

Glenbow Archives, Cliff Bungalow-Mission Oral History Project, RCT-940-16
Jenny Belzberg
March 8, 1999

Maiden Name: Laven

Former Cliff Bungalow-Mission Address: 515 21st Avenue SW

Date of Birth: 1928

Place of Birth: Calgary

Schools attended in Calgary: I.L. Peretz School, Cliff Bungalow Elementary, Rideau Junior High, Western Canada High

Occupations(s): Stenographer, Homemaker, Volunteer

Date of Marriage: 1948

Spouse's Name: Hyman Belzberg

Spouse's Occupation(s): Business Owner, Investor

Number of Children: 3

Father's Name: Abraham Laven

Mother's Maiden Name: Sonia Rinansky

Father's Occupation(s): farmer, business owner

Mother's Occupation(s): homemaker

Paternal Grandfather's Name: na

Paternal Grandmother's Maiden Name: na

Maternal Grandfather's Name: na

Maternal Grandmother's Maiden Name: na

Approximate time period you lived in the neighbourhood(if applicable): 1936 - 1948

Approximate time period your parents lived in the neighbourhood(if applicable):_1936 - 1958?

Approximate time period your grandparents lived in the neighbourhood(if applicable): na

Jenny Belzberg is a prominent Calgarian who has made an immense contribution to the city through her volunteer activity with numerous charities and arts groups. She was born in Calgary to an immigrant couple. Her father, Abraham Laven, was from a small village in Russia and came to Canada in 1911 and established a farm in the Springbank area. His first wife died in childbirth, leaving him with a baby daughter, who he raised with his widowed sister. Six years later he moved back into Calgary and established several different small businesses. Jenny's mother was Sonia Rinansky. She came from the eastern regions of Poland and immigrated during the Russian Revolution of 1917, joining relatives in Calgary. She met Laven in the city and the two were soon married. By 1936, the family was doing well enough to consider moving. They chose a house in Cliff Bungalow part of the Mission district, attracted by its pleasant middle class character and the closeness of the schools.

Ater attending the IL Peretz Jewish school to grade 4, Jenny went to Cliff Bungalow School, Rideau, and then Western Canada High, continuing to attend night classes at the Peretz school. Although her family was not Orthodox, Jenny remembers that their ethnic heritage was very important to them. After high school, Mrs. Belzberg worked as a clerk and stenographer for the military, the Cunard Shipping lines in Vancouver, and the Dominion Department of Immigration in Calgary. She had known the younger brothers of Hyman Belzberg through school, but never really knew Hy himself although the two families lived only two blocks apart. The two were set up on a "blind date" and were married in 1948. Hyman is well known in Calgary as the proprietor of Cristy's Arcade

Furniture and for his involvement in First City, a financial company started by his younger brothers. Jenny Belzberg's record of philanthropy and volunteer work stretches from the Jewish community to a number of arts organisation, particularly the Banff Centre of the Arts. Her contributions were recognised in 1997 with the Order of Canada.

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Two Tapes

Tape One, Side One

002 – Introduction

007 – Born in Calgary 1928, lived at 5th Avenue SE, near Langevin Bridge.

013 – Moved to Mission. Nicer district.

016 – Parents were Russian Jewish immigrants. Mother was Sonia Rinansky, father Abraham Laven.

023 – Father arrived in Canada 1911, homesteaded with dairy farm. First wife died of influenza.

028 – Raised first daughter with help of widowed sister

033 – Farm in Springbank sold to Union Dairy.

036 – Paternal grandfather – ran a village inn, father wanted to be a farmer, later had a hobby farm

044 – Immigrated to escape village life. First went to Boston, then joined sister homesteading.

054 – Mother came direct from Russia to Calgary, fleeing Bolsheviks with sister. Joined two other sisters.

060 – Story of parent's courtship; marrying within faith important

062 – Maternal grandparents were storekeepers. Grandfather died when mother young.

078 – Mother emigrated for the adventure.

090 – Father left farm after new marriage – went into business, not very successful.

095 – Close family, father outdoorsy, family often picnicked. Siblings: three sisters, one of whom was older half-sister. Jenny oldest of second batch.

100 – Stay at home mother. Can't recall many working mothers, just women in family businesses.

108 – Father's business ventures: flour and feed store, service station put under by rationing. Retired early on real estate investments.

130 – Father bought second farm in 1946. Near Strathmore, former CPR experimental farm.

150 – Move to Mission: seen as nicer neighbourhood. Old house on 6th Avenue next to businesses, red light district, not allowed out of yard.

168 – Eight at time of move. Attended Cliff Bungalow School for grade 5 and 6, attended Peretz School before this. Went to Peretz for cultural reasons, continued with night classes.

182 – Culture important, legacy of persecution, mother experienced pogroms in Russia.

192 – Father never mentioned persecution, enjoyed his military service, was cosmopolitan.

206 – Racism in Canada felt by her parents and herself, childhood friend repeats epithet

230 – Cliff Bungalow Mission School: remembers it as small, one teacher, Miss Winfield, very strict, used corporeal punishment. Teacher's pet, favourite teacher Mr. Giger.

252 – Holy Angels School: not much contact, played with Catholic kids outside of school.

264 – Neighbours: Taylors, piano teachers. Haydens, Rootmans - older Jewish couple, Kosher butcher.

- 284 – Laven house at 515 21st Avenue SW
- 286 – Tivoli Theatre: watched it built, neighbourhood baby sitter on Saturdays, meeting place for kids.
- 318 – Neighbours: Woodleys, retired Calgary policeman
- 340 – Playmates: from all over neighbourhood, most were school friends. Sutter twins, Oliver twins.
- 355 – Most friends lived on next street; her block Hepburn boys, older. John the paperboy, gave rides on his bike.
- 372 – Would visit neighbours baby, take her for walks in carriage.
- 382 – Much contact with neighbours.
- 386 – One family quite poor, lived kitty corner from them.
- 420 – Spent weekends on family outings, around town, excursions to Banff – major undertaking.
- 458 – Neighbours' occupations: Hayden, travelling salesman, lived with wife's parents, the McNabbs.
- 480 – End of Tape

Tape One, Side Two

- 006 – Sealock family
- 010 – Belzbergs: knew husband's brother Sam, used to cut grass
- 021 – The Depression: didn't notice as child, more obvious at high school, lack of new clothes.
- 038 – Dad's car: had car despite relative poverty, trade in every two years. Not too unusual for area.
- 048 – Home ownership: most families owned their own house, some rentals, some houses divided into suites.
- 064 – Businesses on 4th Street: Johnny's Confectionairy on 21st Avenue
- 078 – Attended Rideau Junior High. Had P.N.R. Morrison as grade 9 teacher.
- 096 – Cliff Bungalow-Mission school children attended Rideau.
- 107 – World War Two: awakened by newsboy
- 144 – Parents very concerned about the holocaust.
- 150 – Peretz School: only attended up to grade 4, smaller than Calgary Hebrew School.
- 178 – no other Peretz kids in Mission.
- 182 – Western Canada High: her high school, kids from all over, Scarboro.
- 194 – Post secondary education: father told her to take secretarial training, did not think girls should go to university, youngest sister went.
- 204 – Sisters: oldest Anne, Fran and Dorothy younger
- 214 – Dorothy: went to Central High, popular, married and divorced, earned Phd in Communication Studies, taught University of Calgary, married Justice MacDonald.
- 232 – Fran: helped husband in business, now helps son in deli business. Married Mort Libin.
- 252 – Anne: married into Groberman family, moved to Vancouver.
- 278 – Family expected marriage to Jewish men.
- 290 – Worked after finishing high school. Secretary at Department of Agriculture, then Department of Immigration, 2 years in Vancouver with Cunard Lines
- 360 – Lived with sister in Vancouver. Parents insisted on her return

- 405 – At Immigration department, boss caught taking bribes.
- 430 – Met husband Hyman Belzberg on blind date, 19 years old.
- 441 – Knew Hyman's brothers, not him. Belzbergs lived two blocks away.
- 456 – Moved into Drake Apartments as newlyweds. Started family immediately.
- 472 – End of Tape

Tape Two, Side One.

- 007 – Women: did not work after marriage unless financial need dire. Couples waited until they could afford to marry.
- 016 – raised children, joined volunteer groups.
- 025 – Parents stayed in neighbourhood until late fifties, moved to smaller home in Mount Royal.
- 036 – Changes in neighbourhood – 4th Street more commercial, more houses previously. More traffic, families moved away, more transient, shabbier.
- 051 – Parents first moved to North Hill area, then lower Mount Royal, finally upper Mount Royal.
- 060 – Three children, attended Earl Grey Elementary, Mount Royal junior high.
- 069 – Oldest son, attended Queen's University, law school in Toronto, lawyer, went into finances.
- 086 – Daughter attended University of British Columbia, York University, ardent feminist. Worked for Simon Weisanthal, now a Hollywood producer.
- 109 – Youngest son, became a vice-president at Merrill Lynch, tried business ventures, now financial planner. Attended University of Western Ontario.
- 124 – Awarded Order of Canada: for volunteer work, started with Jewish causes and groups, took on leadership roles. Involved in arts: Calgary Philharmonic, Banff Centre, Esther Honens Competition.
- 166 – Closing remarks: remembers Cliff Bungalow-Mission as a quiet, friendly, middle class neighbourhood.
- 174 – End of interview.