

**Ida Levitan Sanders**  
**Narrator**

**Rhoda G. Lewin**  
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**Mrs. Sanders' apartment**  
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[Note: Because this interview was conducted for research purposes only, in preparing a history of East European Jewish immigration to Minneapolis, the interviewer did not follow oral history guidelines and record the questions she asked during the session.]

**Ida Sanders:** My name is Ida Sanders. My maiden name was Ida Levitan. I came here to this country with my mother in July, 1905. I am now seventy-six years old.

I was born at the turn of the century—January, 1900. I have taken the birthday of the 27<sup>th</sup> of January, but I really don't know when my birthday was, because my mother told me I was born twenty-seven days into Shevat. I always thought the equivalent of the twenty-seventh day of Shevat was the 27<sup>th</sup> of January, and sometimes it comes near that day. This year it was within two days; the twenty-seventh of Shevat and the 27<sup>th</sup> of January were within two days of each other.

My father came here in about 1903 and my mother followed with the three children. I was five years old, don't remember very much of life in Europe at all. I remember a little bit . . . vague memories of a ship . . . probably we were in the steerage . . . coming over, but I have very few memories of that.

I often wonder how the people came here. What brought people from a little hamlet in Europe? My father comes from a small town called Botok—I imagine the spelling would be B-o-t-o-k—in the province, or the [unclear], of Kovna. I often wonder what brings people from the depths of Kovna to Midwest America. What in the world brings them here? Well, my father I can understand, because he had a brother-in-law, Max Levitan, who was here. But whatever brought the brother-in-law here? What brought the first person here? I know people who have gone to Montana! We landed in Baltimore, that I know, and came here, and father had brothers and sisters.

Some of my earliest memories were of Sixth and Lyndale where there was the Bank Steamship Company. Meyer Bank, I think, was his name; he was Henry Bank's father. And I suppose he was the one who sold steamship tickets to my father for him to bring his wife and three children, me and two younger sisters, over here.

When I came here, of course, I knew no English and soon I was ready for school. Six years old. I still knew no English. So my family decided that I should stay home a year

and try to learn English. Well, how could I learn English when I lived in a neighborhood with my cousins and my neighbors and such, and where the older people spoke Yiddish? The younger people spoke English, and I still hadn't learned English. So I started school a year later than everyone else, I was a year behind, I started as seven. I went to Grant School, which was at that time on Girard and Twelfth, Fremont-Girard and Twelfth. And I knew absolutely no English. I remember my teachers' names, Miss Prescott and Miss Kennedy, and some of them probably knew a little German because with my Yiddish and their German we managed to get along. And in no time, of course, I picked up English and went through school. Then from there I went to... We had moved. We had lived originally on the eight hundred block of Bryant, and then we moved to 621 Lyndale Avenue North, and I transferred to Sumner School. I graduated at the age of fifteen from Sumner School, and then went to North High and graduated there. By that time I could speak English!

Then I started Talmud Torah. I understand that there was a Hebrew school of some kind on Fourth Street and Sixth Avenue North. I don't remember that. I remember the Talmud Torah, the old building that was moved on Bassett Place, probably eight hundred block Bassett Place. In 1912 my father enrolled me and my sisters in the Talmud Torah and then in 1914 the new building was built on Fremont and Eighth Avenue North. I attended the Talmud Torah and the rest of my life I was very closely associated with the Talmud Torah.

I went to North High, and St. Paul wanted to start a Talmud Torah like Minneapolis. Rabbi Philip Kleinman was rabbi at the Temple of Aaron at that time. This was the year 1917. I was still in high school. Rabbi Kleinman approached Mr. Avin, who was principal of Talmud Torah then, to help him start a Talmud Torah. And he wanted a teacher. Well, I was still a pupil at the Talmud Torah, I was just a senior in North High, and my friend Rae Goldberg (who later became Mrs. Chaim Margulies) and I were sent from North High every day, five days a week, to St. Paul. We had two classes there. Rae had the Hebrew-English class, I had the Hebrew class, and we taught from October through May. I don't think I did very well, because I was young and I had no idea of how to teach. The fact that I knew Hebrew doesn't mean that I'd make a good teacher, because a person can know French or German or any other language and not be able to teach it, because you have no training in pedagogic methods at all. But we did what we could.

Then after that the Talmud Torah wanted me to teach over there, both Rae and I. We did some studying with the teachers over there, and I taught for about a year. And now I meet hundreds of people who tell me, "You were my teacher," which I don't remember, because I only taught one year. Because I found it was too hard for me to teach. I just couldn't control the kids; I didn't know how. The kids also were pretty wild, especially at the Talmud Torah, and some of our finest people! So I told Mr. Avin that I wouldn't be able to teach, that I was trained for the business world and I wouldn't keep up my position there. But they found that they could keep me as secretary to Mr. Avin, and I continued there as secretary to Mr. Avin until I got married in March, 1923.

When I was married then, the Jewish community on the North Side was a very cohesive

community, a very homogeneous community. It was not only the Talmud Torah and the synagogues and later the Beth El, which was the first Conservative synagogue on the North Side—before that the only Conservative synagogue was the Adath [Jeshurun] with Rabbi C. David Matt, whom I knew as a pupil at the Talmud Torah—I remember Dr. Gordon, who later became director of the Talmud Torah, saying that the "rey-ach" of Judaism was as important as the "ru-ach." "Rey-ach" is aroma and "ru-ach" is spirit, and the two words in Hebrew are very closely related. I later became president of the Talmud Torah Auxiliary—that was in the 1930s—and Dr. Gordon was taking me somewhere to get the treasurer to sign some checks, and as we were going up and down the street, we could literally smell the Sabbath, the fish and the chicken and the preparation, and that was when he said that the "rey-ach," the odor, the aroma of Judaism, is as important as the "ru-ach," the spirit.

I remember the first World War, but somehow when you live through an era, especially when you're young and you're in grade school, you don't pay too much attention to it. You don't realize the enormous historical impact that it will have. You have to be older to really appreciate what happened when you were young. I do have some recollection of the war. I remember when the United States went into war. I remember the war work that we did. But we were kids, so we didn't do too much.

I remember when the Association of Jewish Women's Organizations—I think they called it Conference of Jewish Women's Organizations—started in 1930, with Belle Rauch as the organizer. Those of us who were connected with organizations worked in it. I remember the work we did, not for the first World War, but for the second World War—that the Conference of Jewish Women's Organizations had their one large tremendous meeting, and all the proceeds went to the Red Cross. We were all involved in war work, one way or another, bandages and Red Cross and raising funds . . . various things that we did.

I will go back to the first year of my upper teen years. It has been said that the youth of that age was trying to get away from Jewish things and from Judaism as much as possible. I didn't feel that at all, maybe because my family was so Jewish. I lived in a completely Jewish neighborhood, lived on the North Side all my life, and I was so closely connected with the Talmud Torah, all of my activities, our whole "gang"—if you can call them a gang—not a rough gang—we were at the Talmud Torah. We graduated the Talmud Torah. We organized a Talmud Torah alumni. We went out for Flag Day to raise funds for JNF, house to house, we went for Flower Day for JNF collection. And it was this very group that was associated with the Talmud Torah, the Talmud Torah Alumni, that went out with the Blue Boxes twice a year to collect funds. We had wiener roasts, and we had winter parties, and we had toboggan parties, and it was all the group from the Talmud Torah. We were not far away from Jewish things at all.

As a matter of fact, after we graduated the Talmud Torah, we organized the Young People's Synagogue, where we had our own services downstairs. We had our own sermons. People that were associated with that group were David Goldstein, now Rabbi Goldstein, Max Shapiro, Max Feder, Harry Kaplan, the Korengold boys, Reuben Lenske,

who was married to Rose Mirviss—all the people who graduated the Talmud Torah in the first class. We had Friday night services where we were our own speakers, our own chazzanin, and then some of the older people of the community realized what we were doing and came to services. We also organized our own High Holiday Services, and soon we had a very, very large attendance. And some of the people of the North Side, with a long range view, realized that they needed a Conservative synagogue on the North Side. And from the Young People's synagogue came the Beth El.

When I was working at the Talmud Torah, we had just the school. Then later they organized what they called the Social Service Department of the Talmud Torah. The first head of that Social Service department was Miss Julia Felsenthal. She had been in charge of what was the Associated Jewish Charities of Minneapolis; she was head of it at first. Later there was a Mrs. Kurtz who became head of it, and then, much later, Rabbi Abraham Heller, who was a graduate of the Seminary, was head of the Social Service Department of the Talmud Torah. And the reason I know that is, when I was married in March, Rabbi Heller was the one who married us. Rabbi Aronson was not here yet. And from that time on Beth El grew, and he really was the first Rabbi, although it was not called Beth El at that time; it was the Young People's Synagogue, and from that grew the Beth El.

As I said, our activities centered around the Talmud Torah and they were all Jewish activities in Jewish organizations.

Where did I live when I was first married? My parents lived on Fremont in the seven hundred block and I lived on Eleventh and Fremont, a small building that had been remodeled into small apartments, which Mr. Friedson owned. We lived there for about four years and rent was thirty-five dollars a month. That included heat and electricity and furniture! We paid for our own telephone. It was a good thing it included that because we couldn't have afforded much more.

I remember the Talmud Torah Ladies Auxiliary had their dinner dance already, but for many years Max and I did not attend because we couldn't afford the tickets, and certainly I couldn't afford a long dress! But we did meet with our alumni activities with our friends.

We did attend the Schubert Theatre that had a stock company, and we had season tickets. We were able to get a baby sitter for my daughter Deera, who was born at that time, and we went once a week to see the plays. And not only did we see the plays that the Schubert put on, but they brought in many leading actors and actresses who later became famous—Florence Reed, Victor Jory and others who acted in their plays as guest stars. And we had our discussion groups and study groups and friends.

Later we moved from Fremont and Eleventh to Tenth and Newton, in a one-bedroom apartment which Mr. Noun owned. Later, when my son David was born, we moved to 1027 Morgan; that was a two-bedroom apartment. We lived there for ten years and in 1939 we moved to Russell and Twelfth, where we lived for over thirty years, until 1967, when Max and I felt our life-style had changed and we wanted to get into a smaller place,

and we moved into an apartment where I am residing now, 3101 East Calhoun Boulevard.

During the time that we lived on Twelfth and Russell, the last few years, there was considerable change in the community. There were violence, a couple of riots, and people said, when are you going to move? And we said we are *not* going to move. Max and I were very happy where we lived, and the fact that black people were moving in around us and black people moved right next door to us, that didn't affect us one bit, because if they were nice people, we were very glad to have them. Mrs. Graham and her family moved in right next door to us. We lived as neighbors for seven years, and I told Mrs. Graham that when Max and I move some day, it will not be because you live next door to us, it will be because we want a smaller place, we want more freedom to travel, and that was what we did. We moved in 1967 and Max and I lived here together for five years until he passed away.

I remember my family, my parents. We had five girls. I was the oldest. We talk a lot about parents sacrificing for their children [but] I don't think that my parents felt that they were sacrificing for their children. As I look back now, I think that they probably were, but probably no more than we think today that *we* are sacrificing for our children. We are doing what we can for them, in trying to give them direction, show them the way, the right way, both by deed and by word, and after that we pray. We hope that they will have the sense to choose what is best for them. But I don't think that we feel that we are consciously sacrificing and hurting ourselves, and my parents probably felt the same way.

Five girls in my family . . . I remember the pigtails that we wore. My mother shampooed five heads every single week, and even after I got older, she still shampooed five heads! One of my sisters passed away when she was seventeen. There's still four of us left.

The big event in our lives was when the Passover and Rosh Hashanah holidays came. We could have new ribbons for our hair and that was when we got new shoes. Between times the shoes were mended at the shoemaker. We couldn't get new shoes, couldn't afford very much, but we always had enough to eat. Although my father was poor, when I think back, we didn't feel poor.

We lived in back of the store where my father sold fish. He was in partnership at 621 Lyndale Avenue North with Mr. Silesky. Mr. Silesky is the grandfather of Irene Stillman and Jean Stillman and he had a lot of other daughters who later became prominent in the city in a business way. Later he had a store on Sixth and Colfax Avenue North; Greenstein's Butcher Shop was there. Later, as the community kept moving, they moved up to Plymouth, in the 2000 block, next to the Stillman Grocery Store. In Greenstein's my father had the fish counter, until he passed away.

But my parents sent five girls to school at Talmud Torah. He supported us literally by the work of his hands and the sweat of his brow. None of us worked until after we got out of high school. The only time we could have worked would have been on the Sabbath, because after school we went to Talmud Torah. We went to Talmud Torah in those days from four to six and from six to eight. We had two-hour classes, five days a week. There

wasn't time to have a job. The only time we could work was on the Sabbath, and my mother said that we cannot desecrate the Sabbath to work, so we didn't go to work until afterwards.

My parents were very observant, didn't turn on the lights on the Sabbath, and didn't have us turn on the lights. I know that that is only one small observance, but they were also observant on the very large and meaningful things of the religion.

Most of our activities centered around the school and the Talmud Torah and the holidays. Our groups that we had were organized by the Talmud Torah teachers and one teacher in particular that I want to mention, and that's Mr. Menachem Heilicher. He was very active in organizing the alumni, as was Dr. Gordon, but Mr. Heilicher organized the study groups. He saw to it that we prepared papers and talks for our study groups. We met in homes and we'd always have refreshments and have business meetings and various social activities, as well as topics that we had to prepare. Mr. Heilicher also saw to it that we prepared the sermons for our Young People's Services. That went on for many years. Mr. Heilicher gave us direction. He did not prepare the paper for us; he told us where we could go to get them. Talmud Torah had a library in one of the rooms upstairs, and we got books from the Talmud Torah library.

When I was working at the Talmud Torah . . . I worked from 1918 to 1923 . . . in addition to being secretary to Mr. Avin, which was in the afternoon, in the morning I worked with the financial secretary, Mr. Ratner, in the office, in billing and such. And then when Mr. Zemach, one of the teachers at the Talmud Torah, started the Talmud Torah library, I helped him. I worked in the library. My hours at the Talmud Torah, by the way, were from nine in the morning until nine at night, but I had a three-hour break from twelve to three because the classes didn't start again until three o'clock. By that time we lived first at 718 Fremont Avenue North and then 709 Fremont Avenue North, which meant almost next door, across the street from the Talmud Torah, so I was available for anything that I wanted. Mr. Avin had teachers' meetings usually Saturday night or Sunday, and if I was needed to send a wire to the East when they looked for teachers—and usually the wires were in Hebrew, transliterated into English letters—I was there to transliterate them and give them to the Western Union operator in Hebrew, but in English script!

The community was a good, active community. The Associated Jewish Charities, which was the forerunner to the Federation, was organized then by members of the community. Mr. David Berman, Mr. A. N. Bearman, Dr. Gordon, and others whose names I know, but I can't recall right now, they were at the Associated Charities. Later, in 1930, the Federation was started and as Max and I became part of the community, Max became active in the community. He was on the Talmud Torah Board, he was on the Beth El Board, and he became an active leader in the Federation. He was chairman of the Budget Committee for ten years. He had all the positions from Vice President down; he never took the presidency of the Federation.

Other people, Max's friends, were active in the Federation, and in the Talmud Torah, and in the Beth El Synagogue. One of Max's close friends was Max Shapiro, who was

president of the Beth El for about ten years. Both Maxes worked with Mr. Harry Sweet, who was President of the Beth El for many years. They worked with Mr. Benjamin Light, worked with Mr. A. N. Bearman, and later there was Mr. Al Berman.. I think that was his name. It was a community . . . and I think when the North Side . . . I don't want to use the word "disintegrated" . . . moved away to another area, something very precious, something very important, left the city. There was so much vitality and so much life and so much real *Jewishness* there. I don't think it can be repeated in any other part of the city, although there are sections of the city where there are a number of Jewish families living . . . not a large percentage . . . but what was there is not there any more, and I don't know if it can ever come back. You look back, and there is a nostalgic feeling there, but it is more than just nostalgia, it was something real, alive and vital and life-giving to the community, and I think that is what has made the community what it is today, that gave it the breath of life.

I remember when I was still a pupil at the Talmud Torah, some of the Zionist conventions were held here. Some of the speakers . . . (Chaim) Weizmann came here. Schmaryeh Levin was here. Jabotinsky was here. And I remember when Max and I were dating and we went to hear Weizmann, and that was already in 1921 and 1922, and Jabotinsky and Schmaryeh Levin. But when I was a pupil at the Talmud Torah, these speakers who came here, they were brought in by the Zionist organizations. I don't know if they were Paole Zion, the Lovers of Zion . . . I don't remember which convention it was. But the Talmud Torah pupils always participated with Hebrew speeches, readings, and people turned out in *very* large numbers to hear these speakers because the idea of Zionism and working for Palestine in those days was so strong that people—especially the North Side community—came out by the hundreds to hear them. Some of the meetings were held downtown and some were held in the synagogues.

I'd like to speak about the rabbis when I was young. Rabbi Silber, the wonderful rabbi of the Kenesseth Israel—the building that was on Lyndale between Fifth and Sixth . . . When my father came to this country he became a member of Shaarei Zedeck, but it was called the "Grine Shul." It was a little building—I remember it distinctly—a frame building painted green! It was on Eighth Avenue and Aldrich. At that time the other Orthodox synagogue . . . they used to call it the Oak Lake Shul . . . was the beginning of the Mikro Kodesh shul. Later there was an Orthodox synagogue, the Tifereth B'nai Jacob, which was on Elwood, and the Mikro Kodesh, which moved up to Oliver.

But to go back to the synagogue that my father belonged to, which was the beginning of the Shaarei Zedeck, they later moved to Bryant and Eighth and they built a very, very nice building, and it stood there for years until they moved to Morgan and Twelfth. Some of the Rabbis of that synagogue, of the Shaarei Zedeck, my father's rabbis, were Rabbi Seltzer and then Rabbi Silver, who is the Rabbi Emeritus of the synagogue to this day. I was not associated with that synagogue, because as I said, when I was in the Talmud Torah we were close to the Young People's Synagogue, and later we joined the Conservative movement. I was never associated with the Orthodox movement, but my father was an active member of the Shaarei Zedeck. And my father working for himself, and being in the fish business, he was able to go to shul almost every day, and certainly a

very important part of his life was Friday nights and all day Saturday, where he went to the morning and the evening Minyan, and certainly to the Sunday morning Minyan.

Of course, he worked evenings in those days. And one thing that may be interesting... we didn't have freezers and the butcher shops were open Thursday nights late, because you had to buy your fish and meat for the Sabbath late on Thursday, and they also opened Saturday night to enable the people to buy their meat. There wasn't fish on Saturday night because the fresh fish didn't come in 'til Sunday or Monday. But the butcher shops were open Saturday night so people could buy their fresh meat for Sunday and the first part of the week. We had ice in those days, and then later we got the refrigerators, and much later, we got freezers.

About anti-Semitism, I can't say that I actually felt any anti-Semitism throughout my life, maybe because I didn't have a chip on my shoulder, maybe because I wasn't looking for it. In the Summer school—I went to Grant school only through the third grade, so my memories of that are rather limited—but in Summer school, we lived in the Jewish community, we had Jewish and non-Jewish pupils in the school, mixed, but I didn't feel any anti-Semitism. When I went to North High, there was talk of anti-Semitism, the Jewish kids and the non-Jewish kids, and I remember finally, just before we graduated, Julius Segal became the first Jewish president of a graduating class, and a big deal was made about that. My father may have run into anti-Semitism, but we didn't talk about it.

Max was in the business world for all of his life. Max, by the way, was a Canadian! He came from the Ukraine in Russia—this is the story that he tells me—his father came from the Ukraine in Russia to a small town in Manitoba named Brandon. I wonder how the Jews from the Ukraine, the city of Kremenchuk, got to Canada. Except in Max's father's case, his brother was there . . . Max's uncle. But how did the uncle come there? I don't know. But Max's father, David, was brought there by his brother, and then they lived in Brandon, which was a small town about 140 or 150 miles northeast of Winnipeg. He lived there and got his schooling there. Brandon College was a branch of McGill University, and that's where Max got his college training. He came to Minneapolis after the first World War. I didn't meet him until about August or September of 1921. We became friends, and then we dated, and after about fifteen months we were married, in 1923. At that time he was in the car business, parking. He was working with somebody in a garage and then the man's son was supposed to take over, but he became an alcoholic and there was nobody to take over. Max and an Englishman, Mr. Green, took over the garage, where they had parking, and from that garage they went into the car business, and into parking. And then Mr. Green and Max separated because Max had ideas and Mr. Green wanted to maintain the status quo. They separated very amicably—they were friends all of their lives—and Max went into the car business and later into the parking business. And that's where he was until our two boys took over—Albert Tychman and David Sanders—and they carried on to this day.

About anti-Semitism . . . The first organization I became active in was the Talmud Torah, of course . . . the Talmud Torah was my first love, to this day. I was initiated into Jewish communal life very early, when I was about thirty years old. I was Vice President of the

Talmud Torah, and Mrs. Ossie Weinstein was President. She served for three years, and then she felt that she wanted to give up the office—not the work, but the office—and I, as Vice President, stepped in. One of our activities was the rummage sale. I remember we were on Washington and Hennepin in the rummage sale and a man came in. He was from skid row . . . he was literally the dregs of the gutter . . . and he came in, and became very abusive for no reason whatsoever, and said, “Hitler should have finished his job!” I have a very vivid memory of that. What we said at that time was to consider the source, but we also knew that the anti-Semites were not just these derelicts, and the scum of the earth, but the higher educated people. By that time I knew more about anti-Semitism, but I personally had very little experience with anti-Semitism itself.

[End of interview]

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