

Oral History of: Audrey Sobel
Interviewed by: Faye Wolf
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Subject Matter: Diaspora in Detroit: the Jewish Immigrant Experience

Faye Wolf: [00:00](#) This interview is part of the Diaspora In Detroit: The Jewish Immigrant Experience Oral History Project. Do you give permission to the Leonard N. Simons Jewish Community Archives to publish, duplicate, or otherwise use this recording for educational purposes, and for use as deemed appropriate by the Archives?

Audrey Sobel: [00:22](#) I do.

Faye Wolf: [00:23](#) Please just state your name for me.

Audrey Sobel: [00:25](#) Audrey Sobel.

Faye Wolf: [00:26](#) Today's date?

Audrey Sobel: [00:28](#) It's the 2nd of January, 2020.

Faye Wolf: [00:31](#) Great, and my name is Faye Wolf, and I will be your interviewer.

Audrey Sobel: [00:33](#) Okay.

Faye Wolf: [00:33](#) We're going to start with just some very basic questions, and then feel free to interject and say anything that you want. This is just a guideline, it's not mandatory.

Audrey Sobel: [00:42](#) Okay.

Faye Wolf: [00:42](#) When and where were you born?

Audrey Sobel: [00:45](#) I was born in South Africa, in Johannesburg, South Africa, in 1943.

Faye Wolf: [00:52](#) Tell me a little bit about your parents, and what you remember about the country you emigrated from.

- Audrey Sobel: [00:57](#) I remember lots about the country, because we go back very often. My parents, my father was a dentist. He practiced until he was 80 years old. My mother was, I think from after, not long after she got married, she did not work, except she did the books for my father.
- Audrey Sobel: [01:31](#) Both my parents grew up with very little. My father lived in Durban, he grew up in Durban, which is where I grew up. It's on the East Coast. My mother grew up in a small town, I don't even know how far it is outside Johannesburg, but in the area that was called the Transvaal. Her father and his two brothers ran a hotel in a small town. She grew up there.
- Audrey Sobel: [02:06](#) They met when my father went to dental school in Johannesburg. My mother was doing a secretarial course. She had wanted to be a doctor, but there was no money in the family, so she became a secretary. They met in Johannesburg, got married, and my father joined the Army because of the war. They got married in 1940.
- Audrey Sobel: [02:44](#) He joined up, and they spent the first couple of years moving around. Then my father was sent overseas, my mother was pregnant with me. My father served in Egypt and in Italy. Came back when I was 21 months, so I never saw him until I was 21 months old.
- Audrey Sobel: [03:11](#) My mother lived with her mother, and sister, and my cousin, together, because my uncle was also somewhere in Europe during the war. After my father came back, my parents moved to Durban, because that was where my father was from.
- Audrey Sobel: [03:36](#) I guess I'm not really telling you about my parents, sort of. I don't know what you want to know about them.
- Faye Wolf: [03:44](#) Just sort of a basic background of your parents, which you have provided. How many generations do you know are from South Africa?
- Audrey Sobel: [03:51](#) I know my mother's mother was born in South Africa, so I'm third generation born in South Africa. Her father came from Poland. It was actually the Austro-Hungarian Empire when he was born. Her mother's family came I think from Lithuania, but they went from Lithuania to England, and then out to South Africa.

Faye Wolf: [04:29](#) Eastern European, you would say around there?

Audrey Sobel: [04:30](#) Yeah.

Faye Wolf: [04:30](#) Okay.

Audrey Sobel: [04:32](#) My father's family, I know my grandmother came from Lithuania. My grandfather, we're not 100% sure, because I have a photo of him taken in Latvia, but in Latvia they couldn't find any record of him being there, it was from Riga. The people at Riga said he probably was from Lithuania, but who knows?

Faye Wolf: [05:00](#) Do you remember, and I'm sure you probably do, the first Jewish memory you have, and how was-

Audrey Sobel: [05:09](#) Yes, I do.

Faye Wolf: [05:09](#) How was Judaism practiced in your home growing up?

Audrey Sobel: [05:14](#) Well, Judaism was practiced the same as here. We did not keep a kosher home, but we did Shabbat every Friday night, the Shabbat. I and my brothers all went to Hebrew school. I had a bat mitzvah, that's why I never did a bat mitzvah here when everyone was doing them, because I had a bat mitzvah at the right time. My brothers were all bar mitzvah'd.

Audrey Sobel: [05:48](#) We belonged to the Reform, it was called a shul in South Africa, not a temple. There was a Reform and there was Orthodox. There was no Conservative. We observed all the holidays. In fact, I, who grew up in a non-Jewish school, because the area we lived in was not a Jewish area.

Audrey Sobel: [06:15](#) When my father came back from the war, there was very little money. When they built a house, they built a house in an area they could afford. Growing up, I was the only Jewish girl in my grade at school, from sixth grade onwards. But I stayed home two days every single Jewish holiday, and not just Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, Sukkot, Shavuot, Hanukah not really, but the minor holidays also. It was a very Jewish household.

Faye Wolf: [06:58](#) Okay.

Audrey Sobel: [06:58](#) Also, my mother was for many years on the Sisterhood of the shul, my father was also on the board, so was very Jewish.

Faye Wolf: [07:10](#) If you weren't in a Jewish area, how far did you have to travel to go to shul?

Audrey Sobel: [07:14](#) It was about 20 minutes, I think, 15, 20 minutes.

Faye Wolf: [07:18](#) Do you recall, I'm sorry I keep asking you that, when you clearly said that you do. I apologize for that.

Audrey Sobel: [07:23](#) No, that's fine.

Faye Wolf: [07:24](#) What was the major religion of the kids that you went to school with and the area in which you lived?

Audrey Sobel: [07:29](#) They were mainly all forms of Christianity, Catholic, Protestant, Church of England, which is Episcopalian here. That was it.

Faye Wolf: [07:43](#) How were you treated as a non-Christian?

Audrey Sobel: [07:49](#) There was very little anti-Semitism in South Africa. Why was there very little anti-Semitism? Because they had 40 million other people to hate, who were all black. They didn't have to hate the Jews.

Faye Wolf: [08:04](#) Quite an observation.

Audrey Sobel: [08:06](#) It's true. Just another point is, just an addendum to that, when we grew up, there were four million people living in South Africa. Those other 40 million people weren't even regarded as people, okay?

Faye Wolf: [08:23](#) I see, okay.

Audrey Sobel: [08:26](#) It wasn't really an observation, they were just not counted as part of the population.

Faye Wolf: [08:31](#) Okay. I'm not trying to fast forward, I'm just trying to get a frame of reference here.

Audrey Sobel: [08:37](#) No, that's fine.

Faye Wolf: [08:38](#) Just tell me when you left South Africa.

Audrey Sobel: [08:41](#) We originally left in 1970.

Faye Wolf: [08:44](#) You were-

Audrey Sobel: [08:46](#) But we did not come here.

Faye Wolf: [08:49](#) Oh, okay. Let me go back a little bit.

Audrey Sobel: [08:53](#) Okay.

Faye Wolf: [08:54](#) I just wanted to have a reference of how to frame the rest of my questions. When you were a child, you were growing up, you grew up very Jewishly.

Audrey Sobel: [09:00](#) Yes.

Faye Wolf: [09:01](#) All your Jewish traditions were already set, and you felt no anti-Semitism, and it was in a way just one big happy. You kind of did-

Audrey Sobel: [09:11](#) I mean I had a couple of incidents of anti-Semitism, but there was no general anti-Semitism. I mean I think I was seven years old, six or seven, when I was at school, and there was another Jewish girl in the class. That's why I said from sixth grade, I was the only one. In elementary school, there was another Jewish girl. I think there were two Jewish boys, there were a few of us.

Audrey Sobel: [09:46](#) The Jewish girl and I were friendly, and we wanted to go and play with all the other girls who were playing. The one girl said to me, "We don't play with Jew girls." Okay, I went home.

Audrey Sobel: [10:00](#) I actually had a birthday not long after that. I gave out invitations, and I obviously didn't give her one. She asked if she could come to my party. I went to my mother and I said, "What am I supposed to do?" I was seven years old. She said, "It's up to you, if you want her to come ..." I went back and told her that my mother said there were too many people, so she couldn't come.

Audrey Sobel: [10:28](#) That was about it.

Faye Wolf: [10:35](#) Okay. Then you went to high school, public high school?

Audrey Sobel: [10:37](#) Yeah.

Faye Wolf: [10:37](#) Just tell me about maybe in your 20s, I assume at some point, since you left in your 30s, you were married?

Audrey Sobel: [10:46](#) Yes.

Faye Wolf: [10:47](#) Tell me about, how did you meet your Jewish husband?

Audrey Sobel: [10:51](#) Well, when I went to university, I went to Johannesburg, because I wanted to meet other Jewish people. I was not friendly with ... There was not a large Jewish population in Durban, but there was a decent size.

Audrey Sobel: [11:07](#) Schools in South Africa were segregated, boys and girls. I'm not talking about color segregation, totally, but boys and girls. The only co-ed school that I know of was an Afrikaans speaking school. Where I grew up in Durban was English speaking. The city was English speaking. There are cities in South Africa that are Afrikaans speaking, predominantly Afrikaans speaking. There was an Afrikaans high school, and that was co-ed, but there was only one for the whole city, where there were numerous other high schools.

Audrey Sobel: [11:48](#) The Jewish kids all lived over the other side of town. I wanted to be with Jews, so I went to ... My friends all went to university near where we lived, not in Durban, but the town is about 40 miles away, where there's a big university. All my friends went there, the vast majority of my friends went there. I just wanted to go and be with some Jews for a change, so that's why I went to university in Johannesburg.

Faye Wolf: [12:24](#) Were you board at the school there, or did you commute?

Audrey Sobel: [12:27](#) Where?

Faye Wolf: [12:27](#) At university.

Audrey Sobel: [12:28](#) No, I was in the dorms, but the dorms weren't like here. The dorms ... It was the two largest English speaking universities in South Africa were Johannesburg and Cape Town. I don't know how many students there were at that time, but there were large ... But there was only one dorm for girls, and one dorm for boys, and that was it. Most of the students were commuters.

Faye Wolf: [13:01](#) What did you study?

Audrey Sobel: [13:05](#) Psychology and economics.

Faye Wolf: [13:08](#) Okay. How did you meet your husband?

Audrey Sobel: [13:13](#) Husband. I met him at a friend's 21st birthday party. In South Africa, you don't have sweet 16, you have a 21st birthday party.

It was one of my friend's from college had a party, and she was also in the dorms. She came from a small town a few hours outside of Johannesburg, and she had a party there, because her parents owned a hotel. That's where we met.

- Faye Wolf: [13:44](#) Okay. Tell me about, when do you feel your journey started?
- Audrey Sobel: [13:52](#) Well, we didn't want to live in South Africa. We didn't want our kids being brought up in South Africa, because of the apartheid. We just didn't feel it was a healthy atmosphere for the kids. We had decided to leave South Africa.
- Audrey Sobel: [14:17](#) My husband actually had a job at Harvard, he was offered a job, but then a schlichah came from Israel to recruit doctors. He managed to recruit one.
- Faye Wolf: [14:36](#) Your husband.
- Audrey Sobel: [14:36](#) In 1970, we went to Israel. I was very reluctant to go. I had actually never been out of South Africa, except I had been to ... I had never been out of Africa, put it that way. I'd been to Mozambique, and to what was the name? Rhodesia, which is now Zimbabwe. We had actually gone into Zambia, but I never left Africa. I was very reluctant to go.
- Faye Wolf: [15:11](#) Did you have children at this point?
- Audrey Sobel: [15:12](#) Yup, we had two kids. We came to a mutual agreement that we would try it for two years, and if I was really unhappy, we would go back to South Africa. I don't know why back to South Africa, seeing as we had decided to leave, but anyway, so we went.
- Audrey Sobel: [15:31](#) We spent the first five months in an absorption center, which all immigrants, most immigrants did at that stage, which was in Carmila, which was a tiny little town of about, I think they had 5,000 people at that stage. It's now enormous. It's outside Haifa. Then we moved into Haifa, which my husband chose. He had been to Israel a couple of times. He chose Haifa because he thought it resembled Durban, and I would be not so unhappy there, because of the beach. Anyway, we made wonderful friends there and we stayed. We were there until 1976.
- Audrey Sobel: [16:18](#) 1976, we came to the States for my husband to sub-specialize in infectious diseases. We actually came on immigrant visas, which is very unusual. Most people come here on study visas, or visitor visas, or something, and then pay lawyers. We came on

immigrant visas. How did we get an immigrant visa? I don't know if you want the whole story.

- Faye Wolf: [16:53](#) Sure.
- Audrey Sobel: [16:55](#) My husband went into the consulate in Tel Aviv, he keeps telling me it was the consulate, it wasn't the embassy, in Tel Aviv, to make inquiries, because he had a job at NIH. To make inquiries about visas for us to come.
- Audrey Sobel: [17:16](#) The person that interviewed him had some medical condition, and I don't remember what, but he recognized it and he spoke to her about it. She was very grateful. This was just because that's what he does, he diagnoses people. He told her that he wanted visas to come to the States for a couple of years.
- Audrey Sobel: [17:53](#) She asked where he was going, and he said to Washington, to NIH. She said, "Are you going to stay there for two years?" He said, "I don't know." She said, "Well, maybe you should take an immigrant visa," because in 1976, they were not filling the quota from South Africa. They were filling the Israeli quota, there was no way we could have gotten ... He said no, he only wanted to come and study, we were going back to Israel.
- Audrey Sobel: [18:27](#) She said, "But I'm offering you an immigrant visa, you and your family, immigrant visas." He said, "No, we're coming back to Israel. I want a work permit." She said, "Are you going to stay at NIH for two years?" He said, "Maybe, maybe not." She said, "If you don't take an immigrant visa, you won't be able to move, because it's for one place." He said, "Okay, we'll take the immigrant visa," and that's how we got our immigrant visas.
- Audrey Sobel: [19:01](#) We came, stayed in Washington for a year, and then went to Philadelphia for two years. NIH was only research, and he wanted to do clinical work, so he got a job in Philadelphia doing clinical work at Medical College of Pennsylvania, which no longer exists.
- Audrey Sobel: [19:28](#) From there, we returned to Israel for two years.
- Faye Wolf: [19:33](#) It's now 1978?
- Audrey Sobel: [19:35](#) '79, we went back to Israel.
- Faye Wolf: [19:37](#) Okay, sorry.

- Audrey Sobel: [19:37](#) We went back to Israel in '79. It's a long story about how come we're back here, but basically the Israelis would not give him what he wanted when we went back. He was actually probably the last doctor employed by the Technion, because originally, the doctors at Rambam were technically not employees. They had moved over to the Ministry of Education, employment at Rambam. Because we were here during that period, he was still on the Technion, on their list.
- Audrey Sobel: [20:31](#) At any rate, the Ministry of Education gives, it's called a [inaudible 00:20:43] every government worker gets, there's a fund set up so they can go study abroad. He really needed it in infectious diseases, because things change the whole time. They change, there are new drugs all the time for infectious diseases, but he didn't have that, because he wasn't an employee of the Ministry of Education, or the Ministry of Health, whatever it was.
- Faye Wolf: [21:13](#) In Israel?
- Audrey Sobel: [21:14](#) In Israel, yeah. We didn't have money for him to come over for just to go to conferences, etc. We didn't have that money, and that comes out of that fund in Israel, which he didn't have.
- Audrey Sobel: [21:32](#) In fact, after we'd been there a year, he came back and he did locums over here, just to get some money, because we had no money. They had promised him that they would set up a division of infectious diseases at Rambam, and he kept asking about it, and he also wanted a laboratory, because he had done a year of research.
- Audrey Sobel: [22:04](#) They didn't do anything, and his boss here at Philadelphia had said to me, "If you ever want to come back, give me a call. I'll find him a job." At the end of a frustrating almost two years, he picked up the phone and he said, "I can't wait any longer. I'm just falling behind," so we came back.
- Faye Wolf: [22:33](#) How old were your kids at this point?
- Audrey Sobel: [22:36](#) My poor kids, my poor kids. Well, when we moved to Israel, the oldest was almost three.
- Faye Wolf: [22:47](#) The first time you moved to Israel?
- Audrey Sobel: [22:50](#) The first time, the first time we moved to Israel the oldest was almost three, the younger one was one. When we moved here

the first time, Ryan went into first grade, so he was seven, Lauren was nine, and the youngest one was three, and the youngest one was three.

- Audrey Sobel: [23:17](#) We went back to Israel three years later, so the kids had to change the school system. The youngest one went into first grade, and the next one went into fifth grade, and the oldest one went into seventh grade.
- Faye Wolf: [23:36](#) During the time you were in Philadelphia, you had to maintain a Jewish household, did you keep up the Jewish traditions?
- Audrey Sobel: [23:45](#) Absolutely, absolutely. Those two years in Philadelphia, the kids were at the Jewish day school, and the year in Washington, they were at the Jewish day school.
- Faye Wolf: [23:56](#) The Jewish day school. Then you went back to Israel.
- Audrey Sobel: [23:58](#) Yeah.
- Faye Wolf: [23:58](#) Then you came back to the United States, it must have been somewhere around bar mitzvah age for one of them, a bar mitzvah?
- Audrey Sobel: [24:05](#) Yeah, our daughter had a bat mitzvah in Israel, and our son had it-
- Faye Wolf: [24:09](#) Is she the oldest?
- Audrey Sobel: [24:10](#) She's the oldest, yeah. Our oldest son had his bar mitzvah the year after we came back. We came back when he was 12, he had his bar mitzvah at 13.
- Faye Wolf: [24:20](#) Would you say that moving all around, and maybe this is more of a question for the end, so if you want to come back to it, we can. Would you think moving from where you did strengthened, weakened, or just kept it the same, your conviction to Judaism, and to maintain a Jewish household, and pass on the traditions?
- Audrey Sobel: [24:41](#) I don't think that made any difference to us. I mean it was important, wherever we have lived, we've always looked for a Jewish area. When we moved here ... In Philadelphia, we knew, when we initially moved to Philadelphia from Washington DC, we moved where we could afford. But when we came back to Philadelphia, we knew where the Jewish areas were. We knew what to do.

Audrey Sobel: [25:19](#) When we moved here, told the realtor, schools and Jewish, those were the two important things.

Faye Wolf: [25:29](#) When did you move to the Detroit area?

Audrey Sobel: [25:31](#) '85.

Faye Wolf: [25:33](#) You were in Philadelphia-

Audrey Sobel: [25:34](#) We were in Philadelphia from '81 to '85, we had four years there.

Faye Wolf: [25:39](#) Okay.

Audrey Sobel: [25:43](#) The kids moved around.

Faye Wolf: [25:44](#) By this time, your kids were ... Your youngest must have been in high school.

Audrey Sobel: [25:48](#) No, the youngest went into seventh grade here.

Faye Wolf: [25:52](#) Oh, okay.

Audrey Sobel: [25:55](#) The next one went into 11th grade, and the oldest one finished school in Philadelphia.

Faye Wolf: [26:03](#) Socially, when you moved around, you mentioned to me that your daughter lives in Israel.

Audrey Sobel: [26:12](#) Right.

Faye Wolf: [26:15](#) Did you socially easily incorporate into Israel, socially, and then coming back to the United-

Audrey Sobel: [26:22](#) Israel was easy, because there were a lot of immigrants there. We were friendly with the immigrants. But today, my closest friend in Israel was our next door neighbor, she comes from Chile. We speak Hebrew to each other.

Audrey Sobel: [26:49](#) I always said that the difference between Israel and America is if you fall over in the street in America, people will step over you. If you fall over in the street in Israel, the whole city will come to help you.

Faye Wolf: [27:03](#) That's a big difference.

Audrey Sobel: [27:04](#) It's a very big difference.

Faye Wolf: [27:07](#) What about socially incorporating yourself and your family in Philadelphia, versus 1985 or was it '84? Detroit.

Audrey Sobel: [27:24](#) Going back to Philadelphia, we knew people in Philadelphia, because we had been there already for two years. We had friends. In fact, our closest friends were Israelis there. But also we knew that there's a smallish ex-South African Jewish community there also, that we were friendly with.

Faye Wolf: [27:51](#) In Philadelphia?

Audrey Sobel: [27:52](#) In Philadelphia.

Faye Wolf: [27:53](#) Were you working at this time?

Audrey Sobel: [27:55](#) No, I was not working. I actually got a job just before we moved here. That was it.

Faye Wolf: [28:03](#) Okay. How did you find this Jewish community in Philadelphia?

Audrey Sobel: [28:11](#) We joined the shul.

Faye Wolf: [28:12](#) I see, okay.

Audrey Sobel: [28:14](#) That's been wherever we've gone, we've joined the shul.

Faye Wolf: [28:17](#) Okay. When you came to Detroit, you just followed the same blueprint?

Audrey Sobel: [28:23](#) Yup.

Faye Wolf: [28:24](#) Were your kids in Jewish day school then or not?

Audrey Sobel: [28:28](#) No, they were not in Jewish day school. I told you, there was lack of money. When we came back in ... When we moved in '85 here, our daughter went to college. She had applied for college when we were in Philadelphia. Penn State was not an option at that stage. Penn State was not a good university, and things have changed, I know. She was in the Jewish day school for, when did we take her out? I think 9th and 10th she did at the Jewish day school in Philadelphia. It was a Solomon Shift, or Akiva, it was called Akiva, and we took her out because she had already finished the Hebrew classes. She was fluent in Hebrew, obviously. We took her out and put her into public school.

Audrey Sobel: [29:37](#) The kids who were the C and D students were going to Penn State. She was not going to be found dead in Penn State at that stage. She went to Wesleyan in Connecticut, and that was coming out of income. We didn't have savings, because we'd been moving around.

Faye Wolf: [30:02](#) Right.

Audrey Sobel: [30:03](#) Everybody else that we knew had been saving for years for their kids' college, we had nothing. It was coming out of current income, so the boys did not go to the day school, because my husband was earning too much money for them to be scholarships, and we couldn't afford it. When we came here, we didn't even consider ... In fact, when we went back to Philadelphia, she was the only one who went to the Jewish day school, the two boys went into public school.

Faye Wolf: [30:40](#) You have three children?

Audrey Sobel: [30:41](#) Yeah.

Faye Wolf: [30:42](#) Your youngest, when you moved here, that's why you said you were interested in schools, the public schools and a Jewish community.

Audrey Sobel: [30:51](#) Yeah.

Faye Wolf: [30:51](#) Clearly, you found that, right?

Audrey Sobel: [30:53](#) Yeah.

Faye Wolf: [30:53](#) You've stayed in the same area? You haven't gone anywhere?

Audrey Sobel: [30:56](#) No.

Faye Wolf: [30:56](#) Okay, so you've stayed in the same area. I met you in our Melton classes, the Jewish Federation Melton classes.

Audrey Sobel: [31:06](#) Right.

Faye Wolf: [31:07](#) I know that you found the Jewish community and you established yourself very well, and educated yourself very, very well with that. Since you've lived in many other places, how would you describe it? How would you describe the Detroit Jewish community, compared to maybe some of the other areas? Philadelphia? It's hard to compare it to Israel.

Audrey Sobel: [31:24](#) How would I describe the community? I found it very interesting that the Detroit Jewish community is concentrated in such a small area. Philadelphia, there were two distinct areas that are very far apart from each other. The Jewish community here is a very cohesive community. It's a very involved community. I mean I can only compare it to Philadelphia, and our year in Washington was ... I mean we belonged to a shul, because as I said, we've always joined a shul. We were scrambling there, we had no money, we had nothing, absolutely nothing. We were just trying to live from day to day, rather than getting really involved with the community. Except that the kids were at the Jewish day school, and so that was the community that we knew, the parents of the kids from the day school.

Faye Wolf: [32:43](#) The practice of Judaism in all the different places, from South Africa to Israel to here, has your practice changed?

Audrey Sobel: [32:52](#) Our practice, no, no, but I think the practice of Judaism is very different in the three places. As I said, in South Africa, I belonged to the Reform synagogue, and stayed home from school on every holiday for two days.

Faye Wolf: [33:19](#) You have to educate me a little bit, I apologize if this is a really basic question.

Audrey Sobel: [33:23](#) No, that's fine.

Faye Wolf: [33:24](#) Is the Reform synagogue there Ashkenazi?

Audrey Sobel: [33:28](#) Yeah.

Faye Wolf: [33:29](#) There was no difference in Sephardim?

Audrey Sobel: [33:32](#) No, our rabbi was actually from Greenwich, Connecticut.

Faye Wolf: [33:36](#) Oh, okay. I'm guessing it was, okay.

Audrey Sobel: [33:40](#) Yeah.

Faye Wolf: [33:40](#) It all comes around.

Audrey Sobel: [33:42](#) Yeah.

Faye Wolf: [33:44](#) Okay.

Audrey Sobel: [33:44](#) Greenwich, Connecticut was so exotic, as far as we were concerned. It was just ...

Faye Wolf: [33:51](#) I don't know if anyone has ever described Connecticut as exotic. I think you're the first person to ever say that.

Audrey Sobel: [33:58](#) No, but I mean when you're living in South Africa the name was so ... It was just a very exotic name.

Faye Wolf: [34:07](#) The stereotype of Connecticut is beige.

Audrey Sobel: [34:12](#) I know.

Faye Wolf: [34:12](#) Everyone's saying it's beige, and you ... That's very interesting, very humorous.

Faye Wolf: [34:20](#) How would you say that the practice of Judaism has changed for you and your family, from all the different places you lived, and to what it is in Detroit? If I were to go somewhere else, what differences would I see?

Audrey Sobel: [34:32](#) What would you see? I think that the Reform in South Africa, which has changed a lot, I mean I can only speak for the community in Durban, where I grew up. It was very close to, despite the fact that it was Reform, it was very close to Conservative. Except the rabbi used to, we had a children's service on Saturday. We had Hebrew school, I think she came out once a week. The Hebrew teacher would come out to our area once a week. Then on Saturday mornings, it was a children's service, the service was a children's, at the Reform, it was a children's service, and there was Hebrew school before then. The rabbi used to come with his list of Aliyot, and he would write in the names, which I don't think that the Conservative would do here, but maybe the Reform rabbis would.

Audrey Sobel: [35:48](#) The vast majority of people in South Africa belonged to Orthodox, but it wasn't Orthodox like here. You could drive to services. The practice was, I guess it was different from here, except in South Africa, obviously, the men and women sat separately at Orthodox, etc.

Audrey Sobel: [36:19](#) It was probably in the 1950s, probably 60s, it was a more aware of being Jewish population, because I don't know what the practices were here. I certainly don't know, as far as kids going to school, what they did here. In South Africa, no Jewish kids

went to school on the Jewish holidays. Nobody went to school on the second day of the holidays, even if you were Reform. Here, the kids really don't ... What do they know about Sukkot, Shemini Atzeret, Simchat Torah. The majority of kids don't know about them, correct? We knew about them. In that way, it was different.

- Audrey Sobel: [37:16](#) South Africa, Durban I told you did not have a large Jewish population, but there was a Jewish club with a very nice building. It's no longer a Jewish club, there aren't enough Jews left there. With tennis courts, and everybody in South Africa played lawn balls, the adults played lawn balls. I don't know if you know what that is.
- Faye Wolf: [37:42](#) Is that croquet?
- Audrey Sobel: [37:43](#) No, it's called ... You play it with a weighted ball, and it's on a green. They all played balls and tennis. At any rate, it was a cohesive community.
- Audrey Sobel: [38:04](#) The practice of Judaism, as I say, we're not doing anything different from what we did before. I think it's more or less the same.
- Faye Wolf: [38:20](#) You maintain the same household traditions and the same things that you did.
- Audrey Sobel: [38:24](#) Yeah.
- Faye Wolf: [38:25](#) From no matter where you lived, so your children had consistency when it came to Judaism.
- Audrey Sobel: [38:30](#) Oh yes, definitely.
- Faye Wolf: [38:32](#) Okay. You mentioned that you've gone back to, you have family there.
- Audrey Sobel: [38:41](#) Yeah.
- Faye Wolf: [38:42](#) Did any of your family ever come to join you in any of the places you've lived in, or they've all stayed in South Africa?
- Audrey Sobel: [38:49](#) No, no, they haven't. I have one brother who's still in South Africa, who actually lived in Israel for a while, and went back to South Africa. I have two brothers who live in England.

Faye Wolf: [39:00](#) Oh. Your brother is the only one that's in South Africa?

Audrey Sobel: [39:06](#) Yeah.

Faye Wolf: [39:06](#) The whole family has basically, you're all over the place.

Audrey Sobel: [39:10](#) Yeah.

Faye Wolf: [39:10](#) Or not all over the place.

Audrey Sobel: [39:11](#) It is all over.

Faye Wolf: [39:12](#) You're not in one region.

Audrey Sobel: [39:14](#) No, not at all.

Faye Wolf: [39:16](#) Do you have any other relatives that are in Israel, besides your brother and your daughter?

Audrey Sobel: [39:22](#) In Israel, I don't have a brother.

Faye Wolf: [39:23](#) Oh, I'm sorry.

Audrey Sobel: [39:26](#) I have a daughter. My husband's got two brothers in Israel. I've got cousins in Israel. We've got family in Israel.

Faye Wolf: [39:40](#) When you came here to the United States, in Philadelphia and to the Detroit area, did you feel that the Jewish community helped you at all, or were you mostly independent and you found your way into the community?

Audrey Sobel: [39:53](#) Yeah, mostly independent.

Faye Wolf: [39:59](#) Does that shape you at all? Do you ever help newcomers that are in?

Audrey Sobel: [40:05](#) Once, a while ago, there was a newcomers group.

Faye Wolf: [40:13](#) Was that through Federation?

Audrey Sobel: [40:15](#) Yeah, I think it was through Federation. I don't think it exists anymore. I don't know, does it? I don't know, do you know?

Faye Wolf: [40:21](#) I don't know.

Audrey Sobel: [40:23](#) There was some kind of newcomers group through Federation, and there was one family that we were assigned. We kept in contact with them, and then they moved away, I think. I can't remember. It's a long time ago.

Faye Wolf: [40:39](#) Do you think that would have been helpful, to have that, or you did fine on your own? You were used to it, so to speak.

Audrey Sobel: [40:45](#) We'd done so much moving around, we were okay with finding out what was where. As long as we knew where ... My husband had a good friend here, who lived in West Bloomfield. We also knew ... We didn't come in completely blind, not knowing anyone at all.

Faye Wolf: [41:11](#) Your husband's position, and correct me if I'm wrong, did he always work for the DMC, or whatever it was called at the time?

Audrey Sobel: [41:18](#) For Wayne State, Wayne State.

Faye Wolf: [41:20](#) For Wayne State, okay, I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I know politically that's a distinction that needs to be made.

Audrey Sobel: [41:25](#) Politically, right.

Faye Wolf: [41:26](#) I grew up in the era when they were kind of one and the same.

Audrey Sobel: [41:29](#) Yeah, that's when he started, it was one and the same.

Faye Wolf: [41:32](#) He's always worked for Wayne State.

Audrey Sobel: [41:33](#) Wayne State.

Faye Wolf: [41:33](#) There's been many colleagues down there that ... There was a community of colleagues down there.

Audrey Sobel: [41:39](#) Yeah.

Faye Wolf: [41:40](#) That probably helped and shaped you.

Audrey Sobel: [41:40](#) Yeah.

Faye Wolf: [41:42](#) How did you find a synagogue here in the Detroit area? You certainly have a choice.

Audrey Sobel: [41:46](#) We have a choice, but we live very near Beth Ahm. At that stage, my husband liked to walk on Yom Kippur. He's grown out

of that. We do walk, I mean they're around the corner from us, so we walk. But he could drive now. That was the last vestiges of his orthodoxy. He grew up in an Orthodox ...

- Faye Wolf: [42:15](#) I see, okay. All right, is there anything else you want to say to your future great-great-grandchildren, who will be watching this and listening to this story of yours, what would you like to tell them?
- Audrey Sobel: [42:31](#) That's a difficult one. Keep up the traditions, that's what I tell my grandchildren.
- Faye Wolf: [42:38](#) That's an excellent one.
- Audrey Sobel: [42:43](#) My grandchildren in Israel, their father is not ... He's anti-religion. When they come to us, we do Friday night, and I tell them they don't have to believe anything. They don't have to believe in God, but it's the tradition that's been handed down through the generations. It's what my mother did, it's what her mother did, it's what her mother did. This has been going on for thousands of years. That's why we do Friday nights, is to keep the traditions alive in the family.
- Audrey Sobel: [43:35](#) When they were younger, there was reluctance on their behalf, because they are all anti-religion and anti anything to do with it. It's wonderful now, they join in with the prayers. They want to do everything.
- Faye Wolf: [43:55](#) How old are they now?
- Audrey Sobel: [43:57](#) 17, 16, and 11.
- Faye Wolf: [43:59](#) A tough age.
- Audrey Sobel: [44:00](#) Yup.
- Faye Wolf: [44:00](#) You did it.
- Audrey Sobel: [44:00](#) Yup.
- Faye Wolf: [44:02](#) Congratulations.
- Audrey Sobel: [44:03](#) They know. I don't think that one has to have a belief in God to carry on doing what has been traditionally done through the ages. I think it's important that they know where they came from, and that they keep those memories alive.

Faye Wolf: [44:33](#) And by you doing this, I think you are accomplishing that.

Audrey Sobel: [44:37](#) Well, maybe.

Faye Wolf: [44:39](#) Well, thank you. Is there anything else you want to add?

Audrey Sobel: [44:41](#) I don't think so. I think we covered almost everything.

Faye Wolf: [44:48](#) Okay. Well, thank you. That concludes my interview with Mrs. Audrey Sobel.