

Oral History Interview
Phil Schreiber
WH028

(written transcript and digital audio)

On January 29, 2009, Phil Schreiber was interviewed at the Woodbridge Main Library at 3:30 P.M. by Brenda Velasco.

Brenda Velasco: I'm here with Phil Schreiber, who is a long time resident of Iselin, New Jersey. We are going to find out more details there. He's also the father of six children. One of the things that we're going to emphasize are some of the synagogues that were located in Woodbridge at the time that he was here.

1. Identify individual-name, section, date of birth.

My name is Phil Schreiber. I was born in Elizabeth, New Jersey. I came home from World War II, went to school on the G.I. Bill of Rights, and got out just in time to be called back for the Korean War.

Brenda Velasco: Wow! So you were involved in two wars?

Phil Schreiber: Yes, both. When I finished up service, I'd been married and had one child and one on the way and we couldn't afford to rent any place in the city.

Brenda Velasco: Alright, and the city that you're talking about is Elizabeth.

Phil Schreiber: And my wife came from Montclair. We looked about Newark, Bloomfield and all the places in between. Rentals were high and starting out on a new job didn't pay that much but the Parkway, at that time, 1953, had just extended all the way to the Raritan River and the builders were putting up thousands of homes. Among them was the 750 home unit in Iselin called *Westbury Homes*. You could buy them under the G.I. Bill for \$12,750.00, no money down, and to carry it. The entire carry charges came to \$77.00 a month. It covered the mortgage, interest, insurance, taxes, and escrow payments.

Brenda Velasco: That's unbelievable, because I know you have just recently moved from this home where you raised your children in Iselin. Would you like to mention what you were able to sell this home for?

Phil Schreiber: Yes, my children were all on their own, and my wife had been dead for ten years, so I decided to sell the house in 2006. An agent said it would go for about \$350,000.00.

Brenda Velasco: From \$12,750.00; I think you got your money's worth out of this house. What a success. Okay, good investment; wise investment.

2. How long have you lived in Woodbridge?

Brenda Velasco: Alright, so then technically you've lived here for.....

Phil Schreiber: 53 years.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, 53 years.

3. Why did you or your family move to Woodbridge:

My six children went through the Woodbridge School System. They all went on to college. Three of them went beyond college and got graduate degrees. They all became professionals. Three of my daughters became teachers. My two sons and one daughter went into business. But

none, as well all of my neighbors, settled in Iselin or Woodbridge Township; they all moved south towards Manalapan.

Brenda Velasco: But still that's not too far and the road connecting everything is the Parkway.

Phil Schreiber: Exactly.

Brenda Velasco: And the homes, the Westbury section, that was the post-World War II boom.

Phil Schreiber: Yes, it was.

Brenda Velasco: And Woodbridge really shot up with their population at this time.

Phil Schreiber: Very congenial, it seems everybody who bought there was a veteran. So we started out with something in common. Not only that, we all had developed a military work ethic that if you have to go 24 hours a day 7 days a week to make something work you did it. Not only that, you helped your neighbor and we had all learned skills in the service. One of my neighbors had been Seabees (WWII militarized naval construction crews). He helped me put in my sidewalks and steps. Others had been in the building and engineering part of the Army and we all helped each other with finishing basements and attics, putting up sheds, fixing lawns and what not.

Brenda Velasco: So you had a regular community within a community in Westbury?

Phil Schreiber: We did.

Brenda Velasco: With people helping each other

Phil Schreiber: And all of us had small children. The kids went to school together. To this very day they are friends. You talk about diversity the first local person to visit me was Father Wilus from St. Cecelia's Church who came to visit us and we told him we were Jewish and that we will probably joint a synagogue. He said, that's okay, I'll bless your house in Hebrew, which he did.

Brenda Velasco: Alright, so you had the priest bless your house, in Hebrew, and you lived there a long time.

Phil Schreiber: You're right.

Brenda Velasco: And you got a great profit, so maybe something worked.

Phil Schreiber: It worked, it worked.

4. What changes have occurred over the years in the area you lived:

-houses of worship?

a) Shuls b)Location c)Dates d)Rabbis e)Famous cantors f)Congregants

Not only did he (Father Wilus) do that, but the synagogue in Woodbridge was overcrowded and couldn't take anymore members. They had just put it up in 1948 and the building boom just taxed it too much. So Rabbi Neuberger suggested that he would help us start our own synagogue in Iselin. Father Wilus told us we could use St. Cecelia's.

Brenda Velasco: This was the real ecumenical movement.

Phil Schreiber: It was, it was, and if there was any conflict between his holidays and ours, the Veterans of Foreign War gave us their facilities to use.

Brenda Velasco: This was a great community. You've got some good memories.

Phil Schreiber: Oh, you bet I do.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, so did you actually meet in St. Cecelia's?

Phil Schreiber: Oh, yes, we had services there.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, and then was there ever a conflict with the High Holy Days?

Phil Schreiber: None whatsoever.

Brenda Velasco: Okay.

Phil Schreiber: None. We had High Holy Day services in the VFW hall. But there was never any conflict. It was just a matter of coordinating scheduling and since we were both new at living with each other, we just had patience until we worked it out.

Brenda Velasco: Okay.

Phil Schreiber: To raise funds, Father Wilus mentored us in bingo.

Brenda Velasco: The favorite Catholic past time. Okay, and were you successful?

Phil Schreiber: Very successful. We ran bingo on the nights he didn't.

Brenda Velasco: So St. Cecelia's was constantly a bingo haven. And how much did you make a night when you ran the bingo?

Phil Schreiber: I don't remember, but the place was packed.

Brenda Velasco: When did you open the shul on Cooper Avenue?

Phil Schreiber: That land was donated to us by people who owned it. They ran a cement business in Woodbridge, doing very well, and they told us we could really put up the building ourselves. I forget the person's name. We had a number of people that had been Seabees in the Navy and were into building. We had a couple of people whose families were in the building business. So we put up our own building on that lot. We looked around for an architect and an architect had won a national prize for public school buildings when he designed the Iselin Junior High School. It was the firm of Feeney and Feeney. The price was very economical because of the way he did it. He designed a synagogue for us. It was something that we could put up ourselves and then hire a builder to expand it as we needed. We got to work on that right away.

Brenda Velasco: Alright, so when was it dedicated? The shul?

Phil Schreiber: 1966. It took about ten years until we had it complete. We started building it about 1956. We built the foundation, actually, which was very large. We had classrooms, a sanctuary, and a meeting room in that cement foundation; it was above ground mostly.

Brenda Velasco: And what was the name of this shul?

Phil Schreiber: Congregation Beth Shalom and we decided that it would be part of the conservative movement; more as a compromise. Most people didn't care what it was, but on each extreme you had firm believers. Most of us just went to the synagogue.

Brenda Velasco: Was it egalitarian or non-egalitarian?

Phil Schreiber: Well, we were cutting edge. In our generation, only boys got a bar mitzvah. We went along with the conservative movement, that male and female would have that.

Brenda Velasco: Okay.

Phil Schreiber: So the girls were taught equally to the boys.

Brenda Velasco: Which was cutting edge at that time?

Phil Schreiber: Exactly.

Brenda Velasco: No longer in 2006. We just take it for granted in the conservative movement.

Phil Schreiber: I know.

Brenda Velasco: So you were in the forefront.

Phil Schreiber: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: With the conservative movement and the bat mitzvah as well as the bar mitzvah, okay. So we have Congregation Beth Shalom built on Cooper Avenue.

Phil Schreiber: Right, 90 Cooper Avenue. We bought the building lot across the street and put up a house for the rabbi.

Brenda Velasco: Was Cooper Field there at that time? The baseball field?

Phil Schreiber: Yes, it was.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, so it's right across from.....

Phil Schreiber: Yes, right there. Little League was our neighbor. It made it easy for the kids who were playing, you know, who belonged to the synagogue.

Brenda Velasco: Oh, yes, and they can make sure they come for the classes too.

Phil Schreiber: Exactly.

Brenda Velasco: They couldn't get out of it if they were playing across the street.

Phil Schreiber: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, how long was this shul in existence then?

Phil Schreiber: In 1980, we merged with Adath Israel.

Brenda Velasco: And Adath Israel is in Woodbridge Proper?

Phil Schreiber: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: It was on Amboy Avenue.

Phil Schreiber: By coincidence, I picked this up while I was downstairs at the.....

Brenda Velasco: Rutgers Library? The archives?

Phil Schreiber: No, right there.

Brenda Velasco: Oh!

Phil Schreiber: They have a stack of these downstairs.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, *Jewish Studies at Rutgers*.

Phil Schreiber: Yes, and low and behold, I saw one of our bar mitzvah boys in here who's head of the Department of Jewish Studies at Rutgers.

Brenda Velasco: Wow! So your mission was successful?

Phil Schreiber: Yes, it was. Let's seen, Gary Ransberg. It had his picture in here. Well, whatever it was I like to feel our Hebrew School's educational program contributed or took I a part in his success.

Brenda Velasco: I would say so.

Phil Schreiber: Yes. We had our first bar mitzvah boy become a professor at West Point, the military academy, after he won the Medal of Honor in Vietnam.

Brenda Velasco: That was Captain Frank.....

Phil Schreiber: Jack Jacobs.

Brenda Velasco: Jack Jacobs, right.

Phil Schreiber: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: And he's the only New Jersey resident that won that Congressional Medal of Honor in Vietnam.

Phil Schreiber: Is that right? I didn't know that.

Brenda Velasco: He lived in Fords, though, right?

Phil Schreiber: Fords, right.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, Gary Ransberg. Wow! Small world.

Phil Schreiber: It is. He lives around the corner from me now.

Brenda Velasco: Which is a hop, skip and a jump from Rutgers.

Phil Schreiber: It is. I do volunteer work at Rutgers. I walk over there.

Brenda Velasco: You walk over the bridge?

Phil Schreiber: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: How convenient. How lucky for them that they have you. Okay, so he was your first bar mitzvah boy then; Jack Jacobs.

Phil Schreiber: Yes, he went to Rutgers and was in the ROTC. He made a career of the Army.

Brenda Velasco: He's also a military consultant with MSNBC.

Phil Schreiber: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: So he really made his niche in.....

Phil Schreiber: Yes, he has.

Brenda Velasco: And made everybody proud of him.

Phil Schreiber: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: Alright, so we have the synagogue being built in 1956 and then it was sold in 1980?

Phil Schreiber: 1980.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, and whom did you sell the building to?

Phil Schreiber: It was to a television ministry. I don't recall the name of it though, which very rapidly outgrew it. In turn, they sold it to a Korean church.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, so now there's a Korean church located at 90 Cooper?

Phil Schreiber: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: Alright, at that time who were the rabbis? Did you have a permanent rabbi?

Phil Schreiber: We had nine permanent rabbis. When you're at the low end of the salary scale, if you get a good one, they get an offer right away.

Brenda Velasco: Yes.

Phil Schreiber: A better offer and when you don't have one who fits in, so we went through nine rabbis.

Brenda Velasco: Alright, do you recall any of their names?

Phil Schreiber: I have them all written down here. As a matter of fact, I went through the records and I'm going to give you their names. You don't even have to write them down. (See attached list at end).

Brenda Velasco: Terrific.

Phil Schreiber: I wrote it down so you'd have them here; not only the rabbis but the presidents too.

Brenda Velasco: Okay.

Phil Schreiber: So our first rabbi was not hired as a rabbi but as a Hebrew School teacher.

Brenda Velasco: Alright, so you had a Hebrew School?

Phil Schreiber: Immediately, immediately. We had like 30 students.

Brenda Velasco: Well you provided about six of them.

Phil Schreiber: Yes, yes I did. These are all of the presidents and the rabbis right here from the beginning.

Brenda Velasco: Alright, very good, very good. We'll include that.

Phil Schreiber: And this is the very first slate of officers.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, alright, now you were also an officer at one time.

Phil Schreiber: I was president for five years.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, so we have you, Phil Schreiber, as president for five years. This was of the men's.....

Phil Schreiber: Of the synagogue.

Brenda Velasco: Of the synagogue, okay. Did you recall those years that you were president?

Phil Schreiber: Yes, I do. I served a term from 1960 to 1961, then from '75 to '80, roughly.

Brenda Velasco: Alright, and what was your role as president of the synagogue?

Phil Schreiber: Sort of like being a mayor; you tie everything together. You appoint committee chairman; actually you recruit them. You see that the budget is adhered to and, if not, you have to sell the congregation on raising dues.

Brenda Velasco: And what were some of the committees that they had?

Phil Schreiber: Rich Wolk took care of all religious services. Education took care of Hebrew school and Sunday school. Youth activities took care of extra-curricular activities. We had youth groups and we had scout troops.

Brenda Velasco: So you had a scout troop then.

Phil Schreiber: Troop 70 was a Boy Scout troop. My older son became an Eagle Scout in that troop.

Brenda Velasco: Congratulations!

Phil Schreiber: Thank you.

Brenda Velasco: That's quite an achievement.

Phil Schreiber: It is.

Brenda Velasco: He was also president of the teenage youth school called the United Synagogue Youth, the USY, as they refer to it. My daughter, Naomi, was in it as well. She participated in the drama programs which were very successful. I still remember hers. She had a leading part in Bye Bye Birdie which had two performances, each completely sold out to parents, family, grandparents and friends.

Brenda Velasco: Yes. Good, that's how you do it.

Phil Schreiber: Yes. And there was the House Committee that took care of the building and grounds. There was the Finance Committee that took care of our budget needs.

Brenda Velasco: So you had a busy role then?

Phil Schreiber: Everybody worked full time; everybody put in extra time doing

Brenda Velasco: And you also had a family at the same time.

Phil Schreiber: All of us did and had a house to take care of and we didn't have extra money to hire people to do things. We took care of our own lawns and we did our own improvements. I put a dormer up and finished off the upstairs for extra bedrooms in my house. It was like one big family though. The entire congregation was like a family.

Brenda Velasco: And the members that came were they just from Iselin, from that Westbury section.

Phil Schreiber: No, as a matter of fact they came from Iselin, Fords, Avenel and some from Woodbridge itself; people who weren't happy with Woodbridge. As a matter of fact, the people we got from the Woodbridge synagogue came because we were considered very liberal and, although they were conservative as well, they went the other way. We drew a lot from Edison and Colonia too.

Brenda Velasco: Wow!

Phil Schreiber: And Metuchen and Menlo Park Terrace.

Brenda Velasco: So you had a wide group of people geographically?

Phil Schreiber: We did.

Brenda Velasco: And it was not far from Route #27.

Phil Schreiber: It was very accessible, very accessible.

Brenda Velasco: Right or Route #1 even just going down Green Street. The location was excellent. Okay, getting back, were there any famous cantors that you had at the synagogue?

Phil Schreiber: We had one cantor for just about the entire period, a member, whose father was a cantor and grandfather was a cantor in Hungary. His name was Norbert Kastner. He'd been in the Army and he used his G.I. Bill to become an optometrist.

Brenda Velasco: And is his son Bruce?

Phil Schreiber: That's his son.

Brenda Velasco: Wow! And his son has the building.....

Phil Schreiber: The practice.

Brenda Velasco: The practice right on Green Street.

Phil Schreiber: That's right and Bert lived there and had his practice there. Bert had a beautiful tenor voice and he probably could have made it as a professional cantor. Just about everybody in that synagogue were raised in the Orthodox tradition. It's apparent we're first generation. Our parents came from Europe and the cantors we heard in our homes growing up many of whom were no match for Bert Kastner.

Brenda Velasco: Then you were very fortunate since he was a member of the congregation.

Phil Schreiber: And he would not take a penny for it. He paid his dues like everybody else.

Brenda Velasco: Exceptional. I mean.....

Phil Schreiber: I'm just saying it's.....

Brenda Velasco: Yes, because some of the shuls have to hire the cantors, they're not members of the congregation and they have to travel far.

Phil Schreiber: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: You were very, very fortunate.

Phil Schreiber: So we had one cantor for our entire period. His health began to give out in the later years and he slowed down but his voice, it was as powerful, but it was just as beautiful. He was able to adapt it. When we merged, he became president of Adath Israel for one term.

Brenda Velasco: Okay and the merger was in 1980 then?

Phil Schreiber: 1980. It was not in '80. I don't know when it was but it was sometime thereafter. Because I was president and negotiated the merger, I was appointed as a trustee of Adath Israel. I remained a trustee for the entire 20 years until we merged with....

Brenda Velasco: Neve Shalom.

Phil Schreiber: As a matter of fact, it was coincidental that I had to spearhead the merger because our income had dropped off in Adath Israel. We just couldn't handle it anymore.

Brenda Velasco: Alright, and what do you attribute to the financial decreases or decline?

Phil Schreiber: It was simply that we weren't getting any new members. Young Jewish families did not move into Woodbridge Township. They were buying, like my kids, in a newer, more affluent, community. So as years went by, without new members, older ones would move down to Florida or retirement communities. The ones that were left really were the ones who really couldn't afford to move and they couldn't pay the full dues either. So as the synagogue plant got older it required more maintenance. What finally caused our major problem was that we needed a newer heater/ventilator/air conditioner which was beyond our means.

Brenda Velasco: And that was unfortunate.

Phil Schreiber: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, now when we talk about Beth Shalom, how many congregants were there?

Phil Schreiber: At its peak, there were about roughly 250 families.

Brenda Velasco: And that was a nice size.

Phil Schreiber: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: That was a nice size.

Phil Schreiber: Yes, it was. It was so large that we had to hire a Woodbridge police officer to stand in the lobby during High Holidays because the people wanting to come in who weren't buying tickets. We'd let anybody in; we weren't checking tickets and then finally the members said, "I can't get a seat and they are strangers, you know".

Brenda Velasco: Okay and when we say the High Holy Days we're talking about Yom Kippur and Rosh Hashanah?

Phil Schreiber: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: Okay. I think we've gotten pretty much the background. What were some of the services that the shul, Beth Shalom, performed for its congregation members?

Phil Schreiber: We performed marriages, that was a popular one.

Brenda Velasco: That was a good one.

Phil Schreiber: Yes, it was a happy one and religious education.

Brenda Velasco: And how often were those classes held?

Phil Schreiber: Religious ones were held three or four times a week actually.

Brenda Velasco: Alright, and how many classes did you usually have?

Phil Schreiber: We had aleph, bet/beis, gimmel, dalet: four. Four years usually brought the kids up to bar mitzvah age when most of them would drop out. We'd lose a family very often. The members, you know, if they weren't committed, the family would drop out.

Brenda Velasco: Okay.

Phil Schreiber: But with a growing community we always had new people coming in. In the middle '70s the building, more or less, hit a plateau and as we lost members, new Jewish families tapered off and our membership began to drop. So by 1980 we were caught in a bind.

Brenda Velasco: Okay and that lead to your merging with Adath Israel. Did you have a men's club there as well?

Phil Schreiber: We had a men's club and we had a sisterhood, we had a senior citizen school, we had a Hadassah, we had a Boy Scout troop, and we had a drama group. It was an adult drama group.

Brenda Velasco: Okay an adult drama group. So you were a vibrant part of the Woodbridge scene and the Iselin scene.

Phil Schreiber: Yes, very much so.

Brenda Velasco: And as you mentioned earlier, the head of the Jewish Studies at Rutgers was one of those that had attended this shul.

Phil Schreiber: Yes. The teachers we hired were all certified also. Most of them either taught during the day in Perth Amboy or Woodbridge.

Brenda Velasco: That's unusual to have the certified teachers in the Hebrew school.

Phil Schreiber: Yes. Well teachers weren't that highly paid in those days either, so I guess they needed a part-time job or it came in handy.

Brenda Velasco: Did you do cooking at Beth Shalom?

Phil Schreiber: We had a large kitchen.

Brenda Velasco: Okay.

Phil Schreiber: We had a very large kitchen and Friday night and Saturday we had a kiddush oneg shabbat. Not a meal but it was more like a buffet snack. For bar mitzvahs and weddings the caterers would come in and use the kitchen. Part of the rabbi's job was to see that everything was kosher, according to halacha.

Brenda Velasco: Alright, so it was busy.

Phil Schreiber: It moved along very much. We had dances, parties, we had a Valentine's Day Dance, New Year's Eve dance and after Yom Kippur dances; a lot of social activities and Purim carnival, Passover model seders and then regular seders for people who weren't having their own at home.

Brenda Velasco: You were really a hub of the Jewish community.

Phil Schreiber: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, have we covered everything about Beth Shalom?

Phil Schreiber: I think we did, really.

Brenda Velasco: You did a good job remembering.

Phil Schreiber: We had a monthly newspaper that covered everything. I was editor of the newspaper for several years. Actually, I was not really religious; most of the men were not religious. It was the women who wanted the kids to have a Jewish education and it was a group of women who really were the initiators of that congregation and they drew the men into it. My wife was one of the women who were in that group. Everybody was assigned a task. She was with the monthly bulletin committee. They must have had about 20 people working on the bulletin. The editor ran into a lot of problems. Everybody had their own idea of what to do. So they said it's just not working. So my wife told the president that her husband could handle it because he was editor of a newspaper. She was telling the truth but it really wasn't what you'd think it was. During the war I was on a ship, had a crew of a 130 people on it, and I was the ship's radio operator. So I was the only one who heard the news.

Brenda Velasco: And that was your vast experience she was boasting about and she got you hooked.

Phil Schreiber: Yes, and in the radio room you copied this news from Morse code and did it on the typewriter. So when the news came on I would put like a half a dozen onion skins with carbon papers into the typewriter and the captain would get the original, the officer's word room would get the second copy and all of the rest of them were tacked up on bulletin boards on different parts of the ship.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, this is pre-TV, pre-computer and the onion skin was that thin, thin paper.

Phil Schreiber: Yes and the more you got down the more blurry it would be.

Brenda Velasco: Yes, yes, I remember those days too. We're aging ourselves right now. But we improvised and we got through. Alright, that was good. So this was your vast experience as a newspaper editor and then for the shul you became the editor of the monthly newsletter. That was good.

Phil Schreiber: That was it.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, anything else?

Phil Schreiber: I was head of the ritual committee for a while, financial secretary for a while and head of the youth committee for a while. As a matter of fact, the president knew they could tap me when they were at a loss to get someone.

Brenda Velasco: You never said no, did you?

Phil Schreiber: No.

Brenda Velasco: You're a great person to have in any organization. You don't say no; we need you. Did you want to talk about Adath Israel?

Phil Schreiber: Adath Israel, when we merged with them, they were at a down swing too. By then the Jewish population was not growing anymore in Woodbridge Township. So the people that we brought in it gave them a new lease on life. Because it was a rising real estate market, we were able to bring nice funds in. I forgot what we got for the property, but it was very good; the synagogue property. But the Adath Israel was not gaining new members and the shot in the arm, financially, that we gave them, and the new members, was able to keep it going for another 20 years. For those 20 years, I was the trustee and I came up with a marketing plan to attract new members. It was unsuccessful though. To draw people into the synagogue, I ran a program

once or twice a year that would attract the public in the hope that we might get new members in there. The post office would issue a special post-park stamp that we'd put on an envelope. It was actually a means of publicity. We'd get a lot of publicity because of that. People would come in from New York and everywhere. **The News Tribune** carried all of the programs of all institutions and if I saw an interesting one at some other synagogue or church had, I'd call up and ask how it worked out and then have that program. Our first one commemorated the four chaplains who died when their group ship was sunk by a U boat during World War II. For all the bashing the post office gets, the Woodbridge Post Office was always so cooperative. They set up a special postal station on a Sunday morning when we had these programs and either the post master or his supervisor and one clerk would come with a supply of postage stamps and that post mark and man that table. They didn't sell our caches but they sold the stamps.

Brenda Velasco: For stamp collectors, this was great.

Phil Schreiber: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: And this was in the shul on Sunday mornings when you had this program. That was clever.

Phil Schreiber: And for that program we invited all of the veteran organizations to participate. So each year we did something like that. We got, for the anniversary of the boat, **Exodus**, we were able to get a former crew member to talk to us about it to commemorate the massacre of the Israeli athletes at Munich Olympics.

Brenda Velasco: In 1972.

Phil Schreiber: Yes. We got an American participant, not Jewish, to talk and the ambassador from Israel participated in it. He came in from Washington for that. We eventually had about 15 or 20 of these programs. It would draw people into the synagogue but it wasn't strong enough to get members.

Brenda Velasco: Yes, too bad.

Phil Schreiber: But it put us in the newspapers and **The News Tribune** would play it up. Paolino would write columns about our programs.

Brenda Velasco: Well that was good PR.

Phil Schreiber: Yes and WCTC would give us a telephone interview. We had a lot of PR and we had a lot of publicity but, like I say, it wasn't enough to.....

Brenda Velasco: It didn't sustain, unfortunately.

Phil Schreiber: No, so the time came in 1980 where we just had to seek another solution.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, and we're talking about, it was just a few years ago that this.....

Phil Schreiber: 1980.

Brenda Velasco: No, 2000.

Phil Schreiber: 2006

Brenda Velasco: 2006 was when Adath Israel.....

Phil Schreiber: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: Merged with.....

Phil Schreiber: We merged with Metuchen. I see Metuchen might be going the same way. I mean, I give them 25 years but I see where the Jewish population in this part of Middlesex County is plateauing really.

Brenda Velasco: Okay and I know just from my educational experience at Solomon Schechter, it is that the growth has been in West Essex County as well as part of Morris County where you've had some growth in the Jewish population because New Jersey does have a large Jewish population.

Phil Schreiber: Yes it does, but the bulk of it in this State, they recently had a survey done and the center of that population is really Monmouth and Southern Middlesex County.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, I hadn't realized it.

Phil Schreiber: Yes, I have one daughter who lives in Monmouth Junction and another in Manalapan.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, so your family mirrors this reflection of where the young Jewish families have gone.

Phil Schreiber: Exactly, my younger son moved out to Pennsylvania, lower Bucks County, which is the same thing. I mean, it's a growing community.

Brenda Velasco: Alright, anything else we should mention about Adath Israel? How many people did you bring to Adath Israel in 1980?

Phil Schreiber: We brought about 120.

Brenda Velasco: 120: families or individuals?

Phil Schreiber: Families.

Brenda Velasco: Families.

Phil Schreiber: Families. By that time, by 1980, the more affluent, more up worldly mobile ones, had moved out.

Brenda Velasco: They had moved out of the Iselin area.

Phil Schreiber: Yes, and twenty years later the same thing happened in Woodbridge.

Brenda Velasco: Yes, yes.

Phil Schreiber: The Jewish populations keep shifting though. I came from Elizabeth which had a very large Jewish population. Well Elizabeth always was a town of first generation Americans; it was a town for immigrants and it is today. Now it's heavily Portuguese, Hispanic, and Cuban.

Brenda Velasco: Right, right. At one time it also had a large Italian ethnic population; Peterstown.

Phil Schreiber: I was born there.

Brenda Velasco: Well so was my dad.

Phil Schreiber: Is that right. I was born on Second Avenue right near where the farmer's market is; right opposite St. Anthony's.

Brenda Velasco: Right, well my father's house was in the parking lot of St. Anthony's.

Phil Schreiber: Oh my Gosh!

Brenda Velasco: Small world.

Phil Schreiber: My parents lived in the house adjoining the convent and my mother was a young immigrant and on summer nights the people down in that part of town would sit out on the front stoop and talk and they taught my mother American cooking. But the St. Anthony teaching nuns, who spoke English, all came from a place called Calabria in Italy.

Brenda Velasco: Well they were Calabrese.

Phil Schreiber: Yes, and they thought the American cooking was pasta. I was raised on pasta fagioli.

Brenda Velasco: A good cheap meal, delicious but.... Okay, so I guess that's why you were able to get along so well with Father Wilus too. Your lives have constantly intertwined with others. Alright, so it was the nuns; we'll blame the nuns.

Phil Schreiber: Yes. My father had a tailor store, people were small businessmen then, and as a matter of fact, I still have a bank book that he had from the Harmonia Bank.

Brenda Velasco: And that was right on the edge of Peterstown on Elizabeth Avenue.

Phil Schreiber: Yes, and the bank book was all in German.

Brenda Velasco: Okay.

Phil Schreiber: It was very ethnic. They had a lot of parochial schools and some of them taught only in Polish or Italian. Although these kids were born in this country, they came into the 8th grade with accents.

Brenda Velasco: I remember it well. St. Anthony's was predominantly Italian. Now St. Michael's was predominantly German. So I traced my family's background and there was a contrast in keeping records too and I don't want to be derogatory or anything but St Michael's was meticulous and very orderly because you go to the church for records of birth, death and so on.

Phil Schreiber: A good friend of mine, may he rest in peace, was a priest in the Polish place way up near the Goethels Bridge.

Brenda Velasco: St. Adalberts? St. Peter and Paul?

Phil Schreiber: I can't think of it; I don't know why I can't think of it.

Brenda Velasco: I can't think of it either.

Phil Schreiber: They had a school, I think, until a few years ago anyway.

Brenda Velasco: So you had wide experiences.

Phil Schreiber: Yes, you know the one thing that I harken back to that childhood, with the president we have now, the first African American, I went to Thomas Jefferson High School which was integrated but only male.

Brenda Velasco: Yes.

Phil Schreiber: That and with the girls' high school. (Battin High School)

Brenda Velasco: Right, in Elizabeth.

Phil Schreiber: We elected Thomas Highsmith the president of our class, but he was black. Not because he was black but because everybody liked him and they thought he was a capable guy.

Brenda Velasco: And when was that? When did you graduate?

Phil Schreiber: 1943. The whole bunch of us went into the service; everybody.

Brenda Velasco: That was during the war.

Phil Schreiber: Yes, and we all went to school on the G.I. Bill and he became a teacher and then he became a principal of one of the Essex County schools. I think Millburn, around there. But the entire class, just en masse, went into the service.

Brenda Velasco: And that was the height of the war, 1943.

Phil Schreiber: Yes, it was odd. We had a very high casualty rate for a peculiar reason. I'd say half the class volunteered and the other half said they'll wait until they're called. The half that waited until they were called were called like within six months, but they were all called up at roughly the same time and they were put in the same infantry division. It was sent into the Battle of the Bulge without proper training and the Germans even killed the prisoners. So there's a big plaque in the hallway of Thomas Jefferson of all of the dead soldiers and that's about half of my class.

Brenda Velasco: Wow!

Phil Schreiber: The people who volunteered, for the most part, survived.

Brenda Velasco: Okay and it was a heavy war. One of our residents from Woodbridge, Stu Brandow, was in the Battle of the Bulge. I don't know if you know him or not.

Brenda Velasco: I know him very well.

Phil Schreiber: We meet every year at the Avenel Middle School.

Brenda Velasco: Okay.

Phil Schreiber: For the Veteran's program there.

Brenda Velasco: Very good, very good. Okay so you lived in Woodbridge for.....

Phil Schreiber: 53 years.

Brenda Velasco: 53 years. Okay and I gather I don't want to be repetitious but you really liked it here.

Phil Schreiber: I was a volunteer for getting the vote out. In fact, the last person I worked with was the guy whose governor now. He ran the last campaign, when I lived here, for McGreevey; I think, John, the guy who's mayor.

Brenda Velasco: John McCormac.

Phil Schreiber: McCormac, he was like the campaign manager.

Brenda Velasco: Right and he's our mayor now.

Phil Schreiber: Yes, and he had me working in that store on Main Street, you know, getting mailings out and then he'd have me go out an register voters in Iselin in those apartments where the people are in and out.

Brenda Velasco: Oh, yes.

Phil Schreiber: The idea was that if you got a new voter they'd probably be Democrat.

Brenda Velasco: And if they met you, they'd be convinced.

Phil Schreiber: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, unfortunately you've moved out of Woodbridge.

Phil Schreiber: We move on after a while.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, but you still come back you said, for Avenel.

Phil Schreiber: My friends are here.

Brenda Velasco: Okay.

Phil Schreiber: I do the Avenel thing.

Brenda Velasco: And that's a Veteran's Day program in Avenel?

Phil Schreiber: It's a Veteran's Day program. Every year, I've been doing that ever since they've had it. We talk to the 8th grade kids and I have a folder of letters. They have the kids write thank you letters.

Brenda Velasco: Excellent.

Phil Schreiber: And if I want to get a mood elevator, I just take the folder out and read what the kids have to say. I like being with the other guys that do it to; they're a good bunch of guys. Then I come back for that and I still have neighbors who are still here. The assistant scout master of Beth Shalom, he was not Jewish, he was married to a Jewish woman and the kids were raised Jewish; he still here. A few of my neighbors are still here and I was involved with Jack McGreevey with the Veteran's things. We would go visit ships on Fleet Week and things like that with Senator Vitale. So I'm still involved with that. When they needed parking space I got permission to let them use the synagogue parking lot.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, you're still active. You've moved out but you still have ties to Woodbridge and I'm glad you do.

Phil Schreiber: Yes, and with the shopping center her, you can't help it. I'm a mall walker at Woodbridge Center.

Brenda Velasco: Good for you, alright, anything else that we should be covering that we haven't covered?

Phil Schreiber: I think you got a lot here but I xeroxed the minutes of the first general membership meeting here; the Jewish Community of Iselin was officially organized at a meeting in St. Cecelia's recreation hall on November 6th, 1955. The chairman, they didn't have a

president, but the chairman “introduced Rabbi Neuberger who blessed our efforts and predicted our success”. I’m going to leave you this.

Brenda Velasco: Good.

Phil Schreiber: “And announced that a real estate guy named Herman Stern of Woodbridge is donating the building site”.

Brenda Velasco: That’s great. That was a bonanza.

Phil Schreiber: Yes. Then it’s got the temporary executive board here, one of whom still lives in Iselin.

Brenda Velasco: And who still lives in Iselin?

Phil Schreiber: That’s Larry Steinberg. He lived in Woodbridge Oaks and he now lives in the apartments on Gill Lane. George Forham was on the committee. He lives in this small tiny development near the post office, where the Iselin Post Office is there are little homes there and he lives there. He bought his home there because he didn’t have a car and he could commute.

Brenda Velasco: He could walk to the train station.

Phil Schreiber: To Newark, yes.

Brenda Velasco: And at that time it wasn’t Metro Park, the train station was right near where the post office is.

Phil Schreiber: Yes, right opposite the fair grounds.

Brenda Velasco: Yes, I remember that and then they moved it to Metro Park.

Phil Schreiber: So I’ll leave you this here.

Brenda Velasco: Terrific. Okay, well I thank you very much and I know we’ve mentioned that none of your children live in Woodbridge any longer, but I thank you very much for the time. We’re going to conclude the interview but thank you so much for coming back.

Q. 6

See response on page 2.

Q7

See response on page 12.

Q8

See response on pages 2, 1.