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Rabbi David Fine

SUMMARY

Rabbi David Fine discusses the history and growth of Temple Beth, emphasizing how community involvement and a do-it-yourself culture fostered a strong congregation and active participation. He highlights the spiritual and educational importance of Camp Kalsman, connecting nature with Jewish teachings, and reflects on his leadership's impact on the community's development. Rabbi Fine shares his hopes for the future of the Jewish community in Snohomish County, underscoring resilience and generational bonds.

Melanie Kay: Today is May 17th, 2022. My name is Melanie Kay, and I am interviewing Rabbi David Fine on behalf of the Washington State Jewish Historical Society. So I'm going to refer to an interview that you did in 2014, maybe you'll remember,

Rabbi David Fine: I can't believe that it's been that long.

Melanie Kay: Time flies when you're having fun.

Rabbi David Fine: I must be having fun.

Melanie Kay: So in your 2014 interview, you explained that you were the first rabbi at Temple Beth Or, and explained that rabbis would come to lead high holiday services from surrounding areas. Can you speak more about how the congregation operated before your arrival there?

Rabbi David Fine: Right. It's great. So, Melanie, thanks. It's a joy to be here. It's like this is going to be preserved.

Melanie Kay: Oh, it's great, it's great.

Rabbi David Fine: It's quite a feeling. So, I guess there are two befores my arrival. One is the historic Montefiore Congregation that began in the late teens. And then there was Temple Beth Or, which I'm really afraid of getting the numbers wrong, but I want to say it was in 1985, and I could be off by a year or two, to be fair. So during those early years, from 1918, really through '85, the congregation would bring in either rabbis or leaders, often from Vancouver. What was often spoken about was the lumberjack from Vancouver. That's how this person, this man, was addressed. Well, we never met. What happened was, as the congregation I don't think dwindled just a little bit strong, but lessened in numbers turns out that there was this core, this reform group, the legendary hot tub group, there were several doctors and it turned out all male doctors at the time, male doctors and their wives who met in a hot tub at a medical convention, as they each discussed, you know, it's kind of far to to live in Snohomish County and then to have to travel into Seattle, probably Temple Beth Am. Maybe we should form something up here. And so they did, and there was some trepidation about how we were going to approach this Orthodox Congregation that had a building on Lombard Avenue in Everett. And it turns out it went pretty well. And the Orthodox group sold the building to the reform group for a dollar, with the provision that they would never raise the dues beyond what they were at that time for the Orthodox members. So beginning then in the mid to late 80s, the reform group brought in a student rabbi from, of all places, Cincinnati, Ohio, because that's where the Reform Rabbinical School was. Bob Davis was one of those student rabbis, followed by Hannah Yerushalmi, whose father was a beloved professor of mine at the school. But she was also a rabbinical student. And then in 19, and I believe also Yoshi, Yoshi Zweiback was also coming in. I'm not sure if he came in as an intern or was there for the full year, but these

were student rabbis that came in, and I actually followed Hanna Yerushalmi. Yerushalmi, I should say her name correctly. Who finished in 1993. I arrived on August 1st of 1993. That's when my tenure began. And feel free, by the way, as we speak, to ask for clarifications and more information. I'm glad to provide. I just don't want to lengthen the interview more than you want to have it lengthened.

Melanie Kay: We'll do. Okay. You spoke about work parties at the congregation where members helped physically build the structure. Do you think the do-it-yourself nature of the congregation helped shape the culture of the congregation?

Rabbi David Fine: I would say very much so. So those early days, there was Paul Wexler, the leader of those work parties. Paul grew up in a Zionist youth movement. Now, I might get it really wrong. I could see either Habonim, which means the builders, or Habonim Dror. And eventually the group merged to become the builders, and really those who spoke of liberty, freedom. Paul was a builder. And the way Paul believed in building community, and no disagreement was to literally have a building project. So I think it was also a This is my place, This is our place. And people could point to, and I may have mentioned this in the earlier interview, you know, you see that cement form right in front. I did that. Do you see the walls I painted those? I think that really created a sense of ownership that went way beyond I paid for it. So it's shaped its culture. And of course, what becomes interesting is that it was in the early 90s. Well, now here we are in 2022. Excuse me. And well, not everybody, most folks in the congregation were not there in 1992 to help do that rebuild. But again, I think it's shaped a This is a place where we do things, and we make things happen.

Melanie Kay: Right. This is actually kind of a perfect segue into the next question. In your previous interview, you spoke about the congregation doubling in size during your time there. What do you attribute this increase in the congregation members to? Were there any changes in Snohomish County at that time that led to there being more congregation members?

Rabbi David Fine: So, there were several factors, I think. I'll probably use the word it was a systemic issue. So one was we had a rabbi who talked about me, who was there, if not all the time, but residents, so I could meet with folks on a Tuesday evening or Thursday morning in a way that had never been in the past. If a student rabbi came in, they were there once, maybe twice a month. Well, what are you doing between its lay leaders and wonderful lay leaders? Let me say that as well. So. I think, and it does go back to the previous question, we had a we can do it kind of American, I think I can, I think I can, or I think we can, I think we can. And we had, I think, an attitude that we wanted to be sticky. We talk about sticky websites. People would come in to say, We're going to engage with you. I think there was a hunger that had that was just latent. It was there, I think in the early 90s, whether we look at grunge culture or early or pre, I mean, I was there from 93 to 98. There was the start of the rise of tech in Seattle, and I think there was just a growth in the county; all these things came together. We were now getting our name out. It was probably before the days. Well, I won't say before the days of the internet because I'm not sure exactly the dates, but you know, when Google became a big deal. That was certainly during the days of dial-up, but it was a way you could look things up. But we were getting our name out there. I had the good fortune of being in place at that time. I think I had an interest, but I don't want to just give myself credit. That would not be fair. We were all pitching in. I think we were running on all cylinders, and that encouraged that growth also. The building became, rather than being a detraction, it became attractive in the old days, from what I hear. Before I arrived, there was, and it was very attractive in the, I think, 40s and 50s, there was a spring-loaded dance floor in the back. But by the time the 80s and 90s, that building was caving in. It wasn't safe to be in; I think it had been condemned. There was a sukkah. In order to have a sukkah, you have to have it be open to the sky. Well, it was based on a sliding roof on a section of the building where the office is. Well, water had leaked in. The floor wasn't sturdy. There was a famous legend that Al Friedman, a lover of Shalom, would tell us that somebody actually fell through to the basement because the floor had rotted. Well, that doesn't make for an attractive building. You know, there were old theater chairs that somebody was able to get at a discount from an old theater in Chicago. Again, it looked like an old-fashioned building. It was Orthodox. So all these things were happening at once. I think that there were a lot of families with kids, but not exclusively families with kids. But again, we were a new, happening, attractive place.

Melanie Kay: Still a lovely place today.

Rabbi David Fine: There we go.

Melanie Kay: Yeah.

Rabbi David Fine: It is.

Melanie Kay: In your interview, you mentioned that you've worked with many congregations in transition. So much so that it was printed on your business card. Was Temple Beth Or in transition during your time there? And if so, what did that transition look like?

Rabbi David Fine: Oh, what an interesting question. So. Transition can mean many things. Sorry to get pedantic, but often there's change, and then there's transition, which is this human response to it. That's more of what I think of on my business card. But it applies to all kinds of how we are going to be different than what we were. So, was Temple Beth Or in transition? Well, one of the big changes was that everything was done by lay leaders, and that was an adjustment. What did it mean if there were lay leaders leading services except for those weekends? Excuse me? When there was a student rabbi. Now, it's interesting because fast forward to 2022, Rabbi Rachel Court is our rabbi, and she's with us half the time. So, lay leaders are leading services on those other weeks, but that was the big one. It also meant how do we deal with growth? It's there were incredible volunteers. Cathy Ruben, Vicki Romero were both leading the religious school. They were getting consulting help from Arlene Schuster. Curriculum assistance. Well, now that I have come in, I was going to be running that school. And within a couple of years, during those five years that I was there, even that changed. And we hired a religious school principal, as you know, because what again, as our numbers expanded, how to use the rabbi's time became an important question. So those were some of the items of transition. It also meant that, financially, the congregation was in order for a rabbi to stay; we had to be able to support a rabbi being there. So I started off half-time, moved to 75% time, then went to full-time. But we really couldn't afford that. I then pulled back and went 90% time, and the salary shifted around with each of those changes. But I was working one and two other jobs at the same time, so it was kind of a trade-off. So it was, all right, if I go 90% time, I will have two days off instead of one. And we won't schedule meetings on Tuesdays and Wednesdays unless there is an emergency or something that has to happen on those days, and then I would work it out. But that's kind of what that transition looked like. Often, what I do now is congregation might be collaborating with a second congregation, or deciding it's going to leave its building, or dealing with the exit and entrance of a rabbi. And, when I left, I really had to pull back so that things could change. And Rabbi Jay Hyman was hired. But please, let's, I think that answers that question.

Melanie Kay: Yes. Thank you. Okay, now I'm going to move on to talking a little bit about Camp Kalsman

Rabbi David Fine: Pronouncing. Yes.

Melanie Kay: Perfect. Okay. One of the core values of camp is the relationship to Teva or nature. What, in your view, is the spiritual significance of campers being able to connect to the natural world at Camp Kalsman?

Rabbi David Fine: Well, we're really getting into theology here. I think that this is about wonder and appreciation, that there's something larger than us, that we're part of, something larger. Call it an ecosystem. I think Teva is shorthand for all of that. I have a friend who's I'm glad to name Rabbi Dan Fink, who's been very involved with Camp Kalsman, who has who's written a book. I could pull it off the shelf behind me. Let the earth teach you Torah. What a great title for a book. I think it's a way of saying, let's. I think this is what we get to do at camp. Let's move out of our urban setting and create a different environment to be again in the natural world, hiking, canoeing, just being with other people. And that's the power of it. I think it's. I don't want to limit it, but there is a pool there, and that's a great thing. But I think there's something that one gets from being out on the water, even being bitten by mosquitoes. But it's camping outdoors has a sense of this is the world in which I live, and what's my relationship to it? And how does Judaism perhaps shape that relationship?

Melanie Kay: Great. Thank you so much. What experiences have you heard from campers or camp staff about Camp Kalsman helping them connect with the natural world, Judaism, or each other?

Rabbi David Fine: Well, they're all important. For some kids, it's their first time doing this. Others are veterans. That was a big discussion when the camp was being formed. Well, kids in the northwest are already camping. Is that something we need to do, or should we be? Do we often need to offer something unique, or do we go with what they're already doing? And you know, there are all kinds of kids and all kinds of families. So for some, it's yeah, I've already done this. My family's already been out here. But I think there's something powerful. About acting and doing in the community and being in a Jewish setting, I think, for all of our students, maybe not those who attend Jewish day schools. They are the minority and a small minority. You know, here Jews are, what, 2.4% of the American population. And, it's one thing if you're in Chicago or Miami or Los Angeles or Detroit, New York. I grew up in Detroit, so I've got to include Detroit. Maybe there's a setting where there are more Jews around, but I think they have all kinds of associations that come with it. So even to float in an outdoor chapel with a song later is powerful. So that kids take this as this is cool. You have counselors, staff members who say, Yes, this is a way you can live. This is where you can connect. These are the ways we're going to flavor those conversations. You're not just talking about a lanyard or clay. What does it mean to have Jewish art? What does it mean to have Hebrew words? And I think it's just in the camp that it's infused. What does it mean when the group of, I guess, emissaries might be a literal translation? The delegation from Israel after lunch and dinner. There's a dance that they bring every year. This, too, is Jewish. This, too, brings a piece of Israel. There's a connection. So I think it just happens throughout, whether it's a backpacking trip. And hopefully one of the things I'm looking to do in retirement is to take those kinds of overnight trips. And to be the embedded rabbi to talk about, to answer questions, but to provoke questions. So what a rich, rich chance. And this is just what we wanted when we were designing camp.

Melanie Kay: That's wonderful. I wish I could go and see it. Maybe one day.

Rabbi David Fine: Sure, you can.

Melanie Kay: Yeah, I'm in Snohomish County. Maybe I'll go up there one day.

Rabbi David Fine: So we're in Snohomish. I'm sorry for going off script? We're in Snohomish County.

Melanie Kay: Are you not like Mountlake Terrace, Mountlake Terrace?

Rabbi David Fine: Oh, okay.

Melanie Kay: Not too far. Like the Lynnwood area.

Rabbi David Fine: All right. But you are still where these streets count. I forgot it goes from Seattle. The streets go up, they number up. Yeah. And they number down in Mountlake Terrace. But as you get toward Everett, do I have that right?

Melanie Kay: Oh, I don't even know.

Rabbi David Fine: We'll have to take a look.

Melanie Kay: Take a look later.

Rabbi David Fine: But, yes, we'd love to have you.

Melanie Kay: Oh, that'd be great. All right, from what I understand, you began a leadership position while you were a rabbi at Temple Beth Or. Could you speak a little bit about your work in Snohomish County?

Rabbi David Fine: So in some ways, it was parallel play. I was the rabbi at Temple Beth Or, and at the same time, I ran the Community High School of Jewish Studies when it existed in Seattle. Actually, that took place on Mercer Island was through the Jewish Education Council of the Jewish Federation. I then ran the Florence Melton adult Mini-school was also a program of the Jewish Education Council of Federation. We were the largest Florence Melton adult mini school site in the world, I'm proud to say. I think that one of my superpowers was the ability to grow communities, to start and grow communities. I shouldn't say start, probably to grow them and expand them. But the congregation doubled in size. And Melton, we expanded that. The community high school went from 118 to 185 students during those years. So. It wasn't that I did so much work. It was nice when things. And then in December of 1996, I started with the URJ. I might add a 10% time. It was 13 hours a month. So here I sit in May of 2022. It's 20, almost 25.5 years with the urge. There wasn't so much urgent work. There were times when there was a region, and I became the regional director before I was doing the work in consulting and transition management. We would have regional meetings. The regional council would get together, and there were a couple of meetings that were hosted by Temple Beth Or of Everett. So it was very, very fun to bring people back from all over the region and to have it hosted in Everett, and the advocacy of Temple Beth Or. I remember one time, Rabbi Harley Wagman, who followed Rabbi Jay Hyman, who followed me, Rabbi Harley Kurzweil. I came for High Holidays. And Harley turned, and he said, Oh, David Fine is here. He may not be a member of the congregation because technically, I hadn't joined. He said, but he is certainly a member of this community. And that was wonderful. But I think I then became involved when Beth Or was in those transitions, and they were looking for a new rabbi, or they were trying to find different ways to do things, and even over the past year and a half, there was a big discussion at Temple Beth Or. Temple Beth owns four properties on Lombard Avenue. The property immediately south is a house that's a rental house, and the synagogue. And then a lot that's now kind of a playground. And then what used to be a duplex, except that it was burned down when a squatter was living there. Was the question then was money from the insurance company? Should we rebuild on the site? Should we move elsewhere? Should we join with a different congregation? Well, these are things that I do in my role with the Union for Reform Judaism. So both with my URJ kippah and my Beth Or. And then now we've since joined rejoined the congregation, kippah to kind of lead the group. That's maybe we should consider this due to the fact-finding and moving out. And this is really very much connected to my URJ work. And interestingly enough, Paul Vexler was leading the group whose thinking was that we should stay in the building and rebuild where we are. And that congregation voted after much discussion and decided we're going to stay with the building. And Paul, thankfully, has been sharing that work he's in and Paul and our friendship has remained, even though we had a look at a difference of opinion for a greater good. And Paul and I have great respect for each other. So that was really a part of where my URJ work intersected with my Beth Or role in Snohomish County.

Melanie Kay: Okay, can you tell me about your involvement with URJ and how the greater Seattle region's participation became more engaged? And what effect or influence did your presence have on Jewish life in the region?

Rabbi David Fine: For if this video is recorded, I'm going to do something that'll make my son laugh. I tend to talk about the region of Alaska, British Columbia, Washington, Oregon, Idaho, and Montana. He thinks that's the funniest thing. He and his friends use their hands to talk about geography. So, Avi, if you're listening, there it is. No, me. Enjoy it as well. Those are my two kids, so let's go back to 1996. I'm glad to name names. Scott Greenberg had been the what was then called WESTY, the Western States Temple Youth. It was the NIFTY chapter, the regional chapter advisor. He was my predecessor. So I believe that he was changing career-wise. He was not going to be the advisor for WESTY. I was brought in, and the regional office in San Francisco, by Morey Hirschman was the regional director, and it covered this entire piece of geography, really north of central California, north of San Luis Obispo. There was a Southern California region, a central west region in the Pacific Northwest. Region I, by the way, here I sit again in May of 2022. I am the last URJ employee who used to work in one of those regions, retiring again in six weeks. Well, the region was always a distant thing. So in December of 1996, there were 21 congregations in the region. And one of my first assignments I was either late in December or early in January, was a congregation in Portland, Oregon, that was considering leaving the URJ. By the way, they did. But I thought I made a great case. And the rabbi even said, You did. You spoke well, but we're leaving. I said, You want to know why? I said I would. He said, because I think we should leave. I want to be connected to my friends, my fellow rabbis here in Portland. And I think that's the Reconstructionist Movement. Well, from 21, it probably went to 20 over the course of those regional days, which probably ended, I think, in 2011 or 12. We grew to 35 congregations. But I think what happened is that in those early days. The congregations in Washington State were Bellingham, Everett, and the three in Seattle. Beth Am, De Hirsch Sinai, and B'nai Torah, and the congregation in Tacoma. That's western Washington. Well, we brought in the congregation in Port Angeles. We brought in the congregation on Bainbridge Island. We brought in the congregation in Aberdeen. We brought in the I mean, you can just hear it expanding. I'm probably forgetting places. Woodinville, which was originally Bothell and is now actually in Kirkland, Federal Way. All of these, and again, I don't know if I should have the map in front of me, but I think it made for a certain synergy. And there's more going on here. West Seattle is another one, Yakima, for congregations to talk with each other because they had so much in common that then built strength in this region. It wasn't just numbers. Spokane is another, Walla Walla is still another, and again, I tend to forget, but it's just things just grew, and I guess, reverberated with each other.

Melanie Kay: Pencils getting away from me there.

Rabbi David Fine: Uh oh.

Melanie Kay: Were there any hurdles or challenges that arose in your time as a leader in Snohomish County that you were able to successfully overcome? Or., this is kind of a different question, but could be the same. What are your proudest leadership accomplishments in your time in Snohomish County?

Rabbi David Fine: Hurdles or challenges? What makes me smile about that? It may seem small, but when I arrived, it was the interface. Excuse me? It was the ecumenical council. And ecumenical really means an alliance between Christian organizations. So there was a big push to make it the Interfaith Council. I remember saying to the group, Great people, if you want to be an ecumenical interfaith group, that is wonderful. I'm just not going to take part. You know, you could be a guest member, which is what our status was. But I think listen, there's now a mosque in, you probably know better than I do, there Lynnwood or Montlake. Is it Lynnwood? There's also one that's looking to form in Snohomish. I think that's important. There was a lot of discussion and controversy over whether the Latter-day Saints got to join. That was a bigger issue. There was also a messianic group where I had challenges because they were representing themselves as a Jewish group, so that was one, I think, where there were incidents of white supremacist activity. Often, you know, scattered. But the community and Aggregations were great at rallying. And we stand with the Jews, not during my time, but after the shooting at Tree of Life in Pittsburgh, there was an incredible, incredible gathering of the community hosted, I believe, by the city of Everett. And Rachel Court spoke. It was early in my days here. What are some challenges? I think it was just and proudest leadership accomplishments. I'll go with a positive to be appreciative. I think that people are connected. I think that we grew in numbers, which was nice, but we grew in depth. Depth of relationship to Judaism, depth of relationship to each other, and a greater impact in the community. We were doing more. I think numbers helped in that way. I think that we felt like we were something and all the best ways, not showing off. It wasn't my greatest leadership accomplishment that leaders were grown, that people learned that I think that has to do with, how do we live on after we die, whether that's dying professionally or, you know, that this body and I think it's in the impact that we've had in others, and I feel like I've had an enormous impact in Everett. It's shaped at Temple Beth Or and maybe in Snohomish County. It's striking, I kind of shake my head and realize that I left there 24 years ago, and yet I feel like I made an enormous difference, and I'm very proud of that. The numbers have ebbed and flowed, but that's not what it's about. It's those relationships. It's the caring. It's the fact that we're going to go, and we have gone through life connected to each other. I think for here, I'll quote, Harold Showwise Alav Hashalom, who talked about, although I may he rest in peace be upon him, he talked about godliness rather than God. I think we've brought godliness to this community. And it's really been a we. So that's pretty powerful.

Melanie Kay: Thank you for that.

Rabbi David Fine: I even mean it.

Melanie Kay: Yeah. Yeah. Oh, I love it.

Melanie Kay: I'm going to hop back a little bit to Camp Kalsman.

Rabbi David Fine: Sure.

Melanie Kay: More questions left.

Rabbi David Fine: Sure.

Melanie Kay: Can you speak a little bit about the founding leadership of Camp Kalsman? How did the founding of Camp Kalsman determine the day-to-day activities for campers, and which messages they wanted to convey to Jewish youth?

Rabbi David Fine: The founding leadership. So I was the point person from the URJ, as I may have mentioned that in the 2014 interview, I was the point person. And I think it's part of what helped increase my job at the URJ, which I went from 13% time to 10% time to 50% time to then 100% time. And I remember they offered me. I think it was after a year or two, it was Rabbi Lenny Thall who by who happened to be the vice president of the Union for Reform Judaism, who, by coincidence, grew up in Bellingham in Whatcom County. I remember Lenny said, after a year of my being with the URJ, what would now like to increase your time to, I guess what it maybe it would have been to half time at that point. And I had to say to him, you know, I wish you had told me three months ago, I just signed another contract with Congregation Beth Or. I can't take it. If you can wait a year, I'll commit to it right now. But if you need to hire somebody else. I have to concede. You. Please. Thankfully, he waited. And it's been a wonderful career. And Lenny and I are still in touch. And I could give you, you know, I won't recite it, but I could give you his phone number from memory. I have a funny thing about remembering numbers, especially phone numbers. The founding leadership. So I looked at 35 different sites. The goal was that it would be within two hours of SeaTac airport. So there were places that I looked at in Skagit County, Whatcom County, and east toward Yakima. I'm embarrassed to say I'm not sure of the county name there, but it was east of Snoqualmie Pass. Looked at places south of the airport near Olympia. It was actually once. Maybe we'll go just south of PDX of Portland's airport. So McMinnville, actually, we were going to go, and I may have said this, the 2014 Camp Baraka in Black Diamond. We actually had a deposit put down on the camp. And as the Love Israel family was kind of playing their cards, they were going bankrupt. That became the site, the founding leadership. So, there was lay leadership and professional leadership, and it was kind of like making the Golem. What am I talking about? It was a little bit of dirt from here and a little bit of ideas from there, and it was the URJ to think. And some from Northern California, where Ruben Arquilevich, now the director of the entire camping system, Reuben and I actually looked at property together, and he had some influence because he was the director at that point of camps, Newman and Swig. He and I actually tell the story because we were looking at property at Baker Lake. We went snowshoeing and got stuck in the snow up to our waists. We thought we would never get out of there, but we're here to tell the story. So there were all of these influences, and much of it happened organically, but even things we knew that we wanted to have, a strong environmental ethic. Well, there was, you know, so let's use someone said maybe we should use paper plates. No, do not use paper plates, even though it would save water. We're going to use glass dishes that can be washed and reused, only to find out later that, if even had we been composting using paper, it would have been helpful. It would have used less water and probably, in the long run, been better off. But we didn't know that. Some things early on there wasn't minhag. There wasn't a custom. Early on, a Birkat Hamazon developed at camp with its own hand signals. It's since been studied by Rabbi Chaim, PhD. Sarah Ben Or is a professor at Hebrew Union College in Los Angeles. Hope I'm getting her name right. She studies Jewish languages, Yiddish and all the, you know, Ladino. And they use actual colloquialisms and how they've developed. She has studied this Birkat Hamazon with its own hand signals that were developed at camp. And there are still some people who remember when it was created. But David Berkman, who was the first camp director, brought in things from his experience at Camp Harlem and Greene Family Camp in Texas. He brought some staff members with him from Greene Family Camp, and they shaped that early culture. I think, you know, Tefillo, prayer once a day. There were Jessica Stein and others in those early days who, some of the physical arrangements. There's a mosaic in the garden that. Jessica. I think it was Jessica. I believe it was Jessica who led that. Well, that's become a part of the feeling of camp. Now, Rabbi Alana Mills is the director. This will be her second summer. She is bringing in, as a rabbi, all kinds of things. So it continues to grow. The lay leadership is influential. It's this wonderful partnership. I don't know that others could have said. Let me let me rephrase it as there was an idea, an ideal that had to be brought to fruition over time. Some of it was, oh, predetermined. If I believe in predetermination, like there will be Birkat Hamazon after meals, there will be a song session. There will be prayer. There will be Shema in the cabins at night. But the exact details, those will be figured out and co-created and changed and grown over time, just isn't as the camp has grown. You know, they recently put in a high ropes course and a swing, and you know, and eventually a treehouse and, you know, goats and a little

animal corner. So all of these things happen over time. You're smiling.

Melanie Kay: That sounds fantastic.

Rabbi David Fine: It is.

Melanie Kay: That sounds so fun. I want to go.

Melanie Kay: Kind of actually segues nicely. How has the camp changed over the years? You've already mentioned a couple of things, but if there's anything else you wanted to mention.

Rabbi David Fine: Well, there's the physical space, and then there's traditions. So the camp has now been around long enough that kids who went to camp have become the staff in those early years. There weren't. You know, it's. My son was a staff member. I didn't create the camp for him to get a job. But as the camp director, David Berkman said, it's a good thing your son is good at this. There are no camp traditions that dance the way Birkat Hamazon is sung. It's that there is a faculty commission Mission that thinks about the theme for camp and then puts it into place for me there. I often say that I see ghosts when I come to camp. People look at me askance, like you're a rabbi. What do you mean, seeing ghosts? And that's because I see things that are no longer there. I see the buildings where there used to be a silo and a yurt. I look inside the villa, which is theirs, and I see the downstairs, which is the staff lounge and some bunks. And I see what used to be washing machines, on a cement floor. You know that the staff lounge used to be the home of Randy Parsons, the camp's first caretaker. Randy is no longer with us. I look at the photo of Randy every time I go to camp, and I miss him. I hear his voice. He was the first person who was a resident from the URJ at the camp, whom we met when we went to look at a property in Granite Falls, but all of these things I think make for. That's part of the beauty of camp. You come back to the same place every summer, and there are a few things that are new and so many that are familiar, including the people. And it's striking because I think a generation at camp is three years. And, you know, people will talk, oh, I was there, but even staff and then staff grow, grow out and move on.

Melanie Kay: Sounds like it's constantly evolving. That's right. That's right.

Rabbi David Fine: It. Good. Good.

Melanie Kay: This is an oral history that will be available to future generations to read and listen to. Is there anything you would like to say to future generations about Judaism in Snohomish County during your time there?

Rabbi David Fine: Well, I think what I'd say is, as somebody who now lives in Seattle, Snohomish County, let me start again. I won't start my sentence with Snohomish County is, I'd like to say with smaller congregations. You're not going to be a congregation of 4 or 500. Be really good at who you are. Embrace it. Grow. You may not be able to grow in numbers, but grow as an organism that is with your relationships. Grow in meaning. Grow spiritually. What does it mean to learn about this tradition when you're there to gain the wisdom that you can take to the world and have an impact, increasingly so, you know, take your values out to the world. Numbers. They're interesting. You can't ignore them. Really. Here we here's where I was going to start. You're in Snohomish County. You're not in King County. Be really good at being in Snohomish County. I still joke that I used to be the Snohomish Araba, which of course has that Yiddish sound, but it just, you know, it's been really good at that. There are Jews scattered all over the county. That was something I marveled at. I would find Jews or Jews would find me everywhere. The community is so much larger than the building. We need a place to gather. And I'm hoping that here we are talking in May of 2022. The building, in its expansion, is potential. I'm hoping the others listen to this, that the building in fact happened and grew, that people and people were excited by it. Be really good at whether our numbers go up. The numbers go down. We are not the distant cousin of those larger places in Seattle. We are the Jews of Snohomish County. That's a powerful thing. And we need each other. We experience things that others don't. Well, there may not be the Secret, you know, like The Sting, the old movie, like The Secret Signal. It's something that we share with each other. I guess I'll quote my late in-laws, Morty and Chaya Burstein, who would say. It's a biblical quote. Be strong and courageous.

Melanie Kay: I love that. You kind of spoke a little bit about this, but if there's anything you want to add, feel free. What hopes do you have for the Jewish community in Snohomish County moving forward?

Rabbi David Fine: What hopes do I have for the Jews, the Jewish community in Snohomish County, going forward? Hope and optimism differ. And that optimism is just. Well, I wish it would happen. And I think it'll happen. I want it to happen. Part of hope is working for it. It's making those dreams come true. As Theodore Herzl, right. Easy to quote, right? (Hebrew) And so if you really want it, it's not just a story. It's not just a legend. All my hopes are that. The Jews, the Jewish community of Snohomish County, continue to look to each other to respect each other, respect those differences in geography in outlook, and continue to partner and collaborate with each other and with the larger non-Jewish community. To go back to the comments just before that, we

continue to grow even if our numbers don't increase. an What an opportunity. Embrace it.

Melanie Kay: Absolutely. Is there anything else you would like to say? This is the last question of the interview. Is there anything else you would like to add about Judaism in Snohomish County?

Rabbi David Fine: Oh, it's Judaism in Snohomish County. But I'm going to revert to my go to's. And they are. It's a yes and not an either-or. Yes. And we can do this rather than a yes, but or no but. Yes, and we can build on that. The second one of my favorite books professionally is the book Getting to Yes. Let's think of what our interests are rather than what positions we have been insisting on. And let's build on those interests with others, because I think that's where we're going to connect with the Jews of Snohomish County. And frankly, those who are not Jewish are considering those who are our allies. There's such potential here.

Melanie Kay: Rabbi Fine. Thank you so much for your time. And thank you for taking the time to speak with me today. We really appreciate it so much. I'll go ahead and finish the recording. Unless there's anything else that you would like to put on there.

Rabbi David Fine: So are we still recording even as we speak?

Melanie Kay: I can turn the recording off now.

Rabbi David Fine: No, no, I want it to be.

Melanie Kay: Okay, go right ahead.

Rabbi David Fine: And that is, I'm going to say hello to family. So here it is. It's May 2022. My wife Beth, my daughter Naomi, my son Avi, and my daughter-in-law, Erin. And of course, to Maya. Maya, you're just over 19 months old. And I want to know that when I look at you, I see the future. And you're going to carry that future. And connecting this way is so, so powerful.

Melanie Kay: Oh, that is so sweet. Oh, I just love it.

Rabbi David Fine: And I even mean it.

Melanie Kay: Oh, I love it.

Rabbi David Fine: It's, it's, that is when I see her.

Melanie Kay: Oh. All right, I'm going to go ahead and stop the recording.

Rabbi David Fine: Okay.

Melanie Kay: Okay.