

E. Brooks
May 9, 2013

Intro: LT Oral History Reading, May 13, 2013

Just over one year ago, Rabbi Nathan brought a group of temple members together to plan temple-wide education programs for the year ahead. That evening, we met in small groups and brainstormed many ideas--the more we talked, the more we were drawn to the idea of collecting oral histories from temple members. We envisioned starting small—collecting a handful of oral histories the first year, and gradually adding to the collection each year. We believed that this work would deepen our connections with each other and with our temple community as a whole. We believed in the power of stories, and we concluded that the rich histories that converge at Larchmont Temple should be preserved. We were intrigued by the idea and excited to work together.

We embarked on this project as novices-- coming together to learn about the oral history process and to record the oral histories--or spoken autobiographies-- of some of our temple members who grew up in the 20's, 30's and 40's. We met with GerryAlbarelli, professor at Sarah Lawrence College and Columbia to learn about oral history research and the interviewing process. Gerry has been our guiding light through this journey.

It soon became clear that these stories were headed toward a common point of convergence. One story leads-- and is connected in unexpected ways--to the next, creating a complex and beautiful structure that reminds us of the breadth and universality of experience--in this case, the American Jewish journey. These stories begin elsewhere, moving around in time and space, from the early part of the twentieth century to the present, from as far away as German and Russia to as near as the Bronx.

Our original intent was to share these oral histories through the creation of a website with photographs and excerpts from the transcriptions. This process has been deeply compelling and moving for each of us. We met regularly to share our work--listening to excerpts, reflecting on our experience with the project, and checking in with Gerry for guidance at various points along the way. Our own enthusiasm for the project continued to grow, and our appreciation for each interviewee continued to deepen and give us a renewed vision about the work we were doing and the importance of sharing our discovered treasure with the larger temple community. So we are here today, to do just that-- to share a bit our work--today's reading is just a taste of these oral histories, and we hope you will enjoy this glimpse into the personal testimonies of our LT members and the ways that their stories intersect with one another and resonate with your own.

We want to thank each of our interviewees for sharing their time and their stories. Here are their words.