

Dr. Bertram R. Pass

This is an interview with Dr. Bertram R. Pass. The date is Thursday, June 16, 1988. The interviewer is Leatrice Kraft. Dr. Pass will be designated as a "P", and Ms. Kraft as "I".

I: Where were you born and raised, Dr. Pass?

P: Seattle, Washington.

I: What was your religious affiliation as a youth, in your father's home, as it were?

P: I was associated with the Congregation Bikur Cholim, the Ashkenazi Bikur Cholim, until I was married, and actually until I came back from my internship and residency in Cincinnati, Ohio.

I: When did you join the Reform movement?

P: Actually, when my two boys, the oldest one was approaching Bar Mitzvah, I felt that there were certain inconsistencies in what was preached and what was practiced, and I decided it was best for the boys to be Bar Mitzvah in a Reform setting.

I: The inconsistencies were with you or with the Congregation?

P: It could have been... that's a good question. I think that there were some, again this is personal opinion, not meant to demean the Orthodoxy, because the Orthodoxy I have great respect for as an institution. There was a vast disparity between what was preached and what was done by individuals. I felt this inconsistency had to be resolved in some way. My resolution was to go to an area where there were fewer inconsistencies in what was preached and what was done.

I: You went to Temple De Hirsch, is that correct?

P: Yes. That's correct.

I: When was this?

P: Well let's see, that would have been 1964-65.

I: Your children attended Sunday school there?

P: Yes, they did.

I: ...and were Bar Mitzvad there?

P: Yes, they were.

I: What were your feelings about Temple De Hirsch? Were you comfortable there, coming from the background that you came from?

P: I was not totally comfortable in a Reform setting, however, I felt that it was the better way in society in Seattle for my family to be.

I: Were you aware, or what was your awareness of the situation surrounding Rabbi Singer's leaving Temple De Hirsch?

P: I was peripheral to the entire affair, never involved. I wasn't particularly involved in Temple De Hirsch in terms of their political hierarchy or religious leadership. I respected Rabbi Levine tremendously, I thought he was a great individual. I enjoyed conversations with him, and I really was peripheral to it. I had no direct knowledge of what was going on. After the fact I heard what had happened.

I: So your leaving Temple De Hirsch to go to B'nai Torah was not a personal following of the leader, as it were.

P: No, not mine. When I was in Cincinnati, I met a very wonderful young man by the name of David Robins, which you would

have no knowledge of. He's a rabbi now. He married a Seattle girl.

I: Florene Griff.

P: Right. David and I had some long conversations, and I became enamored of the idea of a small congregation. The idea of having a limited number of people where each member of the congregation could have an impact on the direction the congregation was going to take. So that the concept of the small congregation attracted me to B'nai Torah, rather than the religious leader.

I: You see no pitfalls in a congregation that is a set number?

P: No, again, it's an ideal. It cannot be achieved, but the thought of having a small congregation is still a good idea, I think.

I: You were not involved in the establishment of B'nai Torah, as I understand it, but from your own understanding of what happened could you describe how they started. Who was involved in the beginning?

P: There were, and the exact numbers may not be correct, about between eighteen and thirty individuals who followed Rabbi Singer, who met with Rabbi Singer to form a congregation. Without Rabbi Singer there would have been no congregation formed. Without the members involved, there would have been no congregation. It was sort of a symbiosis, as it were, the Rabbi contributing religious leadership and the layman doing the mundane things that have to be done within a congregation. Everybody, as I understood it, was excited. It was a very exciting time for them, establishing a congregation is an important event and they

took a part in it. There were fellows like Dick Silver, Ted Rosenblum, Marty Noodleman, Jack Yusen, along with their wives, of course. This was a combined thing. There were several others that I know of, Norm Sargeant, Bernie Zeldow to name a few. There were others, I don't want to leave anybody out but it's hard to remember.

I: Of this nucleus, are many of them still involved? Not necessarily involved in leadership roles, but just involved with the Temple?

P: Very few.

I: Why do you think that is?

P: Leatrice, Leatrice!!

I: ... the rate of attrition or what?

P: To a few of them, I'm sure that their allegiance remained with Temple De Hirsch. Their sympathies were with Rabbi Singer. When, later on during the development, they returned to their allegiance. There were some, however, who left for reasons that I don't know, or choose not to say.

I: Of course you've answered this question, but I'll ask it anyway. Was the movement for a new congregation born as a means to give Rabbi Singer a pulpit or did it answer a real need in the community, other than your own?

P: Initially, I think that the sympathies for Rabbi Singer were great amongst this initial group, I think they wanted to give him a pulpit. I think that Rabbi Singer was an extremely good speaker in classical rhetoric. I think this attracted a lot of people, and I think that they wanted to give him a pulpit.

I: The first Sabbath following Rabbi's departure from Temple De Hirsch, he held services at a Mercer Island church. Did you attend?

P: No, I did not.

I: A meeting was held on December 22, 1968 at Glendale Country Club to discuss this establishment, did you attend that?

P: No.

I: You were not interested at that point.

P: As I said, I was peripheral to what was going on. I had things that interested me other than the establishment of another Temple.

I: Well then, you were not swayed other than by your own personal conviction in going there, it had nothing to do with the rabbi.

P: No. When it was established and it was incorporated, I believe in 1969, Jack Yusen actually talked to me one night, and explained to me what was going on, and wondered if I would be interested in going and taking a look. The thing that attracted me was the concept again of the small congregation. This also, I'd had some idealtistic views that when you enter the Bas-midrish, everyone is equal, there's no Mr. Rich or no Mr. Poor, but everybody is equal. There's no names on the doors. Everybody goes to pray. Now that's perhaps idealistically naive. But, that's how I feel and that's how I felt. I became very interested in the project.

I: Did you become active in the congregation, or were you just a dues paying member?

P: I became active almost immediately. Again, the concept had intrigued me, and I wished that I could do what I could to further this particular idea.

I: Who made up the leadership at that time, the same gentleman that you talked about earlier?

P: Yes, I believe again, I know that I am leaving some people out. This is over twenty years ago and I didn't write things down, ...Dick Silver, who now lives in Boston, Ted Rosenblum, who now goes to Herzl Ner Tamid, were very, very active at that time. Bernard Zeldow, who was, I believe, the controller. The reason I remember these fellows is that I attended finance committee meetings at Zeldow's house. Norm Sargeant was there initially, Marty Nudleman was there. Again, there were other people involved too, but those spring to my mind. Harris Sprincin and Eddie Fisher were all involved initially. Very involved.

I: Usually a congregation seeks a rabbi to fill a pulpit. This was not the case here. The rabbi more or less sought the pulpit. Was this cause for a friction between the board and the rabbi, I mean, did he assume a proprietary air about how things were run, how things were done?

P: Rabbi Singer, at least in my estimation, was a dreamer primarily, he had ideas without any idea of how to implement them. He was not the most well organized person in the world. So, when you say conflict, I don't think it existed in the sense that you would mean. No, I think that the board of directors, the board of

Shamasene, attempted to project the congregation's needs and have the rabbi recognize them, but in no way limiting his ability to preach at the pulpit. In any organization there's minor differences of opinion which are resolved in a civilized manner, I think this occurred in this board too. I don't think there was any great friction in the sense that you would say that they were coming at odds between the rabbi and the Board of Shamasene. I think there was an attempt by the board to direct the rabbi to the needs of the congregation. There was an attempt by the rabbi to do his own thing.

I: When you say that B'nai Torah is a traditional Reform, now was this something that the rabbi decided on, do you know?

P: I don't know. I wasn't at the organizational meetings.

I: The format had already been set by the time you got there.

P: Actually, if you look in the articles of incorporation, that's incorporated as the Traditional Reform Congregation of Mercer Island.

I: Traditional Reform is different than Reform at Temple De Hirsch?

P; This was our definition, yes. And the definition that I understood it to be, to develop and allow some of the traditional symbolism to again creep and jump and rapidly go into the format. There was more Hebrew. The wearing of the yarmilke and Talis were encouraged. Although we used the Gates of Prayer I think it's called, the prayer book, we attempted to introduce more Hebrew ... also there was more participation by the congregation in songs, and in reading or chanting, it was a sort of an attempt to

reintroduce some of the Orthodox symbolism that Temple De Hirsch, by that time, had eliminated almost entirely from their format.

I: While at the Mercer Island Presbyterian Church, was the congregation able to maintain a full schedule of services?

P: Yes, I was with the congregation I believe since 1970, which was a year after the incorporation. I think I was a Vice-President starting in 1971 and had been active in the congregation up until eight months ago, very active. I think that there was an establishment of a religious school early on. We did not have a formal sisterhood or brotherhood, but believe me, the comradery of this small group was such that everything they did was as a group and it was very, very nice. It was a good feeling. Actually, when you say that the things that traditional Jewish organizations or Jewish Temples do or synagogues do, there are only three basic functions of any Jewish congregation as I look at it. They are marrying, burying and training the young. We did all those three functions. Early on we established a cemetery of hallowed ground over on the Eastside. The only cemetery on the Eastside that had Jewish hallowed ground. That was done by Rabbi Singer through Norm Sargeant, who was the Cemetery Chairman at that time.

I: How many families were there approximately when you joined?

P: I believe there was between eighty and ninety families at that point in time. It could have been sixty, it could have been ninety.

I: What was the makeup of the congregation, were they dissidents from Temple De Hirsch, were they new people to the area, you think you just picked up people on the Eastside?

P: There was a compote of Temple De Hirsch people, who we've stated before, there were new people to the community who lived on Mercer Island, and there were people who were wanderers, they'd gone from temple to temple.

I: What about the age, what was the general age.

P: We were a young congregation, very young. The fact is Rabbi Singer, I can recall on about the tenth anniversary, recalled that there had not been a burial in our plot on the Eastside at that time. Which meant that the average age of our congregation when I joined ... when I joined, let's see, I was fortythree, and I was probably one of the elders in that community.

I: How long before it was deemed necessary to build.

P: Initially, the idea was to look for pieces of land and even from the very beginning with the idea that we'd be able to build. We had three gentlemen in the congregation who aided us tremendously, and they were Harris Sprincin, Eddie Fisher and Ted Rosenblum, who found a piece of property, I think it was some eight acres, in the place where we're now located. They had the foresight, I believe, to put a binder on that land, an option, and then approach the Temple, and said "We found a piece of property, you can have it for whatever we pay for it. In other words, we'll pay for it, then you have to pay." They bought it, the price was about \$35,000 for all that property. We were thrilled at the time. I think Ted Rosenblum was President at that time, Dick

Silver had gone and Ted was President. At any rate, they were instrumental in getting the property. From that point, we had a fundraising affair.

I: How was the money raised?

P: Internally, primarily.

I: Was it?

P: Yes, most of it. Then we went to the bank. I had a relationship with a banker at Rainier Bank downtown, a fellow by the name of Jim Williams, he was very, very nice to us. He gave us a favorable mortgage and we built a small building. I think the architect was Michael Schreeve.

I: Interesting, not David Gray?

P: David Gray was instrumental in helping, but I think Mike Schreeve was the architect at that time as I recall.

I: There was something about the way the building was built, wasn't there?

P: Because of, we thought, the small congregation, we built with the idea if we ever had to sell, being naive again, that we would have to sell it as it could be reconverted into a house. That's why the initial configuration of the building was more like a house than a temple.

I: Now, just for purposes of this interview, can you locate the temple for me, it's off Island Crest Way in Mercer Island.

P: Well, I'll tell you, it's adjacent to Pioneer Park, it's on 92nd Avenue SE, just off of 61st. It's in the Timberline four plat.

I: In your fundraising, you said it was all raised internally, there were no outside angels? Any endeavor of this type needs a few angels.

P: Well not angels per say.

I: Well let's say big givers then. Angels is better than big givers.

P: We never had any what you'd call big givers, we had moderate givers. We had fellows like Gene Aaron, Harry Lipsett, Jack Yusen, Marty Nudleman, who gave considerable to the initial project. In addition, the Rabbi had relationships with several men in the community like Tony Berg. Any time we needed extra money up to a certain amount, up to \$3,000, Tony Berg would contribute to the rabbi personally. There were a couple of others that would contribute a like amount. That's not a lot of money. It certainly was helpful, but it was not a lot of money.

I: Was the Mercer Island community receptive to the new congregation?

P: You know, it's interesting, in my memory all the good things remain and the bad things go away. I have this newspaper from 1972, and when I talked to you before, I thought there was very little trouble in the community. As a matter of fact, according to the newspaper there were eighty residents of the community who were at the design commission meeting during the initial organizational thing. They were afraid of the traffic primarily. I doubt that there was anti-semitism here.

I: They weren't worried because it was a Jewish Temple in their midst.

P: It was a church. And as far as they were concerned a church should not be in a single family residence area. However, if you look at the zoning codes that's the only place they are. But none the less, they had a real fear, and it was pointed out at the design commission meeting that if this plan were fully developed with twenty-one building sites, that the traffic would probably be more than the synagogue would generate. However, that was before the present time. At that time we were planning one hundred and fifty families, maybe one hundred and eighty families at the most. That was going to be the tops.

I: In that same building?

P: No, in our congregation. In other words, we'd have to add on or what have you. But at that time, that was our planning. You've got to recall we had little less than one hundred families at that time.

I: To what extent did the new building stimulate growth in membership?

P: We lost and we gained. I became President in 1974, actually I became Assistant President, not Vice-President, a year earlier. During the time of my Presidency, the membership rose to about one hundred and thirty-five, thirty-six families. It stayed at that level basically during the next ensuing ten or fifteen years. It never got above that. Basically all of the things that a congregation does were done by this synagouge. We had all the attributes of a larger synagouge on a smaller scale. Everyone,

every individual could have an impact on the congregation if he or she wished to work. Most of the people there did wish to work. We had the most successful fundraisers, we had auctions which we collected more money than the larger institutions, we were having services at which we had as many people present as Temple De Hirsch had. We were ten percent or one-tenth the size. At our annual meetings we'd have a pot luck type dinners. It was delightful, everybody pitched in. I forgot to mention there was Marilyn Teitlebaum and Bob Teitlebaum, the reason that came to mind, she made the spaghetti. It's fantastic!

I: Claim to fame!

P: Right!

I: Did Temple De Hirsch help or hinder? Did they help in any way, or were they a hinderance in some ways? Or was it just negligable. Their effect was negligable.

P: In my memory, they never helped.

I: Did they hinder?

P: When you say hinder, was it active or overt? Active hinderance... no. I think that the attitude of a lot of the people at De Hirsch and at Herzl was there was no need for another congregation that close in.

I: When you start a new congregation under UAHC do you have to get a charter? As I understand it you can just say we are going to start a congregation and you're not really answerable to anybody.

P: You aren't unless you join... as I understand it there is usually some space limitation. However, we were far enough away

from Temple De Hirsch basically. We did not join UHAC in terms of paying dues for many many years. We were too small and too weak financially. We had a deficit budget for years, which was filled in by our fundraisers.

I: UHAC is not a tremendous help is it except in finding a rabbi and you already had one.

P: Not really. There are many things that this organization ... literature, school curriculum, help with choosing a choice of books, as you say supplying a rabbi or substitute rabbi.

I: Which I'm sure you must have been ... some of those services must have been available to you. Help in choosing books and that kind of thing.

P: More or less.

I: Back to the membership, do you have any idea at that time how many were dual members. You said earlier that a lot of people felt a loyalty to Temple De Hirsch, but they liked Rabbi Singer.

P: Well, they had an alligience to Temple De Hirsch.

I: An alligience to Temple De Hirsch and a loyalty...

P: ... and a loyalty to Rabbi Singer. Right. I can't give you an exact figure, but my guess would be fifteen-twenty percent.

I: Quite a bit. What was Raida Singer's role all this time?

P: She was a Rabbitzin and I think she played that role very well. She was the choir director, the music director. She helped organize a choir for the holidays. She helped when we had functions at the Rabbi's house, we had two or three a year. She organized the food service and what have you. Coincidentally, on

the original temple, we were the first commercial building on Mercer Island to have to supply an environmental impact study.

I: They had just passed a law there?

P: That's right, and they included a synagouge. The thing that was very funny, we were laughing about at the time, is that the cost of building our temple was less than the cost of most of the homes that surrounded it. But I think again, that's not anti-semitism. That's the design commission on Mercer Island.

I: No, that was the law.

P: Have you ever had to go before the design commission of Mercer Island?

I: As a matter of fact, yes. During the occupancy time of the first building did your membership remain static or did it grow?

P: No congregation's membership remains static.

I: Did it grow?

P: We lost ten percent, we gained ten percent, and we did not grow. We grew, as I said, during my term as President, to about one hundred thirty-six families. Never grew above that.

I: You considered yourselves a continuing and growing congregation offering all or most facets of a Jewish house of worship?

P: Yes.

I: The night of the fire, when did you first hear about it.

P: I heard about it late. Probably about an hour or forty-five minutes after the Rabbi had heard about it. When I arrived down there, the Torahs were out of the temple and the temple was almost totally destroyed.

I: What was the date, do you remember?

P: Probably 1973, toward the end of 1973.

I: What was the extent of the damage?

P: Almost totally destroyed. It destroyed the sanctuary and it destroyed some of the offices.

I: What was saved? Or, was anything saved?

P: The Rabbi saved the Torah, there were two Torahs. One particularly had been lent to us, a small Torah, that had survived the Polish period during the Second World War. There's a clearing house in England, as I understand it, and Temples or synagogues that need a Torah and can't afford to buy one at the time, are lent these particular documents, these scrolls, and he saved that one, and he saved the other one.

I: Is that still in your temple? Or did it have to be returned when you could afford one?

P: That was returned when we could afford, right. It is historic. Each one had a label where it came from and what it's background was.

I: What was your insurance coverage?

P: Not very much!

I: How did you...

P: Well, then we met, I think within the week, not within the two days. We met at Marty Gelfend's house. Marty Gelfend was fairly active all the way in that period. He subsequently became President of the congregation later on. But, Marty held a meeting at his house, and we all decided that night that we were going to rebuild and we set up a building committee of which I was chairman

at that time. We went through over several architects and we selected Sonny Gorasht, who had done several of the synagogues in the area. And we met with him innumerable times to design a temple. Everybody had input, I can recall we went to the congregation, asked them for ideas for the kitchen, for the building, what they wanted, what their wish list was, what they would want in a building. Then we had to raise money. Now here's where the relationship with Jim Williams came in real handy. The original mortgage was never called. We were permitted to keep this original mortgage, I beleive it was for eight percent or something like that. We didn't have a building, but they permitted us to keep paying on the mortgage, which we did. Which is un-heard of. You call it and you pay for it and then you start from scratch. So, they permitted us to do that which gave us a little working room, because we didn't have to come up with money to pay that mortgage off. Then when we had originally platted the property there were two lots that sat up above the property and when I had it platted, I had it platted separately so that we could sell those two lots off at any given time. My initial ideas was to have the rabbi's quarters up there. To have his house.

I: A "manse", as it were.

P: But, that didn't come to be. He had a beautiful home in the other part of the Island. It worked out real well. We were able to sell the property for a fairly decent price, two lots. That gave us the nucleous of the money. Then we had pledges for the remainder of it, and we also got favorable treatment in that we received a mortgage that required interest only payments with a

balloon for the principal in May of June for the next year. So that we had enough time, breathing space to raise money. The first two years, we were not able to pay the principal, we just paid the interest. And, they went along with this, they were very nice. Rainier Bank was extremely nice to us. We had pledges, whenever we needed money there were, particularly when I was involved, there were about eight or ten men that I could go to and get anywhere from five hundred to three thousand dollars from. This would go on several years running. They knew what was going on and they were fortunately able to contribute. Harry Lipsett, Eugene Aaron, Marty Gelfend, the Gelfend family was extremely generous. Marty Nudleman's family and Mrs. Friedman, I think that's his mother-in-law, was extremely generous. There's just a number of people that were extremely generous in the initial fundraising efforts. There were also, as you suggested, some angels, Rabbi Singer had two or three people, who if we needed limited amounts of money we could go to them, and he did. Just two or three people, and get extra money. We had the organ, for instance, Harry Lipsett, myself and Eugene Aaron contributed a certain amount of money and then I believe there was one other contributor that Rabbi Singer got to get this organ that we finally had for the new temple. Then, at the very end, Sam Stroum gave I believe ten thousand dollars to the construction of the Aron Kodish.

I: He was not a member of the temple?

P: No, he was a friend of Rabbi Singer's. The Aaron Kodish, not the Bema. The Lipsett family contributed the Bema, they had it

made actually, yes they had it made. Then the Pass family gave the candelabras. There were a lot of people involved in making gifts. The one thing this temple always did, was that there was no recognition by name of plaque. Like this is the ...

I: Nothing like "donated by..."

P: ... "by" etc. We had a book of life which was destroyed in the fire which our idea was to print these things in it and if one cared to look you could go look. But, when they walked in the door, there was nothing staring them in the face. It was a difficult thing, a difficult concept, because to get people to give money, some people need to have recognition, need the kouvah. We did have our memorial plaque, which we sold, plaques, you know, if a parent had died you could buy a plaque and put the name on it. Those were the only names within the congregation. It was felt that if one felt like giving, the giving did the person more good than the congregation. At least, that's my idea. Not too practical.

I: Were the culprits ever apprehended, the ones who actually set the fire?

P: Yes they were. They were two young boys and I think it was pure vandalism. I don't think it was anti-semitism. They went for the wine. And then they torched it. They had torched a couple of other churches on the Island.

I: What happened to them?

P: They went to jail, now where they are now, I don't know. They went to jail for that particular item.

I: What was the reaction of the Mercer Island community to this fire?

P: They were extremely supportive of the congregation. There was an outpouring of sympathy from almost all the clergy, all the clergy on the Island. They wanted to help us, they wanted to contribute, they felt a, whatever they felt, they wanted to help. We had services, as you know, for a while in various churches, and we had our congregational meetings at one church, it was big.

I: Where did you hold Sunday School?

P: The JCC. The JCC allowed us to rent rooms, and we had an office for the while during the building period down, well it would be where the Tradewell is, about a block away from the Tradewell down in the center.

I: Did you lose members after the fire?

P: No, the fire had nothing to do with losing. We actually may have gained a few.

I: I mean because there was no building.

P: No, because there was an indication immediately that it would be rebuilt.

I: Then there was never any doubt that it would be rebuilt.

P: No way.

I: Even with very little insurance.

P: That's right.

I: How did the second building differ from the first?

P: The building was built as a synagogue, with a definite sanctuary, with offices for the Rabbi and the secretary. Because of the nature of the congregation the need for a building that

would be useful for a variety of things, we had a soundproof barrier, removable barrier, and four classrooms could be closed off, could be made into classrooms by these removable barriers, they were on overhead ceiling slide, and there were four permanent classrooms, but during the holidays or a big wedding or what have you, these barriers could be pulled away and you had a sanctuary which could seat two hundred and ten people by the fire code.

I: At this time, when you moved into the building, what do you think was the largest attraction for new members. Was it the building, was it the rabbi, was it the religious affiliation, or the religious philosophy I should say, or even the location of the temple?

P: The location of the temple, I think, had a great deal to do with some of your newer non-Seattelite members being on the Eastside, Mercer Island. The Rabbi attracted a few. The idea of a small congregation attracted a few. The idea of being traditional attracted a few. A combination of all those things.

I: Even now, demographically, are most people from the Eastside?

P: I believe if we were to do a demographic study we'd find most of them are from the Eastside.

I: Was there a change in the leadership during the years, or has that remained fairly constant?

P: There were several of us who remained in a leadership position over a fifteen year period. Doris Haykin, a very talented woman who subsequently was President of the congregation, a very very excellent worker.

I: Can you remember some of the presidents, outside of Mrs. Haykin and yourself?

P: Ted Rosenblum, Dick Silver, Marty Nudelman, Marty Gelfend, Frank Reich, he was dynamic. He worked for Exxon, he was in the corporate structure and he had to move back to New York. I hear from him periodically. A wonderful guy. Allen Gallant, a very talented fellow who had dealings with Alaska, was up in Alaska for a while, and is back now. Myself, Doris Haykin, I think that carries up to the present. Marty Gelfend also was a President.

I: At the inception, Rabbi Singer was the motivating force, did he continue to be the motivating force do you think, or was it the membership itself?

P: I think there was a symbiosis between the rabbi and the membership, and I think that the reason for existence was embodied in both. The rabbi could not exist without the pulpit and the pulpit could not exist without the people. So that I think they worked together. Again, as I said before, there were differences. The rabbi was unstructured and the board wanted more structure, so we'd periodically had meetings and we would try to restructure and try to guide the rabbi in the structure of what was done, not the content. From the pulpit he could say what he wished. We had some reservations about what was said outside the pulpit. We attempted to control, it was hard to control, what was said outside. In other words, as a representative of our congregation, and we came from very diverse backgrounds, all of us, some were converts, some were Orthodox, some were Reform, some were conservatives, some were liberals, within the congregational

structure, however, we were all Jewish. Things Jewish, there was no consideration at all that our rabbi could say what he darn pleased. Things not Jewish, or that we perceived were not Jewish, there were discussions.

I: Did Rabbi go out into the community, say in the way that Rabbi Levine has always been known for going out in the community?

P: Yes, he had a good relationship with all of the clergy of Mercer Island.

I: Than his activities were more or less restricted to Mercer Island community?

P: I really can't answer that Lea, my memory here says that yes they were primarily on the Island. He was a Rotarian, I believe, attended Rotary and had a lot of friends within the clergy on Mercer Island. And as a consequence, it helped us too.

I: Yes, because as you know, we Jews have our rabbis as a press agents very often in the outside community.

P: On Mercer Island, I think that that would probably be true.

I: You don't think he got involved in anything in the Seattle area. I don't even know what kind of things to say, at the community college level, in United Good Neighbor drives, in that kind of thing?

P: In my memory, I don't believe so.

I: Then he wasn't particularly communally minded, is what I'm getting at.

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P: I didn't say that.

I: I'm sorry. Rephrase it, you don't remember.

P: I don't remember. He was communally minded on Mercer Island. He was heavily involved with the clergy on Mercer Island.

I: Rabbi Singer became ill in 1979 or '80, '79 I think it was. Was he able to continue in his ministry?

P: That's a sore point Lea. No he was not physically capable of continuing. He was depressed, of course, but he was not physically able to and he could not,... the congregation felt that we needed a rabbi not to force Rabbi Singer out, that wasn't the intention at all, but to service the congregation during very difficult times.

END OF SIDE ONE, TAPE #673 DR. BERTRAM PASS

This is side two of tape #673, Interview with Dr. Bertram R. Pass.

P: In response to your question, felt a need to have, during the Rabbis illness, once we learned the diagnosis, we felt that he probably would not be able to come back. We wanted to have him as an emeritus, we wanted to have him as a guiding senior rabbi at that point, and the family wouldn't permit it.

I: When you say the family wouldn't permit it, what did the rabbi want?

P: We never knew. We weren't permitted to get close to him. Once there was a screen dropped...

I: Hi didn't come back to the temple at all?

P: He came back early on a couple of times. But we never could talk to him. We never could get close to him to talk to him.

I: Do you mean physically close to him?

P: You said it. In other words, there was no private time with the rabbi at all, and there was an increasing heavy atmosphere.

I: What did the family want, they wanted him to be a full rabbi?

P: I'm not sure exactly what they had in mind, but the result of what they did placed a schism in the temple community. There were about eight of us who ran the temple for a period of two years.

I: You conducted services, the lay people conducted services?

P: Conducted services, we had at that time Cantor Serkin made it known that he was an ordained Cantor, and of course an ordained Cantor can perform all the life cycle events that the rabbi can do. So from that stand point he helped run services later on. Initially though, it was a lay operation. We hired rabbis to come in for the high holidays, and again the intent was never to supplant or to put aside Rabbi Singer. But, we knew that he was physically incapable.

I: Now, as emeritus he would have to be paid some stipend. You were a very young congregation. Had you made provisions for this kind of an eventuality?

P: We had provisions for retirement, but he'd never wanted to retire, you see. Then we paid him full salary, actually full salary during the entire...

I: Till he died?

P: Till he died.

I: You couldn't hardly afford, I wouldn't imagine, to have two rabbis.

P: No, we couldn't, but we did.

I: Could the congregation have acted otherwise, do you think?

P: Not and survived.

I: Did you lose people at that time?

P: Yes, we lost half of the congregation, we went down to about sixty-five members.

I: They left because of Rabbi Singer, or because of what was done?

P: They left because of the perception of what was done. What was done was actually there was a commission that came out from HUC, we actually asked the commission to come out to adjudicate. Their conclusions were that the people who were running the congregation had acted in a very responsible manner. That was their conclusion, as a matter of record. What we had proposed and what we had done was extremely honorable.

I: How did the congregation change, if it did, after the Rabbi's death, outside of the fact that....

P: I think that every person played a role and attempted to do their part, and the congregation started to grow. Actually, we were up to one hundred and thirty-five members, one hundred and thirty members by the time that Rabbi Mirel made his appearance. So, we were back up to where we had been and this was without a rabbi, with just a cantor. The cantor did a tremendous job.

I: Could you describe the years between Rabbi Singer and Rabbi Mirel.

P: The first two years were the rather terrible emotional time for those of us involved, and required weekly meetings for two years, of the principals. Cantor Sirken, then organized the religious aspects, took the religious leadership at that point and we paid him a salary. He helped organize Sunday School, we had two or three religion school heads that we hired and paid for during that period of time. The school was...the curriculum was very good. We always had a high caliber leader for the Sunday School. And, the services were pretty much like Rabbi Singer had had, without the oratory.

I: Did you feel the loss of the religious leader?

P: Are you talking personally or congregationally?

I: Congregationally.

P: Congregationally, yes. Personally, no.

I: I understand.

P: Congregationally, yes. There was a hue and cry from the congregation. They needed a rabbi.

I: Then, why didn't you have a rabbi?

P: You just can't go...

I: Can't you just call, I mean don't they, what is it UAHC, don't they send out...

P: We were not a member.

I: You still were not a member, I see.

P: We applied for membership and the costs were too much for us. It cost money to belong to that organization and we had no

money, no money to spare anyway. So, finally we did join and we were actually in the process of a rabbi search committee was formed when Rabbi Mirel became available.

I: What transpired with Rabbi Mirel, how did that come about?

P: We did it ... Rabbi Mirel was going to leave Temple De Hirsch, this was a foregone conclusion. He met with some people who were supporting him and we talked to him, the rabbi search committee held three or four meetings with him trying to gauge what his views were on a number of things. It was felt that the congregation would grow locally, although we didn't realize how much, by having a scholar, which Rabbi Mirel is, a gentleman, which Rabbi is, and a gentle person, which Rabbi Mirel is, and well liked. So, we felt that he would serve the Temple B'nai Torah community very well.

I: What's happened since he assumed the rabbinic post?

P: The congregation is now at about four hundred and seventy families, we've outgrown the building and we are bigger than I ever thought we were going to get. We're a big congregation.

I: How about spiritually, well, I don't mean spiritually, the spirit of the congregation, the unified force?

P: It's changed to some extent. The people who were there initially have the same feelings about the concept of a small congregation that I have. That has been swept by the wayside. We are no longer a small congregation. We are now a large congregation and we're hoping to maintain the traditional Reform approach.

I: They are the same services, basically?

P: Basically, there's a new prayer book now and we have the new prayer book, the new edition.

I: Did you keep the same rituals that you did before?

P: Pretty much the same.

I: The same symbols?

P: The same idea, yes, from that standpoint we do.

I: What's the makeup of the congregation now?

P: I haven't been on the board now for eight months almost ten months. I would think that it is seventy percent new non-native Seattleites. Now that can mean a number of things. Either new people to the area or people who weren't born here that have been here for a while. Of the old members, there's very very few of the original members left.

I: What about mixed marriages, and converted marriages?

P: There are a large number of converts in the temple. There are, I imagine, I can't give you numbers, but considerable number of inter-marriages with converts.

I: Do you think this is a draw to this particular temple or just a trend of our times, of course?

P: I think it's a trend of our times, I don't think that any young congregation, this is a young congregation, again I have no demographics that I can point to, but just looking at the congregation, I think that we are basically a young congregation still as made up of younger people, as compared to Temple De Hirsch, or Bikur Cholim, or Herzl Ner Tamid.

I: Is the leadership the same or has that changed?

P: The leadership has... Well, it is changed and it is not changed. I notice the composition of the new board has a couple of old members in it back in again.

I: They're recycled.

P: They recycled them. Well, I think it's important. I think that if I ever have more time, I had some changes in my own life that I had to devote more time and didn't happen to have enough free time to continue or I would have continued adinfinitem. I enjoyed it. I think I gained a great deal.

I: Then there are many of the first families still involved?

P: There's several that are still involved. If not directly, peripherally.

I: What personal observations have you considering the role the temple has taken over the past twenty years?

P: I think it has supplied a place where people who have a strong Jewish feeling can still maintain some of the symbolism which is important within Judaism, to continue their involvement in the Jewish community. If this congregation weren't there they would be lost in the Jewish community, some of them. I think it served a very good purpose in attracting people, well a large number of people who were peripheral to the Jewish community, they were Jewish, but were not involved. I think when they came into B'nai Torah they became involved.

I: That's communally, what about yourself? Have your hopes and desires been fulfilled in this temple?

P: I have mixed emotions, Lea. I helped give birth to a baby, I trained the baby, or tried to train the baby and like any other parent, I watched the baby grow to maturity and perhaps they are not developing exactly as I would have had them develop, but they developed in a good way. So, what I am saying, you asked me a question, have my hopes been fulfilled. I think that that's unimportant, I think that the community is being well served by a congregation of the nature of Temple B'nai Torah. I think it's done some good. I would have preferred that my children stay young all the time. Well, you know I really wouldn't have, but in essence you have children, I want to see them grow and mature and go in their own way and yet I would like to go back to a time when we had a sense of small family. Now the family has grown, I certainly am not unhappy with Temple B'nai Torah, but have all my hopes been met? No, they haven't. I doubt that any person is fortunate to have all their hopes met. I think Temple B'nai Torah, though, will continue, and that's a hope of mine. When I first got involved I remembered my Father was involved with Bikur Cholim and he was on the finance committee for thirty or forty years as far as I know and he made a statement to me which I think is important, that every Jew should leave the community a better place for him having been there. To do something good for the community. I think this I've done from that point of view. I think I've helped this section of the community and for this, yes, I'm happy and I feel fulfilled. The other part of the question, I think it's like any other maturing or growing individual. You can sit and watch it grow and you like what you see, it does not

necessarily have to be exactly what you want, but you like what you see.

I: Do all your children belong to B'nai Torah, or do they belong elsewhere?

P: Well, my two daughters and their husbands belong to Temple B'nai Torah. My youngest son, who was a member of Temple B'nai Torah, moved out of town and he's indicated when he comes back he'll join again. My oldest son is in California and will never be in Seattle. So, three out of the four, yes.

I: That's pretty good. What future do you see for B'nai Torah?

P: In the light of its development, in the light of its attraction to young families, I would think that Temple B'nai Torah will become, in the next ten years, one of the leaders in the Reform tradition in the Seattle area. I think that under the guidance of Rabbi Mirel, and with the guidance of the board of directors, that the congregation will continue to grow. There strengths are in their Sunday School and their adult education programs. Both of those will continue to be developed. They have a social action committee, which I'm sure will become more involved. I think that in general the congregation has a bright future and I think it will become a dominant congregation in the next ten years, looking at it's past growth.

I: Something I didn't ask you earlier, this membership, the makeup of the membership, it's quite an intelligent group, isn't it?

P: I don't know what your driving at.

I: Alright, let's say that they are mostly professional people, I don't think you have too many single parent women families that have to be taken care of.

P: We have a few, we have a few widows. You have to recall the congregation is not an old congregation. With time we'll develop these things, unfortunately we'll have more widows, we'll have more single parents.

I: This is the day and age of the single parent families, is why I asked.

P: Well, no we don't have a great number of them. We have some, oh yes. And we have some widows. I think that the Temple is mature enough to handle the problem in a gentle and fair way. I think that it will gain strength as we go.

I: With four hundred and fifty families you are not going to be able to stay in this location.

P: No.

I: What is the outlook for the future.

P: I think we are going to have to build somewhere else.

I: You'd go off Mercer Island then?

P: I'm not a member of that committee.

I: I see. You assume they would go off Mercer Island?

P: My presumption is that they will look to where some property can be had, and that the property will be purchased and that we'll have another fundraiser.

I: I would assume that would still be on the Eastside.

P: I presume that will be the Eastside. I don't think we could go anywhere else. I think it has to be the Eastside. To do otherwise would be detrimental to the congregation.

I: Do you think Rabbi Mirel was the big draw.

P: Obviously, the man has a great deal of attraction. He's intelligent, he's charming, he's an honest individual, he's a good individual. I think, yes, he has had a major attraction. I think that his influence is probably greater than the concept of a small congregation at this point. I think it will continue to be. He's a good man.

I: Well, we'll wish him a great deal of luck. Thank you Dr.

END OF SIDE TWO, TAPE #673.