

**INTERVIEW WITH MAX KAMINOFF
ERNEST STIEFEL, INTERVIEWER
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ES: Today is July 12th, 2002, at the office of Bader, Martin, Ross, Smith. I, Ernest R. Stiefel am talking to Max Kaminoff about the old Yesler neighborhood and other neighborhoods. I am interviewing Max Kaminoff, a retired attorney from Seattle.

As you know, we are studying the old Jewish neighborhoods. I understand that you know a lot about Yesler Way in the 1930's. We would like a little flavor of what it was at that time. We have a list of all the places but I think what we really want to do is find out a little more what went on, flavor of the items, where you socialized, where you hung out, something about the synagogue, etc. I understand that your father had a grocery store at 27th and Yesler.

MK: 26th and Yesler.

ES: 26th and Yesler. Tell me something about it.

MK: We got to Seattle in 1917. My dad had several small businesses initially, including a stall at the Pike Place Public Market. But several years after he came here, he moved to the store at 26th and Yesler. Before that we lived at 122 17th Avenue, a half a block from Bikur Cholim Synagogue. In those days, that intersection, Yesler and 17th, was the hub of the Jewish community in Seattle. It was later that some of it moved over to the Cherry Street area, but initially when we got here, it was 17th and Yesler. I started public school, I don't recall it was kindergarten or first grade at what was then the Washington Elementary School. By the next year we had moved and I went to Rainier School, which was, as I recall, at 24th and King, now long gone. And then later, Garfield High School and the University of Washington.

ES: Tell me a little about your father's store, what he sold, who his customers were.

MK: It was a typical, old-time grocery store, an old frame building at the corner of 26th and Yesler. In the days before self-service, the customers were all in the area. Very little traffic in those days. Very little business, but he stayed with that until he retired.

ES: When was that?

MK: I don't recall. I know he retired sometime prior to 1956 because my mother died in 1956 and he had retired before she died, several years before. The store is still there.

ES: Tell me a little bit about the neighborhood at 25th and Yesler. Let's go down and see if any places you still remember, what happened to them.

MK: I recall that at the corner westerly of the store, there was a gentile family who lived there as long as we were there. They were sort of the exception in the neighborhood. All the others were Jewish, but I can't recall specific names.

ES: We have an old directory (1938). Let's go further down 24th, this is 25th. There was the 24th Avenue Market.

MK: Yes.

ES: There was a shoe repair shop, and a few other stores, and there was an auto mechanic.

MK: The auto mechanic was a man we called "Swan." I think his name was Swanson, but he was "Swan" to everybody in the neighborhood, not Jewish. The store at 24th and Yesler was run by Jack Iunes and Albert Oziel. They went into the furniture business. There was a man named Grodstein, G-r-o-d-s-t-e-i-n, our plumber, who was THE neighborhood plumber. He was Jewish.

ES: He took care of everybody?

MK: Yes. If you had a plumbing problem, it was Grodstein. There was another plumber a half a mile from Bikur Cholim between 17th and 18th on Yesler, Ziebarth. He was not Jewish, but he did some work in the community also, but it was mainly Grodstein.

ES: Going down 24th to 23rd, we had the Yesler Library. Tell me a little about what your experiences with the library were.

MK: All right. Yesler brings back very, very fond memories. Yesler Library was one of those that was built by a grant from the Carnegie Foundation. It was and still is a beautiful little brick building, and as a youngster that was one of my hangouts. It was just a typical little library. We liked the librarians and I was there at least once a week. I would have loved to be a Boy Scout, but my parents wouldn't approve of it because of the military-type uniform. So I'd be there a minimum of once a week to read Boy's Life Magazine, about the Boy Scouts. Very, very fond memories of it.

ES: That's interesting because there was a Jewish Boy Scout group, I understand.

MK: I don't think so. At least not in our area.

ES: That could be. Anything on the other side of Yesler Library which you remember.

MK: As I think I mentioned to you, across the street to the west was Lippman's Bakery. The John Levy family lived at the house on the corner, directly west of the library, and then kitty corner was the fire station, which initially when we were there still had horses. I'll never forget the day that the fire trucks moved in for the first time.

ES: Was the fire station busy at that time?

MK: Well, it was typical. They had their share of alarms. In those days there were alarm boxes at every corner and if there was a fire, somebody would have to run to the corner, flip a switch and then stand there and point to where the fire was when the trucks came along.

ES: Talk about Lippman's Bakery which I believe was on 23rd.

MK: 122 23rd Avenue.

ES: Tell a little about their bread and their customers. Did they deliver?

MK: Oh, yes. I was very close to that family. The son Ben Lippman was part of our group. They were THE Jewish bakery in those days. Brenner Bakery was already in operation. In those days it was A. Brenner, the father of the Brenner brothers. Mr. Brenner died, he remarried—

ES: Mrs. Brenner died.

MK: Well, first she died, then he remarried. Yeah. Apparently the boys and their stepmother did not get along, so they stepped out and started Brenner Brothers which later became THE Jewish bakery in town. There was a Mosler Bakery, very small at about 14th and Yesler. I know of it but I know very little about it. There was another bakery, a very small one, someplace on Jackson Street or King or something of that sort, what does occur to me—I think that the little girl that I knew as Charlotte Lippman, married Harry Kessler, who died recently, but I think she's still alive and she would possibly be a source of information about the bakeries.

ES: Wasn't he the father of George Mosler the attorney?

MK: Yes, yes.

ES: And the grandfather of Arlene Schuster?

MK: I had forgotten that.

ES: The bakery on Jackson, was it Egger Brothers?

MK: Yes, yes.

ES: Mrs. Egger just passed away some days ago. Go down a little further between 20th and 21st, there's a grocery store.

MK: The store at 20th and Yesler, I can recall very well, it was not owned by a Jewish person.

ES: Okay. Go further where the cable car was.

MK: Oh, yes.

ES: Going down to 19th, you had several stores on the left side. There's the grocery, a butcher shop, a card room and two more stores.

MK: I'm trying to think, I think the butcher shop was Ziegman's. There were two principal butcher shops in those days, in our area. One was Ziegman's and the other was—

ES: Kutoff?

MK: Kutoff.

ES: I think that's the one. The one there was Kutoff's.

MK: Yeah, I think there was one owned by Mr. Harris. As a matter of fact, I'm almost positive.

ES: Yeah, the was a block south.

MK: Oh, that's the one.

ES: There was a card room owned by Mr. Amon. Do you know anything about it?

MK: No. Was that between 18th and 19th?

ES: No, that was 19th and 20th.

MK: No, I know nothing about that.

ES: I think that was frequented by Sephardic Jews.

MK: I mentioned my dad had a few small businesses before he became a grocer. One of the businesses was a card room. My dad does not play cards. He disapproves of playing cards and he just hated that little business and he couldn't get rid of it soon enough.

ES: Going down from 19th to 18th, we have on the south side Brenner's Bakery, and you just mentioned—

MK: Right on the corner, right.

ES: Mr. Brenner passed away in 1952. Then there was the barbershop, fish market.

MK: Yeah.

ES: On the north side we have Harris kosher butcher.

MK: Right, right.

ES: Then the grocery store. A shoe repair shop. Then there was a Mrs. Olswang.

MK: Oh, yes.

ES: Tell me a little bit about her.

MK: She was very, very prominent in all Jewish charities at that time. And so we heard her name or saw her picture in the paper often. But aside from that, I know nothing about her. I don't know her background; I just know that she was very, very active in various charitable causes. I'd hear her name and I don't know whether they had The Transcript in those days yet or not. But I can picture her in my senior pictures, but that's about it.

ES: I see. Going down a little further, we come to 18th and 17th and there is Bikur Cholim Synagogue. I assume that at that time you went to Bikur Cholim?

MK: No question about it.

ES: Tell me a little about Bikur Cholim during those days.

MK: Bikur Cholim was, and still is, a beautiful, beautiful synagogue. It was designed by an architect whose name I can't recall at the moment.

ES: Pretica.

MK: B. Marcus Pretica. It was one of his first projects and he did a wonderful job and later, of course, became a very, very prominent architect. He designed some of the major movie theaters downtown. But as I say, it was a very impressive building. It was the hub of religious and social activity in our day. I think it was built, when we came to Seattle in 1917, it is my recollection that it was built in 1914; a very traditional synagogue, a balcony for the women. And right now I think of the beautiful pews that we had there, but that came much later.

ES: We go on. There are several stores between 18th and 17th. There was a drugstore—Johnson's Drugstore—a jewelry store, another barbershop, Louis Ziegman's, another card room, Hoffman's Grocery, and a hardware store. Anything you remember about those?

MK: Well, just Hoffman's store was owned by Mr. Hoffman, of course. One of his sons was Al Hoffman, who became a very, very successful and prominent composer. To this very day, you keep hearing, "Among My Souvenirs," that was one of the very first songs. Before he left Seattle he was the conductor of the choir at Bikur Cholim.

ES: Very interesting. On the south side you have Ziebarth, which you mentioned, and another butcher shop, Roses, a shoe repair shop and another grocery store.

MK: I don't recall that one.

ES: There is not much between 17th and 16th, is a gas station.

MK: To me that's sort of a blank. Everything was east of 17th.

ES: I see. And going further south, you have the gas station that was Louis Sands Richfield station. There is not much left. There was a Turkish steam bath I was told on 12th.

MK: Yes, yes.

ES: And Visse the coffee shop.

MK: That I don't recall. But I do recall the steam bath.

ES: Tell me about yourself. I know you had a sister.

MK: Two sisters.

ES: I only know one, Mrs. Ezra, Ida Ezra. Who was your other sister?

MK: Dora Blond.

ES: I see. I didn't know her.

MK: She was not very active in the community.

ES: When you were young, who did you socialize with?

MK: I was part of a group of four or five of us. The others were Benny Lippman, who was the rich kid in the group because his parents had a successful bakery. There were two Hyman Cohens, cousins, and the older one was called by us "Big Hymie," and the other was "Little Hymie." "Big Hymie" became a very successful surgeon. He died just a few years ago. The other Hymie Cohen, to everybody's surprise, became a career military man after World War II. Then there was Sam, we called him "Shimshi" Lawson, who was a successful pharmacist. And then one of his brothers, Louis Lawson, who became a CPA.

ES: I knew him.

MK: Yeah. And as I mentioned to you on another occasion, all of us did quite well with the exception of the rich kid, Benny Lippman. Very, very tragic story.

ES: Any activities on Saturday nights you can remember?

MK: No. Our group was very active. We were sports nuts. We'd go to all athletic events together, but I don't recall that many social activities involving girls, specifically. We were a bunch of shy, young boys. I'm really surprised that every one of us got married! [Laugh]

ES: Anything you want to add to the flavor of the neighborhood? Cherry Street, Yesler Way, Jackson Street?

MK: I'm trying to think. I just think of our neighborhood as being a happy neighborhood. I know my parents were very, very appreciative of being in the United States. They had come here when the Czar was still the head man in Russia and they never did lose their appreciation for the freedom here; particularly the opportunities for their kids. That was more important than anything else.

ES: Did you belong to AZA?

MK: I was very happy with B'nai B'rith, but AZA, I am not sure that I did. As a matter of fact, I don't think I did. But I was quite active in B'nai B'rith in the early days.

ES: Well, is there anything else you want to add to—let me ask one more question. When did the neighborhood as you remember it break up?

MK: I can't put a date on it. Of course, as I say, we moved around 1920, so we moved out of that neighborhood. But every Saturday we would walk down to the synagogue for services. But with that exception, we just never got down to that neighborhood and little by little, though, it phased out. But that was over a period of years. But I can't pinpoint a year or give a period.

ES: Where did you go when you moved out of there?

MK: Well, we got here in 1917. We would have moved out in around 1920. That's when we moved out to, well actually we first moved to a very small cottage that was behind the grocery store. It was tiny. Then we moved to a house on Yesler between 26th and 27th. And then we bought the home that we lived in for years at 2717 Yesler Way.

ES: Well, thank you very much.

MK: You're most welcome.

ES: This ends the interview.

ES: One addition to the interview, tell me about the Talmud Torah which was on 25th and Columbia.

MK: Now, when we came to Seattle in 1917, the Talmud Torah was in a small-framed building between 17th and 18th and Fir Street. Later it moved to a frame building on as I recall, it was the corner of 17th and Alder. As I recall, it was the northeast corner of that intersection. Later on it moved to the building where it still is at 25th and Columbia.

ES: Did you attend Talmud Torah?

MK: Oh yes, oh yes. In those days that was a regular routine for all of us young Jewish kids.

ES: Tell me a little bit about what you learned and what they taught there.

MK: We were taught Hebrew, but realistically only enough to be able to pray. There was no conversational Hebrew and very little of what we learned, frankly, rubbed off, and stayed with me.

ES: That was not good.

MK: Yeah.

ES: Well, thank you.

MK: You're most welcome.

END OF INTERVIEW