

Interview with Midge Pines
May 24, 2007
[Lia Lewis in blue](#)
Midge Pines in black

[Why don't you start with how you came to Greensboro and what brought you to Temple Emanuel?](#)

Well, we came in 1969, and there were two choices the synagogue or the temple. They were referred to as synagogue and Temple. My husband said he was Reform and we didn't even look at the synagogue. People were very, very friendly, and that was one of the things that was very impressive. It was also, it was easy to meet everybody. Services were large groups of people and sisterhood, Mohandas, Council of Jewish Women, all made for a very close knit social atmosphere. Back then most women did not work and there was a meeting every Monday. Monday was lunch and meeting...Hadassah, the sisterhood, Council, we ran out of Mondays for groups. But they would bring in 60-150 women every Monday. It was well attended. People worked hard. There were lots of projects. Council mainly took care of projects in the community. The synagogue and Temple, their sisterhoods took care of their organizations. Ort was mainly to raise money for education. Hadassah of course, did Hadassah hospital fund raising. There was no Federation at that time. When the Federation came to town, when they started that, and I don't know much about that, because I wasn't in on the beginning of that. Council went by the wayside. Meetings started to get smaller. Brotherhood was huge. Brotherhood was very active. In fact, you asked for a picture, I had a picture. Brotherhood took on a project called Chitaqua. I don't know if they still do Chitaqua. They had a group here in Greensboro and of course it was mainly for fund raising and it did also education in the colleges. It came from Chitaqua, NY, that's where they got the name, I think. But these guys, they were the first life members. This is Arnie Task, Leonard Warner, my husband, Bill Pines, he came down from NY, I don't know who that is. This is Bill King, and if you've ever heard of Bill King, he was our shofar blower. He was fabulous, I mean, you would pay to hear him play, to blow the shofar. And he was a convert.

[Really? Were there a lot back then when you first came?](#)

Yeah. But, you know it's very funny, I once tried set up an organization for converts, so they'd feel more comfortable in the Jewish social strata. You know a rabbi can make you feel very comfortable in the religion, but you've also got a culture to learn about. And I called one person who just reamed me out. He said, "If you read your Bible you will know that once we are converted, we are not considered converts, we are Jewish, so don't pick me out." And that was the end of that. [Laughing] But, Bill King was our shofar blower, and he was a professional trumpet player. I think his widow and son still live here. And then the next one is Phil Maeler who now lives in Wilmington somewhere. And that's Bill Starr, who was and extremely active, and generous giver. And still is. Just put the wall up.

[Who was the rabbi when you came?](#)

Arnie Task. Brand new. He started in 1969 or 8 just when we came here. And he was a young man, did a lot with the children. We didn't have many bar mitzvahs in those days, but he started bat mitzvahs and bar mitzvahs. And they were always on Friday nights never on Saturdays. He figured we got more people there on Friday night. There was a regular crowd that came every Friday night. An older crowd. And, but you know it was small then or smaller. When you had a bar mitzvah the whole congregation helped put it together. Did all the baking and the cooking and it was a fun thing for not only the child who was having his big day, but for the whole family. And I think it might still be that way. People getting together. So, what else can I remember about it?

It's funny, I just went to a congregation meeting. Back in the old days, or back in the early 70s, we'd have congregation meetings, it would be standing room only. And...which was very interesting. And there was a woman named Sylvia Ricketts, who was the head of the Friendship Circle, which Arnie Task put together. He started the Friendship Circle. And her report, everybody had to give a report, every committee chairman, her report used to be so funny and so long, everybody would just go to hear it. That's about all I remember about Arnie Task. After 10 years it becomes controversial, as with everything. And, he was a good rabbi. He was a kind man, a very kind man. He did mixed marriages for people who belonged to the congregation. That was kind of a new thing, because people weren't doing mixed marriages where you could hire a rabbi. He would do them because he felt he couldn't turn them away. You know, it has both sides. He was very, very active in the community with all his clergy peers. Extremely active. And we did run several programs under Arnie which encompassed the First Presbyterian Church, the Episcopal Church and our Temple. We ran a summer program for kids, for underprivileged children. And we used our kids as counselors and our parents and it was very, very successful. Up until after Arnie left. It was a good thing. It was great to put on your resume for college for these kids to do that. Plus it taught them that you know, not everybody has everything that they have. And the kids that attended loved it too. They got to go swimming every other day. But anyway, that was program that he started also.

[Do you remember any of the other rabbis?](#)

Well, I don't, because Rabbi Asher was right before Arnie and he went to another congregation in San Francisco. So, we didn't see him much. He came every once in awhile as a guest. But, you know, I didn't know any of the other rabbis before Arnie. After Arnie, I know Harkavie. And he was here only 5 years. And Salkowitz. Salkowitz was our interim rabbi, because we'd learned our lesson, that we couldn't rush through hiring. We had to make sure we were doing the right thing. And it gave us time to find Fred, which we did. And, that's all the rabbis. I think our congregation was very lucky, in that we didn't have many rabbis. It wasn't a revolving door. We had difficulty, you know, Arnie Task was with us 20 years. And Harkavie said, you know, to follow someone of 20 years whether you liked him or not, it was very difficult. And he blamed a lot of his problems on being that first rabbi after Arnie Task. So it was good to have an interim to give the congregation time to calm its anxieties down. We had a very active board. And we still do have an active board. But I was the first woman president of the congregation, and I really feel that there were many women before me, who deserved that opportunity, and probably would have done fabulous jobs. But I don't know whether they were asked and refused or it just never happened I don't know. But the door is open now for anybody that wants it.

[Have you noticed a lot of changes in the role of women in the congregation since you've been there?](#)

Yes, there are less women in the congregation, believe it or not. Women were the caretakers, the mothers of the congregation. They were the welcoming committee, they were the housekeepers. I remember seeing in the minutes from the 40s, that although most of the women in the south here had help, full-time help, they wouldn't trust the Temple with the full-time help. So they would go to the Temple to wash the windows, to clean the pews, and do all the housework. Very active group to cook, because all of the luncheons, which were every single week, were made by the women. You didn't have the caterers. We didn't even have the restaurants here in town. But, you know, women had a different role. Today, the role of women is handled by both men and women as couples. Good, bad, indifferent, I think it's just the times.

We had one big building; we outgrew our Sunday school, and we had to build the Rypins building. We were doing classes in a house that was on that property. They bought the property, and the older kids would go into the house for classes. And our first person, our first executive that wasn't a rabbi, was

Victor Cone who headed our education. Now, we had Dave Helberg for many, many years, but he was really part-time. Victor Cone was full-time education director. So our Sunday school grew, and we had to build the Rypins Building which you probably don't even know. It was a building across the street. I guess that was finished in 1979. And then, we had a big push to redo the sanctuary, and we had plans to turn it around sideways. We had all kinds of plans to expand, but we didn't have the money. So it never got done. It got painted, it got renovated, it got all kinds of cosmetic surgery, so to speak, but it did not get bigger. So, we were happy with that for a while. And then, we grew again, so we needed more room, and that's when we decided to move to Jefferson, which was not an easy decision. So the Temple is a very active place.

[I heard something about when they were coming up with funds for the Rypins Building was around the time of the Yom Kippur War...](#)

Yes, we had the funds to build the building, and the Yom Kippur War broke out. So we sent all the funds to Israel and started again. And there was... You know there was fund raiser the Temple had which was fabulous. It was selling bulbs. Flower bulbs. And people from Holland, we made an arrangement with this one company and they would come and help us organize some kind of project with this. It cost us nothing, cause we didn't, we sold the bulbs, sent the money, and got the bulbs. And it was really cute, because the whole community, all of Greensboro, was so happy with the "Jewish bulbs". They were from Holland, but they were the "Jewish bulbs", and the Sisterhood made enough money then to, I guess they donated about \$50,000 to the Rypins Building. Did the kitchen, just from flowers. That was a good fundraiser. And the Brotherhood used to have dances. Like dinner and dancing, and make a lot of money with that or a lot of money in those times. But everything wears out, you know, and you have to go find another fund raiser. So, I think they're doing well. One of the things that Arnie Task had, that I don't know if the rabbis have today, was whenever Arnie really wanted to do something, bring a project in, bring speakers in, he was able to just go to the community and ask for money and it was there. So, the Temple never had a money problem, which is not the case anymore. [Laughing] That was, you know, it was a nice feeling.

[Do you remember any social action type projects?](#)

Well, like I said, social action was mainly taken care of by the Council of Jewish Women. The enrichment program for summer enrichment, I can't remember the name of it, but that was the camp that I was talking about. That was a social action project. There had to be others, but those were the big ones that I knew about. Council of Jewish Women ran a daycare center. That was about it for social action. I was not here during the 60s; it must have been a turbulent time, being downtown, especially. But, you know, we didn't have many social action projects. Like I said, if you did them, they were through a different office; somebody else did them. The Brotherhood would do their thing, and that's it. What else?
It was a proud time.

[Do you know of anybody else that we should maybe talk to?](#)

You know, have you talked to the Marx family?

[You're actually the first one.](#)

Oh, I would say the Marx family, you can talk to Elaine and Ben Marx was president at one time. And all of these people, there's another generation, but it's sad to say, they're not around anymore. So, you

know I would say Carol Lebauer; I don't know where she is now, or if she's able. And Barbara Cone, Barbara and Herman Cone. Of course, the person I idolized was Leah Tannenbaum. The daughter is Jeannie Tannenbaum, but Jeannie moved away when she graduated from college, and came back, I don't know, 15 years ago, 20 years ago.

[So, she missed a lot of stuff.](#)

Yeah. But her mother, her mother was a pistol. I loved her. And she's still doing good works. She was one of the great ladies of Greensboro. You could call her to come make soup, and she was down there cooking. There was one lady who was another older woman. Hilda Wallerstein. Hilda Wallerstein was a college graduate, I guess if she were alive, she'd be 110. But, she graduated from Greensboro Women's College in physical training, physical education, and this lady at 80 years old would go to a play or go somewhere or go somewhere that she was socially involved in and then come down to the Temple and help us clean up after a bar mitzvah. She was an amazing lady. I just, I admire people who have so much energy, and are willing to do menial jobs when they are in essence, you know, college educated, don't need to do menial jobs in their homes. But the Temple was a different story. The Temple was something sacred. Of course, one of the people that I just thought was great at the Temple was not Jewish and not a member, but Reggie, our custodian. Reggie was custodian for a very long time. His mother worked there, two sisters worked there, and Reggie at different periods of time. And Reggie was a great, big guy, who would help the people from Friendship Circle get out of their cars, but just about lifting the wheelchair. He was well-loved. Very well-loved. And the Friendship Circle was a very good thing that the Temple did, and you didn't have to be Jewish to belong to it. You don't have to be, and that was one of the stipulations for the funding was that anybody could come. People did bring their friends, people from the Presbyterian church. I think it's still going very strong. It's changed complexion a little bit, but it's still very, very strong. I mean you used to have to bring your own sandwich, now they provide lunch. I think the Temple is a wonderful place. It gives the newcomer a sense of belonging, it's friendly, and it was never pushy. And even now, you can go to things without belonging, but it's not pushy. You can do it on your own. It's there if you want it, and it's not going to demand anything of you. And then the preschool is not new, because it started in the old building, but that 15 years, 20 years. And that's been very successful with Janet Hiatt, who's done a phenomenal job. I hear all good things about that.