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RS 301 Oral History: Interview With Harvey Raider

Althea Newman

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Recommended Citation

Newman, Althea, "RS 301 Oral History: Interview With Harvey Raider" (2021). *Humboldt in the Time of COVID - Digital Archive*. 109.

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Althea Newman

Professor Hart

RS 301

April 30, 2021

Oral History Project: Harvey Raider

Althea: Hi Grandpa how are you?

Grandpa Harvey: Good Althea how are you?

Althea: I'm great! Thanks for sitting down with me to talk about religion.

Grandpa Harvey: Of course honey.

Althea: What religion do you practice?

Grandpa Harvey: I am a Reform Jew my father was a Russian Jew who fled Russia during the early 1900s.

Althea: Has religion always been an important part of your life?

Grandpa Harvey: Yes, Judaism has always been a very important aspect of my life growing up. My parents raised my siblings going to temple and I grew up hearing my fathers stories of facing persecution in Russia as a young man before he came to America. My parents and my siblings have all gone to Israel and or lived in Israel for various periods of time. I was raised Orthodox Jewish in a very strict religious household. While I was growing up in the midwest and as an adult when I lived in Southern California I attended temple.

Althea: Where do you practice or where did you practice before Covid?

Grandpa Harvey: Before Covid I would attend temple at Temple Beth-El in Eureka. A few years ago I served as the president of the temple for many years.

Althea: How has Covid changed your religious practice?

Grandpa Harvey: Covid has changed a lot of things for me, especially my social life. Now that your grandma and I are vaccinated I'm hoping most aspects of our social life will return but this year it was very sad not to be involved in all the different clubs and organizations I like to take part in. I used to sing in a barbershop but we haven't been able to meet since Covid began. We tried once but it didn't really make sense because we couldn't sing together. I also haven't been able to attend temple or through my annual Hanukkah party which is something I really look forward to. We love hosting people and I love making latkes. Having friends over helps keep you young but since I'm in my 80s and so are most of our friends none of us have really seen each other at all this year. The gatherings with people from the temple both in the temple and outside in our free time is what I miss most. I still run into some people from the temple at the farmers market or the few other places I go to but I'm looking forward to returning to the temple and for this coming year, which hopefully will be more lively than this year. My personal practice has changed during covid I've had to focus on my individual study of Judaism and I enjoy reading books on history and Judaism. One of my favorite books is about the history of piracy and how a lot of the pirates in the Carribean were Jews escaping religious persecution.

Althea: I miss your latkes and Hanukkah party. I'm excited that this year will be back to normal! I would love to read that book about pirates that sounds super interesting. How do you think your temple will change post Covid?

Grandpa Harvey: I'm hoping almost everything will go back to normal but one thing I could see happening is a continuation of recorded meetings which is a nice thing for us elderly members of the temple who can't always go. I could see them continuing to use masks but because almost everyone is getting vaccinated I'm not sure that it will be necessary.

I can tell my grandpa is really excited for his religious practice to go back to normal and get to regain his social life. I really admire my grandparents for being so social and so involved at an old age. I really feel that their active and friendship filled lifestyle keeps them young and healthy. With the lockdowns this year I've seen my grandpas physical and mental health take a downturn this year. My grandpa is a passionate woodworker, singer, and reform jew with a really interesting family history. I was lucky enough to meet his father who has escaped from Russia. My great grandfather lived to be 103 years old and he was a very funny sweet guy. My grandpa lived a really adventurous life living mostly in Los Angeles where he has children and grandchildren. My grandparents lived in Monterey for several years as well before moving to Humboldt county when I was a kid and my mom had cancer. Moving to Humboldt county as a senior and not necessarily by choice (they moved to help take care of us when my mom was sick and my parents were leaving often for treatment) I am so impressed by the vibrant social circles they created for themselves. Him and my grandpa also used to love going camping, biking, and kayaking and it really sucks to see them not be able to do as many activities as they used to because of poor health and lockdowns. My biological grandpas both died before I was born so my grandpa Harvey is the only grandpa I've ever known. Because I myself am not Jewish I haven't developed too much interest in learning about his religion but I intend to ask more questions in the future because he is the only person in my immediate family with a faith. I am devastated that Covid has changed so much for my grandpa and I hope this coming year he will be able to attend temple and do all the other things he loves!