Washington State JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY
Powered by Jewish Federation of Greater Seattle

Recording Date: June 4, 2025
Last Edited: October 27, 2026

Seth Goldstein

SUMMARY

Seth Goldstein highlights his family's immigrant roots and longstanding involvement in the Jewish community in Seattle. He reflects on his active participation in Jewish organizations and the significance of preserving community history for future generations. Additionally, he discusses contemporary challenges faced by the Jewish community, including misconceptions and the importance of personal identity.

Pam Mandel: There we go. Today is September 30th, 2024. This interview with Seth Goldstein is being conducted by Pam Mandel in Seattle, Washington, for the Oral History Project of the Washington State Jewish Historical Society. Thank you, Seth, for making time today. Can you please introduce yourself again? Tell me your full name and when your birthday was, and where you were born.

Seth Goldstein: My name is Seth Goldstein. I was born May 28th, 1987, in Seattle, Washington, at Swedish Hospital.

Pam Mandel: You're a local guy?

Seth Goldstein: I am local, I've been here most of my entire life.

Pam Mandel: And, has your family been in Washington for a long time?

Seth Goldstein: So, going back to my grandparents. My parents were born and raised here. My mom was born in Seattle. Bellevue area. My dad's from Spokane. Prior to that, my grandfather and a couple of great uncles emigrated here. Immigrated here from London between the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s. And then my great-grandparents came here through Ellis Island. I believe in the 1930s. I'd have to confirm that with my parents. But most of my, at least my parents. And then I think a couple of my grandparents were born here.

Pam Mandel: How did your family come?

Pam Mandel: To live in Washington state?

Seth Goldstein: So my understanding, my great-grandfather on my mom's side, my grandfather. Yeah. Great-grandfather, my mom's side. So her grandfather came to Ellis Island and was a peddler. And he made his way from New York selling goods and whatnot and made it all the way to, ironically, Spokane and Seattle, and just made his way across the country. My grandfather, on my dad's side he came over after World War two. After he was in the British Army in World War Two and did his service, he had two uncles who were out here that owned a women's clothing store, one in Spokane, and I believe one in Lewiston, Idaho. And he said, Do you want to come out and work here? We have jobs over here. So my great my great-grandfather moved out to Spokane to work in the family business and did that until the day he retired.

Pam Mandel: So it was family that brought them out here, huh? Yeah. Did your parents or grandparents belong to Jewish organizations in the greater Seattle area?

Seth Goldstein: Yeah, a lot. So my dad belonged to B'nai B'rith. I think he actually might have been B'nai B'rith president. My mom

was in the Women's League. My dad and my grandfather were both in the Sigma Alpha Mu, the Sammy Fraternity at the University of Washington. I was a Pi at the University of Washington because Sammy's no longer existed when I went there. I think there are a couple of other organizations that my family's been a part of. My dad is actually president and on the board of the Washington State Jewish Historical Society, which is how I ended up being a board member of the Washington State Jewish Historical Society.

Pam Mandel: Right. So you're a second-generation board member, second generation.

Seth Goldstein: And I just had my son about two years ago, and prepping him for the next generation.

Pam Mandel: Excellent. It sounds like the answer to this question is going to be yes. Did you feel connected to the Jewish community when you were growing up?

Seth Goldstein: Absolutely. Yeah, we went to both in the synagogue. So we went to Herzl Ner Tamid. Growing up, had my Bar Mitzvah there. Felt very connected. Had a lot of friends who were Jewish. Went to Camp Solomon Schechter every summer for 11 summers, absolutely loved it. And then I also participated in both BBYO for one year, but then USY for four years. Felt a really, really strong Jewish community here and tried to be as much of a part of it as I could and participate, however I could.

Pam Mandel: Would you kindly unpack those acronyms for people who don't know what they stand for?

Seth Goldstein: Of course. So, USY is a united synagogue youth group. So, we were part of we had chapters within conservative synagogues all across the country. So, I was part of we were the Pacific Northwest Region, and we had a chapter out of Herzl, and I was there for it was during high school. So it was those four years I was kind of a member. And then I joined, and I think I was president at one point and maybe president for a second time. I'm trying to remember back then, but yeah, United Synagogue Youth. So, B'nai B'rith Youth Organization was another young adult high school, Jewish youth group that I was part of.

Pam Mandel: And can you tell me a little bit about what you did in your capacity as a member of those organizations?

Seth Goldstein: So, BBYO was just one year, and I kind of attended some meetings, and there were a couple of events that we would do more social events, within us, we, uh, as a member, we would have kind of monthly events. So I'd help either plan or organize and then attend and be responsible for getting more of the Jewish community kids my age to show up to some of those events. Some of them were social, some of them were, you know, a lot more oriented. So whether it was going to a food bank or donating time somewhere for doing a community service project, and then additionally, there were like local and regional events that we'd go to. So we'd get a group together and travel to different chapters around the Pacific Northwest for overnights or conventions, but it was kind of a good mix of social and then social action and as well as, um, you know, I was both a member there, but also a member of our local chapter board as president. So, making sure we had, you know, a budget working with the adults, of course, but making sure we had a budget and had, you know, responsibilities planned out.

Pam Mandel: Right. I'm going to jump to these identity questions. Do you remember when you first became aware of your Jewish identity?

Seth Goldstein: I don't remember exactly when, but looking back now, there are definitely moments where I knew that I was Jewish, and I knew that the majority of people that I went to school with and interacted with on a secular level weren't Jewish. And so things started to stand out for me as far as, like back in like the fourth and fifth grade when I'd go to Hebrew School on Tuesdays and Thursdays, or Sunday School, and my friends would go to church on Sunday, and I would go to synagogue on Saturdays. So I started to notice those differences. But I think in the lead up to my Bar Mitzvah was when it became really apparent that I did things differently and I had a different connection to my religion than I felt others in my secular life had.

Pam Mandel: I'm just thinking, there's definitely something I want to follow up in there, and I'm trying to articulate it. I think actually, I think I'm going to jump to this question. Then maybe it will come back to me. Did you ever feel that you were treated differently in either a positive or a negative way because you were Jewish? And if you sort of tie this to being in fourth grade and noticing that you're a different person. Did you see that people responded to you differently because of your background?

Seth Goldstein: I'd have to say yes. I think overall growing up, um. I looked at being Jewish as something special, something unique. You know, there's a very small percentage of the world that's Jewish that can say they're Jewish. Yeah, exactly. So I actually thought it was it was something special, and I still think it is, but I noticed that, you know, probably closer to middle school and high school, when I would, you know, I'd always be out for three days for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. And I had, you know, I don't feel like I received any preferential treatment, but I definitely noticed that it was, you know, being out for a religious observance that wasn't part of the regular secular calendar was one thing that, you know, I feel like teachers probably

accommodated us, so I don't know if I guess I'd say I don't know if it's politically correct, but like, I feel like, yeah, I was treated differently because my religious observance was different than what everybody else participated in their daily life.

Pam Mandel: Was there anything outside that construct of the holidays that sort of reflected in your social life, either as a kid growing up or even, you know, now, today as an adult?

Seth Goldstein: I might have an answer, and I'm not sure if I'm answering right, like the not sure it answers the question, but I just noticed I the priorities that I had growing up, or the activities, I guess I'd say I participated in, were always different. It was Sunday School and Hebrew School, and even Hebrew High during high school. And then there were sports and other activities. And so I just noticed that there were certain things in my life that started to have more weight and more of a focus than others. Like, I remember my mom said. And she. I mean, I'm 37 and I still remember this to this day. And she'll bring it up. She's like, you can fail baseball, you can fail whatever. You're you can fail school, but you can't fail Bar Mitzvah. And so I just know that there are things that, now looking back on, you know, my middle school and high school, those years that the things that involved being Jewish, took more of a precedence, like Shabbat dinner every Friday night with grandparents, just was something we did, um, and I absolutely loved.

Pam Mandel: So as a kid, your parents sort of weighted those priorities for you towards Jewish-centric activities. Is that correct?

Seth Goldstein: It's I'd say it's partially correct. But I also think because I was so much part of the community that it didn't seem like a parent dictating to me, like, you have to do this, you have to do this like I look forward to Wednesday Night Hebrew High because I knew I got to see my friends and I looked forward to, you know, the the youth groups because I got to see my friends who were in different cities. And I still have friends from those, those groups today. So it it kind of like was, you know, they made sure from a young age to be part of a Jewish community and have friends that were Jewish, so that I felt part of that community, that I think they kind of nudged me in that direction. And then I kind of took it from there.

Pam Mandel: Right? So and it also sounds like it was not a sacrifice for you, you wanted to embrace these values that they were prioritizing. So there was no conflict.

Seth Goldstein: Correct. Yeah. No, I mean, like there was a, you know, calendar schedules and calendar conflict, but other than but it wasn't a you know, I wasn't a hard decision kind of choosing between the two.

Pam Mandel: Right, right. Um, were there other sorts of Jewish values that you feel you learned from your parents or your grandparents?

Seth Goldstein: I think, I mean, I think taking care of one another is one. I think, just honestly, I think tikkun olam, trying to do what we can to heal the world. I think being part of a community and being there, you know, being part of a community are values that they've taught me. And just looking back at, other organizations that I choose to be a part of or donate to or, you know, the times that I prioritize spending time with family and friends over other activities just a really deep, you know, even even it's a really deep appreciation of family and tradition and, so there's so many things that they did subtly that I'm now that having a chance to reflect, I'm like, oh, that, that, that was something that they influenced.

Pam Mandel: They sound quite like they knew what they were doing. Yeah.

Seth Goldstein: I think they did. I don't know if they had a script, but, you know, I think they did a good job.

Pam Mandel: I love that. So you're a long-time Seattleite you were born here. Have you noticed changes in the Seattle or the greater Washington Jewish community over time, over the course of your life? What? What is different? So if anything.

Seth Goldstein: So I don't. I don't necessarily know if I can speak to the kind of what's different. I think I grew up very much a part of the synagogue. I grew up very much part of the, you know, the youth groups were there for me. After high school, I moved to Israel for a year and did the Native Program, and I found a different sense of community. And then I came back and I joined AEP, which is the Jewish Fraternity. And so I feel like what I feel like was, and I know this necessarily wasn't the question, but what was missing for me was what to do after I'm fully immersed in Judaism, in my community. So I feel like I had to figure it out for myself. And I don't know if I did the best job. And so I actually, I actually find myself now trying to reintegrate into the Jewish community. I think my life kind of went from college to living in DC on the East Coast to coming back and making friends, and a lot of my friends who were Jewish who lived in Washington had moved away. A lot of them live in LA now, and a lot of my friends who I met through AEP, who are Jewish, are more on the secular side, and so I kind of struggled for a little bit with reconnecting with the Jewish community. I guess I'd say I didn't do the best job, but now that I have my son, who's almost two, I'm trying to figure out where I belong in the Jewish community. I still think that there is very, you know, from just my short time on the board and being

to some events, there's a very strong community. There's a very welcoming Jewish community, so I don't necessarily know how it's changed. I know it's still there. And I'm actually interested in, like, reconnecting with the community.

Pam Mandel: So you're still navigating that space? It sounds like. Yeah. Or you're navigating that space again.

Seth Goldstein: Yeah.

Pam Mandel: Yeah, yeah. Can you back up? You mentioned that you did the Native Program in Israel for, again, for folks who don't know what that is, can you give us, like, the condensed version of what that was?

Seth Goldstein: Yeah. So Native is a, uh, I guess most countries call it a gap year program, but it's run through the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism. So right after USY, which is another organization they run, they offer a year-long program for kids entering college. So, between high school and college to live in Israel. And at the time, they had kind of a couple of different sets of curriculum. You could either go to the Yeshiva in Jerusalem or Hebrew University, and then do either spend time on a Kibbutz or volunteer in a couple of volunteer programs, living out of and based out of Beersheva. And now I think they've expanded the number of tracks, and there's there's the number of kids who've participated has increased at least since I went. That was the program that I did, and I chose to study at Hebrew University in Jerusalem. And then I lived in Beersheba and volunteered at a couple of local. Um, I don't even know how to describe it. There was a house for children with disabilities, so I did some stuff. Just making sure the house was up to date and helping out, and cleaning up there. And then I volunteered at the hospital in Oshawa.

Pam Mandel: What, did you study at the Hebrew University?

Seth Goldstein: So I studied Hebrew, and then I took there was a History of Israel course that we took. I took a couple, it was a class on business ethics that I took. And then political communication was another one.

Pam Mandel: Okay, great. Great. Can you tell me, um, have you do you feel have you personally in your in your life, do you feel like you have experienced direct antisemitism, antisemitism, or discrimination against you because you're Jewish?

Seth Goldstein: I have there there was one point in high school that I remember walking home from the bus stop, and I had my Kippah on, and somebody drove past and threw something at me and said something not so nice. Um, that was the most direct that I can remember. I don't feel like I feel very fortunate that I, you know, in my college days, I didn't feel or see or experience any really antisemitic acts. So, I feel very fortunate that kind of that is the only one that I, you know, that sticks out that I remember.

Pam Mandel: I'm glad that's the case for you.

Seth Goldstein: But, yeah, it's not the case for a lot of people. So it's I, it's not. No. Yeah. That's, that's, that's the one.

Pam Mandel: So you participate in the Washington State Jewish Historical Society. You are, as you mentioned, on our board. Why do you think that it's important for us to document our experience? And why do you think it's important for us to capture the history of the Jews of Washington?

Seth Goldstein: Simply put, I think it's because it's the ability to capture it won't be around forever. Um, meaning like, and I think back to my family, like, I talked to my dad as he's going through Ancestry.com and, you know, finding relatives and piecing things together. And every couple of weeks when we talk, he's like, Oh, I wish I had asked my dad this question. I wish I had asked my dad this question, I wish, I wish I, you know, I wish I we kept more of these documents that we had for my grandpa. I don't know what my grandfather's signature looked like, or if he'll find things like that. And so I just realized that, you know, if we don't do something, there's a risk that we lose that history. And we have so many ways to capture today just like this, this video call this this interview that that make it just like a to me, it's like a no brainer. Like we should be doing this to know that we're also not alone. We had to not feel like, you know, for people who moved to this area or for people like me who have young kids, like we've been in this area for a long time, there's a history of a Jewish identity in Seattle. You don't feel like the only place that has any Jewish identity is Israel or New York or those bigger cities, that it's it's it's just an important thing to do while we have the chance. And to get more people to do it, I think it's going to be hopefully very impactful that we can tell, like a true narrative of Jews living in Washington State.

Pam Mandel: Um, so my last question here is a little bit of a sort of look at where we are today. Right now. This is truly a uniquely challenging time for us. What do you wish people knew about being Jewish right now?

Seth Goldstein: Well, I think in the scope of geopolitical events, I think what would be helpful to know is that even among Jews,

there can be conflict internally. Meaning, like I lived in Israel, I love the country, I love, I like, I love Israel. However, I don't have to always love what the government does. And I don't always have to agree with policies, and I don't always have to agree with them 100%. And I just wish that people understood and could separate the people who are like the Judaism from Israel, because I think that it is by what I've seen in people bringing those two together, it prevents any kind of dialogue or any kind of discussion or any kind of areas where we can be coexistence. And so that's one thing that I wish people really understood. And I've been fortunate to have conversations with friends to kind of unpack some of these, where I'm like, I don't agree with Israel's policies 100%, but you can't be mad at me. Who's a Jew? For something that a country thousands of miles away is doing? Do you like that? That can't be a connection that can be made. So I wish that is something they understood. And I also have a partner, having my fiance who's not Jewish, I think one thing that I wish people understood or took the time to understand is the true essence of each Jihad, for each Jew, of what it means to be Jewish. Because when deciding to be with my partner and, you know, hopefully for the rest of our lives, it was the same things that I saw in her that I seen like that I love in Judaism. Like it's about being together with family, about supporting one another, about providing a caring home for children. It's about, you know, appreciating one's similarities and differences. And I think that's where we can find common ground. And I think where we can learn to coexist is that, you know, really like I feel like there are so many misconceptions about holidays or about, you know, or so many things in religion in general are tied to holidays. And I wish that there was more unpacking of those kinds of like, just of this kind of question. Like what? Instead of labeling somebody as Jewish, like or saying, Why are you Jewish? Like unpacking, what does Judaism mean to you? And then being able to be like, have that opportunity to tell that to someone.

Pam Mandel: Is there anything else you would like me to ask you? Is there anything else you want to talk about while we're here? Is there anything you want?

Seth Goldstein: To, um.

Pam Mandel: Add?

Seth Goldstein: I mean, I think I'd love to probably clarify a lot with my dad, and like the history of our family. I do know it goes back a long way, and I know that I have lots of great grandparents, I have uncles, I have cousins, I have a large, large family. Um, so I probably want to clarify some of that and make sure I got it right. But I think what I would want to discuss a little bit is. I touched on it a little bit. I think it's where I see the importance of Jewish organizations within Washington State. Um, please. Yeah. And so I think there's there's a lot of different organizations that do a lot of different things. So, like we're talking right now, I'm on behalf of the historical society. But, you know, there's the JCC, there's synagogues, there's youth groups. And so I think one thing that doesn't get discussed too much is what role each organizations play and how they can partner and not overlap or conflict. And I think we're such a small community in general that when there are lots of different organizations affiliated with being Jewish, people's attention and people's priorities get pulled in too many places. Um, and I think, you know, this is not necessarily on the subject of oral histories, but I just think in general, from a Washington State Jewish Community perspective, that I'd love to talk about and maybe in future interviews and future oral histories understand the broad scope of how Jews have participated in different organizations or I'd say organizations like I have a different view, and I think I've done very much similar to my my dad and my mom, like done us why they did BBYO or BBG. I think I followed their suit very well, but I'd love to understand how people engage with Jewish organizations. You know, from my parents' generation to my generation, because I know, at least for me, it's very different. And for me and my sister, it's very different than what it was for my parents.

Pam Mandel: Right. That's interesting. You know, when you think about the landscape of Jewish organizations across even just the, like Central Seattle, it's so broad, right? There are so many of them. And they're pulling in so many different ideas and populations and focuses. That's an interesting I did. And it makes me think about the notion of sort of doing a survey. This is veering off a little bit. Um, but just with regards to the oral history program, it makes me think about a sort of survey of Jewish institutions across the region. Like, what are we doing? Right? Like, what are we doing? Uh, like, who's there? What are you doing? Who's showing up? What do we do once we're there? Right. And that's it's very interesting to think about. Like. And how long have we been doing this? Also, like what's what's the history of, you know, the historical society is 20 years old. I volunteer with JFS. It's x number of years old. Uh, the film festival is 30 years old. The JCC is, I don't know how old it is, older than that. So, yeah, that's an interesting like. That's what I'm going to put in the hopper to take away. So I'm going to hit the stop recording button because we're kind of veering off. Um, and give me one.