



Interviewed: Denise Rootenberg

Oral History Clip Title: We Thought We Were Orthodox

Theme: Jewish Identity

Interviewer: Lisa Newman

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(Denise)

It's interesting because we thought we were Orthodox. We called ourselves Orthodox. We did all kinds of things on Shabbat that Orthodox Jews wouldn't do. No black hats or any of that like very strict Orthodoxy. But...So we did think we were Orthodox and most of us were like that. And my son also points out that we're very shul-centric. Like all the South Africans feel you can only worship or whatever if you [sic] in shul. So most of us do join shuls. So yeah, that was a big difference. And here someone said to me, "You were actually traditional Jews. You weren't Orthodox Jews." And I was very insulted at the time. The first Rosh Hashanah we were here we couldn't afford two seats in the synagogue [laughs] and there was a Conservative synagogue down the road, and at that time we weren't really anything. We were South Africans who thought we were Orthodox, whatever. So, my husband and I split the seat so he would go for some of the services and the other one would babysit and, you know, we did it like that and we weren't that involved. And then, through a friend, we started going to Aish HaTorah and slowly we got more observant. And there's a funny story actually. My son was at Loving Care Daycare, which is in Thornhill, and Devorah who runs it is Orthodox and her father started *Eitz Chaim*. But most of the kids who were going there were not [sic] their parents were not observant. And she used to try and do her bit to sort of "bring us in." So the one time I picked up my son, Mark, and I said, "I think we'll go to McDonald's for supper and Devorah came running over and said, "Mrs. Rootenberg, there's so many kosher places you could go to." And at the time I was so annoyed and I thought she was meddling. And we just got more and more into kosher. And then Mark as well from going to the daycare got more into it. And the unthinkable happened and we decided to start keeping kosher. And Devorah gave us a set of meat plates. She bought, like, a whole set of meat plates for us. And the doll's house at the daycare got new plates because Mark was getting new kosher plates.

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