



Anonymous

Speaker 1:

My parents moved here from New York, as did many of the other Jewish families here that were... Should I take this off? Is that-

Speaker 2:

Oh, it's fine with me if you want to take it off, if you feel more comfortable.

Speaker 1:

Just to talk, I think it's easier for me.

Speaker 2:

Right.

Speaker 1:

Came here when they were in the textile business.

Speaker 2:

Right.

Speaker 1:

All right. And there was lots of textile manufacturing. Men's clothes, women's clothes, pajamas, and my father made bedspreads. And the reason that many of these people from New York came is that the city of New Bedford, this was in the late '30s, wanted to get so many people off the welfare rolls. They were looking for people that would have jobs available for the community. And so many of the people in the textile industry came because, besides what the city gave them which was very good, so many of the Portuguese women knew how to sew and how to use a machine so that meant that you didn't have to do a tremendous amount of retraining. That was really a plus for, I know, so many of the clothing industries, et cetera, that came here.

And the Jewish community was... I'm trying to think of the proper word, but it was... Business-wise, for the doctors and the dentists, et cetera, it was really the whole community. They were owners of small stores, shoe stores, et cetera. So it was a fairly... Affluent is too heavy a word, but they were successful. It was a successful community. Socially, though, it was very... Isolated is another wrong word, but they really kept to themselves. There was very little interchange socially. And that's the story I want to tell you.

I never thought of anti-Semitism going... There were just few of us. I went through elementary school and high school, et cetera, and had a few non-Jewish friends, but very few. I had one wonderful friend when... And she was a Portuguese woman. She never would invite me to her home. She was really too embarrassed to. She was a very bright lady, got a full-time scholarship to Smith. That was something at those days and most unusual. I went off to college, got married and lived in New York for at least 10 years with my husband when he was finishing his medical school and internship and the whole business. We came back to New Bedford in the early '60s.

At that time, there was a sense of social anti-Semitism that... I don't know how much you know about the history of that time. But my husband had his first medical office right down on Spring Street, a half a block from the Wamsutta Club. And he was invited by one of the physicians to have lunch with him and said, "This is wonderful.



If I want to have lunch, this would be a terrific place." And was told, "No, you can't, because you're Jewish."

The gentleman that was very active in the Whaling Museum, Calvin Siegal, I'm sure you've heard the name, was not allowed to join the Yacht Club. And he was an ardent sailor. Finally, for whatever reason, I think funding was probably a reason, they invited him to join the Yacht Club. And he said he would not be the only one. So they invited, I think, a physician from Fall River, Jewish physician, to join as well. So the two of them were allowed to join the Yacht Club.

My husband and I had a small home near Buttonwood Park. And we said, "It's time to move." And Calvin got us a very good real estate agent who would take me around Padanaram, anyway, the whole South Dartmouth area, looking for a house. And any house that I saw that was for sale, et cetera, I was not allowed to go in and look because they would not sell the house to me.

I think some of that should be brought out, that it took a long time for those... I don't want to say Yankee institutions, but it took a long time for those organizations to open up to the rest of the community. And the Wamsutta Club, not only were they anti-Jews, but they were not accepting many Portuguese people into it, as well. And a friend of mine, Dottie Rogers, whose family owned Rogers Wallpaper on County Street, the first time she was invited to come to the Wamsutta Club was so nervous. Was she wearing the right thing? Was she walking properly? This was in the '60s. Not in the '30s, in the '60s. And you don't forget those things. So it took a long time for the area to be open to all communities. That I thought was important for you to understand.

Speaker 2:

Very important, very important. And this is your story. I don't mean to interrupt you, but we're doing the board learning series now for DEAI. I don't know if you were there. I think it was last week. I did a presentation for the board. And it was on New Bedford as a city of immigrants.

Speaker 1:

Absolutely.

Speaker 2:

But the whole point of my presentation is the city takes a lot of pride in that history, but it's not like people were welcomed in.

Speaker 1:

No.

Speaker 2:

They could come and work but then go home. And then I pointed out... And Amanda said she was watching faces, as I said this, because even she didn't know I was going to say this. I pointed out that the peak was at the turn of the century, 1900 through 1905. And then I go to a slide and it's the Whaling Museum. And I said, "And at this time the Whaling Museum was established to preserve history. But it was to preserve a certain history in a certain time."

Speaker 1:

That's right, that's right.

Speaker 2:

And Amanda said she was looking at particular faces to make sure people weren't offended.



Speaker 1:

Right.

Speaker 2:

But I think you got to start with recognizing that it hasn't been this big, happy, welcoming... There are people who were left out.

Speaker 1:

What I wanted you to know is that we moved back in the early '60s. This was the '60s.

Speaker 2:

Right.

Speaker 1:

And you think the '60s were liberated.

Speaker 2:

Yeah.

Speaker 1:

And coming from the city of New York, I had been away from New Bedford for a long time, so it was a wake-up call.

Speaker 2:

Shock, I'm sure.

Speaker 1:

All right. But for the Jewish community, I think it was a successful community. There were doctors, there were lawyers, there were dentists, there were small shopkeepers, and it was successful in that sense. And remember, there were a lot of textile plants still operating before everyone went south. And then they went to China. And then it changed. Economically, it changed. I think when Clint and I moved back, there were a lot of families that were still in the same business. The son would stay and take over the dad's position, et cetera. That no longer meant anything because so many of the textile industries moved elsewhere. That was done here. And so there wasn't a job for the people of either my age or younger to come back to the community. And that has really changed the size of the Jewish community.

Speaker 2:

Right. Yeah, I'm glad you mention that because that was one of the questions I had for you. When you asked me to come over, you said you wanted to talk about the old Jewish community. And I was wondering if the elders are still here or what the community is now. But you're saying a lot of people just...

Speaker 1:

Right.



Speaker 2:

There wasn't anything here anymore.

Speaker 1:

Right. And in the '30s and '40s, a lot of the Jewish community shopped down on South Water Street. It was a whole enclave of stores that catered to the Jewish community. And then that changed. What else can I tell you that changed? Well, again, as the futures for the younger community was not... The future was not here so many of them did not return. And I'm glad you talked about it being a community of immigrants because a long time ago when I was on the board and they were doing their first capital fundraiser, and I was interviewed by whomever was doing it, my emphasis was really, "It is a community of immigrants," and how important that is for the entire community.

Speaker 2:

Right. Absolutely. Yeah.

Speaker 1:

So that's what I wanted you to know, that anti-Semitism was alive and well in the social end of it. Not in the business end of it, as I know it.

Speaker 2:

Yeah.

Speaker 1:

But in the social, you had your own community.

Speaker 2:

Yeah, it's amazing. You could treat someone's child, but you couldn't go to the same social club as them.

Speaker 1:

Right. And as a matter of fact, I was talking to my friend, Judy Stern. And she said, "You know, there used to be dances at the Yacht Club." And of course, lots of people who sailed would just rent places to tie their boat up to. And she said, "And there were dances for the kids, but if you were Jewish, you couldn't go to the dances." And she's at least 10 years younger than I am.

Speaker 2:

Wow. I know you said when you were referring to the Wamsutta Club, that someone was told, "You can't come in because you're Jewish," but was it something that was known in the community? Was it a sort of, "Don't bother trying to participate"?

Speaker 1:

I would assume so. I would assume so. And if you didn't have a friend who maintained membership in the Wamsutta Club, why would you want to apply since their food was never good anyway?

Speaker 2:

Right.