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Avram, Eric, Oral history interview conducted by Sady Sullivan, November 12, 2010; Brooklyn Heights Synagogue oral histories, 2011.005.001; Brooklyn Historical Society.

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Oral History Interview with Eric Avram

Brooklyn Heights Synagogue oral histories, 2011.005.001

Interview conducted by Sady Sullivan on November 12, 2010

at the interviewee's office at ABC News in Manhattan, New York

SULLIVAN: OK, so -

AVRAM: Do I have to be like this, or--?

SULLIVAN: Um, no -

AVRAM: [inaudible]

SULLIVAN: Oh, I can move it if you're--

AVRAM: No, I'm good, whatever.

SULLIVAN: Yeah.

AVRAM: Is this right, like --like this?

SULLIVAN: Can you count to five?

AVRAM: Five, four, three, two, one.

SULLIVAN: Yup. That sounds good. [beeping noise in background]

SULLIVAN: OK.

AVRAM: And if I --can I --if we --can I say --can we stop for a second if something-- I don't think it should happen, but if there's--

SULLIVAN: Oh, yeah, any time you want to stop -

AVRAM: Right, OK. OK, great.

SULLIVAN: Yeah.

AVRAM: OK, cool.

SULLIVAN: And then also at the end if there's something -

AVRAM: Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

SULLIVAN: --that does happen and you want it off-record -

AVRAM: Yeah.

SULLIVAN: --we'll delete it.

AVRAM: Yeah, yeah. Yeah, yeah, OK. [laughter]

SULLIVAN: Um-- so.

AVRAM: Gotcha.

SULLIVAN: OK. [laughter]

AVRAM: Ready to go.

SULLIVAN: OK. So I will-- to slate the interview, today is November 12, 2010. I'm Sady Sullivan from the Brooklyn Historical Society. This is for the Brooklyn Heights Synagogue Oral History Project. And now if you would introduce yourself -

AVRAM: Well, it's Eric Avram, A-V-R-A-M. Um-- Brooklyn Heights resident my entire life. I'm 45 years old.

SULLIVAN: And for the archive, what's your date of birth?

AVRAM: [date redacted for privacy] sixty-five. [date redacted for privacy], 1965.

SULLIVAN: Great, and where were you born?

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AVRAM: I was born at 199 --Long Island College Hospital, and, uh, first lived at 199 Hicks Street, which is Hicks and Pierrepont. Uh, then moved to, ah, my family - I'm one of five children. And moved to 115 Remsen Street, which is Remsen Street between Henry and Clinton. And I guess, also, for awhile, literally right next door to the Brooklyn Heights Synagogue, and now just a few, uh, a few addresses down. Uh, and now, uh, I --that's where my parents still live, in that 115 Remsen Street house, and I live, uh, with my wife and two children who both go to St. Ann's at, uh, at 31 --at Garden Place, 31 Garden Place in Brooklyn Heights.

SULLIVAN: So-- tell me a little bit about your parents.

AVRAM: Uhhh-- my --you, you know, my --I'm --my --both of my parents came to the United States after the war. Um, my father, um, Romanian and went through the Holocaust and, um, came, uh, to the United States, uh, I think in 1949. Uh, but had a --you know, one of these kind of horrific experiences during the war, separated from his family, uh, um, you know, and they lost everything and came here to Brooklyn. Uh, you know, penniless, not speaking the language. Uh, he married my wife [mother], who's from Switzerland. Uh, and, they also --they met when he went to medical school in Switzerland. And they both came back and then I think first lived in Cobble Hill in 1956, I think. Uh, and I've been literally in the neighborhood since.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

AVRAM: And he's a --a doctor at Long Island College Hospital, and he's very active in Brooklyn, uh, Heights. Uh, he's got a bunch of -- nephrology centers around Brooklyn, and, you know, all-- and, uh-- and --all of that of the, uh-- almost all of the grand--out of this he has five kids and, um, I don't know I got the exact number down, but one, two, three, four-- I think seven of the grandkids --we all went to St. Ann's, and seven of the grandkids now go to St. Ann's.

SULLIVAN: Oh, wow.

AVRAM: Yup.

SULLIVAN: And-- so your mom is from Switzerland originally?

AVRAM: Yup. Yup.

SULLIVAN: And so did-- id she come to the States before they met?

AVRAM: Yeah, so I should have explained it better --no.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

AVRAM: He came to the United States -

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

AVRAM: Uh, he, uh, went to medical school --it's kind of complicated. He went to medical school in Geneva.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

AVRAM: And that's where he met my, uh, mother who was a nurse there, and so, you know, they fall in love, and then she came here. So-- and the --again, [inaudible] lived in, you know, Brooklyn Heights the en--you know, for the last fifty years, I guess at this point.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm. And do you know why they settled in -in Brooklyn?

AVRAM: You know, I guess-- well, I never really thought about it, but I guess the answer is that my father probably-- uh, probably --his job was at Long Island College Hospital -

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

AVRAM: So I don't know --I don't know if --which came first, but I assume it was probably because of --he got the job at Long Island College Hospital. But I guess I -I guess I just kind of always assumed like, oh, you know, you come to Brooklyn and-- I guess --I think it must have had something to do with Long Island College Hospital.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

AVRAM: Yeah.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

AVRAM: Which he was --I don't know the, uh-- but he was --you know, he-- he's done very exciting --you know, he was one of the pioneers in kidney dialysis machines, and done a lot of breakthroughs, and is the largest, um --I don't know if it's still the case, but it was the case for many years, he's 81 now --but, you know, more kidney patients being treated than any other doctor in the country. And he was also very --played a big role at the Brooklyn Heights Synagogue, and at the beginning and to this day is on the board, and, you know, he's very active in Brooklyn. Brooklyn Heights, in particular.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

AVRAM: Yeah. And-- so. Hm.

SULLIVAN: And where in the five children are you?

AVRAM: Middle. Middle.

SULLIVAN: [laughter]

AVRAM: [laughter] That, the-- I have an older --my sister, Rella, is the oldest. Uh, I have an older brother Mark and two younger brothers. All four of them are doctors.

SULLIVAN: Oh.

AVRAM: And so I'm, I guess, the black sheep of the family. Uh, and all went, um, and I think all --and all still do go regularly to the Brook--not --all were bar-bar or bat mitzvah'ed at the Brooklyn Heights Synagogue, and all have, you know, to varying degrees, go to, like, high holiday services --everyone still goes there for our sort of --for our entire life.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

AVRAM: So. My sister is five years older, and if I'm 45, I guess she's --jeez, I guess she's going to be 50 next year. She's probably 49 now. Then, you know, so it's been, you know, 50 years.

SULLIVAN: Yeah.

AVRAM: Mm.

SULLIVAN: Um, and can -

AVRAM: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

SULLIVAN: --before we get to more synagogue stuff, can you tell me briefly about your grandparents?

AVRAM: Ah, I know very little about my pa--grandparents on my father's side, because of the war.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

AVRAM: And, um-- I know very little about them. He doesn't talk about it.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

AVRAM: Uh, and, on my mother's side-- Both of their fa- My father's family all, because of the war, it basically decimated it. It didn't really ex--exist except for a sister who came here. On my mother's side, she was the only one who came to the States. So they're all still in Switzerland. Uh, my grandmother, uh-- you know, just died a few years ago. She - I don't know --she, uh, she must have been in her mid-90s. My grandfather died when I was very young, but he was a-- it wasn't a prominent --he was the-- They lived in a small town in Switzerland, and he was the only doctor for, like-- you know, in this four-or five-town area. But it was, like, kind of this very-- almost like cliché --like, Heidi existence. Like, I mean, we're talking about Switzerland --we're not talking about like Zurich or Byrne. It was --you know, she lived, like, in this little village in-- which is still kind of idyllic and --I mean, it's changed now in the last-- but not that much. But, you know, it

was --for her to go from there to Brooklyn was-- I --as I got older, I appreciate --I always thought it was a big switch, but now I really appreciate what a big deal it was.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

AVRAM: So, uh-- they're --you know, they're great. We're --they're --we're a very close family. And, you know, they're the --you know, the day we regularly, you know, have family meals, and everybody --all the cousins are close. We're very, very close.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

AVRAM: Yeah, so.

SULLIVAN: And you have two children, you said?

AVRAM: I have two children. Benjamin, and --can we stop for one second, because this is -

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

AVRAM: Thank you, thank you, thank you, thank you.

SULLIVAN: Thank you.

AVRAM: Thanks.

[Unidentified speaker]: Yup.

AVRAM: Did you get something for yourself?

[Unidentified speaker]: Yeah, I got a little [inaudible].

AVRAM: Good.

[Unidentified speaker]: Thank you.

AVRAM: Wait. I'm going to send you something.

[Unidentified speaker]: Me? Yeah?

AVRAM: And if you can just-

[Unidentified speaker]: Read over it?

AVRAM: Maybe futz with it.

[Unidentified speaker]: OK.

AVRAM: So just --because I think you probably just - you can see I didn't finish. But just --I think you know where --where I'm probably going.

[Unidentified speaker]: Yeah. Yeah.

AVRAM: If you want to --when it says, like --I guess I have to send you something. Uh, the numbers-- yeah, I'm going to send you this spreadsheet where you can fill in some of the blanks.

[Unidentified speaker]: Well, didn't Dan say not to use too many numbers?

AVRAM: No, but --but I'd just even say --you'll see. You might need to use --not all of them, but just --you might not need it, just so you know.

[Unidentified speaker]: OK, I'll take a look at it.

AVRAM: All right. And if you can close that it would be great. [pause]

[door closes]

AVRAM: OK. Let's keep going.

SULLIVAN: OK. Um, so you were-- you have two children.

AVRAM: Two children. Benjamin, uh, who's, um, sixteen. Junior in high school, can't believe it. And, uh, Lily, uh, who's at --in the seventh grade at St. Ann's, twelve-uh, gonna be thirteen shortly. Uh, in January. Um-- my wife's Lynne Greenberg, who's from --we met in college at Brown, uh, but she's originally from St. Louis, Missouri, but, you know, she's -- she didn't want to move to Brooklyn, but now she loves Brooklyn.

SULLIVAN: [laughter]

AVRAM: So, uh, you know, they're --you know, they're-- they're great. And, uh, Benjamin's a big --uh, he's actually a, a-- a dancer at Alvin Ailey, which he's become very serious about. He's now actually in the professional division. He goes five days a week, and so he's very involved with that. Lily's, you know, a great, you know, seventh-grader, and she's in the Brooklyn Youth Chorus, which she loves.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

AVRAM: So, you know.

SULLIVAN: And they both go to St. Ann's?

AVRAM: They both go to St. Ann's. Their whole life, since nursery.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm. And did --when did you start there?

AVRAM: I didn't go --I actually went to --out of Brooklyn. I went to Packer [Collegiate] from nursery to fourth grade. Then from Packer to [Brooklyn] Poly Prep from fifth through ninth grade. And then I only went to St. Ann's tenth, eleventh, and twelfth grade.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

AVRAM: Uh-- but, you know, I loved --I mean, I, I, I liked all the schools. But it was very different --Poly Prep, which was kind of the opposite of St. Ann's. Poly Prep was very formal, wearing a tie and jacket. St. Ann's is St. Ann's. But, uh, but you know, I love St. Ann's, and, uh-- you know, now, like I said, everyone ended up going --except for my sister, who was at Packer the entire time, all four brothers ended up going to St. Ann's.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

AVRAM: And the kids --grandkids --not all of them, because one of them lives up at --Mass General, is a doctor up in Boston. But all the other ones, uh, have children at St. Ann's. Well, four of --four of the five have siblings currently at St. Ann's.

SULLIVAN: That's neat. So all of the cousins --do they all hang out?

AVRAM: Yeah. I mean, I don't know if they hang out -like, it --you know, they're very -- they're, they're separated in age --I don't think they, like, hang out at school -

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

AVRAM: --because, I mean, they do a little bit. But I think, um --but they're very different. They range from one that's already graduated St. Ann's to, you know, nursery.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

AVRAM: But they're very close. So they hang out, but more, like, at family things than at St. Ann's. But, you know, they hang out at --I'm sure they hang out a little bit at St. Ann's, too.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

AVRAM: Yeah, so.

SULLIVAN: That's really nice.

AVRAM: Yeah, it's cool. [laughter]

SULLIVAN: [laughter]

AVRAM: So.

SULLIVAN: And so-- then you --after St. Ann's you went to Brown, you said?

AVRAM: I went to Brown.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

AVRAM: I graduated in [19]'87. And then I went to Duke Law School and graduated in [19]'91. And I practiced, actually, for a couple of years down at a Wall Street law firm, Hughes Hubbard & Reid. And then made a very kind of big change to, um --I worked --I took a leave of absence from the law firm to work very early on in the Clinton '92 campaign, but I started working very early and worked at them for a year and then I

had a choice, when I was finished, to either go back to the law firm. But I also was offered --I always was a big news junkie, and, uh, there was a new show starting at ABC, and somebody I knew said they were looking for people to do it. And I didn't love my old job --I didn't hate it, but, um --looking back it was more radical than-- At the time it didn't seem that crazy, but in retrospect it seemed like-- Because I was making kind of a good salary in the --the law firm. There was this new show, and it was --I'd just gotten married, and, you know, it was a starting position at ABC. So I went from a pretty good Wall Street lawyer's salary to, like, 20 --you know, very little, as a researcher here at ABC. But that was, whatever, 17 years ago. And, you know, and --but I got here, I loved it immediately, and so I've been at ABC for, I don't know, 17 --maybe more. Like, 19 --17, 18 years. And now I'm an executive producer here overseeing the division-wide interviews: the medical coverage, business coverage, legal coverage for all the shows, and the websites, and, um-- and, uh --and kind of specials that --the special coverage sort of stuff. So. It's-- and my wife is a --she also was a lawyer. She --after Brown, she went to University of Chicago law school. She worked at [inaudible], which was a big law firm. She legitimately didn't like it after --when --so she took the opportunity when we had our first child, Benjamin-- after the maternity leave she went back to school, and now she teaches 17th-century English at the Hunter graduate school.

SULLIVAN: Ah.

AVRAM: Yeah.

SULLIVAN: That's so --it's so interesting that you both took these--

AVRAM: Yeah, totally. Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

SULLIVAN: [laughter]

AVRAM: Yeah. [laughter] Though I probably think, if someone would have said when we first met --I mean, they're kind of the things that both of --when we met in college, I knew that what she loved was literature and poetry, and I think that she would say that

she knew that I loved current events. So it --it probably ended up right. Uh, but I think both of us kind of were from the type of families where we were like, "You know, you should go to law school, and you should --you know, you can do what you want after that, but just in case, you should have--" You know, so --you know, so, it's --it's --It, it worked out. So-- but the law sounds like a long time ago. [laughter]

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

AVRAM: I don't really... But. So-- that's that. [laughter]

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm. And what about your religious education?

AVRAM: So-- I don't even know what happened --what my --I never went to --well, I shouldn't say that. Uh, I presume --I'm sure this is right, that from, uh-- from the time I was born, uh, I would --and I think, actually I know, much more --we --we would then regularly go. You know, I think we'd go every Friday-- I know we went when-- it's whatever time I'm conscious of --I guess it's, like, four, five, six years old --we'd go every Friday to the Brooklyn Heights Synagogue. At that time, it was on Grace Court. Is that [inaudible] right? Grace Court in-- uh, in the church. It was, like, this room, and-- it was in the church. And it was, like, ga--I never really --I wasn't conscious of how it worked, but I guess how it worked was that the church was nice enough on Friday nights to just give out a room, and [laughter] --And so we'd go, and we'd go every Friday, and, um, uh-- I remember-- I remember we always used to have to construct it every Friday --like, we'd have to take out the chairs, the folding chairs, and put them all out, and --like, before the services, and then there'd be, like, a classroom, from --I guess from the church. I guess we'd pl--what school is there? It's Grace-- there was a school --whatever the school is there. Uh, and, so, I would --went, you know, a couple of times a week. Well, when I was young I remember it being always on Friday that there'd be Hebrew School. And then as I got older, maybe eight, nine, I'd go Tuesdays and --and then it moved from Grace Court, you know, I think when I was eight or nine years old, to Remsen Street, literally next door to my --our house. Literally --you know, like, literally right next

door. And I would go on Tuesdays and Thursdays, uh, until I was bar mitzvah'ed at the age of 13. Where I was bar mitzvah'ed there by, uh, Rabbi Rick Jacobs. And after that, I wouldn't --after I was bar mitzvah'ed, I didn't --I maybe went for, you know, I didn't then continue to go regularly --regularly to Hebrew school, but I would always, to this day, go --you know, it's like the major holidays. The high holidays. Uh-- and, you know, depending on the year, sometimes Hanukkah, sometimes Passover, whatever -- whatever. But everybody, all five of my --all--all five kids were bar mitzvah'ed there. All five of us were married by the rabbi at the given time that it happened there. All of our male children who had a service of bris were born, it was all done by, with the, the, the [inaudible]. So every major family event was at the Brooklyn Heights Synagogue.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

AVRAM: So. Uh, and-- which was, uh-- You know, so it's not, like --we're not that --we're not a very re--I don't really know how to --I mean, it's not like we're that religious a family, you know, in the sense of in a traditional sense. Like, we don't --you know, it's not like we go, uh, every Friday. But in some ways we are very traditional, in that there are certain holidays we always go, and, um-- and it's been --become important in-- you know, and like I said, we bring our --our --our kids back. So-- it's --you know, it's, uh-- Hebrew school there was fine. I met some of my best friends to this day. One of my closest friends, Johnny Shaman [phonetic], we went to Packer originally together, but then I was --I told you I left to Poly, but I in many ways stayed very close to him because of the Heights Synagogue. And, uh, many other people that, you know, I grew up with at that --that --Martha Pollock, Hara Person-- you know, some of them are, uh, uh, uh-- it's, uh-- Stu, um-- Stuart Sachs. Uh, Laura Barnett. These are all people that I've known my entire life, and it's because we went to Hebrew school together. And I think all of the ones I just --they still live in neighborhood, still go to the Synagogue. So. And not to mention people who --unfortunately a lot of them are now passing away, but the, like, kind of the elder statesmen of the Synagogue at the time, like Belle Huffman and the [Marion and Jack] Cohens, uh, uh, uh --all of them, you know, were a big part of our,

you know, life. And we all kind of-- it was nice. Like, we kind of, like, could see them as, like, from little kids, and we saw how kind of things got more established, and they got bigger, and, you know, it --it --especially now when I get older, I really appreciate the fact of how, you know, it didn't exist, and they basically like cobbled it together, and now it's, you know, it's a fu--it's, you know, this very sustainable thing that will go on for a long time with very interesting things happening, and it all kind of started just from like some people just very determined to keep it going. And they do. So.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm. When you were little and -

AVRAM: Mm-hmm.

SULLIVAN: --going, did you have a sense that it was --did you understand as a --as a kid that it was a new --a new--

AVRAM: I had a sense that when I went to other synagogues, they seemed much [laughter], they seemed more impressive and established. Like, I remember, like --like, you know, when you get to thirteen, your friends --other friends, you, or even your family, whatever, where you go, like --you're going to other people's bar mitzvahs or weddings or whatever else, and you'd often go and you'd be like, "Wow. Like, this is --they've got like this whole building, and--" And it always seemed-- So that's when it --you know, when you're a little kid, you know, it's all you know. But I remember thinking like, "Wow, they have all this stuff, and we have--" I mean, now when I look back on it, it's more now when I look back on it that I go, like --well, even when I'm just telling the story-- yeah, I remember we'd go. We'd put --like I said, we'd literally put the chairs out in a room that was something else. It was like a conference room. And where the Torah scrolls are, which is like, you know, like, the central thing for, like, I guess any synagogue, was like --you know, it was like this one little thing there. There was-- [pause] It was a church. [laughter] You know? It was, you know, and-- And now, if --if I see where it's gone from there to --it was even a really big deal that it went from there to, like, a brownstone; and again, right next door is 117 Remsen Street. And now it's

gotten even, you know, sort of see --it's, uh-- I'm very aware of it now. Uh, when I was a kid I was only aware of it when I went to other things, and it was always kind of, like, you know, when you're like, "oh, that school has --" like, it seemed like a lot of other synagogues in New York, you know, had these kind of beautiful --what churches all, like, you know, churches seemed all --you know, they had all this stuff, and this was very, you know, small. And so it's actually now in the --I guess it was the 50th anniversary recently, and it was --there was this big celebration that I was thinking about, like, it really is an example of, like, these group of people who --you know, they made a legitimate, you know, huge thing, and they kept it going, and, you know, keeping it --there's no reason not to think it's not going to keep going for a very, very long time, and, you know, I feel like they --I think there's --like I said, I think there's only a handful of the, you know, I think maybe-- I might be wrong, but I think Stanley Cohen might be the only of the real founders. My father came like a year or two after. Uh-- I think. And --but, you know, yeah. I mean, they did ama--it's incredible, what they did.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

AVRAM: And I get --in retrospect I could see how committed they were. Like, they were-- you know, like, they made a big --like, I don't really know how I knew them so well. But, like, you know, I was like this little kid. And we were all these little kids. And, but-- they seemed to be, like, in Hebrew school and stuff, and they'd be at services, they'd talk to us and they'd-- they made a big, uh --they made like a big effort with us, I think in retrospect because they knew that it was really important to have the school and to try to make the school --you know, to keep that going. And it was very small, the school. I mean, I don't really know how many-- In retrospect, it was tiny. You know, it was like a --there only was a handful of people in my class.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

AVRAM: And now I think it's, like, you know, one of these --it's big and it's like established and--

SULLIVAN: So that was --the Huffmans and the Cohens-- anybody else who was--?

AVRAM: Uh, you know, I hate the fact that I can't remember this one name. Uh-- the, the -- there was --uh, yes. There's, there's, there's --there is a couple of people I have in my head who I think, you know, have passed away a long time now, but who were-- like, you know, I can see them --I can hear them, like, giving their little speeches and stuff like that, but I'm just blanking out on, on, on, on the names now. But, you know, like Belle and Ruben Huffman, um-- you know, actually we'd want to come back, and I can even tell you afterwards, because, uh, the names which I'm not going to remember now, these were not little --they were big --I, I, I can --I feel like I can tell you a bunch of stories about each of them without knowing, uh, remembering their names at the moment.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

AVRAM: I mean, they --with --they were, you know, very active and very involved with us from everything from, um-- from, again, like I said, with helping with the Hebrew school to, uh-- you know, um, helping, you know, organizing things where we would -- yup?

[knocking door]

[Unidentified speaker]: Betsy [inaudible].

AVRAM: Uh--

[Unidentified speaker]: [inaudible] message?

AVRAM: Yeah, can you just tell her --just tell her he's in --he's in --I, I have no --you know, uh, can you -can he call you back in a little bit and then get a message because he's in a meeting right now.

[Unidentified speaker]: Do you have his number [inaudible]?

AVRAM: Just get it.

[Unidentified speaker]: OK.

AVRAM: I mean, I do, but just get it. [door closes]

AVRAM: Actually, let me [inaudible]. Betsy? Hey, I actually have to --I'm actually in the middle of a meeting right now. OK. OK. No, no, that was great, that was great, and let's follow up --let's follow up on this stuff. I, I, I'm selling the Twitter and [inaudible] media, I'm ready to go. OK. So, it was, so, but, so --it was great. I'm glad I was there. OK, good. Yeah, and then let's --and let's --let's follow up on --let's --let's --OK, great. All right. Bye-bye. Um-- uh-- uh, so, you know, I can --I, you know, whether it was, you know, helping to buy more Torahs and getting them, like, showing it to us, explaining what, what they were, to introducing whenever there was a new rabbi, to asking us what we thought about the teachers at the Hebrew school, to, um, uh-- I also remember them being very, uh, telling us a lot about how we should be very respectful of the building and of the church, and how we should, you know, uh --you know, I guess in retrospect, there was like, this --the early '70s, and I think there was a --yeah, which I think it's fairly typical even to this day, but certainly back then, yeah, it's like 30 years after --not that long after World War II. A lot of people came after the war and things like that. So there's always, like, this kind of suspicions of, like, you know, being accepted and not accepted, and I remember it being like, "Wow, can you believe it, here, that this church is letting us in, and it's like totally-- it's not even-- you know, like, they're really nice about it, and --"

SULLIVAN: [laughter]

AVRAM: [laughter] --and you know-- And they all seemed so, like, touched by that. And [laughter] you know, surprised, but in a good way surprised. Uh, and, so they would really make a big effort to tell the kids about, like, you know, this is what it is, and then --and then a lot of pride when they actually had their own building and stuff.

SULLIVAN: That's such an interesting generational difference.

AVRAM: Right. Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. Yeah. Exactly.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

AVRAM: Yeah, I don't think it would occur to-- you know, but, uh-- you know. It's-- it was-- sign of the times, I guess.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm. What else did you know about those -like, the Huffmans, and--

AVRAM: One of my earliest memories, which I always want to check, because when someone says, well, my earliest memory was, then I should actually figure out when this would have been. But I remember a couple of times we'd come out of the Brooklyn Heights Synagogue, and that was when I would have been in --in --in Grace Court; I would have been on, uh, Hicks Street and-- the corner of --you know, coming right out there, Hicks and Grace Court. And looking up at the moon, and people saying, "There's people on the moon." So I always --people say what's my earliest memory --when kids ask for my earliest memory, that's always my earliest --that's my earliest memory.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

AVRAM: Is coming out of a Friday night --twice coming out in, like, you know, then me trying to see if I can tell-- [laughter]

SULLIVAN: [laughter]

AVRAM: --that they were --you know, if I could see them. You know. So-- And I remember we used to have, uh, they used to give --like, you know, Friday, they used, they used to have-- they said this very --you know, they say the prayer for the wine and the bread, challah. And, um, I remember they used to give us, like, some sort of grapefruit juice, and it's-- one of the teachers used to, like, bake this --I don't know how she would have baked it, but she would --I don't know if she baked it or she got it somewhere but it was very, very fresh, you could feel that it was still like it just got baked. And I always remember that, too.

SULLIVAN: Oh, nice.

AVRAM: Right. Yeah. Uh, so.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

AVRAM: [laughter]

SULLIVAN: Um-- We've talked about some of the changes in the --in the gathering space.

Was there --in your time have there been ritual changes? Changes in the ritual practice?

AVRAM: Well, I mean--

SULLIVAN: That you've seen?

AVRAM: It's always been a Reform synagogue. But yeah. I mean, it's been-- So I think it was always very -relatively, for the times, progressive. But, like, now, I think --well, like, the -- if you --These are little things, but they're the types of things that-- um-- you know, for a Reform synagogue, I think for the first fifteen years or twenty years I went there that I was --my life. I mean, I don't think --maybe I'm wrong, but my clear impression is you wouldn't --would have never seen a woman wearing a yarmulke or a --a prayer shawl. Now that's, uh, not unusual at all. Uh, you would, um-- they-- the language has become - I think they were always, again, rela--for at the times, kind of a little bit progressive on this stuff, but it --the language has definitely changed. So in other words, like, with all this Biblical passages where it's, you know, like, "our Father" or "our King" or whatever, that --that --it'll become much more, you know, gender-neutral, and, like, all that sort of has become, for lack of a better way of saying it, very politically correct. Like, uh, in terms of, uh --And I actually remember sometimes that --not liking that, not because of the sentiment behind it, but because only --but --like, again, when you, like, you're a kid, and like you --so you just kind of know, this is, like --this is the way it's been said for 15 years, and all of a sudden they change, you're like, oh, like, you know-- noticed how I changed. But [inaudible] better now. Uh, and-- And I think it's become --the congregation's actually become far more --which, this actually does surprise me. I'm

not sure why it does. But much more --it --uh --it --my impression when I was younger was that it'd be very rare for someone from the Brooklyn Heights Synagogue to be able to get up and, like, look at the Torah and read it without --like, you'd learn Hebrew, you'd learn like the vows and [inaudible], reading the prayers struck me as something that when they called people up to do something, it wouldn't be to read from the Torah-- I don't --I don't remember that. Maybe --if it happened, it was rare. And actually, I remember every now and then that someone would do it, it would usually be an Israeli who was there, and I'd be like, "Wow, that's really impressive." Now, there seems to be lots of people who can --and I'm always kind of, like, impressed at how lots of people that -- how they get up the, the, the Torah --person will just get up and will chant it and they'll do it and I'm like-- It seems much --I know literate's not really the word, but much more-- I guess it is. Uh, you know, it's better-- it's, it-- they --For some reason, to me, I would have thought that as ti--time goes on, it seems to me in some ways more --even though those language things, those types of things they're talking about are, you know, they change, but in some ways it's more-- I don't want to say "traditional," but I guess that's the word that comes to mind. That it's, you know, it's just that, like I said, more people who can read Hebrew, and more people who --they have more of these classes about religious studies and things like that. That, to me, didn't seem like a --it seemed much like, OK, Tuesday, Thursday you learn about the Ten Commandments, you learn about, you know, kind of the ABC's. And-- and, you know, you learn your Hebrew, you learn how to get through your bar mitzvah. And that was --now it seems like it's much more-- better-educated --and it's progressed.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

AVRAM: But. I don't know if that answers the question.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

AVRAM: [laughter]

SULLIVAN: Yeah. Very much.

AVRAM: Yeah. Yeah.

SULLIVAN: Um, and how would you describe the community as a whole?

AVRAM: Meaning, like, the Brooklyn Heights community, or

SULLIVAN: Brooklyn Heights Synagogue.

AVRAM: Or the Brooklyn Heights Synagogue? As-- [pause] Well, I can --for me, what I always thought was, you know, I actually appreciate this even more as I get older, is I find it to be, um, neat, and very-- uh-- uh, comfort-comforting, that, like, that this place I went to my entire life, even if I'm not --I'm not --I don't go --I go these days for, you know --I always go to the high holidays, and I probably go the rest of the year literally like two or three other times. Besides, like, you know, there'll be like a bar mitzvah or whatever. But, like, the certain, like --you know, maybe, like, five times in the entire year. And that's the norm for like the last-- But I, you know, it's-- uh, you know, uh, I feel like there's people there who know somebody in my family well always. Um-- I feel like even if I don't know the person, I'm kind of like, "oh, there's them," you know, and-- A lot of familiar faces. I do realize now that I feel like I'm not --it's not the same as it was, where I kind of thought for, when we-- when I was younger and we'd go all the time, I -- you know, you kind of felt like, you know, we were at the center of things. Now I kind of feel like there's a group that I just don't know, just because I'm --they're there much more than --than I am. And so that's something that actually kind of makes me sad, because I'm like, uh, you know, I was, like, trying to think of, like, you know, a big --that we used to always feel like we were central to things that were going on at the synagogue, and now it's less so, because-- for the reason I just said. So. But I see it as, you know, a very-- close --in that familiar-- and when I say close, I don't mean close like that I'm that close to them, I just mean, like, it feels close to me. And-- and, like, you know, I --and I think it's very, very-- I always see it as --like, it's very-- "idealistic" sounds, uh-- you know, it seems very kind of innocent in its, like, wanting --you know, like, it's -- you know, it kind of seems always like ambitious about "oh, there's this problem in

society, and we should, you know, fight AIDS, and fight homelessness, or fight --" whatever it kind of --whatever it is at that moment. And, you know-- "And 9/11 happened so we should do this," or -and I always think it's, like --you know, it's like, "oh," and it's --I think it's very impressive. Uh, and-- and I think that it's-- mmm. [pause] You know, I think it's like a genuinely very --it's not a --it's a --it's -whatever it is, it doesn't strike me as having an ounce of cynicism there. It's a very --it's not a --you know, it's not a --I'm --I guess whether you're in the media, or you're at a law firm, or whatever --I got it.

[Unidentified speaker]: [inaudible]

AVRAM: Yup, yup, yup, yup. Like, it doesn't, that-- it seems very-- that, that-- I love that, actually.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm. What was the --I haven't --I don't know, what was the Synagogue's response to 9/11? Was there--?

AVRAM: Well, actually, you know-- There was definitely responses to 9/11. I remember --but what I do remember was, you know, the high holidays that year were -were-- it felt like they were just, like, a couple weeks after 9/11. And, um-- and there was a lot of people. There was the fire department --you know, they did a lot with the fire department. They went-- these are things that I'm remembering that --I, I, I remember they reached out to the Muslim community in, in, in, you know, Atlantic Avenue, and, and they were kind of in a- you know, let's-- let's not have any --we don't want you to feel like there's any ruptures here, or that, you know, it was very, you know-- between the churches, mosques, synagogues, I remember, you know --I remember them being really at the -- maybe I'm wrong, but I remember that they made a big deal --I think --I don't think - I'm not saying they took the first step over anybody else, but I remember they were very active about trying to reach out to make that happen. I know that there were people in the Synagogues who lost loved ones, and there was --there was the local fire department, which I think lost eight, or-- and I know that they did, uh, stuff on that front

-you know, reached out and visited and, uh-- uh --but I do remember the message being very much --this is kind of where I go back to not having the cynicism, it's kind of like -- I mean, again, it kind of seems now like --but it wasn't a few weeks after 9/11. It wasn't exactly the prevailing-- not that I think in New York it was a big problem, but I don't think the prevailing mood was "Oh, let's reach out to the Muslim community."

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

AVRAM: To me, that's very much of a Brooklyn Heights Synagogue reaction to have. And there's always a part of me that's like, uh --where I can sometimes be cynical, and be like, "Well, that seems like a--" Like, I'll think of something --like, I don't think there's --I don't think anybody's --there's a problem. I don't think anybody's --anything's happening on, you know, it, there's --that anybody on, uh, say Atlantic Avenue, meaning not limited, I mean, I guess --like, there's a problem that, like, people are going in or doing anything. But then I, like, I think that for a second I'm going, you know what? Actually, especially when time goes on, I'm like, you know what, that's a really good first reaction. Because it's certainly, after 9/11 was --whether things were happening or not happening, you know, everyone had every reason --if you were, you know, a Muslim in the shadow, quite literally, of, you know --the Twin Towers were literally dust that was coming down on the neighborhoods. I mean, you would have every reason to be like, "Jeez, I don't --this is --this can't be that comfortable a period of time." And I remember there being an aggressive outreach, and marches, and, uh, you know-- I think --and I also remember --I don't know exactly what it was, but I kind of remember whenever things like happened, I remember when --I don't mean AIDS --I mean, AIDS when AIDS was not --when not that many people were talking about it, in the '80s. Uh, and-- and I --I remember being talked a lot about it, and, and-- you know, I was younger, I don't know exactly what it was, but I remember hearing, you know, a lot about it. In retrospect, you know, I'm like, how --I always feel like on these things they're very ahead of the curve.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

AVRAM: So, uh. And-- you know. But not really, you know-- but not like political-political. Like, political, yes, but not like, "Oh, vote for so-and-so."

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

AVRAM: Right? Or --or-- you know. I think a lot of things in New York-- I think it's a very tolerant place. And I don't --and to me, a lot of times it can be, again, like, you know, liberal New York, and --the --I think a lot of times under those type of umbrellas, whether it be at schools or at various places, it could still have, if you're not part of that norm, intolerant, like, if you somehow think differently, or your politics are a little different, then you'd be made to feel out of the --you know, like, you're, when you, you're, you know, a redneck or --I, I -one --I think one of the nice things about the Brooklyn Heights Synagogue is --again, it goes back to what I was saying before. It really didn't have any of that. It's kind of like --genuinely like, you know, very welcoming. But clearly, uh, has a bent to it which is, you know, wanting to help out, uh, and reach out on things that --to help people. Especially things that --when it was perceived that people weren't being --weren't --weren't necessarily being helped by others.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

AVRAM: So. You know. It was good.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm. [pause] Are there other key people besides the --the founders who stand out to you?

AVRAM: Well, I mean, uh, the, you know, uh, Rabbi Lippe. I mean, Rabbi, uh, er, Rick Jacobs. Uh, Rabbi Ruben --I mean, all the rabbis --Rabbi Ruben, Rabbi --I don't know if there was others in between, but the ones --Rabbi Ruben, Rabbi Rick, and certainly, uh, uh, Ruben, Rick, and Lippe. Uh, there were others --others, but they --they-- you know, I think they've all been great. Uh, I think-- I think --you know, again, it's not really about -like --I mean, it's not the founders, necessarily. I always feel like there's always a group,

always, and now I'm saying it's actually more of a totally --it's a totally new group. And I don't really know them, but it's very clear that --how committed they are, and how much time they're putting in. And I think these are people who have very busy lives outside of there. And it's not particularly religious in the sense of, like, traditional, you know, Judaism, right. But they're clearly spending a lot of time devoted to it. So it seems to be whoever in a leadership position, with very few exceptions --uh, like anywhere else, some --that, that they seem to be very super-committed. So, and --so it's not --you know, it's, like, generic. It's like, in a bigger sense, it's the commitment. Yeah. [laughter]

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

AVRAM: Yeah.

SULLIVAN: Uh, can you describe the --the three rabbis that --that you mentioned?

AVRAM: Uh-- the-- gosh. One, um, um, was from the earliest Rabbi Ruben and my --I don't know. I must have been in --in gra--I definitely was in grade school. I remember we went to a Mets game and Willie Mays was playing, so I guess that was like 1974, so I was probably like eight or nine years old. Um, and he was --again, I was a little kid then, so he seemed like he was just kind of fun. Um, who was a big, important, uh, person in, I think, the Synagogue, and so in my family, he was Rabbi Rick Jacobs, who, um, was the rabbi for my bar mitzvah, was, um --did a number of our, our, our weddings, and, you know, I was very close to him. Our whole family was very close to him. You know, I was at his, what, was at his wedding. Um, and, you know, he was, uh, I --I now remember my son's a dancer. He was a dancer, you know, and was this tall, good-looking guy. I remember all the women liked him. And-- he was --he was just like a really-- I mean, it sounds kind of trite to say, but, like, going through life, I mean, sometimes people are going like, that --Rabbi Rick was just a good thing --he was really --he was a man. He was a really good guy. He was really made always the extra effort. Uh, he was a lot of these things I described them before, where, you know, not any cynicism, always trying to help, added --he was --you know, he had a good sense of humor, or in the --you know,

kind of in the appropriate ways. And, uh, I remember thinking it was a really big loss. And I remember actually kind of thinking it was surprising, because he left to go to --I think it was Scarsdale. Kind of like almost again like this cliché --like, kind of with the synagogues I was talking about before, like, these ones that have, you know, these very kind of established and, uh, you know, and, just, like, have, like, a lot more money than Brooklyn Heights Synagogue has. Uh, so he went to --and I remember kind of thinking a little bit to myself "That was a little bit of a sellout." Like, "I'm a little surprised he went to go, uh, do that." Uh, I don't think it was at all. I think it was, you know, uh, whatever. I don't know, it's his life. I mean, I --it --I don't look at it that way anymore. But I remember thinking at the time, like, "This is really bad for the Synagogue." And then --and then this is --and then I do --and then I think there actually was a period of time where things weren't --they weren't really bad, but where --and I don't want to get this wrong, because there's --because definitely between Rabbi Rick and Lippe, you know, I don't know how many rabbis there were --I think there were a few. And I think some were good. But I --I just got the feeling that was kind of a time where things got a little bit --and I think that Rabbi Lippe, uh, who I was --most of my family was older at the time when he came in. And I don't know how long he's been there, but it's been awhile now, and I feel like he's brought back, like, a lot of the stability-- he has a lot of --all of the same qualities I've just mentioned, um, about Rabbi Rick, and I kind of feel it's like --you know, he's taken it to a, a-- you know, if there was like kind of a bridge, it's like, if I talk about where I was when I was a little kid and we were like opening up the chairs and putting them away before the services, now it's like, he went from, you know, the brownstone to, you know, down the block, where it's like a real sanctuary, so it's a real kind of established building, and he's got lots of programs going, it's-- you know, he's taken it to a-- you know, to me, a different level. And, you know, he's just --and he's just a good guy, and he seems like he really loves the neighborhood and the Synagogue and, you know-- like I said, I don't go that much, but I --I love --you know, uh, but, you know, I love the guy, so.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

AVRAM: You know, it's-- so-- You know, so, you know, I think the rabbis have been, you know-- I think there were one and two that were --that weren't so --I knew there was something, when I was a kid, there was something going on that I didn't know about. But I didn't know exactly what it was. But, you know, I'm thinking of one [inaudible] -- I'm forgetting his name, but we used to call him the GQ rabbi. I forget what his name was. Uh, the kids used to call him that. Uh--

SULLIVAN: Why --what did that name come from?

AVRAM: Well, I mean, it --it --he --before he was there, he was, I think, I'm pretty sure he was in the --he was in the clothing business or fashion --I mean, he was like this kind of, you know, hip New York downtown kind of dress --I --he was --I liked him. He was --but-- but I, I --I remember the --for the first time, in my entire time at the Heights Synagogue, where you never heard anybody say being a split about a rabbi, I remember some people have --there being some split. And I don't think it was any, like, big, you know, but-- and maybe there was. I mean, I was younger, so-- but there was definitely some people who didn't --I think that where he kind of took it a little further with the jokes and-- I don't know. I don't know exactly what it was. But I don't want to speculate. Uh-- but he left and, you know, that was that. [laughter]

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

AVRAM: And-- you know.

SULLIVAN: Is there --I'm --I'm being conscious of --of time.

AVRAM: Yeah. Yeah.

SULLIVAN: Um, is there --Um, is there --

AVRAM: Yeah, like --yeah.

SULLIVAN: --a moment that, that you felt most connected to the Synagogue, or that you feel most connected?

AVRAM: Well, um, I don't know how many years it's been, but it's been at least 40 or maybe 30, you know, 30 --a --many decades, where on the high holidays, uh, on Yom Kippur, you know, the-- um-- you --the, you know, the --I don't know if it's exactly the --you know, it's the --the holiest day of the year, or I don't know if that's exactly the right way of saying it, but it's, you know, it's Yom Kippur. And our family does, um, the --the haftorah. And I remember it being, when we were very young --so, say it was, like, my, my, my bar mitzvah, I, I'd --like, I would get up, since I --I knew the --you know, I had just learned the prayer before and after the haftorah, and I would get up, I think alone, and do that, and, you know, and that would be that, and then, you know, it was every, it was five of us, and so then it would be the next person, and they'd do it. But now it's almost comical, because, um, you know, then after a certain period of time, we'd --a bunch of us would go up, and we'd --you know, so we'd do the prayer, but then we'd also read the English, and, so it used to be, like, OK, the five kids and my parents. It would be seven. So we'd split up the thing seven ways and do the prayers. Now, between --we have not only the, the seven of us, but we're all married, so that's ten, and then now we have some of the grandkids, so it's literally like we get up and it's like [pause] --it's probably-- five, ten, twelve-- you know, it's like we get up to say that prayer every year, and in the last few years I feel like it's like --like twenty people get up.

SULLIVAN: Wow.

AVRAM: So. And so, like, to see --a --and I think for the people who've been there for a long time, I think --and it --it's certainly like this way for the family, is --it's kind of, you know, we all get to go up, and, you know, obviously for us, we can't help but think, like, "wow, we've been doing this for all these years, and now we're doing it --you know, first it was a big deal that we started doing it all as a family; then it was a big deal that, like, a spouse would be involved, and then it was a big deal that a grandkid --and now there's all these grandkids. And so for us, yeah --but I --and I also can't help but think that for

people who've been in the synagogue for a long time, they're being like, "Wow, this family's--" You know, we --you kind of --even if you don't know us, you're like, you know, you can see the family, uh-- so I --I, you know, uh, you know, you're fascinated with things. So it's not like, you know, uh, I don't --I can't say I, like, love the whole thing, but it's --it's, I always think that's a very --it's become a very special --uh, that's become a special thing for our family. So even if somebody's, like, in college, and it be, like, you kind of feel like --well, you know, you've got to come back --back because we're doing the Jonah reading. You know, or if somebody's somewhere else and --and my brother, like I said, lived up in Boston. And, like, various times people have lived in Cali--you know, we've lived in different places. But it would always be this type of thing where, you know, very rarely is not everybody there, no matter where they are, because, you know, it's just one of the things we do. So. That's-- the special, uh, I guess the, the --and then, uh-- uh --- I mean, like I said, like, every major family moment, like, you know, I remember marriages, or every major moment was there, so. Uh, and, also, um-- you know, recently when --I guess it was --I guess it was like a year ago, maybe less, or-- uh, where one of the founders --when --when Mrs. [Marion] Cohen died, uh, you know, there was in a --sorry, I don't know what the right word is. There was a-- I don't remember it, but it's --you know, basically they say, you know, --you know, let's come, let's all meet at the, the, the Synagogue on whatever day of the week, like, you know, it was, like, one day after, you know, whatever day it was, like, Thursday. And, uh, for the reasons that I've kind of said from the beginning, this is somebody I've known my entire life, who had been at all the ma--major events in my life and had become very close to my family. And I guess that --it was a special day in the sense that it kind of-- there was --it was a, a whole lot of people there, I think the majority of --maybe not the majority, but a lot of whom I never met before. But --members of the Brooklyn Heights Synagogue, --or friends of hers, and people got up and told stories, and, uh-- I remember thinking, you know, being very aware of the fact of kind of what I said before. Like, uh, you know, this is somebody who did --you know, in some ways was, you know, not that, uh-- you know, sh--she had --it would --one wouldn't know it by, you know, if you met her somewhere, if

you saw her CV or whatever it was or anything like that, but somebody who had accomplished, like, a, a --it was a big part of making Brooklyn Heights Synagogue what it was. Uh, who had a large amount of people who were speaking the way I --I am now about the feeling that she was a key --not because she was there, but because somehow made it warmer and nicer at these very pivotal parts of people's lives. Like, over and over and over and over and over again. You're kind of like, you know, again, I am a little bit --like, I'm, I'm here at ABC, and used to it, you know, well, we're like --we're like --i-interviewing really interesting people or, or, you know, people you know, have, you know, who've done that kind of --but I remember thinking, like, uh, uh, being very moved by the fact that, um, how much she had done. And, like, I was kind of proud of her. Like, in, and, and very proud of the Synagogue, that, uh --because I knew how close she was to me, but, I, I mean, this was like, people, you know, there was --uh, uh, me, times one, at, times, times fifty, you know, whatever, like, one after the other, and it was kind of like --you know, and in some ways, that's the power of the Synagogue, where you say, you know-- like, you know, here's somebody who, it, you know, you kind of --and I think if you would say --maybe --we're a little different. She was legitimately a very close family friend after all the time. But I think a lot of people in that room would say, "you know, it's not like we'd go have dinner with her, but, you know, we'll never forget that on that day she did this, or on this day, or she remembered this--" and, and I think that that is, uh, kind of a illustration or-- uh, you know, really the --what the --when you say Brooklyn Heights Synagogue, to me it's like that. It's --that's really what it is. And also, that --these are people who, uh, you know --Brooklyn's kind of a little --you know, it's a lot --you know, these are people who are very committed to Brooklyn. And, uh, you know, a--again, this is something that's changed, but I kind of remember it back then being much more like, you know, you, you get -- you all go to Manhattan, and, you know, you, you kind of --it was --but that was, like, it was very, kind of --like, kind of looking back on it, kind of almost funny. Like, fiercely pro-Brooklyn Heights and the whole area and, like, it was kind of, like, frowned upon to --not really frowned --you kind of got the sense, like, it wasn't --like, people didn't want to hear of you. You know, that it

was --it was the neighborhood. Uh, and, you know, so to me there --the neighborhood, and, and the Synagogue, it's all very intertwined. [pause]

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

AVRAM: That's that. So. I only got like a couple minutes, [laughter] so I've got to -

SULLIVAN: That was -That was -

AVRAM: Think we're good?

SULLIVAN: That was great.

AVRAM: We're good?

SULLIVAN: Yes.

AVRAM: OK.

SULLIVAN: Um, if I could just ask one more question -

AVRAM: Yes.

SULLIVAN: --because I, um, I wasn't able to interview -

AVRAM: Mm-hmm.

SULLIVAN: --Mrs. Cohen, and -

AVRAM: Mm-hmm.

SULLIVAN: Mr. Cohen -

AVRAM: Mm-hmm.

SULLIVAN: --has not wanted to -

AVRAM: Right, I understand that.

SULLIVAN: I think. Yeah. But I wondered if you could just, out of -

AVRAM: Right, right.

SULLIVAN: --my own curiosity now, do you know about, like, when they came to Brooklyn or what their background is?

AVRAM: Well, I don't know their back--I know that they were there, you know, whenever the Synagogue was founded.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

AVRAM: So they've been there at least, uh-- that long, I mean, the kids-- I mean, I don't, you know --I don't really know. But in a way, that's what's kind of really interesting about them. It's like-- um, that's not [laughter] that's not what's really interesting about them. But it's, you know-- she [pause] was the ca--ca--I don't think we even called it the cantor. But when we were young, she was the cantor at the Synagogue. And I think, it was kind of like --I don't really like to make this analogy, but it's sort of like when you, like, see those old movies, and they go like, "Whoa, we're going to put on a show! You do this and you do that and --" You know, it was kind of like, "Oh, well, I play the piano," and there was an organ, "you know, so I'll do that. And, you know, I'll sing, and --" You know, these weren't, like, trained, you know --like, now, what I'm saying, like, you know, the cantors, my impression of them, I'm thinking, right, is, like, somebody who, you know, like I said, could --you know, God bless her, but I think if you put her in front of the Torah, there's no way she was going to be able to-- to read, but she could sing.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

AVRAM: And so she'd go, "Well, I'll do that." And -but she would --that's what she did. Uh, and she'd get up in this room in front of the people, and she'd --and then --you know, and she had to learn all that. And, and he would --you know, like --almost kind of like in a [inaudible]. Like, it's almost like he would be, like, what, you know, was always seemed to be --first of all, they were always there, every Friday. And always, when

accompanying, just, you know, they're-- it's too bad. I'm not surprised, actually, that, uh, he doesn't want to talk, but, um, you know, my parents would know a lot about them.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

AVRAM: I mean, they were --they're very close.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

AVRAM: I mean, uh, you know, uh, this is, uh-- I, it -actually, I'm going to talk about --my parents should, or at least sort of my father should definitely should do this

SULLIVAN: Yeah.

AVRAM: --because he, he --you know, I'm --those days, to me, are kind of --you know, I'm a little kid. It's kind of a blur. No, not a blur, but you know what I mean. I'm like a kid. You know. He was -

SULLIVAN: But your impressions are great.

AVRAM: Right, but he's -

SULLIVAN: I mean, it's a -I mean, it's a -

AVRAM: --he's much more, like, he knows what happened, and he knows what, you know, to me, like, it's funny --I mean, in my --it's not funny to you, but in my head it's funny. Like, I know the Cohens really well. But what's funny to me is, or makes the point to me is, if you said to me, "What do they do?", I actually don't know the answer to that question.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

AVRAM: Or what they did do. Uh, and that's --it's probably sounds --that doesn't mean I wasn't really close to them. It's almost like in-- and by the way, there were --you know, I know that, um, you know, it --you know, he had the kids and, you know, they, they --I don't know what it was, but, but --but he was busy doing it, right? Uh, but, but in a way, that was kind of the remarkable thing about them, it's kind of like, when you went there,

or when --it was about, you know, it was about the Synagogue, or it was about the family-- You know, when we got married in St. Louis, they came to St. Louis. Uh, but, you know, and, and, and you know, I think he's really --I --I don't know if he's a--he might be the o--is he the only-- do you -I don't know if you might know if he's the only surviving of the --of the people who originally started the Synagogue.

SULLIVAN: I think so.

AVRAM: Right, yeah.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

AVRAM: But, you know, uh-- and-- you know, and --the other --one last thing I'll just say, and then, and then maybe we'll be done if there's nothing else to say. You know, I told you about, uh, um-- my --my very close friend from childhood, Johnny Shaman [phonetic]. Uh, both his mother and his father, uh --his were --were --they were probably there when --I'm, I'm basically certain they were there when it was founded. Uh, he --uh, Johnny's father, Bernard Shaman [phonetic], uh, died out of --totally out of the blue. He was young. I don't --he must have been in his early forties. Massive heart attack a couple of weeks before his son's bar mitzvah.

SULLIVAN: Mmm.

AVRAM: And it was --you know, obviously really bad. And on New Year's Day. You know, so he died on January 1st. Uh, out of the blue. And he had to give --had to have his bar mitzvah afterwards. He --you know, there was all this talk, "should we cancel it," like, you know, what do you do. And it wasn't right --it was like three or four months after. And, um, you know, he had it. And, um, I remember it being, you know --how much of a --I remember it being, you know --how much of a --everybody, people who didn't even know him really needed to make it, like, a, just being, you know, very good and making it a very special day. Then his mother, who was also very involved in the Synagogue, you know, she then very suddenly, not --after that, all of a sudden got --had cancer. And

she was -she --she died-- she was very quickly obvious that she was going to die; she didn't die for, you know, maybe four or five years later, but she was in bad shape for most of that time. Uh, and another part of what I --what I always remember that --that it's not just the --the Cohens and these people I told you about at the beginning whose names, whose faces and, you know, are like, kind of indelibly [inaudible] whose names I can't remember [inaudible] when I go home and I --or ask Johnny what their names are, I'll go "ah!"

SULLIVAN: Well, when you know, you can tell me and I'll say

AVRAM: Whatever. But, like, how, like, they --you know, what an effort they made for Johnny and for his sister. You know, who were basically --and my, frankly --and my parents, uh, and how the --you know, and I think the Synagogue's doing things like that all --whenever things like that happen in the neighborhood that affect the thing, I think it's a very-- you know, I think it --it ---whenever things like that happen in the neighborhood that affect the thing, I think it's a very-- you know, I think it --it -it's a very --it --it handles those things well, and we'll take a big, big part. So.

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm.

AVRAM: Uh-- uh, was there anything else, or--?

SULLIVAN: No, that's great.

AVRAM: OK?

SULLIVAN: Mm-hmm. [laughter]

AVRAM: [laughter] That's good.

SULLIVAN: Thank you so much.

AVRAM: Yeah.

SULLIVAN: Um, this is the release.

AVRAM: Thank you --now, who comes and listens --does anybody actually come and listen to --I mean, I don't -it's not like I, I don't, I didn't say anything that I, that I wouldn't want said, but it's not like --it doesn't, like, go out on --like, where does it go in the end?

SULLIVAN: Um, this --for the -

AVRAM: Would it just be like, if, if someone would have to go to the Historical Society and ask to hear it or something?

SULLIVAN: Yes. Well, at the Historical Society, we have -it will take a while before it's processed and catalogued, but then it's catalogued in a --our computer database in the library, so if somebody comes in the library and they search through oral histories they can look at the Brooklyn Heights Synagogue Oral History Project and see -

AVRAM: What else do you have there? I mean, I'm kind of interested to hear some of it.

SULLIVAN: Oh, we have --we have 500 -

AVRAM: Wow.

SULLIVAN: --narrators and growing. Um, Brooklyn Navy Yard, um--

AVRAM: Do you have anything else from Brooklyn Heights?

SULLIVAN: Um-- a lot of individuals -

AVRAM: Right, right.

SULLIVAN: --who are important to Brooklyn Heights. Um, a lot of the projects --the --it goes back to '73, and so a lot of the projects are, um -

AVRAM: Would you have, like, have St. Ann's or something like that, or Packer, or, like, any of the schools in a -

SULLIVAN: Not with, um, what's her name, um-- one of the founders of St. Ann's -

AVRAM: [inaudible]

SULLIVAN: Um, I forget her name, but we --I interviewed her. Um, I forget her name, but we --I interviewed her.

AVRAM: Right, right, right.

SULLIVAN: But not a specific project for St. Anne's.

AVRAM: Right.

SULLIVAN: But the older projects are --different neighborhoods or, like, ethnic communities

-

AVRAM: Right.

SULLIVAN: --the first one was Puerto Rican Oral History Project -

AVRAM: Right.

SULLIVAN: And then, yeah, now we're --and we just keep doing more and more.

AVRAM: Right. Well --all right. I mean-- I have to read this. Uh-- and I fill this top part out?

SULLIVAN: Yes, please. And I can give you a copy of the interview, also.

AVRAM: I don't know. I don't think I want that. I think it's just -

SULLIVAN: [laughter] And -