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Edgar Ross

Jazz Glastra

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EDGAR ROSS INTERVIEW

MARCH 1, 2011

E = EDGAR ROSS

J= JAZZ GLASTRA

~~AA~~ Interviewee does not want
real name used - I used
pseudonym "Edgar Ross"

E: Let me ask you a question before you start asking me.

J: Sure, yeah, go ahead.

E: The um, you're a sociology major?

J: Religious Studies; the two are closely related.

E: Ok. Now the subject. Did you broach the subject with the gentleman that was here or vice versa? I mean—

J: You mean where did the idea come from?

E: Yeah.

J: Um, it was, I guess the idea came from—there's a lady named Lois Hanson.

E: Bingo. There's the question you see. I had her name because Richie Cochran, who's a Mount Vernon resident who I've known for years and years and years, we went to school together, told me, or sent me an email, that this woman Lois Hanson approached him about some getting, doing some research on the Jewish Community in Mount Vernon. Well Lois Hanson never contacted me. Who is Lois Hanson?

J: Okay, she's a woman, she's Jewish and she lives in Mount Vernon, and she's been doing historical research basically on Jews in Knox County, basically as far back as that goes. So her research is starting I think in like the 1820s or something.

E: I was there.

J: [Laughs] I don't believe you. And so, and she's been doing stuff kind of more before my time period, although stuff that's...see my time period that I'm focusing on is basically 1930-1960.

E: So you're not cooperating with her or vice versa?

J: Um, yeah we're in contact and we're sort of cooperating, but she, she's more interested in purely historical stuff and I'm more interested in, like, the religious studies approach, so, generally the religious aspects.

E: Ok, last question. Where you from?

J: I'm from Washington State.

E: Are you? Where?

J: Um north of Seattle, in Stanwood, Washington. I actually have family roots in Knox County though.

E: Do you?

J: Yeah, yeah, both my grandparents grew up here. My grandpa graduated from Mt. Vernon High School.

E: What was his, was his—

J: You mean his year?

E: No, what was his name?

J: His name was Anderson, Rupert Anderson, but he was before your time. I think he would've graduated in probably '38 or so.

E: But their children, which is your parents, did they grow up here?

J: Um, no. My grandpa, during the war ended up stationed in Washington and so, kind of just landed there.

E: I used to have to go out to Seattle very, very often.

J: Oh really? What for?

E: Well I used to be with NCR Corporation, and I designed a system for liquor stores.

J: For what?

E: Liquor Stores. And Seattle, er Washington was a control state. So, and they bought my system, I mean I didn't sell it cause I was a designer. But, I always had to go out there to work with their [unintelligible] folks and explain all the wonderful things about my system.

J: So you said you worked for NCR Corporation, what is that?

E: National Cash Register, based in Dayton. Made computers, and you know all the electronic cash registers and [unintelligible] sales.

J: Okay, cool.

E: Oh y—I wish I were your age. How old are you?

J: I'm 21.

E: Huh, like I said. Alright.

[Cut tape]

J: Ok, so this is Jazz Glastra and the date is March 1st and it's a little after 1 o'clock in the afternoon doing an interview for the Rural Life Center with Edgar Ross. Um, about Jewish life in Knox County. Um, I kinda wanted to get, start with learning more about your father, if that's ok? Um, so do you know where he was actually educated in Germany?

E: He got his master's degree from the University of Darmstadt, in ah, Darmstadt, Germany. And that's where he got educated.

J: Ok, um...can you spell that? [Laughs]

E: No. Hahaha.

J: That's alright, I'll look it up.

E: Yeah, you look it up.

J: And his degree was in engineering?

E: Engineering.

J: Ok, cool. Okay, and do you know when he initially came to the United States?

E: I think, originally 1922.

J: '22. Ok, um...

E: But then he went back again. To uh, get, um, his fiancée, which is my birth mother.

J: Right ok. So were they engaged before he came here?

E: I think so.

J: Ok. And did he work at Cooper-Bessemer from the beginning?

E: No. I'm going by recollection.

J: Ok, that's fine.

E: When he first came to the United States, he was sponsored by a fellow by the name of Oche. O-A-C, no O-C-H-E I think. He was a big muckity muck down in Cincinnati, in fact there's a school named after him. But he worked, my dad worked for General Electric in Cincinnati. That's where he started off.

J: Ok. And then—

E: And then from there he moved to Grove City, PA for Cooper-Bessemer. And that's where my brother was born. They, they lived in Franklin, [which] is a suburb of Grove City. And then from Grove City to Mount Vernon.

J: Ok. And so, you're, do you know what year your father actually came to Mount Vernon? If you can't remember that's ok.

E: Uhhh, no.

J: Ok, that's fine. And so it's my understanding that your father was able to sort of sponsor several of his family members from Germany.

E: Right his brother. Well, first of all my dad had a brother and a sister. Lothar, was his, and stop me if I'm replicating something you're aware of. And Friedel was his sister.

J: Ok.

E: [Showing papers, pictures] There, I got this, there's a family that's related to the Erlangers. This my dad, and this is his dad. And this is in Germany.

J: Ok, great. Can I keep this?

E: Uhhh, no well it's public record because it's on the—

J: I'll just write this down and look it up then.

E: I was gonna show this to my son when—

J: Sure. Ok and do you know how many, um so he was able to sponsor them to bring their families? Or, I guess Friedel didn't have any children.

E: No, um. Friedel and Leo, her husband, were originally scheduled to go to Brazil. Because Leo Frankle had a brother in Brazil, who had, was a, was the biggest toy manufacturer in Brazil at the time. Um, I was born April 29th, 1938. Um, Erna, which is my birth mother, died May 5th, 1938. So here's my brother who's four years older than me, and here I am, a little snot-nosed kid, came into the world. So, my dad, somehow Friedel and Leo got notification that Erna had died. So instead of going to Brazil like they had planned on and everything, they came here to Mount Vernon. Mmmkay. Friedel took care of us for four years. And Friedel was a nurse at Mercy Hospital, in the neo--what they call now, well it's a nursery but now it's neonatal. You know all the other things. And um, Lothar came over I don't know what, and Lothar had five children. Which years, I don't know.

J: And they were specifically coming from Germany because of the Nazi oppression, correct?

E: Right. Apparently they look at the crystal ball, and saw what is happening, and so my dad did everything to get everybody out. Unfortunately, he didn't get everybody out because some wound up in concentration camps and later in the ovens.

J: Ok. Um, and so kind of when, when your father was here, do you know if he ever encountered discrimination as a German immigrant? Or as a Jew? Or...

E: No. I mean, don't forget, here I am—I'm young, naïve. Ok. And I have, I don't have the peripheral vision you have now. But I, he never talked about, or I've never witnessed discrimination against him. I do remember two instances where discriminatory remarks were made. The first one, or the second, it makes no—one, you know everyone has a little clique when you're in high school. I was sitting on a porch and we were ready to go somewhere, and somebody said "I don't want him to go along," talking about me, "he's a Jew." I didn't get mad. Um, back then the community was so small that you didn't hear that. Or, if other people thought about it they didn't say it. But I took that as—it was a girl. This girl, it didn't come out of her own head. She heard it from her parents, or somebody, ok? So how can that be? Did I get hurt? No. Was I sorry she said it? Yes, 'cause I didn't expect it. And the other incidence, was um, I was a boy scout. And um, we were going to the boy scout jamboree out in Irvine Ranch in California. And in preparation for the trip there was a meeting and I don't really know where it was. And an Eagle Scout got up, talked about all the things you should pack, blah blah blah, what to do, and he said "Beware the Jews."

J: Wow.

E: Oh yeah. And he, "don't trust the Jews." I remember that like... Well my dad was pretty, he was a pacifist, ok? And I looked at him, and he looked at me, and before I could say anything he got up. And he gave a tirade that Stephen Douglas would be happy with. You know, here you are you're an Eagle Scout, you know, you s'posed to have these boy scout standards, blah blah blah. And here—my dad put that kid to shame.

J: Did he look embarrassed? The kid?

E: Absolutely! I mean he, he cowered. My dad actually put him to tears. The tail end of this story, when we got out in California, and we set—I mean there was a gazillion boy scouts out there. We set up tent, and uh, one of my travel mates and my tent mate was a black fellow from Mount Vernon, Leonard Sally—great guy. So we were out doing something and the same fellow who made this ill-advised remark said "I'm gonna pour this," and he had a bucket of water, "Ross, I'm gonna pour this bucket o' water." And I said go ahead, but you know, do it at your own risk. "What are you gonna do about it?" I said, "Well, find out." He threw the bucket of water, and boy I nailed him to the cross. You would'a thought he was Jesus Christ reincarnated. So those were the only two times.

J: How old were you at that time.

E: Oh God...maybe 12, 13, 14 years old.

J: But would you say that by and large Mount Vernon was a fairly accepting place?

E: Exactly. I mean, like I said, you know, you at your age of 21, you haven't expanded horizons really out there. You only lived in your 21-year-old tunnel. And that's what I did, every kid does it. So like I said, first instance my thought was "Boy, she's really from an ignorant family." The second one, I creamed him.

J: Yeah, ok. So, um, I guess as far as, with your father, how committed was he to religion, would you say? Was that like a big deal in his life or kinda peripheral—

E: No, um, he wasn't Orthodox. He wasn't, I don't know, Conservative... There's you know three breakdowns: Reform, Conservative, and Orthodox. I know damn well he wasn't—excuse me.

J: Strike that!

E: Haha, strike that. That he wasn't Orthodox. I don't know if he was, he might've been reform, I don't know. But for tradition he did, um, take us to the synagogue. And there was a synagogue, believe it or not. I don't know how familiar you are with, um, downtown Mount Vernon. But being a Kenyon student—boooooing! You have to go to Mount Vernon right? Boooooing! Right? Mk. But there was a Lester's Men's store on the corner of Vine and Main Street. And on the side if you look up, you know beautiful downtown Hooterville, you take a picture of that. And on the second floor there's a door, and that's my first, my first recollection of a little synagogue. They made a room out of it, uh, ok. And they had a traveling rabbi, you know.

J: And so the Lester's Men's store, was that, if you were coming from the square, like say the square is over here. Which, cause there'd be like four buildings on the corner, I've been trying to figure out—'cause I've heard about this synagogue, but I've been trying to figure out where exactly it was. So like,

E: Well, it's on the...Northeast quadrant. I think it's a white building.

J: Ok, that clarifies it perfectly. And did, so the owner of that was also Jewish, right?

E: Well, I, I don't know if Lester Smilack owned the building or not. I know he had the store, and in fact my uncle Leo, Friedel's husband, worked there in that store for years.

J: Ok, cool.

E: Huh! "Cool."

J: [Laughs] It's the way us 21-year-olds talk these days.

E: I know.

J: Um, so, he would take you, the kids to services at this synagogue.

E: Well, yeah, I remember that. And then, I don't know why, then we started going up to Mansfield for the synagogue. And you know I went for—but to answer your question, um, my dad, he was like bilingual. Well, he spoke several—but what I mean by that is I remember having Chanukkah, and I remember celebrating Christmas. Which my dad affectionately termed the Channukah Bush. And my, his brother—same way. The religious one was Leo Frankle. Ok? Um, we used to go to their house on Friday night for Sabbath. And Leo Frankle would always give everything in the Jewish, you know, with the *tallis* [*tallit*] and the yarmulke. And my aunt had the um, you know the regular traditional meal. So, my aunt Friedel and her husband Leo Frankle were the driving force in trying to keep as much Jewish in the family as possible. Side note: Leo Frankle had two brothers. The one I told you was in Brazil, and the other one was in Israel. The one in Brazil was Morris, and the one in Brazil [Israel] was Max. Max had a daughter. Max had, her name was, uh, Yehuva. Yehuva married Uzi Gall. Does that name ring a bell?

J: No.

E: The Uzi gun? He invented the Uzi.

J: Oohhh, wow. Really?

E: He was a officer in the Israeli Army. And Uzi and Yehuva had a daughter. And I remember she came to Mount Vernon, and she could speak no English. She spoke German, and I at that time I spoke German too. And I would take her around Mount Vernon, and I would translate. Unfortunately she died, she had some chronic illness. So that's a side note.

J: Um, ok. So was there any attempt in either your family or by Friedel and Leo to keep kosher? Or was that just totally off the table.

E: No, uh no. To say that—I don't think they kept strict kosher. Several reasons. Number one: in Mount Vernon there wasn't any place that had kosher food.

J: Of course, yeah. Uh huh. So, I heard that actually about Leo Frankle, somebody said that he was the one who was actually leading services from time to time at the synagogue, or was it always--

E: You mean the one up at—

J: In Mount Vernon, yeah. Do you have any recollection of that?

E: No.

J: Ok that might've just been ext—erroneous information.

E: Well he might've. I mean, I don't have explicit memory.

J: Do you know, I guess the synagogue in Mount Vernon stopped after awhile. Do you know about when that was?

E: It—I'm going to say it had to be '49, '50. Maybe, you know '48, '49, '50, somewhere in there.

J: Ok, yeah 'cause I guess it started in, you know, '39, so that would've been a good decade that they had services up there. Ok, cool.

E: "Cool."

J: [Laughs] Yeah.

E: New vernacular.

J: [Laughs] Yeah. You can become younger just if you just say "cool" all the time.

E: I know. My granddaughter's "cool," what's the other one, "total"?

J: Yeah, totally. "Sweet."

E: Absolutely.

J: That one's in there too. How were, you mentioned Chanukkah, were Jewish holidays celebrated in your house? Like were they a big deal? Did your father take off work for them?

E: No.

J: Okay.

E: Now I do know that on the holidays, Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, they did fast. Now I know my uncle and aunt fasted and my dad fasted. Whether Lothar did, I really don't know.

J: Okay. Um, and so obviously you mentioned your dad sort of really standing up for you when you were picked on by the Eagle Scout—

E: Well it wasn't me they picked on, it was the Jewish religion.

J: In general.

E: Right.

J: Standing up for Jews in general.

E: Right.

J: Um, so, was it, I take it was fairly well-known in the community who was Jewish and who—

E: Oh yeah.

J: It wasn't hidden or anything.

E: Mount Vernon was a very close-knit community. Back then, it had a lot of manufacturing base. Both blue-collar and white-collar. Um, crime was, you didn't hear about it. Back then, when you're gay, you didn't mean you were gay gay, you meant you were happy. Mk. And the downtown was beautiful. Absolutely gorgeous. I just went through downtown, and I got sick to my stomach when I saw that. Uh, the square, there always activities on the square, you know where that statue is. And nothing is forever, I know that. But, like I said, my, from what I remember so well and so vividly and so fondly to what I saw in actuality...you know, it's sticker shock. I mean, I remember right here on campus when the men's dormitory burned down. And uh, I think they had one or two deaths. And um, there was a student who was kind of taken under my dad's wing, and I forget his name, that actually saved two of his classmates.

J: Oh really?

E: Yeah. And back then it was all men's. Side note: and this is not for discussion. I graduated from Military Academy in Virginia. And I was accepted to Kenyon College. My parents knew the president at that time, but I applied, you know. And I was accepted. And the military academy was all males. So at the beginning of my, see it would've been maybe April/May of '57, I called my parents up and I said "I got good news and bad news. Good news is I'm going to college, bad news is that I'm not going to Kenyon." There was a pause and I say, here it comes. Here comes the backlash, you know."Why?" And I said, "I'm gonna tell you something. I just spent two years down here in an all-men's academy. If I got to Kenyon I'm gonna turn funny." And I wound up at Ohio State. But we used to come up to Kenyon, there was a big indoor pool, somewhere back there. I don't even know if it's there anymore.

J: It's, yeah, it's not there anymore. It's been converted to a dance studio.

E: Oh! That's right. I think you, I had talked to you, but we used to go swimming there all the time. And there was a day camp that we used to go here, run by, I can't remember their names. But anyway, I'm sorry—my mind wanders.

J: That's okay. Stories are good. So you mentioned that your dad spoke several languages?

E: He spoke German obviously, he spoke English, and he spoke some French.

J: Oh, ok. Um, and so you mentioned that you actually spoke German so were you raised mostly speaking German, mostly speaking English, both?

E: Well no, they had to teach me, they had to teach me English when I was growing up, because I heard everything in German. And my aunt Friedel like I said took care of me, and was the one

that really taught me English. Um, there was also a Catholic nun—do you know where Mercy Hospital used to be? On High Street there?

J: Yes. Right.

E: Well that was a Catholic hospital run by the nuns. And there was a nun there, Sister Charlotte Marie, who my dad used to drop me off there and she'd take care of me. Ok? Uh, while he was in work. I don't know about my brother, where my brother was but... Maybe he was there too. Or he had another, or else he had a babysitter. Which I think happened. So I was close to turning Catholic.

J: Hm. Ok so how well did your father speak English then?

E: Oh very well.

J: But just was more comfortable in German, then?

E: Well no. He was very comfortable in both environments. Wh, when he was amongst people who spoke German he would speak German. And people who spoke, I mean he had a very good, great vocabulary, very articulate.

J: I'll tell you a quick story that you might find interesting. My dad's dad, who was the one who gave me my last name, the Dutch last name, was actually you know, he came from the Netherlands as a young man after WWII. And I guess one time when my grandfather took his family back to the Netherlands to visit, my dad told me that he sort of stepped off the plane and saw all the signs in Dutch, and his mind like kind of switched back to the Dutch side. And so when my dad asked him a question in English, even though of course my grandfather spoke perfect English and had been doing it for years, he had to stop and think for a minute, and kind of like retranslate, because he had so quickly switched back into, into Dutch.

E: Right. And you know it's, it's evolutionary. And I give great credit to all the immigrants in this country. Who, I mean, learning English was not an option. They did. And that's one of the things that bothers me when some of, they say "well, we oughtta make English a secondary language" and that's Spanish, and, well *sorry*. Mk.

J: Yeah.

E: If I step on your toes let me know.

J: No.

E: You know I'm a big boy here.

J: [Laughs] Not at all. So how do you think, some of your cousins were actually born in Germany.

E: Fred. Fred, and Hannelore I think.

J: And Margo as well.

E: That's right. Margo. Yeah Essie and Edgar were both born here.

J: And how do you, do you think your experience sort of growing up here was different from them, as a native citizen? Like, how do you—

E: I don't know. I don't think I differentiated anything. I just had a lot of fun.

J: Yeah, that's what kids usually do.

E: Well yeah, I mean like I said, growing up I never thought of—I knew Judaism is a religion. Now there's people who will argue that Judaism is a religion as well as a nationality. Well, Judea is where the whole thing started. Where's Judea part of? At that time?

J: Right. Well there's no one place.

E: Well I mean it was part of that whole Palestinian thing. I mean, even with Dr. Kullman... what's his name? Your professor?

J: Oh, Howard Sacks. Yeah.

E: Uh, we had a lot of good discussions 'cause he said it's both, and I said to me it's religion. Ok? Like Catholicism is religion. Ok. Mohammed, or Shinto. That's religion.

J: Okay, so you don't think it is an ethnicity then, or like a nationality or anything.

E: No. I think it's religion.

J: Yeah. That's one thing that I've been reading a lot about just about, and sort of this debate—

E: Well that debate's been...

J: Forever. Right, yeah.

E: Forever, yeah. Long before you and I are both going.

J: Um, let's see. Did you attend, was there a Sabbath School or like a sort of Hebrew School kind of thing in Mount Vernon when you were growing up?

E: [Shakes head no.]

J: No, okay. Um—

E: You mean parochial, period? For Jewish study? No.

J: How would you say, how important was religion to you when you were growing up?

E: Not really.

J: Not really? Just kind of...

E : I was too involved in other things.

J: Ok. And when you started going to the synagogue in Mansfield, were there a lot of people from Mount Vernon who would go to the Mansfield synagogue?

E: Mmm, not really. I remember piling into my father's 1940 Ford and going up there. Maybe a few other ones, not a whole lot. There were only about 13, 14 families here that—but we went.

J: Did you usually go every weekend?

E: Oohhhh yeah. Hated that trip!

J: [Laughs] Pile everyone into the car.

E: That damn '40 Ford, with the, with the camel hair, you know that—

J : The trip up to Mansfield.

E: Oh yeah.

J: Okay, did you have a bar mitzvah?

E: Oh yeah!

J: Ok. Where was that held?

E: In Mansfield. And my dear uncle Leo, Frankle, he translated the part of, and I memorized everything in the Hebrew. You know I faked it when they had the Torah out. You know. But I memorized the whole damn thing. Excuse me.

J: That's okay. Strike that!

E: Strike that.

J: Yeah. And who, was it your uncle Leo who was like helping you prepare for that?

E: Oh yeah he was my mentor, my professor, you know.

J: Do you know by any chance if he had any formal Jewish education, or if he was just more, kind of more, into it.

E: I don't know. I do know he was a hell of a soccer, he was a known soccer player in Europe.

J: Oh really?

E: Oh yeah. Big time.

J: I had not heard that. Interesting. Um, let's see.

E: Are you having fun?

J: Yeah, actually this is interesting for me, believe it or not. I do actually care what you...[Laughs] I'm just trying to like not ask the same question twice. Um, let's see. Um so you mentioned a couple of instances of discrimination towards like, your family—

E: Well not toward the family.

J: Ok, in general then. And that was it.

E: Yeah. I mean it's like me [puts hands on eyes] going like that: I hate all Catholics and I hate all Buddhists, and you know.

J: Ok. And was your birth mother also Jewish?

E: Yes.

J: And your father remarried, correct?

E: Greta.

J: Ok and was she Jewish as well.

E: Yes.

J: So how many siblings total do you have?

E: Well, I had my brother. And my brother passed away in 2000. He lived in Michigan.

J: And did you have any younger siblings or? Okay.

E: Not that my dad ever owned up to.

J: Right, haha. Ok, so do you still identify yourself as Jewish?

E: If somebody says "are you Jewish?" I say "yeah." Do make it, do I come up to you and say "Jazz! I'm Jewish!"?

J: Right. You don't make it a point.

E: No. And I just say, you see, and again, sometimes I have a weird way of thinking. I think to be Jewish you gotta focus on being Jewish. To be Catholic you gotta focus on it, ok? I was raised in

the Jewish environment. I was raised in an environment that celebrated the holidays. That we had, like I say, the Chanukkah and the Chanukkah Bush. The Sabbath, we would, Friday night we would go and, you know, have Sabbath. Um, and again I don't make a point saying, there's no big sign that says "Jewish." But if somebody said "what religion are you?" I'd say "I was born in a Jewish home."

J: Mmhm. Sure. That makes sense.

E: Does it?

J: Yeah. It does

E: At your young age that makes sense?

J: Yeah.

E: You'll pass your course.

J: I hope so. [Laughs] Um so, historically Jews usually congregate in larger cities, like big Jewish communities, what do you, do you have any impression of how it was like different for the Jewish community of Mount Vernon being in a small town, very small community?

E: I'm sorry, would you restate your question?

J: I guess, historically Jews are, are usually in like larger communities in big cities like New York or Philadelphia, or Boston, or wherever—

E: Oh you mean, they gravitate to each other.

J: Yeah.

E: Oh.

J: And do you, do you have any sense of how it was different or challenging or anything like that for people living in Mount Vernon.

E: No. You know, everybody assimilated with everybody else, regardless of religion. And again, you know, don't forget: Young guy, impression[able] as hell, uh naïve, naïveté was probably the top of my achievement. But no, you know, I never felt—we would run around, great people, wonderful people, ok? The clique, you know, we had a clique. You had a clique when you were out in Washington. I never, never, never felt that I was, uh, discriminated against, mk? But now my Erna, which is my birth mother, had a sister, Ilsa, who lived in Detroit, Michigan. And my dad, well, my, I would go up every summer for about, you know, three weeks, to visit her. Now there, she lived in a predominantly Jewish neighborhood. Ok? And were they cliquish? You betcha. And I gotta be honest with you I think there's some—I got my first taste of hypocrisy. Tradition, yes, but in, today in the society then was hypocrisy. Saturday, there was a woman,

that's the Sabbath obviously. A woman was deathly ill, a friend of my aunt Ilsa, that's Erna's sister. Deathly ill. But because it was the Sabbath she did not pick up the telephone to call, mk? She wouldn't do anything for, I mean she wouldn't even touch the electricity. And when I found that out I mean I remember, how stupid can that be? Ok? That to me took extremes way too far. Mk?

J: So um, but yeah, it was not like that at all in Mount Vernon is what you're saying? People were much more--

E: No not at all. In fact Erna and Ilsa, sisters, had an uncle. His name was Adolf Gentz. Adolf was extremely wealthy. He owned a huge, huge fashion store in Detroit called Russick's that also sold ornamental shoes Adolf, and this is gonna come right back to you 'cause you're Dutch, Adolf had a brother by the name of Richard. Richard, before he came to this country, was the chief designer for Queen Julianna of the Netherlands, a big article about him. They both got me together, and Adolf was nice. I mean, he's stern. He said, I remember he said "don't marry any but a Jewish girl." I looked at him and I said "I'm gonna marry the one I love. Period." Ticked him off a little bit. And I think that's wrong. I mean I do believe in tradition, mk? But I, I'm not gonna purposely go out, number one Mount Vernon was, Jewish girls where—[grunt]

J: Slim pickins I guess.

E: That was a close, it's close, yeah. And in fact the woman I married, and we've been married now for 53 years—

J: Congratulations.

E:--was at, worked a Smilack's. Lester's Men's Ware. 'Cause Lester was selling out because he and his wife and kids were gonna move down to Winterhaven. So it was a summer that I was home from Ohio state, was it? Yeah. And they hired my wife Nadia to work there because, you know, going out of, and of course like I said Leo Frankle was working there. Turns out, my parents bought Lester Smilack's house up on Edgewood Road, you know where Edgewood Road is?

J: Yeah.

E: Yeah, up there.

J: Oh, huh. Kind of stayed in the comm., very close in the

E: Yeah it was the Jewish community, right? Haha.

J: Ok, so. Um, so you basically already answered this question but I'll ask it anyways. Did Jewish families in Mount Vernon primarily socialize with Jewish families or with non-Jews or was it just kind of whoever was around?

E: No, well like I say it was—I do remember that the Jewish women had a Sisterhood here. But, if they were not, I mean the Jewish families that I knew were professionals or in retail—they did not have a Jewish clique. Or a Jewish mafia or anything like that.

J: Right, ok. You mentioned the Sisterhood, do you know how long that lasted? Or...

E: Hmm mm. [No]

J: Ok. Was your, I guess it would've been your stepmother, involved with that at all?

E: Yeah. There was a Doctor Gomer's, and all... All I remember they said was "I got a Sisterhood meeting" And, and I can, I remember saying "well if they've got a Sisterhood, why don't they have a brotherhood?" That was a dumb thing to say.

J: Well, it seems to make sense. What, let's see we talked about that. Um, how would, so kind of broadly with outside of your family, how important would you say religion was to the other Jewish families in the area? Do you think they were kind of along the same lines as your family?

E: No, some of 'em were more devout. They were devout, again, because of tradition. They came, like there was Dr. Shemansky—there were two Shemanskys in town, one was a doctor and one was a dentist. Uh, and then the Gomers, and then the Zelkowitz. Uh, Zelkowitz owned the, what's the? WMVO? And he was an attorney here in town. And some of em were more religious than—I mean I'm not saying our family wasn't religious. But if you look at a step, ok? Probably the Frankles were the most religious. Mk? And I really don't know what the next step down was.

J: Ok. Um did, you mentioned celebrating holidays with your family, were there like community events for any of the Jewish holidays? No? Okay.

E: Yeah Christmas [Laughs].

J: Right, yeah, everybody celebrates Christmas [Laughs]. Um, let's see what else have I not asked you? I'm almost getting to the end here. So someone else I spoke with characterized the Jewish community as a "tight-knit group," and you said there was no Jewish clique or anything, but do you think, agree, disagree?

E: Well no, I think. You know there's an old saying birds of a feather flock together. You know? So there's a natural inclination to gravitate to where you have common interests, ok? Now in some of the larger communities like the Detroit, Michigans, ok, they wouldn't go beyond their borders. That didn't hold true. Like I said, they assimilated here, and they were, and again, I mean remember I'm only talking from my perspective. But I tried to be as observant back then, ok? And you know I can't remember my dad or anybody telling me, you know, the Jews—Jewish people aren't that well, mk? Never have I ever heard that. My aunt Ilsa, the one in Detroit? She would use the word *goy*. You know what the word *goy* means?

J: Gentile.

E: Yeah. And that offended me. Mk? Cause that was kinda was a slang for gentiles. But she had a mind of her own, and you know, to hell this little snotty kid.

J: Okay. But it sounds like people did kinda help each other out like, Smil, how do you say his last name? Smilack?

E: Smilack, yeah. [Smy-luck.]

J: Smilack, okay. So your uncle worked for him, and—

E: Yeah, he, that was, I think that was probably his only job.

J: I guess, do you have anything, that's pretty much all, most of the questions I have. Oh actually I wanted to ask you can you just tell me like I guess what your dad was like personality-wise? I'm just curious.

E: He was very civic-minded. He belonged to Toastmasters, he was with the, he was on the what do you call it the boy scout council? I forgot what the name was. Cause I was a boy scout, and my brother was a boy scout, and my brother made Eagle scout and Order of the Arrow and all the niceties. Uh, my dad was very involved in the boy scouts. Uh, he was very active in the Easter Seals [unclear?]. Well my mother, being a physical therapist, was at Children's Hospital in Cincinnati. And a mutual friend of my dad and Greta—which is, I call her my mother, cause—got 'em together. But she worked in the same hospital at the same time as Dr. Seaman, Alfred Seaman, that polio vaccine thing. So when my mother and he got married, my mother set up a practice, a physical therapy practice, and she was very active in the Easter Seal thing. So, so was my dad. So, and my dad would collect for community, I think it was called community chest back then. So he was, but don't tick him off. I got some of that I'm afraid.

J: Uh did he encourage you and your brother to get involved with community as well?

E: The Jewish community or community in general.

J: Just community in general.

E: Well we, we were pretty well involved. I know that um, like I said I was in boy scouts, my brother was in boy scouts, my brother was a—watcha call it—manager for the basketball team, I played a little football, then a little more football, and a little more football, and blah blah blah. But we were pretty well involved with things. In high school we used to have what we called a forum show. Uh that was a variety show, if you will; we would get ourselves involved with that. It was a fun time. That's what I call the age of innocence. I really mean it.

J: Um, and, what when did you move away from Mount Vernon.

E: In, well in '55 cause that's when I went to the academy.

J: And after that, you were you said in Dayton.

E: No no no, after that, after graduation, I went to Ohio State. I only moved to, lived in that house up on Edgewood Road for about six months. And went to Ohio State, and partied too much, played a little too much football at Ohio State. So I had a little session with Woody. And I, I didn't have very many options 'cause my grades went to hell in a handbasket. So I kind of left Ohio State before....without my [degree? Unintelligible]. So, '55, to answer your question.

J: Okay, alright. Do you have anything that maybe you think I should've asked? Or anything you wanted to add?

E: No, I think you covered the field quite well. I mean based on how you wanna focus your research, it's basically how did the community accept the Jewish population and vice versa, ok? And like I said, I call it, I really do—I use it then, I use it now—the age of inno[cence]. I wish they had people your age, a little older, that would've experienced that age of innocence. Because people worked in the community and for the community and they associated with each other. Uh, they had a lot of social activities and from my, uh, couldn't care if you were black, white—now was there some discrimination with blacks? Sure. Mk? I never could figure that one out either. Mk? Biologically the only thing that's different is if you take a piece of pigment you'll see the difference in pigment. So it wasn't like that. Growing up Mount Vernon was great, to me. Now if you were coming out of New York, ok, you wouldn't have had that experience. Ok, if you were Irish if you were in Boston, you know, it would be birds of a feather type thing.

J: Okay I think that pretty much covers it then. This has really been very helpful.

E: Really?

J: Yeah.

E: You're not saying that to be nice?

J: No, not at all. It's very, very helpful.

E: Did it plug any holes in your, or no?

J: Mhm. It does, yeah. A lot of stuff that I was wondering. Specifically a lot of the stuff about how the Jewish community and greater Mount Vernon interacted, but yeah, it helps a lot.

E: Yeah, but when you say interacted, I mean, like I said—

J: They were one and the same, it sounds like.

E: Yeah it was assimilation, you know.

J: Yeah, mhm. Great, um well I think that's all I've got. Thank you very much. [End of interview]