

**A ROUNDTABLE INTERVIEW WITH MEMBERS OF
MIDBAR KODESH**

An Oral History Conducted by Barbara Tabach

The Southern Nevada Jewish Community
Digital Heritage Project

Oral History Research Center at UNLV
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Rabbi Bradley Tecktiel, T-E-C-K-T-I-E-L. I'm the rabbi here at Midbar Kodesh Temple.

This morning we are going to be dedicating our Haftarah scroll. Each week we read a portion from the Torah, the Five Books of Moses, and in addition to Torah reading, we also have a reading from the prophets, a selection that they believe somehow closely relates to a theme or some aspect of that weekly Torah reading and it was chosen as a way of helping to remember the prophetic writings. So we read them with a special cantillation, the same way we read the Torah. What we did was we commissioned an artist to create a scroll that will have all of the Haftarahs over the course of a year in it. And what he did was he painted, illuminated the first word or phrase of each Haftarah portion. That's why we're here this morning.

Well, actually, we're going to try to create a case that we'll keep out here in the back of the sanctuary and each week it will be open to that Haftarah portion so that as people come in for the morning service, they can look over there and see what Torah is for that day. And when we get to the point in the service where we have to read from it, somebody will go and get it from the case and bring it and the person will read it, chant it from the scroll, and then we'll put it back there.

[Comments by Rabbi Tecktiel concluded]

First of all, I want to thank all of you for joining us today so we can do some reminiscing and fill in some history of the Jews of Southern Nevada from this perspective. We'll start with each of you stating your name and spelling, and then we'll go back through and I'll give you some prompts of the stories to tell, okay?

Ivan Eisenberg; I-V-A-N, E-I-S-E-N-B-E-R-G.

Bernice Eisenberg; B-E-R-N-I-C-E, E-I-S-E-N-B-E-R-G.

Greg Goussak; G-R-E-G, G-O-U-S-S-A-K.

Ira J. Goldberg; I-R-A, middle initial J period, G-O-L-D-B-E-R-G.

Gerald Welt; G-E-R-A-L-D. Welt, W-E-L-T.

Dorothy Eisenberg, no relation to Ivan and Bernice Eisenberg. The name is D-O-R-O-T-H-Y,
E-I-S-E-N-B-E-R-G.

Barbara Tabach; B-A-R-B-A-R-A. Tabach, T-A-B-A-C-H.

Mr. Eisenberg, let's start with you. Tell me your story about how you got to Las Vegas.

How old were you?

IVAN: We came to Las Vegas from a small town in Ohio in 1947, and the reason we came here is my mother had many relatives. When we came, why, my father established Ideal Office Equipment and I joined the group in 1954 and I've been in the business ever since.

How old were you in 1947?

I was seventeen.

What did Las Vegas look like at that time?

Well, to give you an example, at that time you know where UMC is right now; Charleston Boulevard didn't go any further than that. The population was twenty thousand. The main stores were Sears and Penney's. I graduated from Vegas High in 1948 when it was the only high school here. When we came in '47, there was probably between fifty and seventy Jewish people in Las Vegas; the entire population was twenty thousand.

Anyway, I graduated from Vegas High in 1948 because it was the only high school.

Then I went to UNR, graduated up there. At UNR there were perhaps seven or eight Jewish kids out of a population of sixteen hundred.

Did you ever feel uncomfortable being Jewish with a small population like that?

No, because in the small town we lived in in Ohio, I was the only Jew in my school.

Okay. That was uncomfortable, right? Okay.

Particularly.

And Bernice, tell us your story.

BERNICE: Well, I came in 1955. I was teaching a school. I met Ivan because there was a Jewish center social club for the young adults and I decided to go to some kind of a Jewish group. And the rest is our history.

What were your teaching?

I taught at Washington School, which is no longer in existence. I taught second grade, third grade, whatever, up through the eighth. But I taught in many schools in different cities. I went to different cities and taught. So when I came to Las Vegas, it was 1955 and that school closed right after I was there. I guess I wasn't a good enough teacher. [Laughing] And then I met Ivan. I went to the Jewish Young Adults one night.

Where was the Jewish Young Adults meeting?

They were meeting at 12th and Carson. The temple at that time was housed in a church that—

IVAN: No. They built that for the Jewish temple.

BERNICE: Well, I thought at the time that that had been a church and they were using it.

IVAN: No, no.

BERNICE: Well, then I'm mistaken. But it was at 12th and Carson. I went over one night when they were having a meeting and there were like, I think, three young men who were Jewish and they were all talking. But I looked across the room and I saw Ivan. I thought, *I'm going to go over to that group.*

So it was almost love at first sight you're saying?

BERNICE: Well, I think it—I don't know if you'd call it love at first sight. But he was—I think

he was smitten. Are you still smitten, dear?

IVAN: Probably more so.

BERNICE: More so. That's sweet, isn't it?

That is.

But that's the story of how I...

And all these years you remained here; you didn't move somewhere else?

No. I stayed here because I met Ivan and we married in '56. We raised our children here.

I was just going to ask about raising kids here. What was that like?

It was fine. We had a temple. So the children, three, four years old started going to the Sunday school. And, Dorothy, your children were here early on. Yeah. And I think it was fine. I think it was more—the important thing was the people around you, your Jewish community, your family. So we raised two great kids.

And the temple at that time was Temple Beth Sholom?

Beth Sholom, yeah. And then when they actually built Beth Sholom, we lived one block from the old Beth Sholom. We built our house in 1970 so that our kids could walk to Sunday school.

That's wonderful. And Greg, I understand you were born here?

GREG: Yes, I'm a native.

So you can relate to this part of the story. So tell us about yourself.

Well, my parents moved here from Los Angeles in 1960 after they got married in '59. I was born in January of '61. I've got a younger brother that was born in '62 and was raised here, also. The only Jewish community there was was Temple Beth Sholom. I mean that was everything from religious school to the social aspect except when the temple had their bowling leagues at West Hills Lanes and the kids would get dumped off into the playroom up there and then the parents

would go bowl. This was all on Sunday nights and we'd be home by nine-thirty, ten o'clock after that.

I grew up mostly in an area called Greater Las Vegas, which is a couple of blocks behind Cashman Field; we were there from the time I was born until 1969, which is right off Bruce and Harris, which is just west of what's called Eastern now. Then we moved into this really new area called Homewood Park off Desert Inn and Boulder Highway where we were the last house on the block and they paved the street two days before we moved in and there was nothing from our dining room all the way to old Henderson. It was all completely flat. We could see all the way to Henderson at that point.

Amazing. That's an amazing picture in my mind.

So I did most of my education here, all public school, graduated Chaparral High School in 1979. Did my bachelor's and master's degree at UNLV and five years ago got my doctorate through the University of Phoenix. But all my education's public through UNLV through a master's degree there.

And what kind of work are you in?

I'm currently a full-time professor with Ashford University. We're the second largest online school in the country. I'm also chair of the Institutional Review Board. So I oversee research on campus, which our campus is global. We have a small campus in Clinton, Iowa, but our campus is global. My area is primarily overseeing human subject research.

Interesting. All right. Ira.

IRA: My wife and I came here in 1978. My wife is no longer with us. She is very, very well known in the Jewish community, which we'll address later. We came here because her sister had moved out here in '70-71. Her husband was an IRS agent and transferred from New York, from

the Bronx, as well as I kind of grew up in the Bronx in New York City. And we felt when we started coming out to Las Vegas that Las Vegas was probably the best place to be, almost like New York, because there was kind of a nightlife and because you could get food twenty-four-seven where New York obviously had the same thing.

I got a teaching contract with Clark County School District back then and I had been teaching in New York City for about six and a half, seven years in middle school. It was a...in the ghetto, in the hood if you want to call it. It was a remarkable experience. Then I moved out here and got a teaching contract. I had a bachelor's in psychology and education. I had a master's degree out of New York City in counseling. And I wanted to be a counselor, was why I moved out here.

The culture shock was amazing because coming from New York City working in the New York City public school system, 80 to 90 percent of the teachers were Jewish back then. Coming out here I was overwhelmed by the questions about Judaism from my colleagues who I was teaching with because some of them never saw a Jew and never understood what Judaism was especially in 1978.

So I worked in the school district for a few years; left because I really, really wanted to work as a counselor. Got my marriage and family license. I worked for a drug and alcohol adolescent youth outpatient program for about four years where I got my alcohol and drug license. I became an addictions specialist and I also became a licensed marriage and family therapist and I have a small private practice, which I've been doing for about thirty years.

I eventually went to work for Bishop Gorman High School, of all things, a Jewish kid like me being hired by a priest. They really liked me. So I would work there six and a half years where I then transitioned back to Clark County School District and I worked as a counselor for

the past, God knows, twenty...I've been a counselor in Vegas for over thirty years. So I'd say about twenty...This is actually my twenty-seventh year in Clark County I'm finishing. I've worked as a counselor, as a therapist and a drug specialist for the last thirty-plus years.

Wow. Great.

GERALD: My turn?

Mr. Welt. Yes.

GERALD: My grandparents beat the Eisenbergs by a year moving to Vegas; they came in '46. My grandfather was running away with my grandmother and got a divorce and decided they liked the place. So they stayed. It was small, as he said. They set up with the first pawn shop in town, which sort of has transitioned in the Jewish community through the years. So Las Vegas to me was a place to visit my grandparents. It was the place we always went, where my parents dropped us off on their way to somewhere else.

And then finally when I graduated from law school, we were looking for work. And my aunt, who had been here for a number of years, indicated that they knew the lieutenant governor and they thought he was looking for help. So they could arrange an interview, but the rest was on me. So I interviewed with Lieutenant Governor Harry Reid and it was a very quick interview. He hired me and I worked for him for a few years then I worked for Oscar Goodman for a year and then went out on my own and have been in private practice since 1975.

Great. Thank you.

And now my kids just know it as a regular old community.

And you work as an attorney?

Yeah. We do...It's sort of a boutique practice. We do Social Security disability, worker's comp, and I've represented the Las Vegas Clark County Library District since 1977, which basically

means it grew from one branch to twenty-seven in the course of that time. So that gives you the growth of the community.

Amazing. Dorothy.

DOROTHY: Yes. I'm originally from Philadelphia. Came out to Las Vegas because I had been widowed and met my husband now, Paul Eisenberg. We decided that we should start anew as a family. He knew someone in Las Vegas who was a CPA. Paul had graduated from Wharton School in Philadelphia. So he came out and got a job here. And we came out, after the kids finished school, to shock. It was July. It was a hundred and ten every day. We didn't know where to go or what to do and the kids were very disgruntled, to say the least.

What saved us was Beth Sholom because everybody belonged to Beth Sholom and being there meant you were part of the Jewish community. My children could interact with other children and live a Jewish life, which was really important to me. And one of the things I did was...A lot of their friends used to work at the hotels in the summertime, bussing tables or being lifeguards or things like that. They begged me to let them do that and I said, "No, we're not going to do that; it's too easy for you to get into that kind of a mode here." And I sent them all to Camp Ramah every summer.

So you started out at Temple Beth Sholom, which was normal back then because that was the only choice. So we're going to turn our conversation to Midbar Kodesh. And Jerry, I think you probably could start with telling us a little bit about the history of Midbar Kodesh.

GERALD: Sure. Actually, the intent was not to start a synagogue. The intent by the original families was to set up a Hebrew school on this side of town. Beth Sholom at the time was at 15th and Oakey but was considering out to their Summerlin location. So the intent of the

families were, *we want to participate, but it's a long schlep three days a week to bring our kids out there; let's just set up a school in Henderson and then we can remain affiliated.* It didn't work. And then it developed that, *well, if we can have our own school in Henderson and it's easier, maybe we should start having services.* So we started having services once a month at Thurman White Middle School and then it just progressed and grew. It started with the famous six families, rapidly became about seventy people, and then has grown from there.

But the original spent was really to remain affiliated. But because the community was building and really separating into an east-and-west or a north-and-south, depending on how you view it, it needed another synagogue. Just like Ner Tamid when they split off from Beth Sholom, it was time for another facility. It was time when we opened ours. It's proven very successful and we're pleased we did it.

And what year was that?

Nineteen ninety-four, ninety-five. We had our first meetings in '94 and then in '95 really started having services, having the Hebrew school and doing the other programming. We went from one day a month I think every other Friday and then we went to full Shabbat services and then moved into a larger facility on Eastern and then eventually built this and moved in here, in stages.

Was anybody else a member in that very beginning?

IRA: Yeah. I want to interject a couple of things.

Sure.

And part of that is that besides the Hebrew school, Temple Beth Sholom, where—my wife is Isabel Goldberg. My wife passed away two years ago. She was the executive director of Temple Beth Sholom for thirteen years. There was another game in town that opened, though,

later called Congregation Ner Tamid, which is a Reform synagogue. But being a Conservative Jew, you really want to belong. I had gone to Ner Tamid because my sister-in-law belonged to it. I didn't like it after a year and I started hanging out at Temple Beth Sholom. Again, a long story short, my wife became the executive director of Temple Beth Sholom from '84 until she left, at the time we came out here also to Midbar.

Apparently, again, we were supposed to move to Green Valley. The Greenspuns offered us land and we were planning on moving out here, but Temple Beth Sholom in its infinite wisdom reneged and decided to go to Summerlin. And besides the concept of the school, we wanted a synagogue out here. And so a lot of the families left.

My wife was not one of the founding families, as I wasn't either. But I called her "The Constabulary" because of her history with Temple Beth Sholom back in the day for thirteen or fourteen years and she had resigned from there. Her brain was gradually picked apart about what to do and how to handle everything and then ultimately they invited her to join the board.

Wow. And was she glad that she did that?

IRA: Yes.

GERALD: We were glad that she did that.

IRA: That's right. But there's a dichotomy in that also, as well, because sadly when she became president of Carlos Banchik, a year and a half later she took ill. So I always jokingly say, "See, now she became president and she became sick." But seriously, though, she loved it. She was on the board for many years. And she was, as you heard this morning, a driving force in many levels in this building.

Very passionate person.

IRA: Yeah, she was. And I kind of took the youth side of things and did a lot of the things with

the youth department, having my background in education with teenagers.

DOROTHY: And she is really missed.

IRA: Rumor has it.

DOROTHY: Yes.

GREG: My father was a CPA in town and he was the outside auditor for Temple Beth Sholom going back to the 1960s until his death in 1994. At that time I really didn't have an affiliation. I had done the bar mitzvah thing. I was heavily involved in the B'nai B'rith Youth Organization. And when I graduated high school, I was pretty much done, perfectly done; I was just pretty much done.

My father passed away in August of '94 out of nowhere and I gravitated back towards Temple Beth Sholom a little bit and then met my wife because the families were already tied together. Actually, my wife, who is president of Midbar today, she's significantly younger than I am. And when her parents split up in the early 1970s and she would come back from Canada where she was moved, my mom would baby-sit her. So I have known my wife as this little kid because there's eight years' difference. No interest, of course. Then after my dad died, my mom and grandfather and I were over at the Ricebergs' for Break the Fast and Cindy was in for...She was getting her master's degree, an MBA at Pepperdine, and that's kind of where we reconnected. When we got serious and she started in 1995 coming back here more and more even though she was still going to school, she asked me to start attending the Saturday morning services on Eastern with her dad who liked to go, with this new conservative synagogue Midbar Kodesh. And I wanted, of course, to please her, so of course I went. I had absolutely no desire to do it, get into a suit for three hours on Saturday morning. We got married in 1996 and we decided to make Midbar Kodesh our synagogue, primarily because that was the time when

Temple Beth chose to go out to Summerlin. They originally were coming out here. So we did some of the first Life Cycle events with Midbar Kodesh either at Eastern or at Cactus...Cactus Ridge or Cactus Glen?

GERALD: Cactus Garden.

GREG: Cactus Garden before building the first part of this facility. We've been involved since we got married. We were actually married by the rabbi at Temple Beth Sholom because we didn't have a rabbi at Midbar Kodesh. (Earl Kodeckel) married us in '96 because there was no alternatives over here. And then we've just been a part of it. Then thanks to Isabel, my wife got involved and was roped onto the board. I was told it was going to be a two-year process and that would be it; we'd be done. Eight years later she's finishing up her second year [term] as president. And that's kind of our story getting involved with Midbar. Our kids were born here. Both girls were named here. Both girls were bat mitzvahed here. My oldest is about to go to college. That's kind of where it is. But, yeah, I was a Temple Beth Sholom boy, born and raised in it.

GERALD: Something he touched on that I think was probably unique to here, when you're talking about the bowling at Beth Sholom; that actually morphed into a B'nai B'rith bowling league and I'd venture to say that almost anyone that moved here from 1970 on participated in the bowling league of B'nai B'rith and that's where we all met each other.

GREG: My dad was a charter member of B'nai B'rith at Temple Beth Sholom. It wasn't the religious aspect of it all because there was so much politics and things going on with the clergy and there was some pretty serious stuff that happened in the late 1960s, early 1970s that—if we want to go into, we can go into.

We'll stay over on this end.

DOROTHY: All of us who have been here longer understand that. Yes.

GREG: But that developed the social aspect of Temple Beth Sholom. As a kid, we got to see part of it and we helped set up the old social hall and decorate and then we were sent home and the adults got to do whatever we did. Hebrew school; BBYO was huge; USY wasn't that big. At that time in the sixties and seventies at Temple Beth Sholom, AZA/BBG was the big thing.

DOROTHY: My kids went to USY. When we came here we pushed for USY and that's why they went to Camp Ramah; that was the reason why.

GERLAD: In the late seventies, USY was in—

DOROTHY: Well, this was in the late sixties.

IRA: And then when Isabel became director, for two years she asked me to run the USY program, which started with four kids; which ended with sixty kids when I had to leave. And then his wife, Marcy, took over, I believe.

GERALD: Yeah.

So the youth programs were very important.

ALL: Yes.

GREG: You have to consider Las Vegas in the 1960s and 1970s. First of all, there really wasn't that much to do. The most exciting thing for a kid to do was go to Circus Circus and play the arcade games.

DOROTHY: No, no, no. Go up and down Fremont.

GREG: Well, that was the other thing, if you had your driver's license. The rite of passage in this town was cruising Fremont Street, if you were a kid and you didn't cruise Fremont Street. And that's the one thing I wish my kids could do.

GERALD: (Indiscernible)

Can't cruise it now.

GREG: But cruising Fremont Street was "the" thing. And then going downtown and getting the two-dollar steak dinner or the—and I'm not supposed to say this—the twenty-five-cent shrimp cocktail. But that's what Jewish kids did because there really was nothing. The town was Mormon. Most of the kids we grew up with and went to school with were Mormon. The rich Jewish kids could afford to go to Gorman High School.

IRA: And I will attest to that because in 1984 ten to fifteen percent of the kids at Bishop Gorman High School were Jewish because I worked there for six and a half years.

GREG: Well, we weren't rich, so I went to public school all the way. But that was it; it was either at Temple Beth Sholom or at Circus Circus. And then when the original MGM opened in '73, they had their movie theater; they had their mall area with the Swensen's Ice Cream.

GERALD: And jai alai.

GREG: Yeah, and jai alai. But the Jewish youth group in the seventies, we all transformed over to the MGM. Basically our hangout was...We'd have our meetings at Temple Beth Sholom and then we'd end up at MGM mall and we'd either be at Swensen's Ice Cream or the candy store and the movies; that's where we congregated in the seventies.

Unique Las Vegas upbringing.

IVAN: We're talking about the seventies. You can imagine what in 1948 Las Vegas was like.

What was it like to be a teenager at that time for you?

IVAN: Well, I wasn't too concerned. I was only going to be here for a year and a half. So then I went on up to UNR. Again, there were hardly any Jewish kids. In fact, there weren't that many Jewish people in, say, Reno, but there was people who owned a jewelry store and they supported a temple up there long before we had a Jewish temple down here.

IRA: I want to interject one thing, what Greg had said about his wife. Isabel and I met Cindy when she first moved to town because we were close friends with Harvey and Janice. So I met her when she was probably fifteen, sixteen, years old. And the nice thing was that my wife handpicked Cindy amongst several other people to come on the board and ultimately become presidents of this synagogue because she recognized quality when she saw people who were dedicated, committed and were of that caliber that would be successful at what they do. And I jokingly, euphemistically called Isabel "Team Maker."

GERALD: Or queen.

IRA: Or queen maker, yeah. Actually.

Well, good leadership.

IRA: Very good leadership.

Yeah. So take me back to when Midbar Kodesh first formed and you actually moved to this location, this piece of land. Who can remember part of that?

GERALD: It started with a Torah walk, which I don't—if it had been done in this community, it had only been done maybe once or two. And fundamentally, we were on Cactus Garden at Valley Verde and Sunset and we walked the Torahs from there to this facility, down Valley Verde. The whole congregation participated. We started out with the senior members of the congregation passing the Torahs down sort of chronologically. And then whoever wanted to get to carry it for a certain portion. Then we walked it in again with the senior members of the congregation. So I mean it was monumental.

We had gotten the donation of land from the Greenspun family. So that was considerably helpful. We had some very nice members who enabled us. But we had pretty good participation. And we decided and I've said this often that the congregation was going to be a

congregation of shared values, not necessarily shared interests. The things that we wanted to accomplish, the support we wanted to give the community was going to be paramount, children first and the community's support along with that.

My example of that is when my granddaughter was finally diagnosed with Tay-Sachs and we knew she had a short time to live, this community...My daughter describes it as feeling like she was raised up and carried by the community. And without them, we wouldn't have been able to do it.

DOROTHY: And we have the garden.

GERALD: Right. Jessica's Garden out back.

DOROTHY: Jessica's Garden, yeah.

IRA: There's a Yiddish word that I think most of us here know called *hamish*. And one of the promises that we always make about Midbar was we were not going to be Temple Beth Sholom or Ner Tamid. No offense to them. I'm just saying as a general statement. That we were going to remain a *hamish* synagogue, a members' congregation where everybody had a voice, could say things, be involved, come on the board of directors and be involved.

And to piggyback on what Jerry said, when my wife got sick, if it wasn't for the people that were here and my friends that I developed over the past twenty-five, thirty years, I probably on a personal level would have not been able to get through what I've gotten through until she passed in March of 2013.

DOROTHY: I came to Midbar a little bit later, but early enough when Rabbi Wiederhorn was here. And I came here because, first of all, I wanted a conservative synagogue and this is the only one on this side of town. And secondly, at that point one of my grandsons in Israel had gone into the army and been in some of the action there and I was beside myself and I thought, I

really need to go someplace where I can be welcomed and I can tell people how I feel. Rabbi Wiederhorn was here at that point and really helped me so much to get through this. I think that's one of the reasons I still come to minyans in the morning, because I feel the need to pay back in that respect. But since then I've been through seven other kids who have been in the army in Israel. So I still need to be uplifted at times.

It doesn't end, right?

DOROTHY: Yes.

The cycles of life that you mentioned earlier, Greg, it just keeps on going on. Well, I want to ask if anybody has one more little story they'd like to share before we tie this up?

IVAN: One thing I might mention...Dorothy Eisenberg has a school named after her. It's probably the only Jewish person who has a school named after her here in Las Vegas.

GREG: No. (SCHOOL NAME/indiscernible)

IVAN: Pardon?

GREG: (SCHOOL NAME)

DOROTHY: There were a couple of other Jewish schools.

IRA: Wolff, Elise Wolff.

BERNICE: But we've all been really proud of Dorothy Eisenberg, what she did in the community.

DOROTHY: It's been an amazing journey for me, my life in Las Vegas.

IRA: Dorothy (indiscernible) involved a few years ago and...Jewish Family Service Agency, you're involved with them, too, aren't you? Jewish Family Service Agency, you're involved with them as well?

DOROTHY: Yes. Oh, yes.

IRA: Yeah. So she's been a pillar.

DOROTHY: I was the first woman president of Jewish Federation.

IRA: There you go. So I would like to add, though, that Isabel and I, when our twenty-fifth wedding anniversary occurred, we renewed our vows at Midbar Kodesh. We had a nice celebration. The rabbi that did it was Rabbi (NAME) Isaac was rabbi at the time and we decided to do it over there and renew our vows. We had a Ketuvah and the whole nine yards. Everybody was invited. It was a wonderful experience.

GREG: Jerry mentioned probably the most important thing about Midbar is the youth and education. It goes way back. It goes back to Temple Beth Sholom. My mom was the director of the Albert Einstein Hebrew Day School, which has now become the Milton I. Schwartz Hebrew Academy which is now the Adelson School. I served in 2002 as president of the Hebrew Academy. So I mean that type of transition with education is...That's really what builds this synagogue. It's not the religious aspect; it's what we can do for the kids because without that then it just wouldn't continue.

Beautiful. Any other words?

DOROTHY: Well, Bernice, I feel still a connection because your daughter and my daughter were in school together. Not that they see each other that much, but it's just a wonderful feeling to know that these friendships go on.

BERNICE: I remember so much Amy coming into our home. She was such an adorable little girl, very vocal.

DOROTHY: Yes.

GERALD: I wonder why?

BERNICE: But I have to tell you, Dorothy, she was a big as a minute.

DOROTHY: Yes, that's very true.

BERNICE: She'd come in and I'd offer them lunch and she'd say, "No." And next time she would come in, I'd say, "Hello." And she'd say, "I don't eat."

DOROTHY: Which was very true.

BERNICE: It was cute.

DOROTHY: Yes.

GERALD: Well, the one visual clue to Midbar is you'll notice that our services, none of the officers sit on the bema. We started that I think unconsciously at the beginning that there is no reason for the president to be sitting on the bema during services because they were no different than the rest of the congregation; they just had other responsibilities than the rest of the congregation. But if anybody wants to sit on the bema, they're welcome to do so. But by tradition, the president does not because they're just one member of the congregation that, as I said, has different responsibilities than the other members of the congregation because, frankly, most of us participate.

Excellent. Good words.

DOROTHY: And I want to thank UNLV and all the work that you have been doing, Barbara, because this is something that we can look forward to, our families seeing in the future what this Jewish community was like.

Yeah. I think this is going to be an interesting project once it's all done. Even just the first phase with the website, when you see how parts of this paints this picture of Las Vegas history through the prism of Jewish culture and heritage, it's going to be quite amazing. And I appreciate all your times and stories today. And I will be making appointments with those of you what I haven't interviewed yet on a one-on-one basis so you can tell me

everything, everything.

IVAN: And one thing I might mention...Jack Entratter and, of course, the Strip is very much involved in the Temple Beth Sholom.

DOROTHY: Yeah, he was one of the (saints).

IVAN: Right. And Jack was at one time the head of the board at Temple Beth Sholom. And the interesting thing was they didn't need a board because if anything came up at the meeting and Jack said—I was on the board—Jack said, "Well, this is what we're going to do," the vote was fifteen to zero because Jack said that's what we're going to do. [All laughing]

GERALD: That was Las Vegas.

Yes. And I heard the suitcase of money could pop up, too, sometimes. I'm not saying Mr. Entratter did that, but somebody did. I've heard those stories, anyway. I don't know.

Okay. Thank you so much for letting me have some of your Sunday afternoon.

[End of recorded round table discussion]

PART 2

Thank you all for joining us this afternoon and sticking around to tell us some Midbar Kodesh stories. We'll start out by asking each of you to state your name, spell it, and then I'll come back around and ask for a brief bio.

DAVID: You want me to start?

Yes.

David Gavrin, G-A-V, as in Victor, R-I-N. What else?

That's all you need to do right now. You did good, thank you.

HARVEY: He always wants to steal the show. I'm Harvey Riceberg, R-I-C-E-B-E-R-G.

JANIS: And I'm Janis Riceberg, same spelling, R-I-C-E-B-E-R-G.

And your first name is spelled how?

J-A-N-I-S.

Barbara Kirsh, and the last name is K-I-R-S-H.

Barbara Kaufman, K-A-U-F-M-A-N.

Bernard Kaufman, K-A-U-F-M-A-N.

All right. I'm Barbara Tabach.

Now, Dave, we'll start with you. I understand you are a newer resident to Las Vegas.

That's correct.

What brought you here?

Retirement. We had been visiting Vegas since 1974 off and on. I always thought it might be a great place to live, never thought about it until I came close to retirement. I came here in 2003. I intentionally purchased my home in this area because of Midbar Kodesh. We were members of Temple Beth Sholom in Roslyn, New York. From the day we moved into the house, we were

members. We joined the synagogue, conservative synagogue. I did a little bit of homework and it was before Google was really up and running. I did a little research and I found out there were two conservative synagogues, Midbar Kodesh and Beth Sholom, here. I actually made a trip out here to visit both synagogues. After visiting both synagogues we selected Midbar Kodesh and then we selected our home.

Interestingly enough, Rabbi Wiederhorn, Jeremy Wiederhorn had interned as a rabbi at the Shelter Rock Center in New York. So we had crossed paths long before I came out.

It's important to note that before I was allowed to move here with my wife—because my wife said, "We're going to Las Vegas over my dead body because we'd come out and gamble a little bit—she said, "You have to promise me two things. If we live in Las Vegas, one, you won't be at the tables all the time, and, two, I get a convertible." So I said, "Okay." That was an easy request.

The best move we ever made. Midbar turned out to be not just a synagogue, but a family. I knew that from the beginning just from what I saw. I've gone through in the last twelve years a growing situation here at Midbar and I'm proud to be part of the last ten years of growth. Really it's been wonderful.

That's great. Thanks for sharing that. That's wonderful.

Mr. Riceberg, how long have you been in Las Vegas?

I came here in 1968. I came here as not having an alternative. I got my pharmacy degree in Arizona. I was born in Canada and Arizona wouldn't give me a license because I wasn't a citizen. So I got my license here and in California. At that time Nevada reciprocated across the country. So I figured I'd spend a year here and then decide what I wanted to do and I never left. So that's how I got here.

Did you bring your whole family with you?

At the time I had my wife, which wasn't Jan at the time. She's number two and definitely the best. But I came here in July and my daughter Cindy, Cindy Gusack, was born in November. The first thing, of course, we did is I wanted to associate. Of course, the only real game in town for me was Beth Sholom. I grew up Orthodox though I wasn't really very religious, but that's all I really knew. One of the things that I was happy with Las Vegas about is where I came from you had the Jews living here, you had the Ukrainians, the Hungarians, the protestants, Roman— everybody lived in a different section. Everything was segregated. I couldn't stand that. I wanted to be some kind of inclusion. I was proud I was Jewish, but I wanted to be able to live among everybody. That was one of the things that I got attracted to here. But I had a child coming and I had to join a synagogue. Beth Sholom being the only game that worked out very nicely.

Great. Good.

Janis.

I've been in Las Vegas since 1974. My parents moved here in '72 and I was still going to college. I was going to Long Beach State University. Tarkanian and I were there at the same time even though I never went to any basketball games. I moved here after college not knowing what I was going to do. My mother said, "So why don't you go to the singles club at the temple? You never know who you're going to meet. And if you don't like who you meet, you might have a friend." So I went to the synagogue and, yes, I did go to a few meetings and Harvey was there at the singles club. So to make a long story short, we got married in 1975. So we're going to have our fortieth anniversary coming up this summer. Yes, we jumped into Temple Beth Sholom and then when the temples made the split and half went to Summerlin, it gave us a new

beginning to start Midbar Kodesh, be in on the ground floor and to help it flourish. We've never looked back. We love our synagogue and this is our home and we raised our family and our Marcy and Danny. They're natives, obviously. We're very pleased.

Were you employed outside of the home?

Yes. I worked as a special ed teacher for the Clark County School District for twenty years, went into administration and then subsequently became a principal for a school for autism. But I've been teaching at CSN, the College of Southern Nevada, since 2003.

Great.

Barbara.

MS. KIRSH: I am a native. I was born in 1957 and grew up at Temple Beth Shalom, went to the preschool there and the Hebrew School. We lived a block from the temple. So I was probably there three, four times a week. I was in USY, United Synagogue Youth. I taught Sunday school as a teenager and went away to college, first in Colorado and then in Boston. I came back here thinking, *well, I'll just stay here until I find a job*. I wasn't sure I wanted to be in Las Vegas. Went into the family business and stayed.

And what is the family business?

We have an office supply and office furniture business.

Excellent. You must have seen changes as a youth to...

Absolutely.

I assume you have children.

I have a daughter and she went to the Hebrew Academy through eighth grade because at that time it only went through eighth grade. Now she's living in Washington, D.C. and stayed there. She's teaching there. But she grew up. It was great because she was at the Hebrew Academy.

So a lot of her friends were Jewish. Then for high school she went to the Las Vegas Academy, the Performing Arts High School. There she had very few Jewish friends. So it was interesting because she really enjoyed the diversity of the Las Vegas Academy. But she had a really strong background to continue her Judaism.

And our other Barbara.

MRS. KAUFMAN: Yes. We moved here in 1968, also, the same as Harvey. You're talking Jewish geography before. Harvey lived around the corner from us. When we lived on Castlewood and you lived on Cinderella. I knew Harvey a long time ago because my brother was partners with his accountant. So I had met Harvey that way. But us, too, we belonged to Temple Beth Sholom because it was the only one in town. Our children went to the preschool there, went to Hebrew School there. When this temple formed we just felt comfortable here. My daughter moved here about a year and a half ago with her twin girls and now we are delighted because they're preparing for their bat mitzvahs. So we're really into it. Dave's right. This temple is like a family. Everybody says hello. Everybody knows each other. It's really warm, a really nice place.

And, yes, it was a small town when we moved here. There was like two hundred and fifty thousand people. I remember that my kids were very little at that time, but I didn't want to stay in the apartment. So I put them in the car and we drove around town just to see where everything was. They would say, "We're going to get lost." And I would say, "No, look up in the sky. You'll see the hotels. And we'll be right back."

It was a landmark that you can base everything on.

And Bernie, tell us about yourself.

Well, the same time, I came in 1968. I came out here to help my brother open up four discount

stores in town and they were called Wonder World stores. They were at the time the largest discount or stores—they were a hundred thousand square foot stores—that ever hit the Vegas area. It was a growing time in 1968-69. Came out and Maryland Parkway was just getting started and going. Now everything has moved out south and west and north. So the town has really grown.

Like Barbara said, our kids were raised here and my granddaughters, they were born in Chicago and when they were six months old they came here to our temple to be named. They had their baby naming. Now next March they're going to go for their bat mitzvahs.

Explain to me about the baby naming for people who might not understand that as part of the Jewish culture. What is that ceremony about?

Normally you name a baby after somebody who has passed away. So both of ours are named after Barbara's parents and my parents. The first and middle names are Hebrew names. With a boy usually they have a bris and they name the baby within eight days. With a girl you can wait a little bit. We waited six months before they came here to get their Hebrew names.

And girls are twins, obviously.

The girls are twins.

So they're going to have a bat mitzvah here.

Yes.

That must be very exciting.

It is. It is. I mean that they're going to have it here, that they moved here. We're very excited that we have our kids here and we don't have to five times a year go back to Chicago and freeze or get mosquito bites. We don't have mosquitoes. We don't allow them in Las Vegas. So it is exciting that they'll be here with all of our family and friends.

This is interesting because of the multi-generation that exists in this group. Vegas is considered a very transient city. People come and go. Dave, you came and you shopped for a synagogue. Did you know any of the history of the spiritual world of the Jews in Las Vegas?

Not in Las Vegas. No, absolutely not. I knew that there was a synagogue here. I knew there were two that would fit my bill. All I had to do was select one. So the selection process was fairly easy. The question of...What we had was coming out of New York, which is...You talk about Jewish geography. That's heavily Jewish populated. I would say where I came from was 70 percent Jewish. It was a suburb in Long Island. But I wanted something a little different. I got tired of shoveling snow, basically. But I knew I had to have a synagogue that fit a fit for myself and my wife because my wife is a Yeshiva graduate. Conservative Judaism can fit a bill religiously from right to left. It's kind of in the middle, but if you're a little bit more right, it fits the bill. If you're a little bit more left...In other words, more Orthodox or more Reform. Conservatism fits the bill. We just knew that it would be a fit for us.

The biggest problem was we keep a kosher home. My wife was very concerned about, *where are we going to get kosher food?* It turns out it's not too hard. It really is not so hard. No, it wasn't so hard then. You just had to be willing to get in your car and drive for twenty minutes.

MRS. KAUFMAN: In the late sixties, early seventies, you had to get it either from Los Angeles or Phoenix.

DAVE: Okay. Well, we came in 2003, I think it was. Our problem was we had to drive to Smith's in Summerlin. We were willing to make that—and I put this in [making quotations with fingers]—sacrifice to go over there. Then my wife found a mail order kosher meat delivery place out of Denver and that was nice. Then we realized, well, Los Angeles isn't that far away.

And we had friends of ours that were also keeping a kosher home and they would be driving to L.A. As a matter of fact, Jeremy Wiederhorn's parents, we're very close with them. So Francine and Larry would be driving to L.A. and Francine would call Rosa up—that's my wife—and say, "I'm at the butcher. What would you like? We'll bring you back." So where there's a will there's a way and it's not so hard. It really is not so hard.

HARVEY: I remember we used to get ours...We'd get a delivery once a week from Phoenix. The truck would come in early morning and there'd be a group of us standing waiting to get our parcels and to pay our bills for that month we dropped off and that's how we got ours.

Where was the drop-off at?

At Beth Sholom on Oakey and Sixteenth.

JANIS: In the parking lot.

HARVEY: Yes, yes. It's come a long way. Now it's pretty easy. Come holidays like Passover and what have you, like he mentioned, we'd drive into L.A. and load up in the freezers and everything and bring it all back. It wasn't easy back then. It was not easy to have a kosher home back then.

So what can you tell me about the beginning days of Midbar Kodesh? Were you one of the early members?

HARVEY: We came out I guess about a year after the beginning.

JANIS: We were here at the beginning, but we weren't one of the founders. We started becoming involved with Midbar Kodesh. But the founders were the Welts and the Simons and the Fieldmans and the Goldsteins. They were extremely instrumental—and Goldman, yes, Goldman, Betty Goldman—were extremely instrumental in getting Midbar Kodesh up and running because since the split...But we thrived. We were on Cactus Garden, I think, first and

Eastern. We also met at...Was it Whitney Middle School? White Middle School in their multipurpose room to begin with, which I think they probably talked about that as well. Yes. It's the people that made it come together and made it what it is today.

HARVEY: I was on the board at Beth Sholom about the time that the split was coming and *what side do we go to?* A lot of the money wanted to go west, if you will. The ones that had the money wanted to go west. The nice thing about the Midbar and the people that were doing it, Jews were *hamish*. Everybody was friendly. It was like being in a family. That was the real attraction and that's what started getting people to come. We lived on the east side. So we wouldn't have even thought of going over the other direction. But everybody that came, everybody helped each other. Back at the beginning who had families? Nobody had families. Your friends were your families because you left them from wherever you came from. I remember literally at Beth Sholom before we left there they started forming these friendship groups, *chavurah*. I think Jan and I belonged to the longest functioning early family *chavurah* in Las Vegas and we carried it on from Beth Sholom. We brought it to Midbar. We're just kind of falling apart now. Our children are now having children and everyone is splitting apart. But it was wonderful being able to share all the family happiness and sorrow together. You could do it as a synagogue, but having this group of eight or nine couples that literally formed a family. I think we all had to do this because there was nobody here. So that was really something.

Chavurahs, anybody else want to talk about that? That seems to be something to me, my observation that it was important in Las Vegas. Maybe it's part of that transient feeling.

MRS. KAUFMAN: Like Harvey said, it was going for a while there. We belonged to two of them at one time. But it seems to have fallen by the wayside now because people are busy with their children and their grandchildren. So it's hard to set a time to get together. But it was nice.

MS. KIRSH: When I moved back to Las Vegas from college, I got very involved in Federation and I was in the Young Leadership group. That's how I met Harvey and Janis is through Young Leadership. I started a singles group. The interesting thing about Las Vegas is it was a place where young people would come for a year and work and then they would go back to where they were from. So most of my friends for probably the first five years I was back in Las Vegas would come and go. It was difficult at that time. And then I got married and moved to Summerlin. I'm not married anymore. But because we were in Summerlin, it was easier for my daughter to go to the Hebrew Academy. About five years ago—and I was a member of Beth Sholom for years—about five years ago I thought, *I have so many more friends at Midbar and it's so much more inclusive.* You can come here for the High Holidays and sit anywhere in the sanctuary. There's no assigned seats. You can just sit anywhere you want. It's warm and welcoming. The past couple of years have been difficult for me and the congregation has been so incredible. It's an atmosphere that you don't get anywhere else in town.

That's special.

Very special.

JANIS: Because you're special.

BERNARD: People that came here...We're a melting pot here in Las Vegas. They're from all over. We were born in St. Louis. You grow up together and everybody is the same in the area where you live. Then you come here to Las Vegas and you have people from Boston and Chicago and New York and Alabama. It takes a little while to get to know these people. That's when Midbar Kodesh was able to take all these people and then you became family. So it was done a lot faster in our temple than normal. It's a congregation that is really warm.

HARVEY: Back when I first came, maybe the first year or two after, B'nai B'rith was a large

part of the community. I joined the B'nai B'rith men. I heard they were talking about bowling. The bowling leagues were really an important social event. At the time I came I think Rabbi Gold was the rabbi here. He was on the bowling team with me. All the sudden you have a whole new group of friends that you see every week and you get together for coffee afterwards. You form card games that you'll go to once a week. But a lot of it gelled from there. Of course, we met in the synagogue, but B'nai B'rith wasn't really a part, but it was a part.

BERNARD: Right, it was.

DAVID: When I moved here twelve years ago, I think one of my wife's biggest worries were she's not going to know anybody. And I said, "Don't worry, you'll meet people." As a matter of fact, we moved here right before Rosh Hashanah 2003. One of the first things I did was come to temple and become a member. They kind of looked at me, *why are you doing that? You're just here. How do you know about us?* I said, "It's not how I know about you; it's I have to be a member." I was taken in as if I was here since the sixties. It was like I was here all those years. Then we met a couple of people. I remember the first *chavurah* that we went to was a group that went out to kosher restaurants. There were maybe three or four in the area twelve years ago. Tuesday evenings after minyan or on different evenings if we couldn't all make it, we'd make it our business to get together for dinner at a kosher restaurant. So we were able to all enjoy. I mean it's just a family. To this day we try to continue to capture that family spirit. I know I was so impressed with everything, I think it was about eight years or seven years ago I actually joined on the board of directors of the temple. I've seen this temple grow from adolescence, I call it when I joined, to adulthood or young adulthood now. This sanctuary we're sitting in did not exist at the time. I feel I was part of a certain aspect of the maturing of this organization, which owes its success to being feeling, to caring, to not allowing anybody who wants to try to

participate or participate or become part of, no one is asked to leave. We welcome them in. It doesn't matter what their issues might be; we try to help. That's what the essence of Midbar is.

Yes. That's really wonderful to hear those warm stories like that continuing from one generation to the next. So I'm going to ask if you have any last anecdote or story about Midbar or being Jewish in Las Vegas that you'd like to share with us before we wrap this up?

MRS. KAUFMAN: Well, when my kids went to school here in elementary school, they were probably the only Jewish kids in the school. Well, I shouldn't say the only. Two of very few. Every holiday I would bring up food or if it was Hanukkah, I'd bring up the Hanukkah candles and make the *filatas* and bring it to them so that they would remember they were Jewish. They went to Hebrew School and Sunday school and all that.

I fondly remember at Midbar when we walked the Torahs from Cactus Garden to here. It was really a special event. It really was. Very inspiring.

How many participated in that walk?

I can't even imagine.

HARVEY: It was about a hundred and fifty people.

Was it a hot day?

MRS. KAUFMAN: It was.

HARVEY: Yes.

JANIS: We took turns carrying the Torahs. I think it was a mile and a half, two miles. The Torahs were being carried by members of the congregation and then if the person would get tired then they would give it to somebody else. So everybody who wanted to carry the Torahs had an opportunity to carry the Torahs from Cactus Garden to the new home at Midbar.

It's funny. I wasn't there, but that's one of the images from getting to know people and the history of Midbar Kodesh several years ago. I think that's so impressive just that idea of walking and that effort. I don't know if the other synagogues ever did that when they moved into their other facilities.

BERNARD: I've never heard of it.

MS. KIRSH: Beth Sholom was way too far.

JANIS: Oakey to Summerlin, I don't think they would have done that.

That would be way too far, yes.

HARVEY: The ceremony that we went to with our schools that's another cycle type thing that will be remembered. It's a bonding effect.

I came from an area in Canada that anti-Semitism was rampant, up in Winnipeg, Manitoba. When I came here I was hoping for something else, but there was still an undertone back then. Being associated first with Beth Sholom and here was truly a help. When I came there was only one Jewish dentist in town and nobody else could get in. Slowly but surely it started changing, but it took a lot of pressure to make something like that happen. There was only a handful of pharmacists. When I came here I was going from place to place trying to get a job. I couldn't get a job. I finally went to I guess a competitor of Wonder World; it was Vegas Village. They had three stores in town. The manager of the three stores—I came in and he's hemming and hawing. I said, "Look, you sit on your chair. I'll work for you for a week for nothing. If you like what you see, you can hire me." Well, he hired me within a day. But I can only count on one hand how many Jewish pharmacists there were at that time. So it was really important that I had a place to belong to a Jewish community. Midbar was so much better because of how friendly everybody was, a real feeling of belonging. Of course, that was several

years later.

That's wonderful. Well, I thank you all. That was great. That was a quick half-hour.

Thank you very much.

[End of round table discussion]