



**VERDIGRIS**  
PROJECT

**KBMF & BUTTE-SILVER BOW ARCHIVES**

**NANCY OYER**

**The Verdigris Project**

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## Oral History Transcript of Nancy Oyer

*Interviewer: Aubrey Jaap & Clark Grant*

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**AUBREY JAAP:** So it's Friday, August 2nd, 2019. Nancy Oyer. You're not a native of Butte, correct?

**NANCY OYER:** Correct.

**JAAP:** Maybe tell me where, where are you from and, and what brought you to Butte?

**OYER:** I was born in Ohio. I was raised in central New York state, in Ithaca, and I came to Butte in the late eighties after college for three reasons.

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I usually say - work as a geologist, the open spaces and the mountains and skiing.

**JAAP:** Where'd you find work then as a geologist here in the eighties?

**OYER:** I first came to Bozeman and settled there and then did get work in Butte. So that is what brought me to Butte in 1989. And I worked for a gold exploration company.

**JAAP:** Okay.

**OYER:** For the next three years, traveling back and forth between Bozeman and Butte. And then I fell in love with Butte and moved here. And then I moved around the state a lot, moved out of state, came back numerous times, but it's home.

**JAAP:** Yeah. So you came in the late eighties, so Butte wasn't really thriving at that point. So did you ever look at the city and thought, Oh my gosh, what am I doing here?

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Did you love it? Even though, you know, 'cause the mines had closed just a few years before, and-

**OYER:** I'm not a city person. And so it was a great fit for me. I loved that there was a university, so I felt like there's resources, even though it's a small town. And I was attracted to the people of Butte and the surroundings.

**JAAP:** So I guess we called you in here because you were part of the Common Heritage Grant with the Jewish that we did back in May. We're collecting stories on the Jewish here and kind of that experience. So how'd you get involved with the temple here?

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**OYER:** Despite arriving in the late eighties, I did not get involved with Congregation B'nai Israel until 2003. And that's when they held the hundredth anniversary celebration. So there were services and meals and all sorts of activities. And I decided to attend everything. And I walked around and said, 'Oh my people.' I felt so at home. I felt like I had known everyone my whole life. There is a connection that you just can't explain. We all have a lot of the same filters, and an already, a level of understanding that's already built in. So I knew I was home. And from then on, I started participating and didn't take an active leadership role until a few years later, maybe five years later.

**JAAP:** And then you were president of the church at a point? Am I correct?

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**OYER:** I did become president of the synagogue. The temple. Yes. I always knew I would take a turn in my life somewhere as president of the synagogue. And at the time, 2003, there were still in the twenties, thirties, forties for members. Or people that would come to services, especially at the High Holidays.

And I remember looking up, I think Rand Rafish was president at the time, and I knew in my heart, I would someday sit up in that chair. You sit in the chair on the pulpit during High Holy days, if you're the president of the temple at that time, that's the tradition. And little did I know it would be during what I call 'the fall of the Roman empire', where the synagogue was on its last threads. And that was me being president at that time. But that's about what happened.

**JAAP:** How does that decline of that synagogue, 'cause how many families are active currently?

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**OYER:** I am not on the board right now. So it has perhaps dwindled from what we say as member families. Now, a member could be a single person or a couple.

There are no families with children that are members anymore in Butte. So we're looking at one or two people when I say member families. Think I saw it in the late 2000s, go from maybe 16 families back up to 22 when I was there. And I don't know what we dwindled down to. It's probably somewhere in between 20 and 10.

But, even when we were at 22, 25, half of those member families don't live here in town, they're supporting the synagogue from elsewhere. So it's a very small pool of people we have as human resources here.

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And we always gather people who are not members and people attend events and services, people who are not members. So we draw from the wider community. But as far as who's supporting the synagogue and making things happen, it's a very small handful of people left now.

**JAAP:** Yeah, and to maintain the building and -

**OYER:** Correct.

**JAAP:** And, as a group, you guys are looking at futures of that building, correct?

**OYER:** Correct. We entered into what is called the Jewish, the legacy program with the URJ. Union for Reform Judaism, which has now I think changed their name to Reform Judaism. So that's our umbrella group. And as you may know, there are many different branches in America of Judaism that I guess you could say are sanctioned or have member organizations within those branches.

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And so the Reform Judaism group that we belong to you, URJ, they administer different programs and provide assistance to synagogues who are member synagogues. And they created a program to help synagogues who are at the end of their life look at what to do with resources, what to do with the building, the books, the items that are sacred, the Torahs, and look at the future.

And what's the best use of the building or, what's your legacy? It's really more not about the building. Most people will take the money and the resources and say, okay, what's our legacy. We want to have a lecture series created in the name of the synagogue. We want to have a scholarship fund created and then the building no longer exists.

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We are a people of the book, not of the building, right? That's what we're called. But in Butte, Montana, we are a people of the building. Everyone is so enthralled with the building. It's a historic beautiful building, as you know. And there is a weird twist where, here, this is what people know, is their Judaism that occurred in the building.

Me, a lot of people where I grew up, it's woven into the fabric of my life. It wasn't tied only to the building, but here there's a little bit more presence where everything that happened for them happened in that building. And it's very difficult to let it go. So we have been in the legacy program, which means we pay cut rate dues to the URJ. And the advisor came and helped us box up things that we don't use, get rid of books that went to, for example, a Yeshiva, a Jewish day school in Seattle that would use the books, the ones that were usable, and consolidate our resources. Then we started to work on our legacy plan and we hit an impasse.

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We'll just say that the advisor, the big picture, is he said, 'okay, if you want to save this building', which, please understand it's not up to code for people with disabilities, there's no air conditioning. If the boiler goes, this is a building that was built in 1903, that's a lot of money. So, he said, 'you need half a million dollars and a foundation to run the synagogue. To keep it Jewish, to keep the sanctuary to be used for Jewish purposes, if you want weddings, funerals, lifecycle events, or services. But perhaps partner with someone else or have multiple uses in the building. But to keep the sanctuary Jewish, you need half a million dollars and a foundation to run it'.

So that put the brakes on things for a while. I let go. And I could tell you some very interesting stories of the path that this has taken, because I did want to see this

shepherded through. And I had a lot of energy and was trying to pursue this and then hit a few roadblocks.

And every time I let go and give up, something happens. So it may be my destiny to see this through. Um, can we take a break for a second?

**JAAP:** Of course.

**OYER:** Okay. 'Cause this is just this long crazy story, I'm not sure how much of this I should tell! But that's about the - 'cause do you have, cause we could go off on a tangent about saving the synagogue and that's where we are. So that's one whole story.

But then if you wanted to ask some other stuff, I don't know. Or is this, is this starting to sound like the meat of it?

**JAAP:** No, it's interesting. I guess I do have a question I wrote down. So you said, here there's a connection with the place and the building, more so than other places. So I'm curious..

**OYER:** Yeah. Okay. Maybe we should start to, are we official?

**JAAP:** Do you mind if I ask?

**OYER:** No.

**JAAP:** I guess I've never thought of that before, how our community is different in that way. Why do you think that is so? Do you think there's a reason? Or do you have an idea of why that might be?

**OYER:** One thing that is just particular to Butte, Montana and the Jewish community is that there has not been a full-time rabbi since the 1960s.

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I was born in sixties, so everyone my age, and I'm one of the younger people that's a member of the synagogue, have not had the opportunity to be in synagogue, and have a lot going on all the time. So their exposure here compared to other communities, or the opportunities for exposure to every Jewish holiday has been limited.

And so the few times happen in the temple. Whereas me, I had opportunities. My childhood was Friday night going to Sabbath services Saturday morning, going to Sabbath services. Sunday, going to Sunday school. And Wednesday,, after regular school going to Hebrew school, there was a lot more going on.

And so here it's so limited that it wasn't probably able to permeate into the rest of their lives as much, just because of the offerings were so small. Because the community dwindled very quickly by the 1970s. Okay, so the history is that there are 500 Jewish families in Butte, Montana in the, I believe twenties and thirties.

And by 1970, we all know there were about 30 Jewish families. So I think that is probably the reason - people just didn't have the opportunities and exposure that someone growing up, even in a small town of the same size in New York, that felt like it was rural, and you were still a minority, but compared to Butte, Montana, and

what people here have grown up with, I had a lot more exposure to Judaism and community Judaism.

**JAAP:** Sure. That's really interesting. Yeah. It does make sense. There hasn't been a rabbi here for 60 years. Yeah. It's a long time. So, can you tell me a little bit about some of your traditions and things like that?

**OYER:** My own personal traditions?

**JAAP:** Yah.

**OYER:** Yes. My two favorite holidays are, we have a lot of Jewish holidays, so they're clustered from the fall all the way to the spring.

If you're in Israel, it's just holiday, holiday, holiday after holiday. My favorite holidays are the holidays where we get to eat, as opposed to the ones where we fast. I like to cook. So my favorites are Passover, which is in the spring, and it varies when exactly it is on our calendar because we follow the lunar calendar.

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And so in the spring, I love Passover and I love Rosh Hashanah and I - my traditions have included hosting a Passover Seder. The Seder means order. So it's a dinner where you have certain foods and certain orders and tell the story of Passover, the biblical story of the Exodus from Egypt at home. So it's a home event with special traditional foods.

And I often host more non-Jewish people in Butte than I do Jewish people. A lot of my friends who aren't Jewish love Passover and look forward to when I'm cooking and hosting the big Passover dinner, or Seder. And then Rosh Hashanah, also traditional foods. I like to cook a brisket for example.

It was interesting, I was in Bozeman when I first came here, I was trying to get the cut of meat, the brisket, and it just, wasn't a familiar kind of meat over in Bozeman. I had to explain, it's what you do with corned beef before it's corned. So luckily I've had some good butchers here in Butte, Montana who know what I'm talking about.

**JAAP:** What other foods? So for Passover, do you do a brisket as well?

**OYER:** Uh, that's a good question. What do I usually do for Passover? I sometimes also do a brisket for Passover. Passover we have some unique foods that are part of the ceremony, part of the dinner, where we make something called charoset, which is apples, nuts and wine and cinnamon.

And it doesn't look too pretty when you grind it up because it's supposed to resemble the bricks and mortar that the Egyptians were making us as slaves build. So that's one of the foods we commemorate. But I do like, I like chopped liver. That's a liver pate with the hard boiled eggs and chicken livers. And chicken soup with matzah balls, I'm pretty famous for my chicken soup.

**JAAP:** Great. So what do you think, and let me know if you want to answer this or not. What do you think in the future? So in like, say another 10 years for the temple,

where do you think it'll be? Do you think there will be a legacy program in place? And if so, I guess what would you personally, what would you like to see it become?

**OYER:** What I'd like to see is the plan that has unfolded the last couple of years, and I'll just put this out there - there is the Root and Bloom Foundation here in Butte, Montana. The Root and Bloom currently has taken the Art Chateau and turned it around. It's running in the black for the first time in many years, financially.

It's life breathed into that building with arts programs and children programs. And now, the Henry Jacob's house, which happens to be the, as you know, the house where the first mayor of Butte lived and he was Jewish. And so together with the archives, the Jewish history of that family and Butte is going to be honored in that building and also bring vitality to that house.

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Now that, geographically, the synagogue makes a nice little triangle with the Art Chateau, the Jacob's house and the synagogue. They're all within blocks of each other. And I've spoken to the founder of the Root and Bloom, and she is willing to consider taking the synagogue on as the third part of that picture. Or the next building that could be infused with life, from the Root and Bloom and their magic. So remember how I said that our advisor said you need a foundation to run this that would, you know, have the same core values and goals that you would? And how do you ever find that money?

I think money is easier to come by, but a foundation with the same goals and vision that could honor your vision. And we found that. So now all we need is money. I had potential seed money from a donor who we could only get the money while she was living. And we were in process of signing some documents. And I got the call that said, 'God took Suzanne rather quickly this week'. And we didn't have anything signed in place. So it was a devastating blow to me just to have that energy taken out. And I didn't understand how this could have happened because I was led on a very circuitous path to make this happen. You wouldn't believe it. If I told you, maybe I will tell you. It's a great story.

So, you know, that's where we are right now. The Root and Bloom is busy with the Jacob's house. So they're not even ready to put the energy in there, but we have had some initial meetings with the board of the synagogue and the Root and Bloom, which I facilitated and I think everyone would be on board.

If we got that first money and seed money, then the Root and Bloom would be able to move forward. So my vision is that we have the Root and Bloom foundation, keeping the synagogue alive with programming that is appropriate to the synagogue. And as Carson, the head of Root and Bloom would say, 'we open the aperture a little bit and expand our vision of what can take place that's appropriate there.' But always keeping the synagogue sanctuary available for lifecycle events. And honoring our great history because we are so lucky, and I'm so thankful to the people who came before me and put all their energy into building that building, to give me the decade or two of experience that I had there. It's just a wonderful place. And it's been a wonderful community.

**JAAP:** Yeah, that's really great.



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**OYER:** Okay, to tell you the story, 'cause it's a biblical story. So the biblical story of Jonah, according to me, the biblical story of Jonah is about how - everybody knows Jonah and the whale. He got swallowed by the whale. But the backstory is that God wanted Jonah to go tell the people of Nineveh. We're going to have to fact check me here.

**JAAP:** You're good. You're good.

**OYER:** God wanted Jonah to go tell some people who were badly behaving, that they needed to change their ways. And Jonah did not want to be a messenger of God. And he said, really? And so he tried to run. You know, why does he have to be the one? And it's like, I can't take this. So he ran and ran.

And he decided to jump on a ship and see if he could escape. But God being omnipresent, he couldn't escape God. And a great storm came over the sea and all the people on the sea, on the boat, believed in - they were polytheists at the time. So they were all saying, 'okay, everybody pray to your God'. And meanwhile, Jonah's going, 'I know it's my fault'. And so he's hiding in the hold in the bottom of the ship and nothing happened. Everybody was praying to their gods and nothing happened. The seas were still crazy stormy. So they finally found Jonah in the hold and said, 'you know, who's your God, you're going to pray to him? What's going on? What are you doing down here?'

He said, 'Oh, My God's the God of the heaven and the earth and all the seas and everything in it'. And they said, 'well, you better pray to your God'. And he said, 'you know, even if I prayed, nothing's going to happen, it's totally my fault'. So in the end, he told them to throw him overboard and they said, 'Oh, we don't want to do that'.

He said, 'look, you need to do that'. So that's how Jonah ended up in the whale. So he did get thrown overboard. Got spit out. Eventually he ends up walking through the desert. And he has conversations with God, you know. And he's a bit like a teenager, Jonah. He, you know, he's says, 'okay, I'll do this. I'll go talk to the people of Nineveh, tell them they need to change their ways to be more righteous'. And then he stumbles a few times along the way. So he's really hot, thirsty in the desert and he's sitting there. And then God grows a gourd, a plant to give him shade. And he loves the shade, but he's thinking, why do I need these people?

He argues with God. 'They're not worth saving really, you know?' So he struggles. So then God makes the plant wither, and then Jonah says 'Oh, I'm dying without this plant. Why can't you bring it back? I need it! That plant is everything to me'. God says, 'how long have you known that plant Jonah?'

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And he says, 'a day.' And God says, 'but I've known my people, of Nineveh, their whole lives. And the plants worth saving, but they're not?' So Jonah does finally realize he needs to do what he needs to do.

I had so much energy to help the temple. And then I wasn't able to get everyone on board at the same time. And so I, in fits and spurts, had energy and then let go and

said, 'forget it. Okay. No people don't want to do this. It's not worth saving'. And I felt like Jonah, and then I ran as far as I could.

I have to back up and tell one corollary story, because this all ties together.

We were part of a documentary called 'There Are Jews Here'.

And we were asked - this is part of a program that came out of the legacy program of the URJ, that advisor that I told you, there was a philanthropist who understood what the advisor was doing, going around the United States, looking at these synagogues that were dwindling.

And he said, 'you know, this is interesting'. They realized, they think there may be a story here. And the philanthropist friend was it interested in perhaps funding the story that was developing. They called in a filmmaker and he said, 'okay, I'll go to nine of these congregations around the country and see if there is a story'.

And indeed, he found there was a story and wanted to make a documentary and they came to see us. And it was at the time when we were first in the legacy program and looking at trying to figure out what we would do. And we wanted to save the temple. And we said, 'okay, this is quite invasive to have someone come and film us during our services. And they want to follow people around, but because we want to save the temple, we'll do this. And we don't know if they'll pick us'.

It was like a weird date. We hope we're dying enough that they pick us for the film. So then in four years, when this comes out, it'll be the perfect time because we can promote ourselves and say, 'Hey, you know, we'll have a website', which we don't have. That was my dream, to build a website and promote that we want to tell the world you need to help us save our synagogue.

And so we ended up getting picked. They followed us and then they did make a movie about us. So I was in the movie as one of the main characters they chose to follow. And after the movie came out, it premiered at the San Francisco Jewish film festival in 2000 - now I can't remember the year, but I want to say 2016. We'll have to check.

And then they said the people that were in the film, they chose four synagogues, they ask you to go to one of the premiers - they were sending the film around the country - and speak afterwards in a panel discussion. So I was planning to go to Chicago, where I have two sisters and their families, and the week that I was going to go, I got a concussion skiing and I couldn't fly. So, then they said, 'well, you'll need to pick another location'. And for the next year, I couldn't find anywhere that I was interested in going and finally said, 'Oh, okay, I'll go here. I'll go to El Paso, Texas'.

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Because in my mind I was thinking that it was Laredo, Texas, one of the places that was filmed. And I could meet Uri and Susie, the other characters who I felt close to, because we all kind of got to know each other through making of the film, even though we didn't meet.

So I didn't even realize that I was going to El Paso. So fast forward, I go, 'Oh wait, I'm going to El Paso'. And they were very far apart. But it was February, I believe, in

2018, and it was warm. So I said, 'that's great. I'll go to El Paso'. And I have a Jewish network through my volunteer group, Hadassah, where I know people in almost every city.

So I met up with my Hadassah ladies, the synagogue folks hosted me and there I was in El Paso. And at that point, I was about at the end of my rope with our synagogue, and saving our synagogue. And I was at one of the most negative points I had been, chronologically. So here's this movie showing me saying, 'we're going to save the synagogue!' And then I'm in person afterwards thinking, you know, really in my heart saying 'these people, we need to be saying, forget them'.

And I felt like Jonah, you know, and I'm running from God. And here I am in El Paso. And afterwards, after the film, we had panel discussion. And then after that, someone came up to me and said, how much money do you need to save the synagogue? And I said, 'what are you talking about?'

Well, this was the money that, unfortunately, spoiler alert, you know, that didn't come through.

But at the time I thought, what is happening? I thought 'no, no'. And I was still so revolted by the whole idea that I really did not follow up with this man for a while. So maybe it's my fault that things didn't go as quickly as they could have - had to put that Jewish guilt in there.

But once I finally did connect, and make the connection, it turns out that he was the shepherd or overseer of a couple that was from Butte, who was elderly. And the husband had passed and the woman now had dementia, but she talked lovingly about her experience growing up in Butte, in the synagogue, and wanted to donate money to our synagogue.

But as we said, the way the funds were set up, we could only do it while she was alive. And so I was running. And then I thought, 'okay, you know, you can't make this stuff up, that I'm supposed to go to Chicago and then get a concussion, end up in El Paso thinking it was Laredo. And then somebody offers money for our synagogue. So I realized, okay. I felt like Jonah, I was running from this, but God's finding me and I'm going to do what I need to do. So I kind of think it might be my destiny to continue to help.

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And now with the foundation in place, I really do feel like that's the hard part. Money, you can find money. So that's my goal. I would like to see that synagogue continue to be used and viable. And there are examples out there of successes.

Our advisor, David Sarnap from the legacy program, has given us a lot of good examples of successes. And one of the trips that the students at the Chateau took was to New York City and they saw the Elder synagogue and they have a whole program of educating people about the Holocaust and it moved them so much.

The kids, when they found out, I was told, that they could have a part in their synagogue at home. Not their synagogue, but their community synagogue. Of course, none of these children are Jewish. They were very excited. And the idea that Carson

promotes, is that when you have children involved, that is where the energy comes from.

You give it life. And it's actually, she said it's easier to get funding and grants and programming when you include youth. So, that's the way that I think we could go. I'm hopeful for that.

**JAAP:** So is it like a national trend that synagogues - or is this going on around the country then?

**OYER:** Yeah, it is. And it's not unique to synagogues. It's churches and synagogues in rural areas are dwindling. As young people move to more cosmopolitan areas, this happens. And so there's growth in other areas where there's dwindling in other areas. But I also believe that there's a paradigm shift in how, I guess people like to say, organized religion is going to be perpetuated in this country.

With Judaism, there was, if you think about, maybe just pick a point in time in America - in the 1950s. There's a pretty static model, where you pay dues as a member and you have this board of a synagogue and a building to maintain, and you go to Sabbath services Friday night, Saturday morning. And like I said, there's Sunday school. There's perhaps other educational opportunities. People want a different model, I believe now. They want to have events. They want to be inspired by things. And then just give money when they're inspired. The model's changing and this country is trying to adapt and figure out what works.

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So, there are a lot of different examples out there. My sister's synagogue in Chicago made a point of becoming a community without a building. They don't own a building on purpose. When I was the president of the synagogue, it was interesting because we had a support group for presidents through the URJ. And you could go on this email, what would you call it?

**JAAP:** Like a listserv?

**OYER:** Yeah, you could go on the listserv and nine out of 10 problems, the top 10 problems were all about the building and dealing with the building. And I just thought that was so ironic because they chose not to have a building and are thriving. And here we are trying so hard to save the building.

But as I said, we have a very special building that's not only in the National Historic Register. If you go to a site online called [360synagogues.org](http://360synagogues.org), you can see our synagogue featured with other beautiful synagogues, all throughout Europe and the rest of the world.

**JAAP:** Interesting. So in Chicago, does it work just 'cause they're putting their energy into that community, as opposed to energy of like fixing the boiler, and roofing?

**OYER:** Correct. And so they rent space from a community center. And then for the High Holy days, when 10 times the members come to the religious services, they use the auditorium at a local junior high school. So. Yeah, that's been successful for them.

**JAAP:** Yeah, it is that struggle of, when you have dwindling numbers and then the building stays the same size...

**OYER:** Our advisor came and the first time he tried to tell us, 'it's not about the building, you're a community, Jews are a community. You can be anywhere'. It was just shocking and painful and taboo to even say that. The members of our community - 'well, no the building is everything!'

**JAAP:** Right. I mean, you grew up with that kind of feeling though?

**OYER:** I guess I didn't really think about it as much. Yeah. And there are, we have a nice synagogue in Ithaca, New York where I grew up. But yeah, I just have a wider view of the world, and synagogues come and go. And I've been such a nomad that I've taken my Judaism with me. Butte people have been here their whole lives, so maybe they haven't traveled with it as much. So I know mine's portable and we survived in the desert for decades because we had to make our religion portable.

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And then as Jews, the last 2000 years, we had to take certain steps to make our religion portable, because we didn't really have a homeland. And again, until 1948, when Israel was established. So we know how to be portable with our religion. But here in Butte, perhaps people have just been here their whole lives and that's home base. And that's another attachment to the building.

**JAAP:** Yeah, Butte's a very place-connected community, even though there were people, all sorts of people together. It's like, but people still had kind of their home base, you know. Little communities within the larger community. So that's interesting.

**OYER:** There is something I like to say, which I think I said at our gathering. I'm not sure. So I said that I grew up in Ithaca, New York, but I was born in Youngstown, Ohio. And my family was a member of a reform synagogue there. And Youngstown, Ohio is similar to Butte in that it's a steel mill town. So here we have the mining town. And all the same ethnicities are in Youngstown, the Jewish people, the Italian people, the Slavic people.

But there's quite a difference, because in Youngstown, Ohio, you stayed in your same neighborhood. People didn't mix. You didn't go to the Italian neighborhood. Here in Butte, everybody mixes and they share traditions and they honor each other's traditions.

I mean, everyone loves the Serbian Orthodox church here, the beautiful building. And this weekend, tomorrow is the festival. And I'm looking forward to going to that. And there's a line in the Butte Heritage Cookbook that I always refer to, it's one of my favorite lines about the mixing and how everyone shares. And it says, 'In Butte, on St. Patrick's Day, the Finns celebrate St. Patrick's Day with more gusto than the Irish', it says. And that's just so true. I've met ladies who have, you know, brought me in and said, 'this is how we make our pasties.' And argued over recipes. And they want to eat my food and share my traditions. And they're, you know, happy to come to a synagogue service.

I've been to a service at the Serbian Orthodox church just to see it. And this community is very, very unique in that people support it. And there are so many people that support the synagogue. When Chris, what's his name, I'm blanking on his last name, that has the adult history - when Chris Fisk, taught the adult history class of Butte, and they would get to choose one location, one building where they could go on a field trip, and they would often choose the synagogue.

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Pam Rudolph, used to give the tours. And then I started giving the tours, and we'd fill the synagogue with 80 people from the community on an evening who wanted to do learn about the synagogue and come see it. And there's so much support. And so, it's a nice feeling.

**JAAP:** Yeah. The support is there, I think. And yeah, people are connected to their community in that way.

**OYER:** Yeah. And then another thing about her just being Jewish in Butte, Montana - this will be my, probably the last thing. I don't know what time we're at.

So when I said I hadn't joined the synagogue until 2003. I just found that being Jewish in Butte and talking about God, I found an unlikely, I guess, alliance with the Catholic people here in Butte. I found that for me, talking about God, and it may have been my filter and my age, but in my thirties, when I got more involved in the synagogue here, it seemed like I would encounter a lot of people who didn't want to say the word God, even if they believed in a higher power. They just weren't comfortable talking about God, or putting that belief into that box.

And I am, and always have been comfortable with that word. And maybe it means something different to me than other people. I don't know. But then I found the Catholic people of Butte, who were really also just down with God, and they could say that word and it was this immediate understanding.

And so, there was a lot of camaraderie and support from the Catholic community of Butte. And just the people of Butte that understood. And I didn't have to explain myself. And yeah, I remember being surprised by that and appreciating that.

**JAAP:** Yeah. Do you have any questions Clark?

**CLARK GRANT:** Probably time for just one, huh? I wanted to ask what advice you might give to those looking to save or preserve buildings in town?

**OYER:** Get a foundation, find a foundation, or create a foundation with the same core values that you have. And then believe that the money will come and it will because money, money will come.

[00:45:00]

**GRANT:** Okay. Since that was so quick, could you share, is there some notable story about the synagogue? If you bring people on a tour, or the first time you went on the tour, what did they always be sure to tell you? What's a notable story about it? Or incident?

**OYER:** I don't have any incidents because I came after, but I will just tell you a couple of things. As soon as people walk in that building, they feel a sense of peace and they are awed. They are in awe. It may be the blue shag carpet. But, oh, I guess I just did think of one story. But, okay, the other thing is once they walk in and then I always tell them, 'turn around', once they get halfway up the aisle toward the bimah, is the Jewish word. Pulpit. And then they look back and see the stained glass window that you can see from the outside. But when the light's pouring through, it's amazing. Donated by Myna or Mina Oppenheimer. And I always remember that because my grandma's name was Myna.

**JAAP:** Okay. Yeah.

**OYER:** So here's a story about the building. We have the folk festival, right? And so I was a band buddy. I hosted one of the bands that was a klezmer band, playing Jewish klezmer music. So it was two years ago.... you have to cut this part out, they'll all be like, 'what, you don't remember our name?' I know, because I also was just, maybe I wasn't the band buddy to them. I was a band buddy to Joshua Nelson. So I better start my story over - quick, what's their name? It was the - can you look that up?

So yeah, last year when the klezmer band came to play at the folk festival, I went around the back of the stage and said, 'Hey, you guys want to go see the synagogue while you're here?' Not knowing if they'd take me up on a tour because I'm a key holder. And they said, yes, absolutely. So we made it happen and they came over and I just thought they would be looking at the building.

But I also had some friends in town for the folk festival. So we had this big group over there and they ended up bringing their instruments in. And so they set up in front of the pulpit and played. And then we went down into the social hall downstairs. And it was fascinating, because they all felt like they had been there before.

[00:48:00]

It was the same building built in the same style that many of the buildings in America were built at that era. And they said, 'this smells the same. The stage is the same where we have the Purim plays', we call it a Purim spiel. When you grow up, that's the holiday where you dress up like the characters in the Purim story, it's kind of become in Israel, the Jewish Halloween.

And so they said, 'we've the Purim spiel. This smell, this building. I know it'. And they were just, they couldn't, they were beside themselves, it was really fun to see that. So they felt at home as well.

**JAAP:** That's wonderful. Yeah.

**GRANT:** I'm glad there aren't any incidents to report.

**OYER:** Well, there probably are, but it was my before my time. They didn't pass that along to me.

Well, one incident is when we were filming with the There Are Jews Here crew, they did this thing where they would put people in the chair. So you'd have the solo interview and they'd ask you questions. And they chose the aisle in the sanctuary to

put the chair in. And so they would fly into town multiple times, you know, over a couple of years.

So they came, it was the middle of winter and the boiler went out. So we had no heat in the building and this is, you know, this is us, where we're trying to keep this building going and you see what happens. But they were very resourceful and got the person themselves to come and get the heat on the next day. So.

**GRANT:** Well, good luck with this building.

**OYER:** Well, thank you.

**GRANT:** Maybe the Root and Bloom can do something.

**OYER:** I think we can. We just need energy?

**JAAP:** Yeah. Well, thank you for coming Nancy.

**OYER:** Yeah, I hope there's some usable stuff.

**JAAP:** Oh, definitely. It's a good story to capture. I mean, cause you guys are at kind of a point right now that is kind of that - where are you going to jump off at? Yeah, kind of that pivotal year.

**GRANT:** I learned something interesting about Henry Jacobs just the other day...

[END OF RECORDING]