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(signed) [Signature]

(date) 8/17/76

Understood and agreed to

(interviewer) [Signature]

(date) 8/20/76
Interviewee: Irving Goronkin

Interviewer: Maurice Isserman

Date(s) of interview: August 18, 1976 and August 20, 1976

Setting (place of interview, people present, impressions): I spoke with Mr. Goronkin at his desk in the front of his meat market. He was friendly and very informative. He is also a very busy man, and the interview is punctuated by interruptions from customers and store workers.

Background of interviewee: Mr. Goronkin was born in Rochester in 1914. His father was a kosher butcher both in Russia and in Rochester. Mr. Goronkin himself was a meatcutter at Wegmans for a number of years, a mess sergeant in the army during World War II, and since 1947 proprietor of his own meat market. He is uniquely qualified as an observer of the rise and decline of kosher observance in the Rochester Jewish community.

Interview abstract: Mr. Goronkin discusses in great detail the kosher meat business in Rochester from the early 1900s to the present. He feels there has been a marked decline in kosher observance in Jewish homes since the mid-60s. Though the bulk of the interview is concerned with the history and mechanics of the meat business, Mr. Goronkin also offers opinions on Israel, intermarriage, anti-Semitism and other subjects.

Interview index (corresponding to tape numbers, sides of tape, and cassette recorder numbers):

Social history
Family
Demographic/residential
Economic
Political/civic
Zionism/Israel

Jewish community
community relations
Religious life
Jewish education
Anti-Semitism

Interview log:

- see following page(s)
Irving Goronkin, interviewed by Maurice Isserman, August 18, 1976,
Tape One

Born in Rochester 1914 of Russian immigrant parents.
Father was a kosher butcher in Russia, fled pogroms.
Eight children.
Parents' difficulties in learning English-bilingual home.
Strictly orthodox religious upbringing.
Shift from orthodoxy to conservative outlook among children.
Neighborhoods.
Anti-semitism in school.

Father's store was on Hudson Ave--started with 350 capital investment, prospered in 20s but lost almost everything in depression.
Early history of kosher meat business--grew from 4 to 22 stores in 1900-1945 period.
Decline of kosher observance--estimated only 20% of Jewish homes buy kosher food, 10% keep kosher home. Market decline in business began in 1969. Many kosher markets have closed since mid-60s.
Only 4 markets left in city.
What business was like in his father's store--long hours, delivery by horse and wagon, custom cutting of meat.
Kosher slaughterhouses in Rochester.
Sent to work at Wegman's during depression.
Drafted in 1943--served until 1947 as mess sergeant.
Neighborhoods.
Started own market with partner in 1947.
Difficulty in finding Jews to work as meatcutters.
Instruction to non-Jewish help in preparing kosher meat.

Tape 2, August 20, 1976

Father's role in Lubovitzer community.
Moved store from Joseph Avenue to present location in 1971--people were reluctant to come to store because of deterioration of neighborhood.
Part of general flight of Jewish businesses out of Joseph Avenue area since 1964 riots.
Present size and volume of business.
Need to increase kosher observance--feels it produces stable Jewish identity.
Second wife's children--daughter lives in Israel.
Attitudes to Israel.
Organizational activities.
Role of Jewish butcher in Jewish community.
Criticizes sale of kosher items in non-kosher stores.
Supplies meat to Jewish home for the aged.
Changes in Rochester Jewish community.
Feelings about intermarriage.
Q. The 19th? 19th, 1976. Now, Mr. Goronkin, where were you born?
A. I was born in Rochester, New York on August 28, 1914.
Q. And where were your parents born?
A. In Russia.
Q. And when did they come to this country?
A. In the late 1800's.
Q. What did they do for a living?
A. My father was a kosher butcher, and my mother was a housewife.
Q. Why did they decide to come to Rochester?
A. They came during a pogrom period in Russia. And during this pogrom period they had a few children at that point and they saw fit to leave Russia because they didn't want to go through the harrassment Jews were suffering at that point. And they went into New York to visit with relatives and my father, of course, needed money immediately to support his family, heard of an opening here in Rochester at a kosher market, and there were only two or three in existence at that point. And he came into Rochester and he worked at all these markets part-time until one day when he went home and said to my mother if I had $50 I could go in business. And my mother says, just a minute. And she had saved $50 out of his salary. And my father went in business at that point.
Q. Had he been experienced as a kosher butcher before coming to this country?
A. Yes, he was in the meat business in Russia.
Q. And you... you said that they had other children?
A. Yes, when they came there were five children.
Q. Then were you the first American-born child?
A. No, there were two others American-born.

Q. So, by the time you were born they had been in this country quite a long time?
A. Perhaps twelve or fourteen years at that point.

Q. And...
A. Excuse me. It's closer to 76 according to my calculations.

Q. So around 1900. So, when your parents came to this country I imagine they didn't speak English?
A. No.

Q. Was that a difficult process for them to learn English?
A. It was for my mother because she was confined to the home with the children, but for my father he picked it up very rapidly. And also learned, self-learned, to read and write.

Q. He was still a young man.
A. Comparatively speaking at that point.

Q. In your home then when you grew up both Yiddish and English were spoken?
A. Yes, we generally among the children we spoke English, with my mother we spoke Yiddish. And with my father we spoke English.

Q. Did that feel any conflict over language . . .?
A. No, no we loved it, we . . . we just loved to speak Yiddish at every opportunity we had we spoke Yiddish. We loved to speak Yiddish to my mother. I still love to speak Yiddish.

Q. Did you receive a Yiddish language publications?
A. Yes, we did. My . . . we had at that point more or less. . . (Transcriber's note: interrupted by telephone.)

Q. We don't have any in this anyway. Talking about language spoken at home. I'm sorry, I don't remember quite where we left off. Oh, Yiddish language periodicals.
A. Right. We... we spoke quite a bit of Yiddish at home because we were all on good terms with my mother. So, if we spoke any language at all to my mother it had to be Yiddish.

Q. And, what magazines or newspapers in Yiddish did you receive?

A. Well, well we used to get the Jewish newspapers. And we used to get periodically publications, my father always kept Yiddish books in the house and so on and so forth. And, of course, like I said my mother couldn't read and she couldn't read Yiddish nor could she read English. But my father could read both languages and every night he would sit down with the paper no matter how many hours he worked a day, and he would read the geshilitas and the Jewish newspapers that were continued from day to day to my mother.

Q. Your parents were, I imagine, very Orthodox people?

A. Yes.

Q. What synagogue did they...?

A. They belonged to the Agoodas Achem Nusa Haree Synagogue, they were members in that synagogue. And my father was one of the original founders of the synagogue.

Q. Where was that located?

A. It was located originally on Chadam Street.

Q. Do you remember who was the rabbi?

A. I don't remember the rabbi at that point because I was just a baby at that point. And then they purchased a... a church on Morris Street and they moved over there and my father had quite a bit of deciding and he arranged for the purchase and loaned them the money and so on and so forth. And it was quite a prosperous shul. And in 1953 they burned the mortgage. The rabbis in those shuls were I remember Rabbi Sadowksy, Rabbi Paskowitz, Rabbi Cornell, Rabbi Shukovitz for the most part.
Q. And you were given a very strict religious upbringing?
A. Yes.

Q. What did that consist of?
A. Well, we observed Shabbas and, of course, the home was immaculately kosher. We always celebrated our Shabbas together on Friday night and after shul on Shabbas. And of course everyone attended seder until the point where everyone reached the age of 13 religious upbringing in the family was... it was actually exemplary. We late trom and davad in the morning, but I think as the boys grew up and they found that they had to go to work, they didn't have time to late trom and they didn't davad anymore. And so everyone became I would say, with the exception of my parents, a Conservative Jewish person. They embraced more or less Conservative aspects of the religion.

Q. Do you think that the fact that your father had his own business allowed them to remain more strictly observing?
A. Well, he would have remained that way no matter what the business or whatever because he would have given up anything to maintain his religious beliefs.

Q. Do you think that's a fairly common pattern among families who came to this country that...?
A. I think... I think it was in some cases only for a number of years and for some... in some cases until the original parents who came over from other countries passed away. And I think in some cases it has been retained by the families and in other cases they have sort of left Judaism to a point. I won't say they've left Judaism entirely, but some have given up Kashres and some have given up observing Octavim, some have given up observing Shabbas, I'd say the great share of them have given up observing Shabbas.

Q. I'll return to this a little later but when you were born where was your family living?
A. When I was born I think my family was living on Nassau Street.
Q. Did they own a home there or... rent one...?
A. No, I believe they rented a home. And my earliest recollection of a home is
a home on Wilson Street, which they bought.
Q. Wilson Street is...?
A. Off of Hudson Avenue, it was just two blocks from my father's business. OK,
take care. (Transcriber's note: last part refers to a conversation with a
customer.)
Q. So that was... in those days that was a pretty uniformly Jewish neighborhood?
A. More or less. I would say more. And on that street we had a number of fine
Jewish families living, that is families that became prominent in the community
later on. And when I was five years old we moved from Wilson Street and my
father bought two homes on Helena Street, which was the next street over. And
there I lived until I was married.
Q. I see. Where did you attend public school?
A. I attended No. 18 School on North Street and Draper, and George Washington Junior
High School at Clifford and Thomas, and Edison Tech... technical school.
Q. Were most of your classmates in grammar school Jewish?
A. No.
Q. That was not largely a Jewish...?
A. No. 18 School was predominately Italian and Polish and Jewish. I mean, we sort
of mixed in. Washington High School I would say was predominately Jewish.
Edison Technical School was I would say perhaps only 15 or 20% Jewish.
Q. Do you remember any... 
A. How are you? Shalom. How are you? Good, I haven't seen you in a long time. I
know you don't. Yea.
Q. In school was there any kind of friction between Jewish children and children
Q. (Continued) from other backgrounds?

A. Yes, when I went to 18 School, we more or less fought our way to school everyday with the Italian and the Polish boys, fought our way back home. But, that was only until we grew up and... and went to Junior High School and then of course in Junior High School there was always a bit of friction between the Jews and... and other nationalities. And this more or less disappeared at Edison Tech. And then you more or less became buddy-buddy with your friends, but you sort of stuck with your own.

Q. What do you attribute that to? Was it just a sort of normal youthful rivalries or was it anti-Semitism or...?

A. Well, I don't attribute it to anti-Semitism because as I go back a number of years, we would say well in... when I was 14 years old for example, when I was 14, that would be 1928, it just happened that my very best friend was an Italian boy. And this was at a point where Jewish people did not quite accept Italians as friends for their children, and the Italians didn't accept Jewish friends. And but as our friendship continued his parents realized that I was a good friend of his and that we were really good boys and my parents realized the same thing. So, that there was no further objection to it from the parents. But I did see in those days objections from ethnic groups that were opposed to other ethnic groups. But, like I say, all this sort of disappeared slowly with the years until today I see very little of it, because perhaps I'm associated so much with the Jewish group.

Q. Do you think there's been a general subsidence of...?

A. I think so.

Q. You mentioned that when you were living on Wilson Street you were two blocks away from your father's store? Where was your father's store?

A. It was on Hudson Avenue, and it was located on Hudson Avenue at No. 223rd which
A. (Continued) was just two doors south of Woodbury Street.

Q. Was that also a Coronkin's Market?

A. Yes.

Q. Was that the first location that he had?

A. No my father before that had a market on Chadam Street and also I believe on ... there was one other location it could have been. ... the first one was on Nassau and Chadam, and one on Kelly Street, and then on Hudson Avenue.

Q. Were there ... all those streets places where there was a lot of Jewish businesses?

A. Always. Predominately Jewish, I would say at that point perhaps over 90%.

Q. You said that when he started he started with a $50 capital investment?

A. Right.

Q. What can ... what could you get with $50? Then was it ... ?

A. Well, with $50 then all he needed was a couple of knives, grinding machine, coolers, and a couple of meat blocks. They had no display cases in those days. A cooler was simply a place to keep ice in, they didn't refrigerate the meat. And this was about the extent of what was needed to start in business.

Q. Do you think that many of the businesses started on just that level?

A. I would say that at that point there could have been many businesses that started with a $50 capital.

Q. And did your father prosper?

A. Yes, he did, he did very well. And he ... he prospered, he managed to maintain his family, which at that point was eight children. We had nine and one boy drowned before I was born, and I never knew him. We ... we always were able ... my mother was always able to take us to Nusbaum's store and buy us clothing for every junctive. And we used to go to shoe stores and she would buy shoes for everybody. And, of course, we had an abundance of food in
A. (Continued) our house. My father always drove an automobile when they first come out, he was the first one to jump on automobiles, the first one to jump on oil-burners, the first man to buy a phonograph or radio.

Q. Right.

A. So, he was a very outgoing person as far as improvements were concerned. He loved improvement, and he acquired more property. But then when the Depression came he, like everyone else, lost a great deal of money on the stock market and he lost his properties with the exception of the two homes on Helena Street and his market.

Q. He retained his market?

A. He retained his market. And he just worked his way up again from there, but never attained the level that he had before the crash in 1928, '29.

Q. You were still fairly young and you were 14, 15.

A. Yea.

Q. There must... I understand there were a great number of kosher markets at that point.

A. At that point, no.

Q. Well, I'm not talking about when he was first getting started in business.

A. No.

Q. No?

A. There were perhaps four or five.

Q. That's all, and all in that one area?

A. One... no, some were sort of spread out, maybe one or two on Clinton Avenue, a couple or three on Joseph Avenue, and my father.

Q. Were there more after that then?

A. Oh, yes there were considerably more when I went into the business when I came out of the Army after the Second World War. And at that point there were 22
A. (Continued) kosher markets.

Q. And that number has declined considerably?

A. That number is down to four.

Q. So, it's almost been a cycle then, four over twenty and now. . . ?

A. Right, but of course the reason for the small number of markets in the beginning was because of the population. And now you can't blame it on the population because the population is greater than ever, but kosher observance is not as great, so consequently what's happening is that there's been a reverse in the cycle. I would say that of the four markets that are left in the city, of course, we are the largest and perhaps outside of New York State, outside of New York, and we're probably even larger than most in New York. However, I find that right now it's too large for the population we have in this city. Now where were we?

Q. We were talking about the decline. . .

A. Oh, now the greatest decline that I saw, since I've been in business, when I entered into business after the Army, it was in 1947, and at that point I think there may have been a 75-80% observance of kashres in the city and kosher businesses were flourishing, some were doing more and some less. However, in the past couple of years when meat prices when up and you have this meat boycott, I noticed then that for the first time business was declining. Jewish people were under the impression that meat only went up in kosher markets. And so they left the kosher markets and went to non-kosher markets. Now, after trading in the non-kosher markets for a while, they found that everything was not gold. That, really, especially some of the ads in the newspapers, they found that if they could buy a piece of chuck for 99¢ in the supermarket and have to pay $1.29 in the kosher market that the difference was in the amount
A. (Continued) of trimming, the fat, the bone, and so on and so forth what was left on the other cut. So, it was cheaper to buy the one for $1.29. However, they didn't know these things. And once their home became traife, some people didn't come back for the reason that they thought their home was traife already. Others were ashamed to come back. But, whenever a Jewish holiday, major Jewish holiday, such as Pesach or Yom Kippur or Rosh Hashanah, come around all these people who trade in kosher... in traife markets come back to kosher market because it goes against the grain to have a Seder in your home with a traife chicken and with traife meat. So, there's a feeling of guilt there that these people have. But, it still doesn't improve the standing of the kosher markets in the community.

Q. Well, you estimated that in 1947 70 or 80% of the homes kept kosher, would you make an estimate now on how many?
A. I would say there are perhaps 20% who buy kosher who and perhaps only 10% who keep a kosher home.

Q. Well has this all developed since the meat shortage or has there been more of a steady decline?
A. Well, I didn't have a decline from '47 until 1969.
Q. 1969.

Q. And from 1969 the decline started when prices started to rise and it reached its peak in 1972 I believe when they had the meat boycott. And this is where I've noticed the biggest decline from 1970 till at this point. Now at this point we have a number of new, young Jewish families coming into the city and they all appear to be observant and, of course, it's our job to keep them eating kosher if we can. And, of course, we would like to have everybody being kosher, but we know it's impossible. But we certainly don't want to
A. (Continued) drive anyone away by getting obsorbitant prices.

Q. So the decline has actually been fairly precipitous if it's just started in '69?

A. Right.

Q. How about the number... the decline in the number of kosher markets? When did they start to disappear?

A. They started to disappear in the sixties, late sixties and most of them disappeared in the last ten years.

Q. When a... when a market closes down does its clientele transfer to some other store or do they just...?

A. In some cases, and in some cases they just go away entirely.

Q. So, a number of meat markets have disappeared?

A. Right. No you... you have four markets left in the city and of the four I would say only two are doing any appreciable amount of business.

Q. Well, let's go back now to... to the early years. Will you describe how your father's business worked? Where did he buy his meat, that kind of thing.

A. Well, from my earliest recollection when I was a little boy I used to go with my father to a slaughter house. And at that point I believe the slaughter house was owned by Lepides. And my father used to buy his meat there and have it thrown on the truck and just brought back to the store. Now, of course, there were no refrigerator trucks at that point, refrigeration in the store was of a minimal type of thing, just a... an icebox. And the meat, if it was displayed was displayed on an open counter, on an open meat block. And in the wintertime when it would get cold outside, they didn't dare put heat on in the store because it would spoil the meat. So, so the store would get colder it seemed to me than it was outside. And my father at that point would work from four o'clock in the morning until eight, nine, ten o'clock at night. At
A. (Continued) that point he would come home and have his herring and cup of coffee and read the paper to my mother. Another thing I have a vivid recollection of is that everything that was bought in the store was more or less cut to order. There were never any small cuts of meat on display. Come in and want some chops, he went in and brought out the veal or whatever and cut off the chops and brought it back to the cooler. So, it was a definitely a different type of operation than today. They worked very hard. And they also delivered first by horse and wagon and then by the first Model T Ford that came out, which I remember when I was about five years old. Excuse me. And my father on Jewish holidays like Pesach and Rosh Hashanah would work sometimes for 72 hours at a stretch, always with one of my brothers or two of my brothers working in the store with him to get the chickens flaked, you know, and plucked, opened up and... There was no such thing in those days as koshering that we ordered, like we do today. Today... you see there, they just cut the meat, wrapped it up, sent it out to the customer and every customer koshered their own meat.

Q. I see.

A. Today when they come in to a market, a great many people have their meat koshered right in the market. They have their meat freezer-wrapped. Hi, fellas. They have their meat freezer-wrapped. They get all types of service today. In other words, they buy ten pounds of hamburger, they'll say I want it in ½-pound packages in freezer-wrap. That means wrapping twenty packages, something that they wouldn't do in the old days. 'Cause that would be ridiculous if you wait on 20 customers. So, today the service that people get is considerably greater than what they got years ago. But, the people who had the markets worked considerably harder than we do today.

Q. They... they brought the chickens live to your father's market?

A. Brought the chickens live, yes. And the schaichud used to come to the store,
A. (Continued) slaughter the chickens. They would take off as many feathers as they could from the schaichud's hands when they took the chicken. And then flake them later on and then just open them for the customers. But, in those days some people didn't even want 'em opened. They were a different breed of people.

Q. Right.

A. They opened their own chickens, they did everything more or less in the house. And the sale of meats was entirely different than it is today because in days... those days they would order things that cost no money, not at all, not five cents. Like an eitcher, and I'm sure you're not aware of what an eitcher is. It is the udder of a cow. And they would take this home and it's... it's absolutely delicious and my mouth just waters when I talk about it. But, it's such a great involvement of work that there are not I believe in this United States today, I don't believe we have 100 women who would make an eitcher because koshering of this is entirely different than the koshering of meat. The cooking is different than the cooking of meat. You see it's not a dairy product and it's not a meat product. It must be cooked in a... in a pot which is reserved solely for this purpose and nothing else because there is milk in the udder and this comes out in the koshering. So, there you have a... a situation where a woman would work sometimes for 12 hours cleaning an udder to make a meal for her family that cost absolutely nothing just 12 hours of her work. Where today I don't think you'll ever find a woman again in this country who will spend 12 hours making a dinner for her family and actually it's not a full dinner. You could use it as a main course, but I don't believe there's anybody who would spend the time to clean and kosher this or pechine. Are you aware of what pechine is?

Q. No.
A. That's made from the foot of the cow. And we used to take that and even in my days when I went in business and put it over a flame and burn off the hair and scrape it and clean it until it was real white. And then you cut these up for people and they would cook them with a lot of garlic and other things in there and it's a jelled soup. Now I happen to like it when it's hot, but mostly it's used as a cold gel with hard-boiled eggs in it. This requires a lot of time. We used to bring home kishkas. You know what a kishka is?

Q. No.

A. It's an intestine of a cow. We bring home the intestine and they would clean the intestine. What if, now... These people would work for hours to clean a kishka, now I'm sure you're not aware of what it entails to clean one.

Q. No, I'm not at all.

A. They have to turn them inside out, they have to scrape them and clean them for hours and remove all the fat from them. And then grind, kosher them and grind the stuff. And this could consume hours and hours for a Jewish housewife at that point. And so I could go on and name so many things that today either are against the health laws to use like lung and bringing in the kishka from the slaughter house, this is all against the health laws, the udder. You cannot bring these things in anymore because of the new health laws.

Q. Are there a lot of points of conflict between the kosher practice and the governmental regulations?

A. There's actually no conflict except that the people, of course, are very perturbed because they can't have the things that they want for a meal. But now as it stands, there would be no conflict at all because nobody knows how to cook these things or clean them or willing to devote the time to do all this work. Just to have a meal that costs nothing.

Q. Where was that slaughter house that your father used to go to?
A. It was on Maple Street directly behind the Arpico Packing Plant.

Q. That was Lepides?

A. Yea, at that point it was.

Q. Was that the only slaughter house in...?

A. No, there was another slaughter house on Buf... wait a minute, Buffalo Road, Amdursky's. And then later on Rochester Independent Packer, and that's about the extent of the kosher slaughterers that we ever had in the city. But at this point we have one kosher slaughterer in the city.

Q. Who is that?

A. Rochester Independent Packer. And the others buy their meat from Butte, Iowa or out west already dressed and have it shipped in. So far we have managed to keep ourself 95% home-dressed beef, it costs more money, but it's worth it because it keeps better, looks better and you can pick your own. You're welcome sweetheart, and mazel tov.

Voice. Thank you.

Q. Was there a great volume of spoilage in the early days?

A. No because they watched things very closely. I would say that perhaps my father never threw out five pounds of meat.

Q. Really?

A. By managing to keep his eye on every little thing that he had in his market, everything was disposed of in one way or another. But nothing ever spoiled, they got beef in perhaps every day of the week because of the fact that you had no large storage spaces or things like that.

Q. You said that your brothers worked there. I suppose that's where you learned the business also?

A. No, I didn't learn the business in the kosher end with my father at all. I never worked with my father. When I was 15 years old I worked for Wegman's.
A. (Continued) And I only worked... well, this was during the Depression days and I only worked on Friday and Saturday. That was all I could find, and I worked at that for one year and worked like about 14 hours a day and for that received a total sum of five and a half dollars for two days.

Q. Why is it that you did not work for your father?

A. Well, because at that point another brother of mine was working for my father and that was as much business as they had.

Q. Your father I suppose had always relied on family help?

A. Yes. The only outside help he had was a bookkeeper. Hi, how are you? Fine, thank you.

Q. So, during at least the first half of the Depression you must have still been... still been involved in school, high school?

A. Oh, yes.

Q. When did you quit?

A. Not the first half, no. I would say well if you want to consider the Depression started in '29 and lasted until '40, I would say that I got out of school in 1932, '31 because I could go no further. There was no money to go on to college or anything of that sort.

Q. So you went to seventeen?

A. Right. And that was the point when I was working steady for Wegman's and I worked for Wegman's until I was 28 when I went into the Army. So, at the point when I left Wegman's I was considered a very excellent meatcutter at that point. And we did so much work at that point that I just can't... can't begin to tell you about how much work we did in those days, but you did it because you knew that were at least 20 people waiting to take your job. And you worked for very little, but I progressed in Wegman's until I became the Manager of their Meat-cutting Rooms and so on and worked in different stores. All the stores they
A. (Continued) had at that point.

Q. Were many of the meatcutters Jewish?

A. Very, very few. Very seldom ran across a Jewish meatcutter because even at that point we always used to say the Jewish people were a little bit too smart to work that hard.

Q. Was that before there was a meatcutters union?

A. We... I never did belong to the meatcutters union. And there was a meatcutters union which Wegman's never joined. And when I went into business in '47, after I left the Army, we did not have a kosher butcher's union. They did try to organize later on, however they failed because they realized that it was a ridiculous thing to organize a bunch of butchers where the store was run by either the owner and one person and at that point I was the only one who employed any appreciable amount of help and we had... that was after the third year we had six or eight people working. And then they gave up because they felt that it was going to be a lost cause. I mean an owner is not going to join a union.

Q. So, you enlisted in the Army in 1940's or...?

A. No, I was drafted.

Q. What year was that?

A. In 1943.

Q. Oh, so you were twenty...?

A. Eight.

Q. Twenty-eight years old.

A. 1942, '42 would be. Well, it could be '43, that's right because early part of '43.

Q. And served until 1947?

A. Seven.

Q. Were you overseas?
A. Yes. I was in New Guinea and I was in charge of dispersing the food. I was the mess sergeant in our outfit. I was never the cook, but I managed to get my hands in all the good food. And I was able to cut it up so that our outfit ate very good, and make a lot of deals which everybody makes in the Army.

Q. When you were... went into the Army I don't think you were able to keep kosher, were you or...?

A. No, I was unable to keep kosher. When I came back to the States I went to Fort Dix where I became a camp steward. And in charge of all warehouses pertaining to food and also to rationing of food.

Q. Did you feel any conflict about having to give up keeping kosher while you were in the Army?

A. No, not really because I knew it was a way of life. I won't say that when I went in the Army the Army was the cause of my not eating kosher because I had eaten non-kosher long before that.

Q. I see.

A. When I went to work when I was working on Friday and Saturdays I felt that when there was time to eat I had to eat, food was there I ate it. And, as far as observing koshres, I can only say that at this point with my... when I was married the first time my wife kept a kosher home. Home was always kosher. And, of course, the wonderful woman I'm married to now is a very kosher person and a schomo Shabbas. So, life has changed entirely and I'm back to more Jewishness and I have for a good many years. I've served Friday nights at home when we have big dinners and people over. I'm home on Shabbas all the time. I still don't go to shul because if you're on the go like I go that one day a week to sleep looks awfully good to me.

Q. When were you married?

A. The first time I was married... Hi, Stell. Fine, Stell and you?... The
A. (Continued) first time I was married was in 1936, and my wife died in 1967.

Q. Did you have children?

Q. Where did you live?
A. Well, when I was first married we lived in 1936 we had a three-room apartment in a four-family, I believe it was or three-family house, on Diana Street right next to the health center there. I forget the name of it, Baden Street Settlement. That's it. And it extended through to Diana Street. And we lived there for.

END OF TAPE I, SIDE A

Interview with IRVING GORONKIN
August 18, 1976
By Maurice Isserman

Interview I
Tape I
Side B

A. . . . to an apartment on Rosedale Street. And then I left the Army, I left for the Army and when I came back from the Army we lived on the corner of Tudor Terrace and Monroe Avenue. And after I was in business for four or five years we moved to 688 . . . (Transcriber's note: next words obliterated by background noise), . . . an apartment. And I lived at 688 East Avenue until after my wife died. And in 1971 I moved to 2470 East Avenue where I live now.

Q. Do you own a home now or . . . ?
A. No, it's an apartment.

Q. You came back from the Army in 1947 and you started your own market?
A. Yes, but I had a partner. I had a partner his name was Whittenberg. And, actually, we started out with less money than my father did.

Q. Less than $50.

A. The market was there, it had been a market for years, it was owned by his father. And he closed it up during the war because of the problem with stamps and so on and so forth. And he, of course, was not a retail man, he was a wholesale man more or less. And when I came out of the Army one of the fellas I was in the Army with in my outfit mentioned this fella because he knew he was looking to open up a market again. And we got together and we... I went in there and I cleaned up that market and I threw out rubbish and painted and cleaned for about four weeks till we finally opened up.

Q. Where was that?

A. And it cost me... on Joseph Avenue. And it cost me approximately $22 for some of the canned... my half of the canned goods that were in the store. And that's what it cost me to go in business.

Q. And rent was very little?

A. Rent was... was nominal. And, of course, all our expenses were nominal because I did all the work that first year in the store. And my partner supplied me with meats. He would go to the country and buy his cow, have him cut and slaughter it, and he would sell me the forequarters, or sell the store the forequarters and sell the hank quarters to the traife markets.

Q. But, he was still the wholesaler, while you...?

A. Right.

Q. Did the retail end of it?

A. Right. And we remained partners until 1967.

Q. And at first you worked alone in the store?

A. Yes, I worked for the first year all alone. And, of course, that was not very
A. (Continued) easy because we still didn’t have the situation that exists today like machines for various items and so on. And I did every possible thing that . . . everything that we do today in our store plus a number of things like plucking chickens, making our own roby and tying them by hand that is not necessary to do today. And waited on all the customers, cut all the meat, and so on and so forth. So, I worked sometimes . . . my general day would be . . . Good-bye, Stell. Stell, stay well. You look very well. Fine, thank you. And I worked at that point from like five in the morning, my average day, . . . Hello, Mrs. Sosky, how are you? Good-bye. And I would work sometimes till ten and eleven, twelve o’clock at night. And, of course, after one year of that even though I was quite a bull I was getting run down.

Q. I can imagine.

A. Then I put one man on, and I ran him into the ground and then he left, then I put two men on. Then I put three, four and five and six and so on till at one point we employed ten people over there.

Q. Did you mainly hire Jews to work. . .?

A. Well, again, we had . . . Hello, brother. . . . at that point we had, oh, I don’t think we employed any Jews at this point.

Q. Oh, really?

A. Because it was impossible to get a Jewish meatcutter, they would not work as hard as we worked. I have a . . . an anecdote along the lines where one time I had this one fellow who was helping me in the store, he was an older man, and I had worked for months on end and I just couldn't get away from the place. And one day I think that I'd had it and I was gonna go to lunch. And I left the man in the store to wait on customers. And when I got back. . . came back from lunch, we got a call from Rabbi Berman. He said that I was not putting the store in the hands of a non-Jewish person to go away. Hi, . . . Can I
A. (Continued) come over and we will discuss it? So, I went to over to his house, which was only a block away on Selinger Street, and we talked about this and he said, well it's just not permissable to go away from the store and leave a Gentile alone in a kosher market. I said, Rabbi, I can't hire any Jewish boys because they won't work as hard. He said, true, but why don't you have your wife come in? I says, well first of all, I don't want my wife to be working in my store. Secondly, my wife doesn't know a pork chop from a lamb chop. So, he said here but say, so good to see us, in other words, if it's like this; just let it remain the way it is. And it's all right 'cause I don't go away that much. And so this would give you an idea as to how many chances we had to hire good Jewish people to work in the store and work hard. Like at this moment I'd be... I'd love to have a couple more Jewish boys in here that were very good, that I could just leave part of this business to and let them take care of it and give them a percentage, but I don't have anybody like that.

Q. Well, do you find any problems with non-Jews who don't... who haven't grown up with kosher...

A. No.

Q. ...who don't understand...?  

A. The only thing we have found is that a non-Jew comes into your store, he needs to be oriented along the ways of the Jewish people and what the kashres are that are pertaining to meats. Once they're oriented and they know what has to be done, they will not deviate, they will not cheat because the point is made that if they will cheat on kashres then they will cheat me. And if they will cheat me, then I don't want 'em. So, this is a point that we make with non-Jewish people who come to work in the store. And we've had no problems with non-Jewish help, as far as kashres are concerned.

Q. Do you handle instruction yourself when you hire somebody?
A. Yes. Yea, all that I do myself.

Voice. Do you want cash or...?  

A. Yea.

END OF TAPE I, SIDE B
Q. ... your father.
A. When my father died in 1954 the shul was located on Morris Street and it was very unusual at that point for them to bring a person's body into a shul for a hespet. And it just meant that he was an exceptional person in the Lubovitzer community. Well, the fact is that this had never happened before in this particular shul.

Q. Was that a large community here in Rochester?
A. Pardon?

Q. Was that a large community here in Rochester?
A. The Lubovitzer?

Q. Yea.
A. Fairly large, yes, there were a number of Lubovitzer Jewish people here in Rochester. A great many of them were members of the Morris Street Shul, they were also members in the Kippely Shul and the Beth Joseph, Beth Israel, Beth Sholom. There are a number of Lubovitzer Jews in the City of Rochester; however, they don't all conform any longer to Lubovitzer beliefs and so on and so forth. They... they're Lubovitzer only to a point of being a Lubovitzer by hereditary circumstances.

Q. Right. And what was the change, why do you think about the Rabbi?
A. Yesterday I heard when I said that it was Rabbi Berman that I had seen on Selinger Street concerning a person who was in charge of my meat market on Joseph Avenue while I was out. And the rabbi's name was Rabbi Kurtz, it wasn't Rabbi Berman.

Q. OK. Now, what I wanted to ask you about was you started off on Joseph Avenue
Q. (Continued) with your store.
A. In the kosher meat business.
Q. How long were you there?
A. On Joseph Avenue for approximately 25 years.
Q. And did you move out directly here?
A. Then I moved directly here.
Q. So that was in 1969?
A. No, I moved here in 1971.
Q. And why did you decide to move out of there?
A. Well, I moved out of Joseph Avenue area because the area was getting pretty rundown. And people were reluctant to come to that store because of the fact that the area was rundown and there was a lot of crime in the area. So, they just stayed away. Because at that particular point we had a very, very big share of the Brighton business in kosher foods. And rightfully the women who came to the store were told by their husbands not to go in that area. So, naturally business dropped somewhat because of the situation that existed at that time. And then, of course, when I decided to move I had a choice of either moving to Brighton or moving to Irondequoit. And I decided that while they had a few markets out in the Brighton area, they have nothing on this side of the city. And it would just be asking Jewish people too much to come from Irondequoit to Brighton. Whereas the people in Brighton already had places to shop in; however, thankfully, we've gotten back a good share of our Brighton business because people have found that it's not too hard to get here and it doesn't take too long what with the expressways and all.
Q. Right.
A. So, in the past year and a half or so I would say that things have picked up considerably over the few years before that.
Q. Would you say that was a fairly common experience of Jewish businesses moving out of Joseph Avenue area?
A. Yes...
Q. And for the same reason?
A. ...it was at that time, sure. At that time, you see we had the riots in '64.
Q. The '64 riots.
A. It was shortly after that some of the businesses were destroyed on Joseph Avenue and they didn't re-open. And others continued on like I did and eventually relocated.
Q. Was your own business damaged in any way in the riots?
A. No, my business wasn't damaged during the riots.
Q. I've heard it suggested that ... well, actually I've heard suggestions both ways that the riots in '64 had an anti-Semitic character, other people say they ... they didn't. Which side would you come down on?
A. I don't believe so. I believe if this had been any other kind of a neighborhood it could have been an Italian neighborhood or an Irish neighborhood or a Polish neighborhood. Aside from being black and just the fact that it was black and white is what started the riots and they went after anybody who wasn't black.
Q. So you think it was the fact that ... that these businesses were white businesses rather than they were Jewish businesses?
A. Right.
Q. OK. Since you've come out here have you expanded your business operation?
A. Since we came out here we've expanded greatly. Our ... at this point, this is probably the largest completely kosher supermarket or I would say among the first five anyway takin' into consideration New York City in the State.
Q. What... what is your volume?
A. Our volume in dollars and cents is in the area of . . . of three quarters of a million dollars.

Q. That is most of your business?
A. I would say about 60% of it.

Q. How many people do you employ now?
A. At this point we have two, three. . . . we have about ten steady and four extra.

Q. You were saying yesterday that people tend to buy more kosher food right before Jewish holidays. Is that how. . . . is that how your business goes?
A. Well, it's. . . it's a spotty business. Excuse me. Now we were talkin' about . . .

Q. Whether your business is steady through the year or whether. . .
A. It. . . . at one time when I woke up in the morning my greatest concern was whether I had enough time in the day to take care of all the people who came in. Unfortunately, we don't experience that type of anxiety any longer. What we experience now is just how busy we're going to be. It's not where you can just put your finger on it and say well, it's a warm day, it's a cold day, it's a blizzard day, because everyday was more or less uniform on Joseph Avenue years ago. And now, we have what we consider to be three fairly busy days a week and even those busy days are interjected with slow times. So, we're not completely crowded. We could handle three or four times the volume that we are carrying right now.

Q. But, on a year-to-year basis, can you safely say well, in the week before Passover, we'll sell so much. . .
A. Oh, yes.

Q. Before Rosh Hashanah. . .
A. Yes, you can. . . you can more or less . . . you can come closer on the holidays than you can on your normal weeks of the year. Reason being that
A. (Continued) you know, like I said yesterday, that all the people who do not eat kosher meat throughout the year come in and buy kosher meat for Passover holidays and Rosh Hashanah holidays. And I guess I stated that the reason for that was that it goes against their grain to have . . .

Q. Right.

A. . . . any kind of a religious service with non-kosher meat on the table. I feel that . . . that there are a lot of things that could be done to increase Jewish and kosher . . . kosher business and getting people to observe kashres.

Voice. Is there a Morie here?

A. Which one?

Voice. I don't know which one.

A. What . . . what did you want?

Voice. The one that's got a Buick.

A. Oh, he just left.

Voice. Oh, he just left? When will he be back?

A. I think the community itself doesn't stress the importance of kashres. I, myself, read articles which state that kosher meat is better for people, healthier for people, the koshering is cleaner. And even the non-Jewish people are realizing that the kosher is cleaner now because of the method of slaughtering, getting all the blood out of the veins and so on. It is healthier for people. So, I think that the Community Federation here in the city in conjunction . . .

OK, sweetheart. If they would get together with some of the synagogues here in the city, Bonakashres of Rochester, and conduct a campaign towards getting the Jewish people to observe kashres and keep their homes kosher, more people would perhaps be observant of the fact that they're Jews, more than anything else. Whether you're a pious Jew or a Lebowitz Jew or whatever type of Jew you may be, you can be a Conservative, a Reform, doesn't make any difference so long as
A. (Continued) you know you're Jewish.

Q. And you see kosher food as an important element of that?

A. And... and I say it's very, very important to keep a kosher home because when you walk into your home you'll know that there's things that you're doing in your home are you're doing because you're Jewish. When you get out of your home, I am not speaking about people who are out of their homes because I wouldn't cast stones under anyone who eats non-kosher food away from home. But, somewhere... oh, thank you, Jiggs. Oh, you're good, you know something?

Voice. No, I don't know.

A. You want to put... all get together and stress to the Jewish people there must be some semblance of Jewishness in their home. I think they would find that all Jewish charities would be supported better because people would have more of a feeling of Jewishness. Israel definitely would be supported more and on the subject of Israel, Israel has so many items that they sell here in the States that are made over there and people more or less stay away from them because it's a well-known fact that they've got to cost a little bit more because of the shipping costs, the duty costs, and so on and so forth. And we try to keep a very good supply of Israeli foods on hand. We have an Israeli section here, as you'll note, which is being expanded even further. I think that people have to be more or less reminded of the fact that they're Jewish. And there's just a been a latonic attitude towards being a Jew and everybody just accepts the fact that if I'm a Jew, I'm a Jew and it doesn't make any difference how good or how bad or if I observe or I don't observe. I'm still a Jew, which in some cases may be a good attitude for the person who has an atheistic attitude about the religion. But, on the other hand, like I said, you must have something to grasp on to that you're Jewish. And I was... I have never been a real conformist, except for my home. But, my home makes me understand that I'm Jewish.
A. (Continued) And now even more than ever. Friday nights, or Friday afternoon, I get home, I park my car and that's it until Sunday morning. And, we generally have guests for Friday night Shabbas dinner. We have people come over Saturday afternoon. And we enjoy Shabbas and we rest, which is what God intended for us to do on the seventh day.

Q. Right. OK.

A. I spoke yesterday about children in Israel.

Q. Right, I wanted to ask you about that. I... I... I'm a little confused on the sequence of your marriage. Your first wife died, when was that?

A. Sixty-seven.

Q. And your children then are children of your first marriage?

A. No, from the second marriage.

Q. When were they... when were they born?

A. Oh, they're my wife's children.

Q. Oh, I see, that's why I've not been following. OK. So, they were fairly old by the time... .

A. Yes, when my wife and I married the boy was 20 and the girl was 24.

Q. Were they brought up with a Jewish education?

A. Oh, yes.

Q. What did that consist of?

A. Well, their father was quite a religious man. My wife, their mother, has always been a schomo Shabbas. She won't eat anything that's non-kosher out or any other way. She observes quite, I won't say strictly, but she is a good observer, a good observant Jew. And, the children, the boy was very, very observant up until he was about 19 years of age and went to college.

Voice. Irv, you got Colosse cheese?

A. Right here, Al, on top. Went to college at Buffalo and, of course, while he
A. (Continued) was in college he started to eat non-kosher foods and that was his first experience with non-kosher food. At this point he rides on Shabbas and he also lives in his own apartment now in Boston where he's going for his Masters. And although he's not what I would call an observant Jewish boy, he knows Jewish history, he's well-learned in the Talmud and so on and he just had a good Jewish upbringing. The daughter went to Israel when she was 22, she graduated from college, graduated from Cornell. And she taught... bye Maisch, have a nice weekend... She graduated from Cornell and started to teach and decided to go to Israel for a year. And she taught English in Israel for a year and liked it very much and came back, stayed here for six months, and decided she would like to go back again. And so she has been in Israel I would say almost constantly for four years. And while in Israel she became extremely religious so that at this point she would have to be classed as a super-Orthodox.

Q. Has she become an Israeli citizen?

A. They will be as soon as they get back now, they're here visiting. They've been here all summer with us.

Q. Is she married?

A. She married this boy who has gone to yeshiva, he was born in Toronto, I mean in Ottawa, sorry. And came from a Reformed home where they had no Yiddish kike at all. And, four years ago he embraced Judaism completely. And, he has been a steady student in that time and has learned a great deal unquestionably about Judaism. And he's very interested in the Talmud and can hold his own with some of the finest rabbis at this point when it comes to Hamish and so on and so forth.

Q. And that in... in Israel?

A. And he... yes, and he is also super-Orthodox. There's... there's no
A. (Continued) other way that our daughter would have it.

Q. Do they have children or . . .?

A. They just had a baby last . . . last year my wife and I went to Israel and we made a wedding out there because this is where they wanted to be married. Everything revolves around Eretz Israel as far as the children are concerned. And they wanted to be married there, so we went to Israel and made a wedding there. And they had the baby, she had the baby May 26th of this year. And when the baby was three weeks old they came here to spend the summer.

Q. But, they're planning to make a life in Israel?

A. Oh, yes they're leav. . . . They were in New York this past weekend and they bought. . . . they still have their rights, so she was . . . she and he both were . . . were shopping for kitchen appliances like refrigerator, stove, washing machine and dryer, other electrical appliances because electrical appliances, I'm sure you understand, are different in Israel than they are here.

Voice. Irv, wanna lock the door?

A. Yes, please Al.

Voice. OK.

A. Wait a minute, I don't have a key. Well, actually I. . .

Voice. Yea, well you have to get out. . .

A. And they bought all their appliances there and they're shipping them back and they're leaving on Monday. They're coming in today from New York to spend the last Shabbas with us. And they're leaving here on Monday and going back to Israel.

Q. Was that your first visit to Israel?

A. That was my first visit.

Q. And has your wife been before?

A. My wife had been about, oh, four or five times before that because she has a
A. (Continued) brother, she had two brothers and a mother living in Israel. And her mother has since died and her brother died, her oldest brother. And she still has a brother living there who has a family. And he spent ten weeks with us last year.

Q. Sounds like your feelings towards Israel are very positive.

A. They are. I... I feel... I feel... have a very positive feeling about Israel. If I were perhaps in my late twenties or early thirties I don't think that I would hesitate and I would go to Israel and make a new life for myself there because it's a great feeling to know that wherever you look you're looking upon your own people and you're in a majority, which is very seldom something that happens in this country unless you're in a synagogue.

Q. Right. Have you ever participated in organized Zionist activities?

A. No, I haven't.

Q. No. Did you always... always count yourself as a supporter of Israel like back...

A. Oh, yes.

Q. ... prior to the...

A. Of course.

Q. ... even prior to 1948?

A. Of course and still do. And I hope to make a lot of trips to Israel.

Q. Have you been active in other community organizations?

A. Well, I... if I started to list them, I haven't been active. I... I'm a joiner, but I've never really had the time to be active in very many organizations. I am a member of B'nai B'rith for let's see over twenty-five years. I'm a member of the Jewish Home & Infirmary, and a member of JCC, member of Jewish War Veterans, member of... life member of the Elks, member of the Moose organization. I guess a number of others. And, so the... the
A. (Continued) . . . there's ones . . . I . . . I'd have to go through my wallet to come up with them, there's so many of them.

Q. Are there any of those organizations that you have been more active in than others?

A. Not really, I . . . I won't say . . . I'm also a member of Beth Sholom and Beth El. I was a life member of Congregation Agoodas Achem Nussa Haree, which is the Morris Street Shul. So, I mean to . . . to name all these organizations would take more of your time and I'd have to go through my wallet. And then I probably wouldn't find 'em all.

Q. Do you participate in the fundraising drives of the Jewish community?

A. Occasionally I have when I found that I had time I worked on the fundraising drives.

Q. And have you ever been politically active?

A. No.

Q. In the city?

A. No.

Q. Do you normally vote in the elections?

A. Yes.

Q. Do you feel that Jewish businessmen like yourself play a special role in the Jewish community?

A. I feel we do for . . . especially in my type of business because in this business here I have dealings with Jewish people every day of the week, every week of the year. There was a time when most . . . I used Yiddish most of all when I was in the market because there. . . this was back in the days when the older Jewish people were shopping. And so Yiddish was used quite a bit as a language. And now, of course, there are only isolated cases where Yiddish is being used and we have the younger people coming in. But, I feel that as a
A. (Continued) kosher retailer I have a duty towards the community. And my duty is to keep these people wandering to non-kosher foods; therefore, I've had in many cases had to give up a certain amount of profit in my business to keep things going to these people at prices that are competitive with supermarkets. People who generally leave us go right to a traife market. When they leave another kosher butcher they may come here because they know the prices are gonna be cheaper. And it... it sounds like a sales pitch but it's really not a sales pitch because we... I still feel that by these people coming in here I do everything I can to keep them eating kosher, even a person who comes here who like many of the young people are settling in Rochester now are very, very Orthodox. And they don't trust anybody to kosher their meat except the rabbi or a mashkeia, who's... has the authority from the badakashres. In that case, we will go to any lengths to please these people. We will have the mashkeia do this. If the rabbi's wife wants to come in and kosher her own meat, she can do it. We have couple of other families where the women buy a quantity of beef and put it in their freezer and they want to kosher their own meat and we let them do it. It's not a question of them not obser... not believing that I am truthful about koshering, it's not that they don't have any confidence in me, it's the fact that I am not a schomo Shabbas. And when you are not a schomo Shabbas a lot of these people will not eat meat that is not koshered by a schomo Shabbas.

Q. Well, it seems to me that what you're describing is a relationship with your clientele that's sort of fundamentally different than that that say Wegman's has...

A. Oh, absolutely. Even my... my daughter from Israel, who is very, very Orthodox, knows that I'm not going to cheat when I say that I kosher the meat. She knows I'm gonna do it properly. She'll even ask me questions about kashres
A. (Continued) that perhaps things that she doesn't know about. However, because I'm not a schomo Shabbas, she won't let me kosher her meat. In the time that they've been here, I've had to get meat in here and have the mashkeia kosher it. At one time the rabbi's wife was koshering her meat and she koshered some for me. And, then last night I took some meat home and my wife koshered it. So, this they will accept. But, they will not accept meat being koshered by a person who's not schomo Shabbas. But, we have to respect everybody's beliefs along the way. I... you've gotta have respect even for the person who just says I'm a Jew and does nothing about it. And, so it goes on and on and you must have respect for the extremely Orthodox Jewish people, too. You must also respect their feelings.

Q. You know, I was thinking about yesterday when I... after I'd spoken with you with sholom alchem stories about the little Russian villages, the butcher always is the... the man to be looked up to and is always sort of a community figure. And it seems in a way that... that... well, your own family is a good example because it continued from Russia to Rochester in the same capacity. Do you think that... that the butcher plays some of the same role in American Jewish life that he did in Russian Jewish life?

A. It did when I was... when I was a young boy a kosher butcher, and there were at that time was an example to the Jewish community. And he was a man that was looked up to by the Jewish people in the community. The reason being that all kosher butchers at that time were all schomo Shabbas and all religious people. But, as they died and their children took over things changed because the children were not as religious as the parents. They were not schomo Shabbas. So, consequently the people who looked up to the kosher butcher before certainly couldn't look up to the people who carried on later who were not as religious as the people who had the business before. It's understandable that
A. (Continued) a person would not look up to a kosher butcher such as
myself if he's very religious because he would have certain qualms about me
being in the store without a yamulka so to speak, or having my head covered.
Or he would frown upon my driving on a Saturday, which I do, not my wife. He
would frown upon many things that I do, but there are no more religious kosher
butchers in Rochester. Religious, per se, meaning that fully observant Jewish
people. I believe that every kosher butcher is very observant as far as
kashres in their store is concerned. I don't think there is anybody in this
city who doesn't observe all the rules and regulations as far as kashres are
concerned. But this is something else. You grew up with this. You were born
with this and it's not difficult. It's the same as living in a kosher home.
This is not difficult, it's very easy.

Q. Right.

A. If you're born with it and you live with it all your life, it's the easiest
thing in the world to have a kosher home.

Q. Well, you speak of... of a number of individuals who might object to you
koshering their meat for them, but how about your relations with the rabbis
who... different synagogues in the city?

A. It's very good. I have no... no problems with any rabbis and the rabbis
have no problems with me.

Q. They have no objections to the...

A. No.

Q. ... the business end of...?

A. No, because we do... they... well, the mashkeia is in here three or four
times a week. And, he looks around and he knows there's nothing in the store
that is not kosher. The important thing is to make sure that everything else
A. (Continued) is done properly, such as the koshering of the meat and so on. And this we observe strictly. And we do kosher meat for a great number of people. So, I would say that the relationship between myself and the rabbis in the city is very good because they know that in the store there is nothing, not even a grocery item that is not kosher. I won’t say it’s good for me, it’s not good business-wise because if I had a number of other items that were non-kosher on my grocery shelf, I know I could sell them. We don’t get ashgoha, which means permission to sell groceries. We got permission to sell meat, and this is what the Hebrew Dietary Association overlooks, our meat sales. Now, if I wanted to, I know it would be within the realm of my rights to put anything I want to on my shelves in grocery items. But then I feel if I did that there are a great number of Jewish people who walk in here who would just pick something up and assume that it’s kosher because it was bought in a kosher market. So, I feel that for intents and purposes our method of operation is correct. If anyone is keeping a kosher home it’s correct to keep our conditions the way they exist at this moment because anything that they pick up and take home to a kosher home is kosher. And, this is very hard for us because we know that we would sell a great many more groceries and other items if we decided to put non-kosher items on the shelf. On the other hand, we do have chain stores now that sell kosher delicatessen. This, I believe, cannot be stopped but should be stopped.

Q. Why is that?

A. Because there is no way in the world that you can walk into a store which is open on Friday nights and Saturday, Yom Kippur, Rosh Hashanah, and all the Jewish holidays, and buy kosher food and consider it kosher. There’s always the question of getting things mixed up in the store. So that even your delicatessen can be sliced on a non-kosher knife or machine. So, I believe
A. (Continued) this is one of the places where . . . that Jewish markets have been let down by the Jewish community.

Q. What about the wholesalers? Would it be the wholesalers who would have the control over that?

A. No. Because a wholesaler who manufactures sausage and products like that is always looking for buyers. He's lookin' for business. So, he's gonna sell them wherever he can. Now, some of the . . . one of the foremost rabbis in this country is a rabbi known as Sol of Achick, who gives askhahud for Morrison and Schiff. On the other hand, it's very difficult to understand how a rabbi who is so well thought of and a rabbi that everyone looks up to, gives askhahud for his delicatessen to be sold in supermarkets where treife meat is being sold and on like I said before Friday night and Shabbas and on Yom Kippur, Rosh Hashanah and all other holidays and Pesach and so on.

Q. You're thinking of places like Park Edge or . . .?

A. Well, yes, that would be one of the places. There's Park Edges, I believe that Park Edge is not the only one. I believe there are a few others. But, I don't believe this should be. I believe kosher food should be sold in a kosher store, otherwise it should not be branded as a kosher product. You have chose. . . if people won't eat meat that is not koshered by a schomo Shabbas, that is the religious Jews, then . . . and the store is completely schomo Shabbas, we close as you see at one o'clock on Friday and we don't re-open until Sunday. So, we are completely kosher, schomo Shabbas store. If people don't see fit to patronize a schomo Shabbas store and buy their Jewish products, then I feel that somewhere along the line in the Jewish community here has let kasher's get out of hand. That's my wife. Last . . .

Q. What you're describing is almost a more general problem than. . . than simply one faced by a kosher butcher. I mean, a lot of small grocery stores have
Q. (Continued) been wiped out by the grocery chains. The fact that people want to go to one big store rather than to a lot of little stores, do you think, would you agree with that?

A. Quite possibly, but unfortunately the Jewish people and these are the people that we're primarily interested in are shopping now on Friday nights and on Saturdays. Now this is, I would say, an inexcusable type of thing because if they have a kosher home, first of all, Friday nights they're home because of Shabbas and they're celebrating the Sabbath. And Saturday is not a day to go out shopping. However, if they choose to shop this way it's their prerogative. I mean... there's no one that I know of can stop it. This is one of the problems that faces your kosher meat business today. And the kosher meat business, if this keeps up, we have already decreased the number of markets from 22 to 4. And eventually there may be only one or two. And when there are just one or two then people in the community who do observe will start suffering and the people who go to these other places throughout the year and buy non-kosher meat and only buy them on the holidays, are also gonna suffer. Because there are one or two markets are not going to be able to accomodate these people. So, eventually what they're coming to is a problem of not having any kosher suppliers in the city. And, if they get down to one or two, and they are nefarious people, and they're greedy people, they will probably become tremendously rich in a short time because they know that they're the only one of two markets and there is no competition. So, I... I think in the eventual end they'll be doing themselves harm.

Q. Well, you say... you speak of this as a possibility. Do think this is actually gonna happen? Are... are you that pessimistic about it?

A. Quite likely. I'm... it's quite likely to happen because I don't believe of the four markets that remain, I don't believe there are more than two,
A. (Continued) maybe one other besides this one, who are on a strong footing. And when I say strong footing, I mean they've got their head above water. The other two may have their head above water, but if they ever opened their mouth to call for help they're gonna get water in it. It's just... the kosher business is just deteriorated to that point. And the only way you can manage to stay in business today is like I said, you've got to work on a very small margin of profit, which is fine if you have volume.

Q. And that's what you have.

A. And, of course, at this point we have enough volume to get by, but nowhere near the volume I projected when I came here. Because I... I projected a volume that was at least one-third greater than what we're doing at this point. And that's a lot of volume.

Q. Why... why was it so much less than you had expected? Did you fail to carry over a lot of your clientele or...?

A. Well, first it started by the people who had a... had had a psychological effect on them, customers of ours from Brighton to say that I'm going to Irondequoit to shop. Psychologically just the mention of two different towns kept them from coming. And it took perhaps three years of being in this one location to get back most of those people. I won't say not all of them stopped, but a great many of them did because of this. But, now we find that it's turned around again. And we're getting back the Brighton business, which is... which is what we need because we can't survive with just one end of town here. We... we're just too big to survive with one end. And hopefully people will get back to the swing of eating kosher meat when they find...

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A. ... but it's the psychological thing that keeps people from coming to the store as opposed to the other. And like I said, I'd give it another two years and I believe we'll have back every customer we had in Brighton before.

Q. Are the three other markets all in Brighton?
A. Yes.

Q. So, they're all within a tight little knot there?
A. Right.

Q. What about. . . there are still some Jews who live in the. . . the Joseph Avenue area, I realize not very many.
A. Very few. But they come here.

Q. They come here.
A. The Jews who live all over. We got 'em there in Penfield, there's some in Greece now, Gates, and in Chili. And we've got customers in Batavia and Buffalo, Elmira, Corning. We have 'em scattered out pretty well. We have . . . at one time I think we had almost every Jewish family in Elmira. Now, I guess some of them, like everyone else, they've left kosher. But, we still have a considerable number of Jewish families in Elmira. And in Hornell.

Q. What about. . . I don't know if you have any tie-in with this, with the Jewish institutions like the Jewish Home for the Aged and . . . and their. . .
A. We've been servicing the Jewish Home & Infirmary now for, oh, approximately 27 years.

Q. They. . . they buy directly from you?
A. Right. And, we service the JCC camps for approximately that length of time.
A. (Continued) And, of course, now the situation is changed and JCC camps are no longer operated by Jewish Community Center, they're operated by Serveright Food Service. And Serveright Food Service is a customer of ours for kosher foods.

Q. So, that must add a great deal of volume to your business then, also a steady volume.

A. Well, the Home... Jewish Home adds a steady volume because they're 52-week a year customer. The camps are a summer type of thing and it's maybe an eight or ten-week period. And then, of course, we have the Jewish Community Federation which is a steady type of thing. Because we service them with food for their lunches and so on and so forth.

Q. And, you do supply the meats to the Jewish Home...

A. Yes.

Q. Or do you supply...

A. The meats and the poultry.

Q. Wouldn't... I'm suprised they don't get that directly from a wholesaler.

A. Well, then they would have to put a cutting room in there and start cutting their own meat.

Q. Oh, that...

A. Which would hardly be feasible for the amounts that they use because they would add on the cost of meatcutter in the back. And their meats would become prohibitive.

Q. There... there are no wholesalers that do their own koshering?

A. No, we're the only ones in the city who actually... the wholesaler doesn't service a... a institution like the Jewish Home & Infirmary. Jewish Home & Infirmary's gotta have their meats cut to order and they've gotta have their chickens cut up to order and so on. It... It's not something that can be
Interview with Irving Goronkin

A. (Continued) serviced by a wholesaler, if there were such a thing. But, there are no Jewish wholesalers in the city. The closest Jewish wholesaler for institutions of that type is Lundy's in Philadelphia. And, there of course, they're a question mark because of the problem of buying from one state to another for one thing, and the problem of quality of the product, the service, the freight costs and things like that. So, all these things enter into it, but they're very cognizant of the fact that they must be... we must be competitive. And they get prices from all these places.

Q. Do you have any kind of general comments on the future of the Jewish community in Rochester? Obviously, it's undergoing tremendous changes in the last few decades.

A. Well, I would say that perhaps the few leaders in the Jewish community that we do have who are extremely community-minded are not enough to turn the community around to... in a position where they would follow a different line immediately. This would take long period of time before you could... and it would be a period of regression because you would have to go backwards to some of the years that have passed by already to bring back just some of the finer things that we had in those days as compared to what people have today.

Q. I'm not sure what you mean by that.

A. Well, years ago when the holiday would roll around, I remember when I was a little kid and we all went to shul, and the shuls would be so crowded you couldn't get into them. And, of course, they were extremely hot because there was no air-conditioning. And the streets in front of the shuls were just packed with people and the police would block off certain streets to keep traffic from coming through because the people were just overflowing into the streets. One of the shuls that I remember vividly is Beth Hamedresh Hachodosh, which is the... was known as the Big Shul. And there was... it was on Hanover Street and on
A. (Continued) Hanover Street they had another shul just a block away and then they had one next to the Big Shul and another Sephardic shul just a little ways from that and another shul further down, so there were five shuls on Hanover Street. And every one was overflowing into the street, but that was because of the upbringing of the Jewish children. They were taught that the place to be on a holiday was in a synagogue. And, of course, many slaps in the wrists and spankings and things like that, the kids all got into shul occasionally to visit with their parents. But it... it was a different feeling, you know. It made you feel that Jews were something special. Today when a holiday comes there's nothing special about the holiday. But, of course, it's all attributed to our changes. Today, it's impossible, I know, to conduct a synagogue and have a large membership and get the people to show by walking. You've gotta forget the walking because everybody is so far away from where the synagogues are located now. Where, years ago, everybody lived in one little area and it was never too far to walk to shul. But, today it's impossible. So, to my way of thinking, I would say the Conservative have the right idea to get to shul. If you drive, you drive. Look, can't be a mortal sin because people show up year after year so it's hardly a mortal sin. But, with changing conditions and all, we also have to allow that as time goes on there will be other thoughts along this line. And, we've just got to keep them from spreading too far out so that we don't have a case where there will be no differential between a Jew and a Catholic. We want to keep... we want to keep Judaism alive. And the way to keep it alive is to keep Jews together.

Q. So you think... would intermarriage, for example, be a threat to the...?

A. I don't believe intermarriage is good for that particular reason, no. I'm not in favor of intermarriage because I'm sure there have been very many successful intermarriages, probably will be many more; however, it doesn't
A. (Continued) seem to make for a healthy relationship between two people to have two different beliefs, even if it's in the back of their mind. Even if somebody was just brought up as a Catholic when they were a small boy and forgot about it, he'll still remember it and so will another Jewish person remember when they were small, too, and they were Jewish. So, intermarriage can work out. And, to say you're against it doesn't mean that you dislike anybody who... who does intermarry because I don't. I can just look back and say well, I'm glad it didn't happen to me, it didn't happen to my family. But, I... I think it's unhealthy situation and from religious standpoint, it just takes religion away from them unless one or the other converts and that is also something that I have a firm belief in. I think converting is, in my way, a ludicrous type of thing because if you're... even if you're converting, you're still what you were born. If you were born a Jew, you'll die a Jew. You can convert to Catholicism if you like, but you're a Jew at heart and you know it.

Q. How about conversion to Judaism? Something else?

A. Same way, it works the same way. I've seen some converts who were even more careful of kashres in their home after they converted than Orthodox Jews. But, I'm sure there are times when in the back of their mind they think of the other days, too, when they were not a Jew. And, it's... it's just a question of how you believe. I... and, look, I'm only glad that I'm able to accept whatever people do, be tolerant, don't frown upon people and I don't look back and say well, that's too bad, your... your son married a gypsy or your daughter married this colored boy. But, it's their children and I feel that the least I can do is be tolerant about it. It's their parents who are gonna suffer and they. They will suffer, perhaps... perhaps not. But, on the other hand, their chances are a lot less than two people of a similar faith being married.

Q. OK. I think that's...

END OF TAPE I, SIDE B