**ORAL HISTORY with SAM REZNIKOFF**

**INTERVIEWER: R. D. Moses**

**Date of Interview: July 10, 1998**

*Sam Reznikoff (1921-2014) On Thanksgiving Day of 1946, Sam Reznikoff, who was born and raised on New York’s Lower Eastside, came to Texas to obtain an Aviation Mechanics License. He wanted to work on airplanes. He ended up in the insurance business, with a sterling reputation and a successful office that he passed down to his son-in-law. He was an independent scholar as well as a part-time farmer who raised his children in rural Parker County. Reznikoff served as Men’s Club president at Ahavath Sholom and was active in many aspects of the Fort Worth Jewish community.*

R.D.: Today is July 10, 1998. I’m going to interview Mr. Sam Reznikoff for the Jewish Archives of Fort Worth. Sam, when did you come to Fort Worth?

Sam: Thanksgiving Day of 1946

R.D.: May I ask why you came to Fort Worth?

Sam: I came up here to come to school to get an AV [Aviation Mechanics] license. This was so I could work on Airplanes.

R.D.: Where were you from originally?

Sam: New York City.

R.D.: Raised there?

Sam: Born and raised there. On the lower East Side.

R.D.: What about your parents?

Sam: My father came from Russia, and mother from Russia Poland.

R.D.: When did they come to the U.S.?

Sam: Papa came in steerage and arrived in 1912. Then he brought Mama over 2 years later. My brother and sister and one of my aunts came in 1914.

R.D.: Tell me a little bit about your life.

Sam: It was great, growing up on the Lower East Side... We didn’t have much, but we didn’t go hungry. Papa worked real hard to take care of six children.

R.D.: What did your father do?

Sam: He had a coat shop, a sweat shop.

R.D.: I am sure that your mother worked?

Sam: She worked, taking care of the family.

R.D: How many brothers and sisters?

Sam: I have one brother [Abraham], in Santa Monica, California. Abraham is my older brother, who is 88, is not doing too well at this time; a sister, Sally Nesoff who is 81, living in Lebanon, New Jersey, and that is all who are alive. [Abe and Betty Europe Beinstak, David, Joan Kaplan and Sam]

R.D.: When you attended school in New York, did you attend Hebrew school or public school?

Sam: Of course, on the Lower East Side, we had a melamid [a Hebrew teacher] come to the house. After that we lived in Coney Island, and my father felt that we could move up in life; and I started school in Coney Island and went all through Hebrew School.

R.D.: Thinking about your Hebrew education Sam, in your opinion, what do you think have been the major changes in Jewish education?

Sam: I don’t think that Hebrew schools are doing much today. They have Bar Mitzvah and that’s it. Kids generally forget it after that,. I don’t know what to do to change it.

R.D: You think that in the Bar ad Bat Mitzvahs, they’re taught to memorize it?

Sam: Yes actually that’s correct. If you turn a page on them, they don’t know what to do.

R.D.: Did you have the opportunity to go to college?

Sam: I never went to college (in my youth). I went to Vocational High School in Bronx, N.Y. (Later, in Fort Worth, I took classes at TCU in finance and business.

R.D.: What language was spoken in the home? Yiddish?

Sam: Yiddish was spoken and when they didn’t want us to understand they spoke Russian.

R.D.: Did you learn to speak fluent Yiddish?

Sam: Yes. I don’t today, but I did then.

R.D.: What was the mode of transportation?

Sam: Subways and trolley cars. My father bought a car, because during the summer, he was laid off. We would go and pick up customers, so we had a 1923 Doge Brothers car.

R.D.: Was that the car that had the Start of David on it?

Sam: Yes

R.D.: Let’s go back to why you came to Texas.

Sam: I came to Texas because Uncle Sam sent me here. I was stationed in Austin at Del Valle Bergstrom Army Air Corp Base.

R.D.: After Austin, you went back to New York, after the war?

Sam: No, I came to Fort Worth from Austin.

R.D. How did you meet your first wife?

Sam: Oh, I met her on a blind date. Someone invited me for a steak dinner, and in those days that was pretty good.

R.D.: That was Dorothy.

Sam: Yes.

R.D.: After you met her, how long did you wait to marry her?

Sam: We dated for nine months and married on New Year’s Eve, in 1944.

R.D. How many children did you have?

Sam: 3 children, a girl and two boys. Rebecca, Michael, and Daniel, all native Texans.

R.D.: You feel yourself between Orthodox and Conservative?

Sam: I was raised Orthodox, but I never kept a Kosher home, but followed the religion, and Dorothy converted. We didn’t keep a Kosher home, but had Shabbat every Friday night, celebrated all of the holidays, synagogue on Fridays, and raised the kids that way. We did not drop them off, we went with them.

R.D. How did you get to shul after you moved to Ft. Worth? Was it after your daughter married?

Sam: Not right away, I couldn’t afford it. I got into the Jewish community when they dedicated the shul on 8th Avenue.

R.D.: did you feel comfortable about getting into the activities of the shul in Ft. Worth?

Sam: Very comfortable. The synagogue opened their arms to us.

R.D.: Who was the Rabbi at that time?

Sam: Rabbi Isadore Garsek.

R.D.: Do you remember what year that was?

Sam: I don’t remember what year that was. You can look in the archives.

R.D.: did they have a men’s club at that time?

Sam: Yes, they did. I was president of the men’s club at one time.

R.D.: Were you active in Ahavath Shalom:

Sam: Yes, I was. I was on the board at one time, during Bob Kragen’s administration. I didn’t go up because I couldn’t afford to take the time.

R.D.: How did you get involved and be in the business you are in now?

Sam: I retired. I was in the insurance business. I was working across the street from A. Davis, and a man came over and said that he wanted to talk to me, so we did, and he talked me into joining New York Life. That was February 1, 1955.

R.D: How many years were you in that business?

Sam: 41 years.

R.D. You’re completely retired now?

Sam: Completely.

R.D.: Can you described some of the activities that you enjoyed at the shul?

Sam: As you now, we all came out of the service, and we were like one big, happy family. The Ladies Auxiliary was very active, the Men’s Club was also, we had the dance of the month from B’nai Brith, the Little theater also from them, which I was active in. the Men’s Club put together a camp. Then rented some land. I think that it was near Eagle Mountain Lake, or Lake Worth. We went out there, cut the trees, and made a place for the children. I couldn’t afford to send my kids, but Rabbi Garsek arranged it, and I put in my time and the shul was like a family. I’m sad to say that it is not that way anymore, or it hasn’t been for the last 20 years.

R.D.: Would you care to venture why it is not that way anymore:

Sam: I’d rather not say. I don’t want to mention any names. If I answer that question, you’ll know who it was.

R.D.: What about your kids? Are they all married?

Sam: No. One is divorced. One is separated, and one is married. That is my daughter, to Stuart Isgur. He took over my business and they have two wonderful children. Benjamin and Jeremiah.

R.D. Who do you think was the best rabbi for the last 50 years?

Sam: Rabbi Graubart. After him would be Rabbi Garsek. After that we really did not have any others.

R.D.: Would you say why you thought Graubart was so good?

Sam: He was here for such a short time because he could not take what they were trying to do to him. He was very liberal which some of the people in the community couldn’t take, but I think that he was a good teacher. He told it like it is, and he was very concerned about people. Part of why he left was that his wife didn’t like it here. That’s my opinion.

R.D.: Would you tell me about some of the shul leaders at that time?

Sam: Buddy Rosen, Melvin Rosenthal, a fine man, Lou Barnett, Milton Hamil.

R.D.: How about the ones who were active in the men’s club?

Sam: Ben Coplin, who had me to join, Buddy Rosen, Jimmy Rosenthal. After I was president, Jimmy can in, then Lou Barnett.

R.D.: Did you have any part in getting Stuart active in the shul?

Sam: I guess I did. When they moved to Ft. Worth, they couldn’t afford to join the synagogue.

R.D.: They were married in Ft. Worth?

Sam: No, they were married in Austin. They were married at Hillel.

R.D. When did they come to Ft. Worth?

Sam: We actually came to Weatherford, and we all lived on the farm.

R.D.: You missed the farm life?

Sam: Yes, I do, but I couldn’t stay out there. Dorothy was gone, and also, there were no Jewish affairs out there.

R.D.: What did Dorothy die of?

Sam: Had an aneurism in her head.

R.D. Are you living in Fort Worth now?

Sam: No, w live in Arlington.

R.D.: Why did you move to Arlington?

Sam: We moved to Arlington, because Liz (Gordom), my present wife, was traveling a lot, and it is closer to the airport.

R.D. How did you and Liz meet?

Sam: We met singing in the choir at the shul.

RD. How long have you been married:

Sam: Seventeen years, this past June 20th.

R.D.: Are you still members of the synagogue?

Sam: Yes.

R.D.: Are you members of the Temple in Arlington?

Sam: We don’t belong to the temple.

R.D.: What do you think that it will take to turn the synagogue in Fort Worth? The shul?

Sam: Well, I think that it is turning around now. It took10 or 15 years to bring it back, but you can’t bring it back overnight.

R.D. What kind of cantor and rabbi do you think we need in Fort Worth?

Sam: I think that we have a pretty good cantor now, as far as his voice is concerned; as far as being a mensch, he is fine and seems to enjoy working with the kids. As far as the rabbi is concerned, I don’t know what we need. Perhaps we need a younger man and hopefully we would hire someone who is a good teacher, is liberal minded, and one who can be his own man, rather than cowtow to some of the people as the others have done in the past.

R.D.: Do you think that the membership at the shul should have any input into this?

Sam: Yes, though, my sonn-in-law is president, he is working in that direction, considering the input by the members of the shul before a serious decision is made. Before the way, it was the congregation had no say in what was going on.

R.D.: then, in your opinion, the shul needs to turn around?

Sam: slowly, but that’s the way it’s going to be, you know. It will take several years to et it back to where it should be. It didn’t just happen.

R.D.: What were your opinions and your thoughts of the past?

Sam: They teach all over the world, I guess, but some of it is silly, and I don’t know what to do about it. Our kids are not really educated. They can’t hold their own in the world against other religions in the world when they participate in discussions with others.

R.D.: When you were growing up, Sam, did your really learn Hebrew, or did you just memorize it?

Sam: We learned to translate it fully and learned to read not by rote but learned to read and to translate, translating the English to Yiddish, not vice versa.

R.D.: In Yiddish?

Sam: Yes, because most of the teachers were newly come to this country and did not speak English.

R.D.: Have you retained most of the Yiddish yo learned?

Sam: Oh, I still speak Yiddish, but not as well as I did. There are too few people to speak to.

R.D.: I speak a little. Do you think that yoru wife would let me interview her?

Sam: I don’t know. You can ask her. I think she has only been in Texas for 18 years.

R.D.: Where is she from?

Sam: She’s from Chicago.

R.D.: How did she come to be in Fort Worth?

Sam: she came with her first husband.