there, the Emma Mine, which was across the Street from their synagogue, and conditions were such that it wasn't safe in that area on account of the mining underneath. So the company paid them and they moved to a place on West Park St. next to the Y. They were there for a good many years and then with the Reformed Temple, which was built in 1902, the Jewish people, these families grew older and their children were educated. I don't think there were positions for them in this community and the decrease in population...they migrated into different parts of the U.S...positions..work. That's true today too. Whether you're Jewish or otherwise, there's a decrease in our population due to a lack of employment. Things like that. Business and all those things.

Getting back to that move, went from the Israel Congregation from Silver to Park, what was the address on Park, do you remember?

It was the 400 block, I guess. It was right next to the Y. The house right next to the Y.

Is it still there?

Yes, the house is still there. I don't know who lives in there, though. See, as both congregations diminished in population, of course, they decided to merge together and that's the Orthodox that remained and here and the Reformed. They set up a Conservative Religion which was held and conducted in the Temple, the Reformed Temple, where it is now. That's about 20 some years ago now.

The Orthodox group was called Adath Israel and the Reform group was called B'Nai Israel, what about the other Orthodox group, do you know their name?

I don't know what name they had. I don't think they had any specific name. And the Rabbi they had there used to have a butcher shop-grocery store in about the 300 block on S. Main.

Was it a Kosher butcher store?

Well, he did mostly Kosher, I guess, because he was a -- don't think he was an ordained Rabbi, I think he was a Shohet as they used to call them. They were Rabbis that killed the foods. They prepared foods for the Kosher people that kept that form of foods and stuff like that. But he was their Rabbi for years, same as in our conservative group we had Avram Canty. He wasn't ordained at all, but he conducted the services for a good many years. When we first started, we took turns conducting services until finally they let Avram take the whole thing over. But that's only the last 10-12 years.

What was the Rabbi in the Orthodox Synagogue's name?

Ehrlich. The Rabbi that was here, the last one that I remember, the Orthodox Rabbi was Margolis. I don't know where he was from, but he was here for a good many years. You could look that up in the city directory for the years he was here.

What about Rabbis that were associated with Reform?

We had quite a few of them.

Any outstanding ones?

Well, they were all outstanding. Every one of them. Very prominent. I can't recall their names off hand, but one of them studied law. When he was here, got his law degree. Another one went on a Chautauqua tour throughout the state, and they did a lot of work on the Hillel Foundation at the different colleges in the state. But they were all very educated in their field.

The Hillel Foundations, were there some in the Montana Universities?

They used to go to the Universities. I used to drive one Rabbi over to Missoula and Bozeman. He'd go there once or twice a month. I'd drive him around. But the Hillel Foundation was developed during that period of time. I don't recall the years, but it must be at least 30-35 years ago. It was organized through here. There was a lot of Jewish activities here.

You mentioned B'Nai B'rith in the past. Did they have a permanent meeting place?

Yes, they used to meet at the K.P. Hall on Main St. In fact, that's the place where the second Orthodox group used to

meet, in that part building. That building isn't here anymore. White's Funeral Parlor was on the first floor. The upstairs was a meeting hall, the Knights of Pythias and when they sold the building, or it was destroyed, they moved up on Broadway St... Broadway and Idaho... Northwest corner. I think they still have that.

Yes, they do.

For their sessions here. And then for awhile when they'd close this building on Main St., the B'nai B'rith held meetings in the I.O.O.F. building on Broadway St...right next to the Grand Hotel. That building's still there. They used to meet up there for years.

How many members did the B'Nai B'rith have?

Well, when they were active here, they had at least 90-100 and some members, but then they had members from around the state too. They had members in Billings, Helena a couple from Great Falls, but most of them lived in Butte.

The hundred people were from all those different areas.

Oh, yes. But most of them lived in Butte. There was, oh, I'd say, several hundred Jewish people...400 Jewish people in Silver Bow here. In the City of Butte.

About what year would you say that population peaked?

I wouldn't be able to pinpoint it but between 1906-1920.

Where did most of the Jewish families live?

Most of them, as I recall, lived on Utah Ave., Platinum St., Wyoming St., Colorado, Main, Idaho and then they lived on all the cross streets: Mercury, Silver, Gold, Porphyry, Platinum, Aluminum all the way down to Front St...the whole area. They were all Jewish.

Was that so they would be close to the synaquoque?

No, but that's where most of the apartment buildings, flats, were built. There were so many of them here. Then there was a lot lived out on the West Side: Granite St., Excelsior, Galena, that is. I would say from Emmett St. over to about Clark St. A lot of Jewish people in that area. Most of those homes are still around. Symons and Oppenheimers, Schillings, oh, there were so many of them lived out in that area.

When Jewish people came to this community, what kind of problems did they have?

I couldn't think...I don't think they had any, you mean from Semitic...I don't think there was any anti-Semitism here at all. Absolutely none at all. I lived in a district where I would say 90% of them were Catholic and quite a few of my pals are still living here.

Where did you grow up?

When we first came to Butte, we lived on Utah Avenue..it was Arizona Street then. Then we moved over on West Porphyry and Colorado Street. That is during my time of going through grade school and that. I left here in 1917 and didn't come back until 1923. My folks lived out West in those days. That's when I came back from school.

Out West?

They lived on West Galena Street...the 700 block. There were a lot of Jewish people lived there then. Most buildings are still there. They were all four and five room flat buildings. But if you take a drive around that area, those buildings are still here.

Were there difficulties in keeping up particular kinds of traditions, the kosher or...

No problem to it at all at that time. The Orthodox had all their food prepared through the Rabbi..kosher. They all kept kosher homes, that is, the Orthodox Jews. Then you had the other group that were in the Reformed. They naturally broke away from their traditions, but I would wager to say that most of the Reformed were converted to the Reformed phase as time progressed cause they were successful business people. Their association was with more Gentiles and non-Jewish people.

Certain problems that would arise between one group and another. I don't know if you're aware of this, but in those days, there was quite a class distinction between people from different countries. Germans thought they had a higher standard than the people from Lithuania or Russia, Turkey or Spain. The Sephardic Jews didn't mix with the others. There was quite a feeling between the people of different countries. When I was a child I noticed that.

Did that kind of follow along congregational lines? Or just between people?

No, just between people. Then you can understand with several hundred Jewish families here and having, let's say, three synagogues, one Temple and two synagogues, and each one getting into certain groups, different feelings among them at that time. There were a lot of jealousies and stuff. Human characteristics existed in those days as we have them today.

You mentioned the Jewish butcher.

Well, he was a sort of a Rabbi with this other organization.

Were any other businesses that served just the Jewish community?

Just those two Rabbis,..that is in that kosher style food and the traditional foods. Of course, we call it kosher today, but that was just the form. That wasn't religious. But a lot of people felt that was a religious...part of religion was the type of foods that we ate. But they all carried on the traditions. They observed all the different holidays in the faith. There were no changes in those days.

How did the Butte Jewish community celebrate the holidays?

Well, the Orthodox Jews used to close their places of business and observed holidays that way. I don't recall ever keeping the Sabbath according to our Bible. They worked on Saturday. Except if a holiday fell on a Saturday, they'd close but they didn't work.. all other holidays they would close their places of business, and things like that. But the Reformed group that changed and drifted away, they carried on their things just like the general community. which still exists here today as well as elsewhere. The only place that observes like the Saturday is their Sabbath, is in your large Jewish communities. Other places don't observe it.

You mentioned the issue of closing business. How about in the homes? Were there any special things that were unique to Butte, the Butte Jewish community in terms of celebration..any special kinds of traditions that evolved?

Well, the only traditions they carried on were their religious traditions at home. They carried all of those, lived the Jewish life according to the Bible. They all did that way except the Reform. They broke away from all of those traditions except our holidays. Most of them observed the holidays.

In you own family did you observe most of the holidays and traditions?

All of them. We all did. See, my folks were of the Orthodox group and all their families. There was three families here, and my grandmother came over here and they all lived the Orthodox traditions. They kept every one of them.

Your grandmother came here? Which one, which side of the family?

Father's side. We never got to know any of my mother's side of the family.

Did just your grandmother come or did her husband and family?

No, her husband had died. See, my aunt....Harris Rafish, his wife passed away at the birth of the last child and he brought his mother or my grandmother over here. She lived with Harris Rafish and raised their family. They had four daughters and the mother of the youngest one died at the child's birth. Her youngest child's birth. But when she came here, she was pregnant. That was about 1909 or 1910.

Was there any feeling on the part of some of the people that came from Europe that Butte was too far out or...?

No. they came here, they all went to work. They did very well, they were all successful. I would say they had a very high reputation in the community. They were well thought of. They were recognized in all of the activities of the community. Our first Mayor was Jewish. His house is still in existence on Granite Street, Granite and Montana. That's where he lived. But they had many prominent Jewish people here. Lawyers, physicians, dentists.

The professional people. I'd say most of them came from the States... New York, Chicago, Minnesota. A lot of Jewish people came here from Minnesota. A number of them came down from Canada. Jewish people have migrated over to this country, oh, it was amazing the way they came to Butte. This was a prosperous community. Very seriously, I don't think there was a store in this town ever locked the door. Open 24 hours. How long you lived here?

RC Since 1940.

Well, you haven't seen any of it then. No this was quite a wide-open town.

In Butte, if you wanted your children to have a religious education, were there services...Sunday School, Hebrew School?

Oh, yes. All our children went to Sunday School. They had very fine educations. Of course, the fact they're not living here now, they carried it on cause they're living in areas where there are large Jewish communities. But every one of our children followed their faith. We had quite a few intermarriages and every one of them converted to Judaism.

The religious education was provided through the synagogue?

Yes. They had the Cheder where they had a man teaching religion, but the Reformed had a wonderful Sunday School...carried on all their traditions. Got a wonderful Jewish education. Their backgrounds were comparable to any place in the world.

At the Cheder, at the synaogue, did they then have the boys make their Bar Mitzvah?

Yes, they did. They did in the Reformed too. They did that in the Reformed. They had Confirmations for the girls in the Reformed. They didn't have that in the Orthodox, not in those days. But the Reformed, when I say that, some of the Reforms had been converted from the Orthodox. Of course, if their children grew up they carried on the traditions of the Orthodox. So all of their sons had their Bar Mitzvah, they were all Bar Mitzvah. So the stauncher Orthodox raised their children, the boys especially, of course, they raised them. The Jewish families as you know, but they all made their Bar Mitzvahs. Without exception. They still do, those that are here now. But there aren't many of them here today. But every one of them that are here, their youngsters have all been Bar Mitzvah.

You mentioned there's B'Nai B'rith and they have the Sunday School, were there any other organizations...Womens' Sisterhood or...?

Oh, yes. They had Sisterhood. They had Auxiliary. They had Hadassah. Oh, yes. The women were very active here. They used to raise a lot of money every year for the Synagogue and the Temple. They did a lot of good work.

You mentioned before there were a number of prominent Jews. The first Mayor of Butte was a Jew. Do you have any sense of the general influence that either individual Jewish people or the community as a whole had in both Butte and the state?

Oh, yes. There were quite a few of them were very prominent in politics and business. Outstanding leaders in the whole state. There are quite a few of them still here.

Do you remember names?

Yes. There was--well,..I mentioned the Siegel family. They left here and went to Salt Lake City, and there was the Schilling family, the Oppenheimer family and the Meyers...Billy Meyer and his brother Harry, were very prominent in politics. There was another attorney here, Joe Binnard who was an outstanding attorney. We had an M.D. who was brought here by W. A. Clark. He was his private physician, a Doctor Sam Schwartz. There was a dentist here from New York City and another family, the Neimans, there was two youngsters that studied dentistry there. Doctor Hyman who was an outstanding heart specialist in Cincinnati, Ohio. They had a son who was a dentist also in Texas. Oh, they migrated all over the United States. There were so many of them contributed so much in the community. They helped establish the YMCA, the Silver Bow Club, the Country Club. There were another couple of families that were in the tobacco business, Newman and

Marx, had the Louis S. Cohn Tobacco Company here that was a national organization. Oh, they did so many things. They didn't just come to Butte and stay here, they were very active, competent and gave of themselves, helped the community in any way that you could think of. They were very active here. We had one fellow --oh, they had a lot of gamblers here. Cooks, waiters, oh, you name it, and they were here. One fellow was Constable. Several of them were in the legislature. They did everything.

Do you remember which ones were in the Legislature?

I remember a fellow by the name of Abe Cohen was in the legislature and I think Harry Meyer was in the legislature, that I can recall. A couple of County Attorneys and a fellow by the name of Levinsky who was very prominent here years ago. But they were all very active as far as working for the community. One fellow was in the Sheriff's office a good many years ago. Bernard Barty. They were in everything. I don't know a thing that you couldn't say they were in. Very prosperous. A number of them owned lots of property here. They were very active.

You said these weren't enough positions for the young people, and many of them left. Are there any other reasons that the population dwindled?

Well, sure. The main reason was the decrease in the mining. That's your main reason. Not only Jewish people, but all of them. The population in Butte dropped from 100,000 down to what it is now. That wasn't only Jewish, that was everyone. Conditions changed considerably here.

Why did you stay?

Why did I stay here? Well, that's a long story. I never had any intention of ever coming back to Butte to practice.

To practice dentistry?

Yeah. Well, that's what I--but I was more interested --I taught school for three years and I had the idea that I wanted to study medicine. I was offered a position to take charge of the University of Shanghai. So I came home to visit my folks. My dad didn't like the idea of my leaving the country, so he made arrangements for me to talk to a banker friend of his here and he gave me a good idea.

China Colonia (?), they gave me a contract for three years. If I were to go there I had eight men that were going with me. Eight dentists. It so happened that I was on the faculty at Northwestern University. One of the students was the son of the Prime Minister of China. He was studying dentistry and they offered me this position. When I got home just to visit my folks, they had me talk to one of the local bankers and in regard

to putting my first years salary in an American bank. That would be local here, so we could take advantage of the monetary exchange at that time. So I presented this idea to this Prime Minister, Tze, his name was Tze--Henry Tze.

China was having financial difficulties. They could take care of me but couldn't take care of the other eight fellows. It was at a time the State Board was being conducted in Helena, and I was in Butte for a month, and I took the Board. One of the local dentists happened to come over there and someone told him about me or something and he offered me a position in his office, to take care of his office. I've been successful ever since. Just stayed here.

You decided to stay here rather than go to Shanghai?

Well, I couldn't get the settlement with Shanghai, and there was no other way that we could handle the situation. I had ordered all the equipment in America at Cincinnati, Ohio. I was teaching in Ohio at the time. I had everything set up to send over to Shanghai, but this thing turned out very good for me.

After you went to dental school, you taught in Cincinnati?

I taught in Chicago and Cincinnati. Both Northwestern and Ohio college of Dental Surgery.

Where did you do your own dental education?

I went to Northwestern.

Were there a lot of people in the Jewish community who were able to attend universities, the children of the immigrants?

Quite a few of them. You take, when I left for school, it was 1917, that was during W W I, a lot of them went away in the service to go to college and worked their way through school to get their professions. Naturally, they drifted away from here.

There was a comment made to me at one time, that one of the reasons that people left the Butte community was that they wanted their children to be in contact with a larger Jewish community. Would you say that was true?

I wouldn't think so. Of course, it could be. After all, as times went on, I don't know why. One or two families might feel that way, but after all, they had the same opportunities here they had elsewhere; and even during the time that you've been here--you see how religious these people are. They're not religious. No such thing as religion here anymore. And those that still lived here and had children, they don't live it in their own homes. So I don't know about a statement like that, if it had any merit to it.

Is that a function of being away from centers of Jewish life?

Oh, there's no question about it, the lack of religious education here and the people leaving here caused all of this; but that isn't due to these people that lived here wanting their children to be educated in the Jewish life. I'm quite sure that percentage would be very, very small. If they'd go to a larger community and the religious phases are in existence, they'd naturally join and follow through on their birth's religious offsprings. But I don't think the statement that you have heard would be a correct one. May have happened to one family or two families, but the parents themselves don't live it so how can they expect their children to live it? Conditions don't exist to live that way. But I've never heard anyone say they had their children go elsewhere for religious reasons.

Now, take in our case, we had followed the Reformed faith and lived it, we had our children go to Sunday School, we had three daughters, they all had good Sunday School training and they've all left Butte, gone into communities. Of course, they went to school in large cities, one in Minneapolis, one in Seattle and one in Los Angeles, so they were in with larger Jewish groups. With their childhood training in Judaism, they naturally fell into the same groups at school. They all carried it on, their children are all following it. They wouldn't have been able to do that in Butte. Of course, they didn't leave for that reason. But they still follow it, because we lived it in our home. But it was very easy in our time. It isn't that easy today. I don't know of anyone that lives it in Butte. And I don't think they have for a good many years, even including one person I mentioned before, but they didn't live in an Orthodox way. Not at home. and their children, not one of them really follow it. And he was very religious. But their home life wasn't.

I'm not sure who you're talking about.

The Cantys. You know him. Just left last year. But his wife didn't live up to it. Look at all the intermarriages we've had in this community among the Jewish people, quite a number of them. I find that true of any small community in the country where Jewish people happen to move into. Their association with non-Jewish people. And their children naturally intermarry. As I mentioned to you, we have four grandchildren who all had Jewish education. They lived in areas where there are no Jewish people at all. Every one of them married non-Jewish people. But they all converted to Judaism. So I think that speaks for itself. That isn't because they couldn't do it here. No, whoever made that statement, I would never agree with them. Do you know many Jewish people here?

RC I don't know. I don't classify them as Jewish or not.

As I say, I was raised among a group of people. They were all Catholic. In my childhood, I would say that I attended Catholic services more than I did my own because we only had services like on a Friday and Saturday. They used to observe Saturday morning here in those days, but I don't think anyone has done that in years, in Butte.

I lived with a fellow at College. He was a Catholic. He was from Butte. Another fellow was a Baptist. Two of them were Catholic. One was a Baptist. If it wasn't for me, none of them would go to church. I used to make them go to the Catholic church...the Baptist church. Oh, and one was a Presbyterian, and I used to enjoy those services. This was in Chicago. If it wasn't for me, none of them would have ever gotten up on Sunday to go. But I enjoyed it.

I have a few odd and end questions. Did you hold any jobs while you were going to grade school and High School in Butte?

I worked every day I could work.

What kind of jobs did you have?

I sold papers, I delivered merchandise, worked for my folks, worked in the hotels, bell boy...you name it, I did it. I worked, as I say, from the day I could work.

Then did you go right on to college after you finished High School?

No, I worked a year here in the mines. No, I worked a year after I got out of school.

And another question...Did the Jewish community participate along with the rest of the people in Butte in all of the activities we hear about through the years, the Miners Union Day, and the Fourth of July?

Every one. They all participated. As I said, several times before, they cooperated, they supported everything financially, they had a wonderful reputation here. I never knew what it meant to--when people said something about anti-Semitism, cause I never experienced it.

I had an experience at college. Several months before I graduated, the Dean asked me what my plans were for after I graduated at school. Of course, I owed the school a lot of money, and I didn't think it was possible for me to graduate; and he offered me a position on the faculty. I told him about my indebtedness to the school, cause I borrowed money from them every year. He says, "Don't worry about that."

So I called a friend of my dad's in Chicago who my dad did business with, and told him my story. No, first, there was a Jewish fellow from Butte who practiced dentistry in Chicago. I

sought some information and advice from him. He says, "Aw, you'll never get it. They never hired a Jew in this school in all the time its been in existence. It's a strong Methodist school." I didn't give that a thought at all. Religion didn't ever enter my mind. So I called this Mr. Wineberg who owned a large clothing manufacturing place in Chicago and told him my story. He says, "How much do you owe?" I told him. He says, "I'll have a check for you there in the morning." About the job, he says, "you be sure and sign that application. They asked you, you're not looking for it." Which I did and I went to work months before I graduated from the school. I was with them almost two years.

You didn't encounter any problems.

I never had any problem being Jewish. I came back here. I wager to say that I, oh, I probably took care of over 50% of the non-Jewish. I think I've done work for over half the medical profession and quite a few of the dental and their families from the time I started practice here. I'm very fortunate.

That's what I say, nobody can tell me anything bad about Butte. Its been wonderful to me. I've been asked many times, "What do you want to live in Butte for?" I've been very active. I've received all the honors in the profession. I've been very active in the organizations and the people, I can walk down the street where it takes some people five minutes to walk from Main to Park, it would take me from a half hour to an hour.

Saying hello to all the people you know?

Sure. So I don't know what more a person could ask for. And, as I say, Butte's been wonderful to me. And I've been here quite a while.

How did you meet Daisy?

That's a long story. (laughs) Quite interesting, though. When I was teaching school, I had a cousin who went to the University of Washington. Daisy was in school with her and I corresponded with my cousins. In fact, I used to write to all of my cousins. Somehow or other, Daisy happened to be president of the house that she lived in with eight girls. I was teaching at Cincinnati at the time. We corresponded. They made Daisy foster-mother, and I was foster-father to all those eight girls. If one of them got engaged, they'd write to me for my consent. I'd send it. I didn't even know any of them. And we corresponded for eight years before we even met.

I attended a meeting in California. My folks were living in Seattle then, so I wrote to Daisy and told her I'd be coming through Portland, I'd love to meet her on my way to Seattle. We got to Portland, she met me at the train, we had a nice day together. I went on to Seattle. That's when we met the first

time.

A friend of mine and his parents were going up to Canada. I invited Daisy to go up with me. Of course, she wouldn't accept this. This was just too or three days after we had met. She wouldn't come so I got home again. Our correspondence went on, and my cousin that was in Washington with Daisy came back to Butte and she was teaching school here, so Yetta and I, we used to go out together quite often, and I finally invited Daisy to come over here and spend her birthday in Butte, which was in October. So we had a weeks romance here and celebrated her birthday and from then on, we worked very fast. We announced our engagement and got married on New Year's Day and we've been at it ever since. But it was quite a romance.

That's a wonderful story.

It was quite interesting. Make a wonderful book. But to think of corresponding for eight years, its funny.

Slow start, but when you got together, you moved pretty well.

We just hit it off. I made a home run. No, it was very interesting. There are a lot of things that go on in life. We've been blessed with our children. We've had no faults there, regrets for anything that's gone on in fifty years.

Is that how long you've been married?

We had a picture taken here on our fiftieth--right over there. The kids had a 50 year party for us in Seattle last January. Our kids came from all over, they came down from Alaska, California, Arizona, New Mexico.

You were married in 1930?

January the first. On my birthday. I used to tell them I could never remember anything, it had to be on my birthday so I could remember things. We had quite a time there. But all of our kids were there.

Other than B'Nai B'rith, did you have a lot of contact with the other Jews in Montana?

Oh, yes. There were a couple of prominent people, well...I've had--a Jewish fellow, family in Bozeman, Helena, Great Falls, Missoula, Billings. They all had quite a few Jewish people. In fact, Daisy and I, one of our kids was going to school in Missoula, we'd go over there, holidays. They had a lot of Jewish members on the faculty at the University and they observed the High Holidays. We were over there a couple of times with them. But they were all people from all over the country. None of them were from Butte.

Are there any other people in Butte that you think would be good to interview? That have a similar history or a long history of being here?

Well, Phil Judd's been here quite a while. The Rudolphs. Of course, they're younger, but I met Rudolph's father when I came back from school in 1923. He came here from Russia. I think he got there about 1916 or 1917. I wasn't here when he came to Butte.

Now, who was that?

The Rudolphs. Newt and Lou Rudolph at the Standard Furniture.

That's their father?

Yeah, of course, he just died last year. And Bessie Rudolph, of course, she's Bessie Judd. But whether the guys know anything....

Bessie's still alive?

Oh, yes. Bessie's married to Phil Judd. She was the oldest of the Rudolphs. She was born in Russia and her dad come over here. I don't know how he got here, but his story was that, I guess during the trouble in Russia, he escaped from something, and went to Canada and then into Butte. And another one that is here is Harry Finberg. Used to have the Finberg Furniture here. Another old timer, but they never lived Jewish, is Carl Shiner and his brother...Shiner's Furniture here.

I know their daughter or it must be the granddaughter.

There's a granddaughter. The nurse. Yeah, that's a granddaughter. But they probably know something about the Jewish people. I'll tell you, Sig Meyer, the attorney and Ray Schilling. They were both born in Butte and they must be in their 60's or Ray Schilling must be in his 70's. They've lived here all their life. They could give you a good idea, cause they were both on the Reform side. They both went away to school. Sig Meyer went to school at USC in Los Angeles. Ray Schilling went to Pennsylvania. They all went to school out of the state. Of course, they came back to Butte because their families were quite prominent here. They had a nice business. You take Sig's father was one of the best known attorneys in the whole state of Montana. Very prominent attorney. Sig and Ray Schilling can give you an idea of what we used to consider the wealthy side of the community. They may have a different version of the things we were talking about. Well, there's Fannie and Nate Gordon. They're old timers here.

I talked to Fannie once, but not a formal interview.

She may give you some ideas. Fannie is a cousin of ours. Her mother died when her sister was born here. Her father married Mel Rafish's...my uncle married a Mrs. --I can't think of her maiden name but--Newman. She was married to a fellow by the name of Newman in Billings. There's another interesting thing about this. Now, she was related to the Kenoffels. My uncle was married to one of the Kenoffels, and that's how we all came to Butte. She's also related to the Meyer family. That's Sig Meyer's family. His father. Sig Meyer and my uncle Mel Rafish, there was a kind of relationship there. Fannie, of course, her father is Mel Rafish's father.

But here, my gracious, the Jewish people, its amazing how many of them married within these families. The Jewish people stuck together from that standpoint. There weren't many intermarriages in those days. But as the conditions changed here, same as everyone also, you can take every denomination in the community, every ethnic group, and observe the intermarriages that's gone on in all these years. Take your Syrians and Lithuanians, Mexicans, Irish, Finnish. Its amazing all the intermarriages in all these different ethnic groups. It all happened right here in this town, because each group became smaller and smaller. The Italians...I just got an invitation to a wedding today of an Italian girl marrying an Irish fellow. That's very common here, cause each denomination decreased your association. In school and everything else, but that isn't uncommon. It's all over the United States. Now, I recall when I lived in Cincinnati, I met a fellow,, an Irish fellow who was married to a Jewish woman; and I wasn't familiar with these intermarriages then. This is going back to 1922, 1923.

Cincinnati, to me, was one of the finest Jewish communities in America, because that's where they founded the Reform Temple and there were these Jewish people who studied dentistry there at the time. A young lady whose father was an Orthodox Rabbi in Cincinnati...of course, I'd go to the Reform Rabbi to dinner the first night of Passover and the second night at the Orthodox Rabbi, because in those days the young Jewish fellow teacher in a college, they thought was somebody and they'd try to get all these, what they considered dignitaries, in their homes. You didn't have to miss a thing.

But that's the way Jewish people are. They're very hospitable, but they always went after seeking someone for their children to match and stuff like that...the matchmakers. It was common. I know in all the communities I've ever been to and having a profession, I'd get invitations galore. All you'd have to do was move into a community and someone got to know you, you'd become part of their home.

You mentioned matchmaking. Was there ever any official matchmakers in Butte?

Not that I know, but I imagine there's quite a few. After all, I myself and Daisy were trying to get people together. I imagine that's very common whether its Jewish or not.

I was thinking of the Europeans.

There was quite a few intermarriages in our families, both sides of our families. I don't know anyone being professional at it. A lot of people try to get you together. We've done it here...invite people. We had a young fellow here that we were very fond of who was a Mormon. We tried to fix him up with a young lady here by getting them together. They were together for a long time, but I think religion separated them. Some people adhere to their faith and don't want to change, of course. I would say we're all professional matchmakers. If occasion arises, you try to get people together. But it isn't for that purpose. You just try to get some companionship so they'll have something to do. See, we have a granddaughter who's coming over here on the sixteenth, and she's been raised in the Jewish faith and very sincere, lives every bit of it. Of course, she's been raised in the Reform side, but very well educated in religion and follows it. But they have opportunities in the large city that we don't have anymore and that's true of... I don't know of a city in the state of Montana where's there's any active Jewish life. I don't believe there's any now, Billings probably had more Jewish people than any in the state today.

Of course, Great Falls was pretty good for a while through the airbase. They had a lot of Jewish people in the service, and they had a rabbi go up there regularly, but I don't think they have much now. But Billings, they still have their Rabbi over there. I guess he retires this year. But that's the only community in the whole state that, I think, that any real Jewishness is going on.

You'd be amazed how many Jewish people were here at one time...and all very active. Every one of them contributed to all the things that went on in the community; cause it was business with them and their association with the other groups of people. We had a B'Nai B'rith convention here in 1936. It was one of the most successful conventions that the organization ever had throughout the whole western coast. They had a good time here. The Jewish people here, they were organizers. That's a few years ago. None of that exists today.

How many Jewish families are in Butte now, do you think?

Probably eight or ten...twelve. There aren't many. You can count them on your hands. You probably know every one of them. You take since you came here, there have been about four couples come into Butte and you know the rest of them. There's hardly any of them. Probably five came here around the same time you did. But other than that, there aren't many. But I can look back to times that the manager of the Woolworth Store here--

Jewish people came from all over the country in these different business houses...settled in Butte. Insurance, oh, everything. There isn't a thing that you can mention that they didn't participate in. They were very active and progressive. I only knew of about two of them that were alcoholics, and I don't know of any of them that had any trouble. They were all uprighteous, honorable types of people. That is, here. What happened to them afterwards, I couldn't tell you.

Everything is changed. Conditions have changed so, not only in the Jewish faith, but every faith known. People live entirely different today than they did twenty years ago. Families lived together. They don't do that today. We're going to have a family reunion here over Labor Day, and there will be people here, that is, from the Rafish family, that will be here from New York, California, Florida, Washington, Oregon and there may be a couple from Minnesota, but I don't know how many's coming.

Randy Rafish has charge of the people that are going to be here. I'm talking here, I know with our own families, Daisy and my own, we know very few of our relatives. They migrated all over the country. That's true of every family.

I can recall when we came to Butte and throughout the years, my dad and uncles used to correspond with the family in Europe. We never knew any of them, never follow through with it. But living in America, our European relatives only knew one thing. They could write to us on all different occasions, birthdays, Bar Mitzvahs, this and that. So you sent them money. They thought money grew on trees here, but they never sent us a dime. On different occasions. That's the way people live. But I notice a big change in families today. There's no family life at all any more. You can see that, the way children migrate. Morals--there are no more morals. Girl and boy will live together a couple of years and decide to get married. Okay, if they don't then they ship off together. That's very common today. I don't know what the percentage is, but it's quite high and there's statistics of the birth of children today without a father. Of course, they all have a father but not legitimate. Things like that. It's a different life entirely. People have seen more of this than I do. But it's certainly going on throughout this country. I don't know about foreign countries but I imagine it's just the same.

Where did your family go to England first, from Poland?

They went to London. We lived in London.

When?

It would be about, I would say, about 1896 or so. When they moved to London. Of course, I was born in 1899 and my mother went home when I was born. I had two sisters born in London. My dad came over here in 1905, the end of 1905. We came in 1906.

In Poland, had they ever had any tradition of experiencing

pogroms?

Oh, yes.

In your family?

Oh, no. They had their pogroms in Russia in those days. A lot of them. That's why a lot of Jewish people migrated from Russia to all the other countries...in Europe. Quite a few went to Germany, England, Poland, Turkey, Lithuania, France. My dad's two sisters went to France. I've never seen them, never heard from them. They lived in Paris, but they migrated to all the different countries in Europe. But that was during the pogroms in Russia.

Why did you say your family moved from Poland to England?

That I don't know. I don't know why they--oh, yes. I do too. I recall them saying that was during the conscriptions. See, they were in the army. They were young enough, they didn't want to get into the army and they ran away. That was why.

Why did your mother go back to Poland?

To be with her folks when I was born. See, they didn't have anyone in London and I was the firstborn in our family. After I was born, I have, let's see, Mary, Yetta, Debbie, Stella, Ben, these were five cousins of ours born in London. All the Rafishes moved to London from Poland, but that was all on account of conscription. They didn't want to get in the army.

And they left London to come to America because of the promise of America?

Well, my dad's oldest brother was married to a girl whose parents lived in Butte. They were Kenoffels.

I was wondering why they would want to come here.

To be with their families. Butte was a thriving community in those days. You could get all the work you'd want. I mentioned before these business houses were open 24 hours. Unions had no say in those days. Yet this became a strong union town on account of the mines. But I can recall when we came here, I did all the different jobs that I did and even when I went to school, I worked for a detective agency, I trucked freight, worked in a restaurant. I worked in a restaurant all the time I lived in Chicago, for my meals. Worked in a laundry.

End of Tape