

2011

Interview of Noyma Appelbaum, Ed.D.

Noyma Appelbaum

Daniel Matz

La Salle University, matzd1@lasalle.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.lasalle.edu/histdeptohall>

 Part of the [American Studies Commons](#), [Political History Commons](#), [Social History Commons](#), and the [United States History Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Appelbaum, Noyma and Matz, Daniel, "Interview of Noyma Appelbaum, Ed.D." (2011). *All Oral Histories*. 9.
<http://digitalcommons.lasalle.edu/histdeptohall/9>

This Interview is brought to you for free and open access by the Oral Histories at La Salle University Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in All Oral Histories by an authorized administrator of La Salle University Digital Commons. For more information, please contact careyc@lasalle.edu.

FIELD NOTES

Interviewee: Noyma Appelbaum

Interviewer: Daniel Matz

Interview date: March 10, March 17, 2011 (afternoon)

Interview location: Mr. Appelbaum's home in the East Oak Lane section of Philadelphia, PA

Field notes written on March 30, 2011 and revised on April 23, 2011

The Interviewee:

Noyma Appelbaum was born on May, 15, 1928 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. He was born to immigrant parents, his father being Lithuanian and his mother Ukrainian. Mr. Appelbaum's parents were politically radical and had involvement in the labor union movement of the early 20th century. His mother, Esther Kaminsky, was involved in the organizing of workers in the textile industries of New York City and Philadelphia. His father, Meyer Appelbaum was pivotal in organizing workers in Philadelphia's auto industry and, according to the interviewee, was a founding member of Philadelphia's Communist Party.

Noyma Appelbaum was heavily influenced by his parents' involvement in leftist politics. In his youth he participated in protests and became a member of the Young Pioneers, a youth communist group similar to the Boy Scouts of America in organization but not ideology. He attended Philadelphia schools and eventually went to Temple University with the help of scholarships. During his work there on a journalism degree he worked for the Philadelphia edition of *The Daily Worker*, a Communist Party supported newspaper. Mr. Appelbaum spent his post college years working in industrial Philadelphia in an attempt to organize factory workers. A major political shift occurred for Mr. Appelbaum in 1956 as Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev exposed the atrocities of the heavy handed rule of former Premier Josef Stalin. His disenchantment with communist policies matched that of many Communist Party members.

Mr. Appelbaum returned to Temple University in an effort to receive a teaching degree. He goes on to work for many years in Philadelphia area education and eventually works toward his doctorate in education. He and his wife have lived in the East Oak Lane of Philadelphia for over 40 years.

The Interviewer:

I, Daniel Matz (b. 1969 in Louisville, KY), spent most of my youth in Tampa, Florida. I received a BA in Social Studies Education from the State University of New York at Buffalo State College. Since my move from Florida in 1992 I have lived in Austin, Texas, New York City, and rural Western New York. Presently, I am in seventh year of teaching social studies at Cinnaminson High School in Southern New Jersey and am working towards my Master's in History at LaSalle University. I have lived in the Fishtown section of Philadelphia for seven years

Background:

I have always had an historical interest in political fringe groups in United States history. Upon the recommendation of two of my professors at LaSalle University, Dr. Barbara Allen and Dr. Lisa Jarvinen, I contacted Phil Seitz, a historian at Philadelphia's Cliveden House. Mr. Seitz in turn put me in touch with Noyma Appelbaum whom he suggested as eager to tell his story as a former member of the Communist Party. This interview was an assigned component of Dr. Allen's graduate level oral history course at LaSalle University.

Description of the Interview:

Mr. Appelbaum quickly responded to my February 17, 2011 email regarding the possibility of interviewing him. Initially we discussed interviewing both he and his wife, Ellen. Upon our first meeting at the East Oak Lane Appelbaum residence on February 21 it became apparent that Mr. Appelbaum alone would be sufficient to fulfill the assigned two-hour interview. He presented himself as pleasantly talkative and questions I guided to his wife were at times redirected to Mr. Appelbaum. On this visit I asked questions that would help me better determine where I should direct my research for the interview. Most of this research was done online but time was spent at the Temple Urban Archives as well. Another important part of my research proved to be Mr. Appelbaum's unfinished memoir.

The first part of the interview took place on March 10, 2011 in the Appelbaum's East Oak Lane home. It is a very large home filled with collections of sculptures, original paintings, and an eccentric but pleasing mix of antique and modern furniture. Each of the rooms I was in in the home seemed to be peppered with books of all types. We had planned to conduct the interview in their living room but Mr. Appelbaum's son gives banjo and guitar lessons in an adjoining room. We moved upstairs into a room that served as Mr. Appelbaum's study. This was a smaller room and the most isolated room from the rest of the house. It seemed the best choice to avoid noise from the other rooms. He sat at his desk and I sat next him in a chair with the recorder on his desk.

Mr. Appelbaum has a way that makes you feel comfortable and I was instantly relaxed in the process. He is a man who believes in the story he has to tell and knows the story he wants to tell which leads to answers that are in depth. While I had a long list of questions to ask him I only needed to use a minimal amount because he would answer a number of questions in his detailed responses. This interview lasted for nearly one and a half hours and we planned to continue the following week. March 17th saw us complete the interview in the same room under generally the same circumstances minus the banjo lesson that accompanied our first session. That interview also last about one and a half hours.

Mr. Appelbaum is a quiet but charismatic character. He comes across as an everyman intellectual with his common Philadelphia accent and vernacular. As previously mentioned, he is working on a memoir and believes, as do I, that he has a relevant story to tell. This interview scrapes the surface of his life as an activist who as a child attended a Scottsboro Boys Trial protest march in the 1930s and Reverend Martin Luther King Jr.'s March on Washington in 1963. His discussion regarding his disillusionment with the Communist Party was striking as his entire body language changed. He becomes slumped over and sad. This obviously had a major effect on his life. His continued dedication to activist causes is testament to his drive and tenacity.

While I do believe this interview was a success, this being my first lengthy interview, I did face challenges that I could improve upon with further practice. My questioning could have been more direct. I believe I too often affirmed what the interviewee was saying.

This was the first interview I have done and it was a required component of a graduate level course. I got much more out of it than I expected. I was more than satisfied with the experience. Mr. Appelbaum's story and the story of American communists is a story that often gets overlooked. I would consider conducting more interviews of former Communist Party members possibly toward my work with my master's thesis.

Mr. Appelbaum will be receiving a copy of the transcript and a thank you note.

Note on recording:

This recording was made on a Tascam DR-03 Ultra Portable Digital Audio Recorder. The recording was made with the built in microphone which I found to be sufficient. Upon completion of the interview, I downloaded the recording to my MacBook Pro into .wav format. NCH Express Scribe Software was used for transcription. The interview was listened to at a slower speed in order to transcribe it and then played back again at normal speed for editing. Once transcribed and edited, the audio files were burned onto a data disc in .wav and .mp3 formats.

Editing the Transcript:

My editing decisions, based on editing decisions used by Dr. Barbara Allen, included:

- 1) eliminating repeated words unless they were contextually necessary
- 2) eliminating false starts and words commonly used to wrap up a story, unless either seemed significant
- 3) fragmented or run-on sentences were corrected only if necessary in maintaining the narrative, often a dash is used to improve readability
- 4) eliminating phrases frequently used by the interviewee such as “so,” “apparently,” and “and so on” unless they were contextually necessary
- 5) placed a time stamp on each page (due to the detailed and lengthy answers by the interviewee time stamps are included at the top of a page where there is an extended answer)
- 6) placing information about pauses and visual cues or nonverbal sounds in brackets
- 7) using brackets to indicate non verbal sounds such as coughs and laughter
- 8) providing limited additional explanation in footnotes
- 9) indicating inaudible words or phrases with “_____ (??)”
- 10) affirmations of listening to the interviewees comments by the interviewer such as “yeah,” “okay,” and “I see” were omitted for the sake of flow.