

Notterman - Adler interviewed by B. & F. Leefer

Sara lives in California now and is the oldest of the family of the original settlers.

Q. When did you first hear about what was then Jersey Homesteads?

A. Through our parents, we heard beautiful stories about moving out to the country, with trees, and lawns, and a whole brand new house, all to ourselves. At that time it was very luxurious to our ears. We looked forward to it. I know I did. At that time we were living in Brooklyn in an apartment

Q. Do you have any idea about how your folks decided to come here, or what was involved in the decision?

A. I don't remember very clearly how he heard. It was either from the newspaper or the Union, the ILGWU. And he brought the news home, and discussed it and dwelled on it, and found all the necessary information leading to the interviews and the meetings. We didn't know anybody else who was coming here until we got here and then we made friends. We went to meetings, and everybody seemed to enjoy the meetings, and we became friends and we all looked forward to coming out here. We made one visit out here before we moved out, and it was in the form of a picnic. There was no construction going on then. We just saw the sites of where the houses would be, where the roads would go, where the factory would be. I'm sure we heard speeches from Brown, Samuel J. Finkler, Harry Glantz, etc. We got to meet all the VIPs. And all those people were really interested. Those who couldn't make up their minds were here too. We moved here in 1936, and I think we may have been out here in 1935.

Q. Do you remember about moving here? Do you remember about the circumstances of the move, your first arrival, etc.?

A. Economics of the time were not too good. And I think this was not just a problem with the Nottermans; it must have been a problem with all members of the Union. And this was a way out for them to live nicely, come back to the



earth, to the fresh air, away from subways. There were many strikes in the trade before we came here. The money wasn't very good. I think we had to borrow money to move out. I think we came out separately. I think I remember coming by bus and some of us came out by truck. We came by bus and when we came to Hightstown, and to me - what I saw was a movie set. It looked like a barren Dodge City. The first thing I saw was, I think, the Post Office which at that time was on the triangle (later there was a hardware store there) but when I saw that Post Office, I was amazed. I said "THAT's a post office"<sup>62</sup> And there were no people. This was in August and I think it was Friday, the 13th, in 1936 - no people were out there. It was a very, very small town. But then, as we drove and we came to Jersey Homesteads, ~~and~~ I saw a desert, no houses, no lawns, no trees, - and we came to our piece of property; the house was not really completed at the time. We lived in it but it was not really completed at the time, but there were no lawns. And I can see this man standing there to greet us, and it was Oscar Nisnevitz. I don't think his family had moved in yet, but he was there. He was the engineer. I think he was the only member of the Youth Group that was already employed here, and he was the one who greeted us, and he came in and sort of helped us and made us feel welcome.

Q. What was your first day and night in your new house like?

A. It was very, very exciting. What was difficult was shopping facilities. I remember we had to depend on someone coming in from Perrineville. You see, the people in the area had to be alerted about what was happening. In Perrineville, in those years, it was like the Catskills almost; there was a little dark-haired man had a big grocery store, I think his name was Wolf, and I can see him coming into the house from his car with a big basket of all kinds of supplies. The local coop grocery store was not yet in existence



until more families came in , and we were #7. Also, every Friday or Saturday night there was a party in somebody's garage (Did you get that from anybody?" "Everybody") and beer flowed like water (We didn't get that from anybody"). I remember Harry Kaplan. They came later, but they had a whale of a party. How old was I, I'm not going to tell you, but when I came here I had already graduated from High School. In fact, that was the year I graduated.

Q. You didn't have any trouble making friends here then, did you? Who were your friends?

A. The Feintuck girls, Frances Nisnevitz, Grace Kaplan. I'll never forget the night that Orson Wel<sup>e</sup>ls had the Martians land in Grovers Mills, we all piled into the couple of cars that were available - I think Max Wishnefsky had a car, and I don't remember whether Irving Bach had a car, and we piled in and took off to see if there was anything, and of course there was nothing, but it was an interesting experience.

Q. Did you ever work here?

A. Yes. When we came out here and the factory was more or less ready for employment, more people were living in the community, and there were visitors. For a while we all felt as though we were monkeys in a zoo. Those people who had their kitchens facing front, were exposed to the outdoors. Cars with tourists were coming to see this great cooperative colony and they were constantly looking at us and watching us, and they also came to the Coop, to see how a Coop factory functioned. And on weekends, especially, they would divide the hours amongst all of us. We would work a couple of hours every weekend. I don't remember what we were paid, but maybe \$1 an hour, and I would work



2 1/2 hours on Sunday. And in fact that's how we all started to work a little bit. We all felt comradeship<sup>e</sup> and we all wanted to do something to keep this thing progressing the way we would like it to progress. And I think, we were also very pleased that so many people were curious and coming to see what makes this town alive. And I'm trying to remember - I think there was a Mr. Kazin (sp?) from Washington and he was very active here for a while. There were government officials here and this one had several secretaries that kept things going. They were here for many months, and they worked together with Harry Glantz, but he was here every weekend and I think he was curious to learn what the world thinks about us, to bring back to Washington. I worked there in that office for a couple of years. Then we started the Cooperative Distributing Association, the CDA ~~which~~ it was known as around here, and that was located in the Britton House, and they made it into a store and I used to work there. I used to be their bookkeeper and Isaac Greengross managed the place and that all added to income to the Coop. He had a salary, I had a salary and that's where I worked until I decided to work in New York City. In those days it wasn't very common to see young people leave their folks and go work elsewhere but gradually we did. It was during the war in the mid-forties that I did that.

Q. What do you remember about the failure of the Coop, and the factory?

A. It was very sad and people were terribly disillusioned. But most important, I remember that the people who felt it most, that is the workers, that too many people wanted to control the growth of the organization, to be the leader of the organization. Everybody wanted to be a leader and I think that's ~~why~~ the thing failed the way it did. Unfortunately, Everybody wanted to be a foreman.

Q. Did you attend any of the meetings that preceeded the collapse?

A. No. My father did and I think it got to him a couple of years before it

really folded completely, and he just left because he couldn't tolerate it. He was a very fine craftsman; a good worker. Actually, when he left New York he was an assistant to a ladies' designer. He made samples. And when he came here he was just an operator. He came down a few pegs because he wanted to see something good come out of this cooperative colony. He was very sentimental about it. But it didn't work out the way he wanted it to. Even so, he never thought of leaving. He lived here 15 years and commuted every day to New York to his same job that he had before. They grabbed him back because they didn't have too many craftsman around and he worked with a designer that wanted him all the time.

Q. What kept the family here after the factory failed.?

A. I don't really know. What keeps anybody? There are some people that left and then returned. I left in 1947; I was married and then never returned to live in Roosevelt. My husband was a medical student and there was certainly nothing for him here, and he chose to do whatever it was and moved out here and we are where we are because that's where he chose to practice. I moved from here. When I worked in New York I commuted. This was my home.

Q. What I would like to find out from you, what was the glue that kept your father here in Jersey Homesteads?

A. I think in his mind he still felt that Jersey Homesteads, the Coop, was still intact. I think it was like living in a fantasy; it was being out in the country.

I think it was a belief they had, and it brought them back to their youth, what they had strived for in coop living, and their ideals. They couldn't practice their ideals here, but living here reminded them of the "alte haim" the old home, the old country. They started on the East Side, and most of



us came from Brooklyn and the Bronx, and it wasn't anything like this. It wasn't as wide and open and clean and earthy as what you had in the City. And each year made the City more congested, more dirty and more polluted and they preferred to stay here. And I keep coming back and I notice that nothing has really changed. You don't find any condominiums in your back yard. Not yet. And when that happens, you'll find that all the oldtimers, all those that feel that sentiment about this place, will think twice about staying.

Q. Did your parents have any previous connection with co-op before they came here, or any ideals in that connection?

A. No. I don't think there were any coops around here. No, we never had any connection, because most of the work that my father did was on the East Coast. You know, 7th Avenue, or sometimes in Philadelphia.

Q. Do you have any recollections about what your family went through when the houses were sold? Did they confide or discuss this problem with you? They were sold sometime in 1947, I think. In other words, were you involved in any way in the discussions? It was a time for making decisions.

A. I don't know how they would feel. There was no question about leaving the place, I'm sure. If they did not have the money, they would have found a way of getting it or borrowing it, or whatever, to stay here. They genuinely loved the area. Even without the cooperative failing, it would have been a means for them to live their lives as they would have in the Old Country. Maybe not exactly that, but as close as possible to the old life. They continued to stay members of the Workmen's Circle and my mother was a member of the Pioneer Women and they did whatever had to be done to keep the membership active. They had their Kultur~~e~~ Evenings. I don't know if that had anything to do with the Workmen's Circle, but you'll find that most people who were members of the Workmen's Circle here in Roosevelt, were also part of the Kultur~~e~~ Evening.

Q. What about you? Did you have organizations as a young woman?

A. Well, first in Jersey Homesteads, we had the Junior League of Jersey Homesteads. What to do to stimulate our social life. So we made friends with the different organizations in the area. Edith Brown and Shep Wollman, the government hired them to take care of the names, the teen-agers. There was Arts and Crafts, Social Activities, Dancing. It was like having camp activities. To get back to the Junior League of Jersey Homesteads, I don't remember all the members, but you had to be a certain age, I think 16. The dues were 10¢ a meeting. I have some minutes of some meetings at home on the West Coast and I'll try to remember to send them to you. I remember Max Wishnefsky, Irving Bach, Seymour Kessler, Graham Nisnevitz - all members, and as I said, we tried to make friends with all the organizations in the area from the "Y" organizations. I think it was the YMHA in Lakewood, and I think also in Long Branch, and I forget, but it had a name for the dances and we'd all pile into cars and go to Lakewood. Ah, I remember - The Intercounty Y - that's what it was. And we were all members of this organization. Now, on Valentine's Day there would be a dance in Lakewood, so we would all go there and we'd make friends that way. Another holiday there would be a dance in Jersey Homesteads at the school, and everybody would come to Jersey Homesteads, etc. And that's how we would socialize and we sort of spread our wings a little bit. At that time I was the secretary. The Co-op colors are green and yellow, so consequently all our stationery followed. Everything was typewritten in green. I even remember signing my name in green ink. My sister just reminded me. At one point we found there was a need for a library and what I did was get some people together and I collected books, in fact we all did, from people who had books they wanted to discard, and we started a library upstairs in the Britton House



and certain days during the week we had a circulation library going, and eventually it moved to the Borough Hall and then to the school. I almost forgot, I was also a member of the Board of Education for about 5 years. All of this, and I expect free burial right up here. I've picked my spot, but I'm in no hurry.

Q. Is it true that the early Board of Education meetings were conducted in Jewish?

A. Not to my knowledge. Never. The first few meetings were indeed chaotic, but Jewish - no. We all spoke English, not very kindly at all times. There were always problems, with teachers, salaries. You know, nothing changes. Principals - nobody was good. Every year I recall we had to think of another principal. How is it today?

Q. Same thing. Not really. We've had some principals for a long time. I remember during the war there was a Mr. Cullen who was a gem. There too there were problems. I don't recall exactly what they were, but there were problems. He too didn't last.

Q. You lived in town during the whole war. Did you notice that there were any changes in town as a result of the war, or that was influenced by the war?

A. You know, I left right after that. The changes that I see now is that I don't know very many people, and there are different kinds of people. I don't think the newcomers feel the same sentiment that we did originally. They are here because it's a nice place to live, until they find out that they either like it or they don't. Then they sell the real estate, make a buck and go elsewhere. To them it's just like any other community.

Q. Did you have any connection with the local government? Did you get into the Council meetings and things like that?

A. No. I didn't get into that. And then I left.

Q. Did you know Benjamin Brown?



A. Yes. We used to have meetings in his home, as a matter of fact; which later became the Hechalutz Farm. I remember him as being a very kind person. I think he liked the youth here, and I remember him saying at his house one day at a meeting there, "Remember, the future of this Cooperative depends on you" and he tried to make us think in glowing terms about this place.

Q. Is there anything you'd like to add? Is there anything we forgot to ask that you would like to share with us?

A. I would just like to end by saying - my family is still here - my brother and his family; my sister and her family, even children's children. I enjoy coming back to the area and in Roosevelt I miss all those people that I used to come in contact with. I don't come back here very often, only about once a year and in fact, it is two years since I was here last, but just a couple of hours ago we came back from the cemetery and in order for me to determine who among the old comrades and old friends, are still here; I took inventory of all the monuments I saw and I felt quite depressed. But it's always good to come back home, and this is still home.