

**JEWISH HERITAGE COLLECTION  
COLLEGE OF CHARLESTON  
Mss. 1035-052**

Interviewees: Edward Victor Mirmow (b. 1930 in Orangeburg, SC)  
Rose Louise Rich Aronson (b. January 7, 1922, Camden, SC;  
d. January 22, 2004, Orangeburg, SC)  
Harold (Hal) Marion Aronson (b. February 3, 1919, Lanes, SC)

Place of Interview: Orangeburg, South Carolina

Date of Interview: February 15, 1996

Interviewers: Rhetta Aronson Mendelsohn  
Dale Rosengarten

Transcriber: Sherry Moon

Date of Transcription: March 16, 1999

Editors: Lilly Siblesz/ Alyssa Neely

Dates of Editing: November 10, 2002/May 3, 2010

Proofreaders: Harold and Rose Aronson / Eve Cassat/Alyssa Neely/Edward  
Mirmow/Rhetta A. Mendelsohn

Dates of Proofing: April 22, 2003 / October 20, 2006/May 4, 2010/May 14, 2010/  
June 16, 2010

---

**Note:** See also Harold Aronson's February 15, 1996 interview and Rose Louise Rich Aronson's February 16, 1996 interview.

---

**Begin Tape 1, Side A**

DR: I'm going to ask you to backtrack a little, because I didn't catch any of that stuff. Would you describe the community that you—

EM: Let me just throw in one name for you. There was a fellow named Sol Abrams that left here.

RLA: Yes, I got him.

HA: She knew him.

DR: I know his widow.

EM: Lawyer up in Greenville or somewhere.

DR: Did he?

EM: Yes, he died a couple of years ago.

RM: More than a couple of [years].

EM: You know, with me, a couple of years can be forty [laughs].

RLA: Passes pretty quick.

DR: It's got to be at least fifteen, because I've known Ditty many years and I—

RLA: What do you want me to throw in now?

DR: Well, I just thought that maybe between the two of you, you could describe all those families, those Jewish families who lived in Orangeburg.

RLA: All right. You want me to start, and then Edward could come in?

DR: Sure.

RLA: Okay. Well, this is [about] the Jewish families that were here previously, originally—all right? First, I'm going to start with my own, Rich. Then, secondly, I will go with Mirmow, Wald, Marcus, Abrams, Silver, Rubenstein, the Kohns, the Kahnweilers, the Beckers, the Benjamins, the Bernsteins, the Levys, the Finkelsteins, the Furchgotts, the Loyns— [RM, 6/16/10: the Loyns lived in Elloree.]

.....

RLA: —the Moses, the Klines, the Sorentrues, the Rosens, Vince, the Manheims, the Wilenskys, the Links, the Goldiners, the Levines [ed.: pronounced Le-VIN], the Hurwitzes, and the Pearlstines. Now, I'm going to tell you the ones that had stores. . . . The Riches—Lipman Rich had a store at one time. Joe Marcus had a store. Eddie Mirmow had a store. Yetta Rubenstein had a store. Harry Becker had a store. Herman Benjamin had a store. What was Bernstein's first name?

HA: Mosey.

RLA: Mosey Bernstein had a store. Lester Finkelstein had a store.

EM: Ned Silver had a store.

RLA: I haven't gotten there yet. Arthur Furchgott had a store. Manheims had a store, I guess, in his house. He sold light fixtures in his house. Did the Wilenskys have a store?

EM: Yes, Jake Wilensky had a store.

RLA: Jake Wilensky had a store. The Goldiners—

EM: —never had a store in Orangeburg.

RLA: They didn't? And the Levines, you said, had a store.

EM: Yes. *Two* Levine stores [inaudible].

RLA: Okay, two Levine stores. The Hurwitzes had a store?

EM: Yes, he had a liquor store.

RLA: That's right, he had a liquor store.

HA: Liquor store and little dime store, little notion store.

RLA: And that must be it.

HA: How about the Kohns and the Kahnweilers?

RLA: You said you had another one.

EM: My uncle, Dave Mirmow, also had a store.

RLA: So that's another one.

HA: Kohns and Kahnweilers had a dress shop.

RLA: Yes, I said that.

EM: She named both of them.

RM: All those people had stores when y'all were growing up?

EM: At one time or another.

RLA: Yes, at one time or another, and as far as we know now—Edward just said—the last of the stores is going to be going out of business next month, and that's Barshay and Marcus. Joe Marcus's son, Milton, is running that now.

.....

DR: Apart from the ones you mentioned, what kinds of stores were the other ones?

EM: Most of them were general department stores, although Mr. Becker's were ladies' specialty stores. He had two stores at one time. The Betty Lou Shop? Do you remember the Beckers and the Betty Lou shop?

RLA: Yes, and one was a whiskey store, wasn't it?

EM: Yes, Milton Hurwitz ran a whiskey store. I think Jake Wilensky's was general merchandise. He was down at the low end—that's what he called the Balkan States—that was the lower end of Main Street. [Laughter.]

HA: That's where Mosey Bernstein had his store.

EM: I've got to tell this story [about] Mosey Bernstein. Down in Summerville there was a pond, and one of my uncles took him fishing down there and—something happened—he got out on a log in the middle of this pond, fishing, and he slipped and fell in the pond! And that's what they always call—my boys still tell the story—Mosey's—

HA: Mosey's Pond.

EM: —Log, where he fell. [Laughter.] Daddy swore until he died that it was still there. This happened, probably, in 1910.

HA: [Inaudible] Mosey Bernstein one time at the Elks Club. They had just come from a funeral. I don't know who died in Orangeburg; some Jewish gentleman, elderly, had died. Everybody was talking about it—that they didn't quite understand the funeral—and asking Mosey all about what they did, why they did this and why they did that, and one of them said, "You know, I just don't like a Jewish funeral." Mosey said, "I don't like them either. I'd much rather see a Christian funeral." [Laughter.]

EM: I will tell you one thing that's not about the stores, but it is, at least in my experience, a little bit different about, probably not just Orangeburg, but small towns in the South as far as prejudice is concerned. I never walk down the street and forget that there might be somebody

looking at me, wanting to stick a dagger in my back. But generally speaking, I believe there is far less prejudice against Jewish people in a small town like this than you would find in metropolitan, in larger cities.

HA: We can thank our black population for that.

EM: Probably so.

HA: Everybody has to have somebody they can beat on.

EM: There's never been a question about us joining the country club or that sort of thing. Of course, I've always thought the prejudice generally ran where there was enough of a group to be a threat to somebody else, and I guess maybe there were not enough of us to be a threat or something.

RLA: To anybody.

HA: With all the population they had, I can't think of *one* that ever brought any discredit to the community.

EM: Well, Judge Rosen used to tell me, and he loved to say, "You know, I'm still waiting for the first day that I've got a Jewish fellow standing before me to be sentenced."

RLA: That's true. I bet Joe finds that same thing in Charleston. [Ed.: Rhetta's husband, Joe Mendelsohn.]

HA: Well, just the other week there was an article written in the paper by Austin Cunningham about his experience in the penitentiary—the new jail in Allendale. He voluntarily—before it even opened, just as a public-spirited citizen—he wanted to go through it and sample the experience. One thing, just in passing, the comment about the jail was that there were no Orientals or Jews to speak of as prisoners—never.

EM: Yes, I've always been kind of proud of that. I don't say anything about it, but that's my trump card I keep.

HA: Like I say, with the population that came and went—

RLA: Let Edward tell the stories he told from the beginning—I thought they were great.

DR: Yes, I do too, and also, you say there was no prejudice, but before we started running the tape you described this country club that—

EM: Yes, but that country club is in North Carolina, Highlands Country Club, which is

basically owned by the East Lake Country Club crowd out of Atlanta.

HA: Well, I know our experience right here in Orangeburg, and our parents had absolutely none here in the Orangeburg Country Club.

EM: If they had been prejudiced, for God's sake—for ten years your daddy [ed.: Lipman Rich, Rose's father] kept the country club going. If they had kicked the Jewish people out they'd have closed the country club!

RLA: That's true [laughs].

EM: They didn't have any money, and her daddy could fix things. He fixed everything they broke at the country club, for God's sake. But there never was any thought about that sort of thing that *I* know anything about, although I'm sure there's somebody that doesn't like it.

DR: There's one country club in Columbia that was sort of notorious for not accepting Jews.

EM: Yes. I think Forest Lake has still got a little bit of that in their system, and those downtown eating clubs. The Palmetto did not for a long [time]. A good story about the Palmetto Club in Columbia—this is a true story: the president of the College of Charleston—

DR: Alex Sanders?

EM: —Alex Sanders, he was a senator and Izzie Lourie, who is from St. George originally, was a senator from Richland County. Alex Sanders proposed Izzie Lourie for membership in the Palmetto Club. The membership committee turned him down because he was Jewish. Alex Sanders heard about it and he raised holy hell and wrote them a letter resigning from the club. He said, "You won't take my Jewish friend."

....

EM: They reconsidered and they accepted Izzie Lourie as a member.

RLA: They did?

EM: Yes. Alex Sanders wrote them a letter said, "Well, now that you have reconsidered, I want to withdraw my letter of resignation." They said, "No dice, you're a troublemaker." [Laughter.] That was told as the truth to me.

HA: That's a switch.

DR: Were you thinking about the story about your dad?

RLA: No, I was thinking about the stories that he told us about when his family came over here. I thought the names [inaudible] from the beginning, I thought they were great.

DR: Tell a little bit about where your family came from and what you know about them.

RLA: Yes, and the name.

EM: They were originally Mirmowitz, and there were two branches of the family in Russia on my father's side. Some lived in Odessa and some lived around Moscow. Of course, in one of the pogroms they said, "Get the heck out of here," and they fled the country.

My daddy's mother was—I don't know where they lived, but they were closely related because my grandparents were first cousins; they were Goldiners. They all came to this country too and ended up, in my daddy's family, there were four boys and two girls.

Uncle Dave lived here for a while and left. My daddy's father was Morris, and he had a store here in Orangeburg. Uncle Dave had a store for a while. I have met Uncle Dave's children in Ca—one boy in California. That's when I first came back and asked Daddy about who was this guy, and then he [said], "Oh, they used to live in Orangeburg." For God's sake, I've been trying for twenty-five years to find out if there was any such animal and he wouldn't talk.

But there were two brothers, Aaron and Solomon, who had a store in Summerville. They eventually moved to Pittsfield, Massachusetts, and now the girls live in California, the daughters—one of them. There was a girl that, I think, never got married that maybe had some problem, and then another girl that married a fellow named Harry Suskin that, way back, he was in New York. He was a furrier. They had a daughter who visited here one time who was a first cousin of Daddy's. Daddy did not keep up with his family much. I think Momma might have had a little something to do with that, I don't know.

DR: With keeping up with them, or *not* keeping up with them?

EM: My momma changed her name legally, but she never forgot what her name was, and it was all *her* family, as far as she was concerned. I never heard her say a negative word about his family, but all the attention went toward her family.

RLA: Which was the Blatts, Sol Blatt?

DR: Right. Your mother was—

EM: She was a Blatt.

DR: And what relation to the famous Sol Blatt?

EM: That was her brother. My cousin lives in Charleston. [He] is the judge, retired.

DR: He is the younger Sol Blatt.

EM: Yes. That's my only first cousin.

....

EM: When the Mirmowitz crowd left—and there were, I guess, four boys and two girls and their parents—when they fled across Russia, they spent a night somewhere with the Goldiner cousins. My grandfather, Marsh Mirmow, and—her name was Tannie—Tannie Goldiner, my grandmother—

RLA: That's who Tannie Benjamin's named for, right?

EM: Yes.

....

EM: —they met and fell in love, and eventually got married. [They] sent my Aunt Fanny Goldiner, who chaperoned until they got married. They must have gotten married in New York. They originally settled in New Haven where my great-grandfather, I believe, ran a confectionary store of some kind. Somebody got sick and they were recommended to come to Summerville because of the tea gardens. It was asthma—the air—breathe the tea leaves. Anyway, some of them stayed.

The way they came here [was] Uncle Solomon and Uncle Aaron had a store in Summerville. Uncle Solomon had the store. My grandfather Morris had the store in Orangeburg. Uncle Aaron peddled between the two stores for a good while. For some reason, I don't know why, Uncle Dave was in Orangeburg and had a store for a while. Daddy said he and Uncle Dave didn't get along with *his* father, but that isn't why he left here. He probably didn't make a living down here. He eventually went to Pittsfield, Massachusetts, and ran a store up there.

DR: These are all general merchandise stores?

EM: Yes.

DR: Do you know who supplied them?

EM: Whoever quoted the cheapest price! [Laughter.]

RLA: That's a good answer [laughs].

EM: I've heard Daddy talk about the Baltimore Bargain House. He used to make buying trips about twice a year to New York. I think there was a fair amount of wholesaling out of Charleston and Savannah.

HA: I think that was the primary source, the Charleston jobbing houses. You had the Solomon

family, and what was the other one on—

RLA: Hal and I used to go down with Hal's mother and daddy. We'd take them down there on Sunday and they'd buy stuff and then we'd go have lunch.

RM: Hyman's [inaudible].

EM: Yes.

DR: Hornick.

HA: Hornick and Hyman and—

EM: Charleston was a big wholesale center.

[RA, 2003: Area on Meeting Street.]

HA: My father used to go there once or twice a month, maybe, and do the buying there. The salesmen from these jobbing houses would travel around the various stores in the small towns. I know that was the first job that my father had, it was in Charleston working for one of these stores, and he did a little traveling around. Then he finally opened up his own store in Lanes. He was only sixteen then.

RM: Wait a minute now, finish with the Orangeburg part.

DR: I want to get the whole story on tape because I think it's phenomenal, the ages that these guys came over.

EM: That same sort of thing is how my grandfather, my mother's father, ended [up] in Blackville. He was in New York for a while and, when he came down here, he peddled. [He] would load up in Charleston, peddle inland, then go work his way back to Savannah, load up in another supply house down there, and peddle back inland. He saw the need for a store in Blackville and settled in Blackville.

DR: What was his name?

EM: It was Minnenblatt, and they dropped the Minnen, not legally, they just quit— My grandmomma told us the legal change of name they went through was, one day Grandpoppa said, "Momma, Minnenblatt doesn't sound right in America, so we'll be Blatt from now on."

RLA: Oh, really?

EM: That's right! That was the legal change they went through.

RLA: Minnenblatt was the name?

EM: Minnenblatt. And the name Minnen, probably some of them kept; dropped the Blatt and kept the Minnen. Some of them dropped the Minnen and kept the Blatt.

DR: What was his first name?

EM: Nathan.

DR: We saw the grave today, didn't we?

EM: No, Grandpoppa is buried in Augusta. No Blatts, except my grandmother had an infant—we never could find it—but it's somewhere over there.

RLA: In this cemetery?

EM: Yes.

DR: We saw it.

RLA: We saw it.

RM: But that was Nathan.

EM: Might have been named Nathan.

DR: Might have been the son of Nathan.

RLA: Nathan and Molly.

EM: Yes, Nathan and Molly were my grandparents.

RLA: Well, they had a son and there's a little grave over here.

EM: Well, I have found it before, but Barbara and I went through there one time, and went through it with a fine-toothed comb, and I couldn't find it again. Where was it? What part of the cemetery?

RLA: I can show it to you.

EM: I thought it was on that side street, not in the Jewish part in the back.

DR: No.

RM: It's in the Jewish part.

DR: It was near the Nussbaums, I think. I remember it being near that area.

RM: It's on the back [inaudible] way down there by itself, wasn't it?

EM: All right. I'll go back and look. We went looking one time. Grandmomma told me that she had a child buried over here.

RLA: It said Nathan and Molly—

EM: Blackville was about thirty-three miles—it is twenty-nine now because they've got a new road—but it was thirty-three and they, I guess, came here some.

RLA: Y'all asked me who that was, and I finally said, "I remember Molly."

EM: That would have been my mother's brother or sister.

DR: An infant.

EM: Yes, an infant. I think he had diphtheria, but I'm not sure of that. Anyway, he died.

RM: I don't even remember any of these—very few of these stores y'all are talking about, but your daddy got out of the retail business. I don't remember him ever being in that either; he was retired from that.

EM: '38 or '39, he got out.

HA: He got out. I've only been here fifty-two years, and most stores were in the process of folding up and leaving about that time.

EM: I guess at one time the whole Main Street was dominated by Jewish merchants.

HA: That's right. One by one they—

DR: By the Second World War—you came in the '40s?

HA: I came here in '45.

DR: By then, it was already—

HA: Those stores were ninety percent here; still here.

RLA: Finkelstein's was still here. Finkelstein's hasn't been too long gone—how about eight years, maybe? Not that long—about five years.

HA: Just ten years ago you had a Finkelstein's and—

EM: You had Marcus—Milton Marcus.

RLA: Marcus.

HA: Marcus [HA, 2003: and Barshay] and—

RLA: Rubenstein

HA: Rubenstein and—

RLA: Yetta [Rubenstein] was still there.

HA: That's right. Every little town had their Jewish stores. Rubenstein's was in Ellore. Nussbaum—that's a name you haven't gotten yet—he was in Branchville, and Ness was in Denmark.

EM: Harold just closed *his* store about five years ago.

RLA: Yes.

HA: That's right.

EM: I think Harold's a turncoat. I call those turncoats [laughter], when they join another church. I think Harold—he used to talk about the Methodist Men's Club over there in Denmark. I don't know whether he is a Methodist now or not. [Laughter.]

HA: [Laughs.] No.

DR: This is a Ness?

EM: N-E-double-S, over in the little town of Denmark. They probably had a nice store.

RM: I think what y'all said was that there was a significant number of Jewish stores, and a significant number of Jewish families here when you were growing up, and you never felt any prejudice from the community. Is that what you said?

RLA: Right, yes.

RM: And you were not excluded from anything—

RLA: Anything.

RM: —right on through the memberships to the country club.

DR: What I'd like to know is, how this happened. How did a town like Orangeburg manage to accumulate, really, a substantial Jewish population?

RLA: And then lose them.

DR: The losing them I think I understand a little bit, because I know some of that generation. But you say your family came originally because there was considered to be a healthful environment in Summerville.

EM: That's right. Yes, that's what it was.

DR: Okay. So how did they get to Orangeburg?

EM: I don't know. I know how those two brothers got to Summerville. I don't know why they picked out Orangeburg for—

RLA: I guess because it was a wealthy farming community [inaudible]—

HA: At one time, it was a good business town but, as the roads got better, Columbia became closer.

EM: They bypassed us. That's why they go to Columbia and—

HA: Charleston is closer now because of the highways.

RLA: Dale, at one time, Orangeburg was the bigger of the area here. I mean, we had Elloree, St. Matthews, Denmark, Blackville, Barnwell, where some of these people could have gone, but maybe preferred— As Rhetta said, everybody at the temple came from these little towns— Bowman.

EM: There was one Jewish family in every little town, and a good many of them in Orangeburg.

HA: Right.

DR: Now, your family, the Riches, was a long-established family.

RLA: Yes, they were here.

RM: But they came from Charleston to St. Matthews, and then to Orangeburg.

EM: There was a Rich—a cousin to your daddy that was a lawyer. What was that guy's name?

HA: And Savannah.

RLA: Who's this?

EM: He was a lawyer.

RLA: Gus.

EM: Gus Rich. Daddy used to talk about him and, of course, there was Morris, who was your daddy's cousin; he was a dentist.

....

EM: Morris was a character now, I'll tell you.

RM: That's Reka's daddy we're talking about. [RM, 6/16/10: Reka Rich DeMasi.]

RLA: Yes, Reka's daddy.

DR: What I'm getting at is maybe the Riches, having been here, maybe they either put up people that were new or—

RLA: This is kind of interesting: at one time, there was a short street and, of course, back then, people lived close to town, [laughs] because you didn't live far out anyway. But Hampton Street was close to town; it was a little, small street. My grandmother lived on one corner—the Riches. Next to her lived the Moseses. Next to her lived the Finkelsteins. Across the street lived the Kohns and the Kahnweilers. Next to the Kohns and the Kahnweilers lived the Manheims.

EM: That was like Tel Aviv on Hampton Street for crying out loud—so many Jewish people. The one or two people who weren't Jewish, they spoke Yiddish in self-defense. They had to learn.

When Aunt Fanny got married, Miss Cornelia Bryant—she was a Smoak; she played the piano and lived next door—the music for Aunt Fanny's wedding in her house was, they opened the windows in her house and they opened the windows in Miss Camelia's house and she played the piano from next door. [Laughter.] That was one of the Baptists. The Smoaks were Baptists. But that was the music playing for Aunt Fanny's wedding.

DR: So most of these families you've just mentioned on Hampton Street sound like German names?

RLA: Yes, I think so.

EM: Manheim was certainly a German name.

HA: Predominantly they were German.

EM: Yes. The Pearlstines were landsman to my family from some part of Russia.

HA: There were Russians, but mainly they were German.

EM: Russians and Germans, I would say. Orangeburg was settled, probably, by more Germans than anything else and, I guess, German Jews as well as gentiles came.

DR: In your parents' generation, it was more from Russia.

EM: Yes. That crowd was—all my family came from Russia.

HA: And mine. I would tell you about my uncle Leif, but Rhetta will jump out the window.

RM: I promise not to jump out the window.

HA: You promise you won't jump out the window?

DR: She won't fall too far, anyway.

HA: My uncle Leif, this was—

RM: Get it over with.

HA: —several hundred years before Columbus. He set sail from Norway in a long boat with a bunch of Vikings. You didn't know this either, did you, Eddie?

EM: Not so far. [Laughter.]

HA: Well, they sailed over and they skirted Greenland and got lost in the fog. For months, they were eating nothing but salted fish and raw fish, and had an awful case of the hiccups. When they landed in Newfoundland, and went up the St. Lawrence Seaway, the natives, they came and wanted to know, "Where did you come from? What is your name?" So my uncle Leif there told them, "My name is Leif," and he had the hiccups so bad, he tried to say Leif Aronson, but it came out as Leif Erickson, and every time he tried to say Aronson, it came out Erickson. So history

records that Leif Erickson came over, [laughter] so there we lost the heritage of our name. [Laughter.] Oh my gosh, she recorded that.

DR: It's on tape for posterity. Do you think there was any resistance or antagonism between these settled German families and these newer Russian families?

EM: I never heard any of my family describe anything like that. I don't believe so, either among the Jews or the gentiles—I mean either German crowd. I don't believe so. Do you? Did you ever hear anything of it?

RLA: No.

EM: I never heard any tales along that line.

RLA: There's a *big* Lutheran congregation here, and that's all German.

RM: Well, maybe they felt comfortable here with the language.

EM: Maybe. I don't know why, but I never heard of any conflict from the Germans—

DR: There wasn't a sense of a class difference of the Germans, who were established and better-to-do, if not wealthy—

EM: Too busy all fighting the shvartzers [ed.: Yiddish for African-Americans] to—

HA: Yes. I know what you're getting at. In New York, the first Jewish influx was all Germans, and they became well-established and wealthy in so many cases. When the later wave of Russian immigrants came, they were the poorer relations, and they were embarrassing sometimes to the wealthy German Jews that were there a generation earlier. That's a known fact, and books have been written about it. But here in Orangeburg, I don't think there was any of that.

EM: Among the Jewish portion of those, there might have been a few more of German background, but the Beckers, the Benjamins were from the Russian side. The Mirmows were from the Russian side.

RLA: Where did the Kohns come from?

DR: Germany.

HA: The Kohns were German, right.

EM: What about Kahnweiler, I wonder?

HA: German.

RLA: He was a loner. He came here from Seattle, Washington, I think it was, and she wouldn't go back with him. Anyway, she had to stay in that store and run that store. He lived right there with Adeline and Bertha, the wife, and I think it was too much family for him—that was his problem.

EM: What was that [inaudible]. Rose—

RLA: —Henry.

EM: Kahnweiler.

RLA: Rose Henry—that was the daughter.

EM: Yes. I've got to tell that story. It's one of the great stories—about when she got pregnant.

RLA: Yes. [Laughing.] I told them that.

EM: You already told them that story?

RLA: I told them that in the cemetery. [Laughing.]

RM: She didn't tell it on the tape.

EM: [Sounds like "Stevie"] Bryant used to tell me that story. Said she left town after that and never came back.

DR: Tell the story from the beginning.

EM: Well, the story was—I forgot—what was that guy's name? A real reprobate. This was a nice girl, and a real reprobate of a bum around town.

RLA: Jeffords.

EM: Was it Jeffords? Anyway, he got her pregnant and goes to her mother, who was kind of the matriarch of that family then, and tells Ms. Bertha Kahnweiler, "Miss Bertha, I want to do the right thing. I'm the one that got her pregnant. I'm willing to marry her." She rolls up and said, "Look here, you so-and-so, I'd rather have ten little bastards running around in my family than one son of a bitch like you." [Laughter.]

RLA: No, I hadn't heard that.

DR: Now, you have to tell your story. That's a different story.

RLA: The part that mother always told me was that when she got pregnant, she was scared to tell her mother. They lived on Hampton Street, and on the corner of Hampton Street was the fire department. So she went down to the fire department and told the firemen. Now, that was a good group to tell. Every one of those went home and told somebody—

EM: So it got to Miss Bertha that way.

RLA: Yes. So, then she had an abortion; Dr. Shecut gave her an abortion. She left here and never came back. Never came back. That's funny, though. That's what [inaudible] said she told him. [Laughing.]

DR: Which of the daughters was this? Was it Rose?

EM: Rose Henry.

RLA: Rose Henry.

EM: She married—

RLA: —a man from New York.

EM: I am going to tell you his name in just a minute. Well, it will come back. When we built our cable system, they were manufacturers and we bought equipment from them. They called it Vikoa, V-I-K-O-A. His name was Artie Baum, B-A-U-M. [He] had two boys named Bobby and Eddie.

DR: Well, you just mentioned Dr. Shecut?

RLA: Yes.

DR: Did we see that grave also? I saw a grave S-H-E—

RLA: —C-U-T, yes.

EM: He delivered me.

DR: Now, is that a Jewish—

RLA: No. It was right before you get over there.

DR: Because I thought that would be too much of a coincidence.

EM: He was not.

DR: Do you know what a shokhet is?

RLA: Yes.

....

DR: In this early community where did people go to synagogue? Did they observe?

RLA: . . . . What happened was, I really kind of got behind it when Rhetta and Carol were little, because I really wanted them to do something. We had been going to Columbia, and I got tired of going to Columbia every Sunday. I heard that Teskey was here.

HA: Jimmy Teskey.

RLA: Jimmy Teskey. I had never seen him, and I called him and I asked him. He had moved here from Savannah—

HA: New York area and he—

EM: He had run manufacturing plants in little small towns around here.

RLA: He was married to a Christian girl. He had been married once to a Jewish girl, I think, and he got a divorce. He was married to a Christian girl who had taken Judaism. And yes, they were delighted and they would help, so we got up the temple. It was fun! We had bazaars and all kinds of stuff. We worked real hard and got the temple, but it never worked. The people that wanted the Reform books—and then some wanted the Conservative books. Then, oh, it was nothing but just bedlam. Teskey ran the whole show. I mean, he had to get up, and he had to—

EM: Of course, they gave him his podium and that's all he wanted.

RLA: That's right. That's exactly right. He stood up with the robes and he thought he was the rabbi. He'd give these *long* sermons that nobody was interested in and it just got so it was just—

RM: But before that, when you were growing up, what did you do? You obviously were confirmed, but that was—you went out of town? You went to Columbia, Summerville?

RLA: I was confirmed in Camden, but when I was a little girl, I went to Kate Marcus's, Milton Marcus's mother. She was a very religious person, and a *lovely* person. Bet you don't remember her, do you?

EM: Yes. She had a daughter named—

RLA: —Miriam and Helene.

EM: We had some classes, but Bernie Becker broke it up. [Laughter.] That Schwartz boy, Helene Marcus, Bernie, and I, they were teaching us and it didn't last.

RLA: Well, this didn't last either. I went there just a little while. I went back and forth to Camden all the time because my grandfather lived there and my aunt lived there. When they said they were getting up a confirmation class, I just went there and went through the course with them. That's how I happened to be confirmed in Camden. That's how I got in on that.

DR: But most Orangeburg families went where? Where was their house of worship?

EM: Probably half of them didn't go anywhere, like me.

HA: Didn't they meet in some people's homes?

RLA: Well, that's what I said. I met with Kate Marcus, and he said he met with some people a little bit, but—

RM: What about services for the holidays and things?

EM: You would have to go to Columbia or Charleston.

RLA: If you went. We always read them at my house.

EM: My grandparents used to, in Blackville. Grandpoppa took a course in kosher killing and all that, so we could have some chicken. He went to Augusta and learned. Shucks, in my house, we just forgot about—[laughs]. We judge by how good it tastes. That was our rule.

DR: So people either—

RLA: Just didn't. The Jewish people here, I would say, were not very religious, right?

EM: We weren't, we really weren't.

RLA: It's a shame, it really is—

EM: Sumter and Florence have very active groups.

RLA: Yes. I really think we missed a lot growing up here, I really do, simply because there wasn't enough—with all these people here; all these people here are kind of old people. I mean, [laughing] they don't have any young children.

EM: And they were competitors! These merchants, they were competitors.

RM: All these families, none of them had—where were their children? There were no other people your age?

RLA: Well, one boy that went to school with me the whole way was Sol Abrams.

EM: Yes.

RLA: He went all through school with me. That was the only Jewish person I know that went through school with me.

HA: Alec Becker was [inaudible].

RLA: No, Alec Becker was older than me. I never went to school with Alec Becker.

EM: There weren't many young people—

RLA: Was the Becker girl your age, Margie Becker?

EM: No. Bernie was the other boy. Bernie was two years older than I am. Margie Becker was Alec's wife.

RLA: There was a daughter. What was her name?

EM: Fay.

RLA: Yes.

EM: Fay is way younger than I am.

HA: She was a child.

RM: The earlier part of the 1900s, there were a lot of people here—

RLA: Yes.

RM: —but by the time you were even in school, Momma—

EM: They were fading. There wasn't another generation.

RM: —there were no people *your* age.

RLA: No.

HA: The kids grew up, went to college, and they never came back to Orangeburg.

RM: So, it's really Granny's generation that there were a lot of people here.

RLA: Right.

EM: A good number, I would say.

RM: And in your generation there were fewer, and by mine there was virtually nothing.

EM: [In] my high school class, not only was I the only Jewish person, but there had not been anybody since Bernie Becker finished about two years before. I had to go all the way back to about the eighth grade to find another Jewish person. So I was really about the only Jewish person in high school the year I graduated.

There just was no young group, for whatever reason. I don't know why, and I don't know why they left here, because you had to go to New York to find real serious prejudice, and it wasn't a whole heck of a lot of that.

DR: Well, maybe if you think about the history of these stores—what became of the stores? Were they successful? Were they *very* successful?

EM: They were generally [sounds like “reasonably”] successful—

RLA: The Furchgotts weren't. They didn't do well. They left here and went to Charleston, didn't they Edward?

EM: Furchgott was either a Charleston or Georgetown name.

RLA: Charleston, I believe.

DR: Charleston.

RLA: I know they live there now. I believe they went to Charleston. Max lives there now.

EM: None of them was a rousing success. Mr. Becker made money one time, but he blew it other places and died a pauper. Daddy wouldn't have closed the store if he was making a killing in it, by any stretch of the imagination, so his store was just moderately—it supported him for forty years—but it was just moderately successful.

RLA: Moseley's was a good store. That was Miss Blumah; she was the Jewish one there.

RM: Finkelstein's lasted until recently.

EM: Finkelstein's made money for—

RLA: Yes.

HA: A very successful store.

EM: In fact, he was making more money when he closed than he'd ever made—

RLA: Yes.

EM: —because I used to represent him. I never saw his dollars and cents but he always told me how he did.

DR: Are you an attorney?

EM: Yes, I was. I retired.

RLA: Well, you're still an attorney.

EM: No. As of January 1<sup>st</sup>, I am retired status, so I can't—

RLA: Really? You did let it go?

EM: Well, you know, I had to keep paying dues. I paid dues for about three years after I retired, just because the rules said. But when you hit sixty-five, you can take a retired status and be— I don't want to resign, because that would sound like I did something wrong. Every time you see about this lawyer put out in the publication resigned, you presume he did something wrong. I probably did, but they didn't catch me.

RM: Well, it sounds like most of the stores disappeared because they were sort of mediocre, anyway—

RLA: That's right.

RM: —and the ones that lasted longer, like Mr. Finkelstein, they were doing very well, and his children ended up in them and staying here.

EM: Well, of course, the one reason he stayed was because he realized he'd better get rid of his son. He worked in it for a little while—that's the junior—but then he had to get him out of there before he broke him.

RLA: Yes. See, he's—they left, and the other son didn't want to—they weren't Jewish anyway, the sons. One . . . he's retired—he must have made some money somewhere—retired in Hendersonville. The other one is in some other kind of business.

EM: One other reason they may have gone is because of what we were just talking about, because there just wasn't that next generation of children to go into the business. If my daddy had kept his store, I might well have worked in it. But most of them—Bernie would have broken Macy's in—Bernie Becker [laughter]—in a year's time, back in their best days. Alec would have broken them in less than that! [Laughter.] The Beckers—their sons just—Bernie was good in the store, he just wasn't good with the money. . . .

DR: So, it wasn't that the children were too successful; it's that they weren't appropriate to be—

EM: That's right.

RLA: No, I don't think it was because they made so much money they could just retire.

HA: Speaking about Bernie there, we heard something really funny not too very many years ago. When a friend of my brother's living in Coral Gables, Florida—

RLA: Well, this was before Bernie died. Edward went to Bernie's funeral.

EM: I went to his funeral.

HA: I know. This was several years ago. This fellow, a friend of my brother's, happened to be on a trip to San Francisco. He came back, and just in a matter of conversation, he mentioned that my brother, Al, had this brother, me, that was here in Orangeburg, South Carolina. He remembered the name, and he met somebody in San Francisco from Orangeburg, South Carolina. This was a charming fellow; he was really well-versed in Oriental rugs. He ended up buying the best bargain of a big Oriental rug, something for a lot of thousands of dollars, and where was the guy from? He was from Orangeburg, South Carolina. What was his name? It was Bernie Becker.

EM: I'll be doggoned!

HA: And that was in Coral Gables, Florida.

RM: Also something else that happened to the Jewish population here is the men in Momma's generation didn't marry Jewish women—

RLA: That's true, too.

RM: —so the kids in *my* years, who could have been Jewish, like Louis Goldiner, were not.

RLA: That's true.

EM: My children will be the same thing. I married a Methodist.

DR: Do you have any brothers or sisters?

EM: No, I'm an only child. From a Jewish standpoint, my family is gone because my cousin will eventually join the Episcopal Church.

HA: You've got three sons and one daughter.

EM: That's right. The name might hang on a little longer because I've got three male grandchildren named Mirmow but, from the Jewish tradition standpoint, that's gone.

DR: And the Blatt's as well.

EM: That's right, because they're all Episcopalian.

RLA: That's sad.

EM: It makes me want to cry.

RLA: It is sad.

EM: There is a great story about my grandmother and me, with the Jewish—my grandmomma always talked to me about—

**End Side A, Tape 1**  
**Begin Side B, Tape 1**

EM: —she said, “Edward, when you grow up I want you to marry a rich, good-looking Jewish girl.” I heard about that rich, good-looking Jewish girl *all* my life! She'd tell me that. I said, “Grandmomma, all the girls that I know are not Jewish; we don't have any Jewish—” “No, Edward, don't marry a shiksa. You marry a shiksa and she's going to get mad at you, and she's going to call you a Jew,” you know, all that sort of stuff, and it went on and on.

Well, she finally got desperate enough. She said, “I'll tell you what I'm going to do”—and this is absolutely true—“When you get ready, if you marry a rich, good-looking Jewish girl, I'll pay you three hundred dollars a week for two weeks.” That was two weeks! [Laughter.] That's *absolutely* true. If I would marry a rich, good-looking Jewish girl.

HA: Well, you probably thought that was a contradiction in terms—good-looking and Jewish. [Laughter.]

RLA: You wanted the money, didn't you?

EM: When I was in the air force and when I was dating Barbara, and it looked like it might be getting kind of serious, I went in there—the last ten years of her life she lived with us, and I got along real good with her—and I said, “Well, old lady, we've got to talk.” She said, “Don't tell me, you've got a girlfriend.” I said, “Well, could be. You loose on that money?” She said, “Well, I don't know. What did I tell you about the girl?” I said, “You want her to be rich.” She said, “Yes. What else?” I said, “Good-looking.” She said, “Yes. What else?” I said, “Nice girl.” She said “Yes. What else?” I said, “Grandmomma, that's about everything I can think of.” She said, “[Inaudible] boy, you forgot the most important thing!” [Laughter.]

DR: Now, this was your Grandmother Blatt.

EM: Blatt, yes, that's right. She was a real, real, real character. She came, actually, to Blackville—we used to say—parcel post. She had married Grandpoppa and had one little baby, one little three or four year old boy. Then he [Grandpoppa] came to this country. He'd made his way to Blackville and saved up enough money and sent [it] to her through that grapevine of rabbis, these itinerant rabbis and all—they somehow communicated.

Grandmomma went to her grave claiming the rabbi stole half the money that Grandpoppa sent, but enough got back somehow—I'll never know how—for her passage to this country. [She] came by boat to New York; separate boat from New York to Charleston. Somebody on the boat spoke enough Yiddish. They put her on the train in Charleston—[on] that original line that went from Charleston to Hamburg, just across the river from Augusta; the first railroad in South Carolina—and they wrote on there “Blackville, South Carolina,” had it pinned on her with her and her little boy, and they got off the train in Blackville. So I always said they just shipped her parcel post. [Laughter.] And that's not an atypical story, I don't think, at all.

HA: No.

DR: About what year do you think that was?

EM: Well, my uncle was born in 1896 in this country, and I'm thinking that it must have been about 1893 or 1894. It would just be my guess.

DR: And he had one older brother?

EM: One older brother who died—Jake. He was at the Citadel during the influenza epidemic. He had a rheumatic heart, and when he got the flu he just didn't survive it. He was in his twenties, but—

DR: That was the influenza of 1918?

EM: Yes, and that's when he died.

DR: What did your grandma do when you told her that your girlfriend wasn't Jewish?

EM: Nothing. She got along fine with my wife.

HA: But you didn't get your three hundred dollars a week.

EM: I didn't get the three hundred dollars a week, I'll promise you that.

HA: For two weeks.

EM: But that is absolutely what she offered me. That was true. Of course, I guess everybody heard this thing about, "Don't marry a shiksa, don't marry a shiksa." Great Lord, they drum that thing in. [Laughter.]

RLA: Well, Hal always tells the story that his daddy always told him to marry a rich girl, so he did. [Laughter.] So, here I am.

HA: Can't do much better than that!

EM: There's a book—I tried to look for it and I'm sure I've got it some—Dr. Thackston gave me. His daddy had had it, old Cap Thackston—*The Jews of Charleston*. That's a pretty good history. Have you seen or had access to that? I had one and I wanted to bring it in case you needed it.

DR: Yes, I have that. The Reznikoff from the 1950s? [Ed.: Reznikoff, Charles. *The Jews of Charleston*. Philadelphia, Jewish Publication Society of America, 1950.]

EM: I believe it's older than that.

DR: Then it would be the Elzas book from 1905. [Ed.: Elzas, Barnett A. *The Jews of South Carolina: from the earliest times to present day*. Philadelphia, J. B. Lippincott Company, 1905.]

EM: Cap Thackston was the superintendent of schools here. He died about 1950, and it came out of his library. His son, who was Daddy's age, gave it to me.

RLA: Yes. He was superintendent of schools when I went to school.

DR: Thackston?

RLA: Yes.

DR: The rabbi of KKBE, who was also an M.D. and an L.L.D., wrote that.

EM: Oh, I see. They never have had a rabbi in Orangeburg. Teskey wishes they would call him a rabbi, but he was a rabbi in his name only.

RLA: We did, at one time—when we had the temple and the temple was really going good—we did have Rabbi Gruber from Columbia, and he came once a month. He couldn't drive; he couldn't see. He had glasses like this—so he couldn't drive. He would come on the bus. Who met him on the bus? Who took him back to the bus? Who did he eat supper with every time he came? It got to be a little bit much, but I was always glad to have him. I found him charming. I liked him a lot, but after a while that got to be an end, too. He finally died. I think we quit having him before he died—

HA: He retired.

RLA: He retired? I forgot.

EM: I believe, didn't he come from the crowd that was the Grubers that were maybe over around Williston or somewhere? I'm not sure.

HA: I don't think so. He came from Canada, I believe.

RLA: Yes, he was Canadian.

HA: He had a very broad New England accent.

RLA: Very smart.

HA: Bostonian.

RLA: Now, Rhetta, you knew him.

RM: Yes, he taught us Sunday school.

RLA: Yes.

DR: When you said you went to synagogue in Columbia, which of the synagogues?

HA: Gruber's synagogue.

DR: Tree of Life.

RLA: Tree of Life.

RM: I think Dale was talking about earlier, when you were younger. Did you go to Columbia

then or was transportation too difficult?

RLA: Yes, we went to Columbia—took you and Carol both.

RM: I'm not talking about us. I'm talking about you, when you were little.

RLA: Oh, I never did go to Columbia—

DR: You went to Camden.

RLA: Yes. I was talking about taking the children. That gets to be a little bit much, too, but people do it.

EM: Don't they have a synagogue still active in Camden?

RLA: I don't—do they?

DR: Beth El meets on the High Holidays, which is a little bit of a struggle, but they do it.

EM: They had a little bit better organized [inaudible]—

RLA: They always had a better group than we did. They always saw eye to eye; all of them could talk the same language. They were all friends. It's a real cute little temple there. Now they have a rabbi that comes during the—

DR: No. Well, on the High Holidays, they might get somebody.

RLA: A student.

DR: But they only meet once a year.

RLA: We did that for a while. Remember, we had a student, Hal?

EM: [Inaudible] from Cincinnati, I believe.

RLA: Yes.

HA: Remember that synagogue in Bryan, Texas?

RLA: Yes.

HA: When I was in the air force, I was in Bryan, Texas—instrument training school. We had just come there. We were only there about eight weeks altogether, maybe ten weeks. But this

fellow, he was a lawyer in the judge advocate's office, and he came to see me, by the name, and invited us to come to the services on Friday night.

They had a little temple, a little synagogue in Bryan that no one had ever used for a number of years, but they opened it up. They were making use of it and meeting for services on Friday night. So, I said yes. We were just married about a month. We went and we joined. They imported what you call "gastronomic Judaism." They had a bunch of food from Austin, Texas, and they brought it down—some women, women's group; they are the movers in the religious portion of it, the women—they brought food down, put on a big spread, and we had a little prayer service. That went on for about three or four weeks.

We went there one night and this couple that got us to go there, they weren't there. I said, "Well, what happened to them?" The next time I bumped into him on the base I asked him, "What happened to you on Friday?" He said, "Well, that's kind of a funny story. My wife's brother, he's in the navy and he was missing. The ship was blown up and he was missing for a long time in the Pacific and we were going to services very regularly." Every Friday night they went to services, you know, and prayed. [He] said, "But they found him. He's okay."

EM: So he didn't need to pray anymore! [Laughter.] Fair weather fan.

HA: By that time, my hitch over there was finished, and we left anyway. [Laughter.] I never saw any of them again.

EM: Nobody's like Jewish people.

RLA: That's right.

EM: [Inaudible.]

RLA: You can usually pick them out.

HA: As long as you're on the inside, you can joke about it.

RLA: That's what Hal always says, that if somebody on the outside jokes about it, he gets furious.

EM: No, that's anti-Semitism, but if we do it—

RLA: That's right

HA: Yes.

EM: It's like Alec Johnston always said, it's all right for him to pick at me about being bald-headed because he doesn't have any hair either. [Laughter.]

DR: Do you think, Mr. Mirmow, if you had had more of the training as a Jew, been a regular synagogue go-er or been bar mitzvahed or whatever, that you would then have decided it was more important to marry within the faith?

EM: I know I would have followed the faith a lot better, but—

RLA: That's a hard question to answer.

EM: Yes. I can't answer that because—

RLA: He's happily married.

EM: Well, that always bothered me a little bit. I can understand where it's coming from, but the idea—arranged marriages just don't go over with me. That is a form of arranged marriage, so I can't answer you. I don't know. I'm sure it would have been more of a conflict.

HA: Let's say this. If you had a more viable Jewish community, several hundred people to go around with, it would have been a different situation.

EM: It would have been. Of course, the only trouble is I only dated one Jewish girl, and that was such a disaster it made me prejudiced. [Laughter.] Was for her too, I'm sure. I can't answer that, because I can't put myself in that—

RLA: Well, it's funny how you meet people, how you're put in a position. I was at college, and one of my best friends that I met was Jean Tucker. She was really a cute girl and I was crazy about her. She was from Kingstree, and she asked me to go home with her, so I went home with her. She called Hal and asked him to come over, she had a visitor. Hal came over, and that's how I met Hal. So you do meet people through other people by going different places. Just like Edward said, you can't tell when you're going to meet somebody and when you're not. I don't know who you went with. I don't know when he started going with Barbara, whether he was in high school or college.

EM: We were in the same high school class, although we didn't date in high school.

DR: But was it important to you to marry a Jew?

RLA: I never thought about it.

DR: Really?

RLA: Yes. I was twenty years old. What do you think about when you're twenty years old?  
[Laughing.]

EM: I had this ongoing thing with my grandmother, but it was more of a joke than anything else.

HA: Well, she just plain lucked up on me. [Laughter.]

RM: I can't believe you never thought about that, because I can remember fighting with Poppa [grandfather], sitting on the porch on Ellis Avenue, over Kenneth Guin. He was afraid I was going to marry Kenneth Guin.

RLA: Yes.

RM: He kept telling me he wasn't Jewish, and I kept saying to him, "Would you rather me marry somebody I love or somebody Jewish?" He never would answer me. I'll never forget that—

EM: These older people, I know what the answer was.

RM: Poppa and I had that over and over again.

HA: That's the first I've heard that he was concerned at all.

RM: And he was *crazy* about Kenneth Guin. They watched football together, and we went over there—remember when they had that TV, the first color TV thing? He was crazy about him, and he was scared that I was going to marry him. I remember that over and over again.

EM: I was scoutmaster when he was in scout troop.

RLA: He was a cute boy. Rhetta went with him forever. I liked him. He was cute as he could be.

RM: I sure did have that conversation with Poppa. It was the maddest we ever got with each other. [Laughter.]

DR: Do you think if you had happened to meet a Catholic or a Methodist or whatever at that point, it would have been all the same?

RLA: I don't know. I'm kind of like Edward; I can't answer the question because I've never been in that position. I have a daughter that married a Catholic, and I love my son-in-law dearly. Religion doesn't come into it with me. I'd love to see my grandchildren be Jewish, but they are not, so I'm not going—the world's not going to come to an end.

DR: Now, your grandchildren could be, that is if she—

RLA: I would like it very much if they were, but—

DR: If your daughter decided that's what she wanted to do, she would have that option.

RLA: But my daughter doesn't care that much about religion.

EM: Dale, my aunt over in Barnwell, who was Jewish and was a music major, as her outlet, she became the choir director—the organist, and later the choir director of the Episcopal church over in Barnwell. One time she went to Columbia—

RLA: This is Sol Blatt's mother he's talking about, the judge's mother.

EM: —went up and spent one week when he would go to legislature. Some rabbi came to see her and said, "Mrs. Blatt, I don't think what you're doing is right." She said, "What do you mean?" [He] said, "I don't think a Jewish woman ought to be the organist and choir director at an Episcopal church. It's not right for a Jewish woman to do that." She said, "Rabbi, you're right." She went back home, and joined the church. [Laughing.]

RM: Oh, my gosh!

RLA: He gave her good advice, didn't he? I knew she joined the Episcopal Church.

EM: She didn't join that until probably 1960 or something like that. She was from Sumter and—

RLA: Green was her name, wasn't it?

EM: —Green—was very active. In fact, her father was a grocer over there, and gave them the property where the synagogue now stands.

RLA: What do they think about that, I wonder?

EM: Well, I heard two people comment about it. Grandmomma, of course. Anytime my aunt would talk about the Episcopal Church, Grandmomma would just [say], "The blame church, the blame church." [Laughter.] That's what she'd call it. She didn't like it—of course she didn't like my aunt anyway. And Momma made a couple of snide remarks about it, because she was jealous. I was crazy about her. She was a very, very nice person. But yes, that caused—

RLA: That's pretty strange though, isn't it?

EM: Even so, I call any Jewish person that joins another church a turncoat. I don't necessarily dislike them for it or disrespect them, but I call them all turncoats.

RLA: You don't see too many Jewish people do that. You see them just drop.

EM: Well, Bubba Ness did it; Harold Ness did it; my cousin Sol did it; and my aunt did it. I didn't call my aunt a turncoat, now.

RLA: Did Bubba Ness—

EM: Yes, he became a Methodist.

RLA: I didn't know that.

EM: Yes.

DR: Did young Sol actually—

EM: Join the Episcopal Church? Yes.

DR: After his mother did.

EM: I don't know whether it was before or after. When he got married, they had an Episcopal minister and a rabbi up in Ithaca, New York. He was in the navy up at Cornell. Carolyn, his wife, was an Episcopalian, *is* an Episcopalian. I can't remember whether he joined before or after his mother. Because, I don't know, you just believe different things.

RLA: Me too. I don't see how you could do that. Now I *really* don't see.

EM: The biggest insult I've ever received in my life—I never forgot it—but after my grandmother died, Polly Atwell made the statement, “Well, now that his grandmother has died”—of course Barbara was a Methodist then—“maybe Hank will join the Methodist church.” I always said, “How anybody could know me and even think I would even consider that,” and I don't mean anything [inaudible]—

RLA: Did you tell her?

EM: I didn't tell her, no. But I remembered it. I'll never—

RLA: Every time you see her, you'll think about it.

EM: My totem pole—she got on a different position on the totem pole, that's all.

DR: People call you Hank?

EM: Yes. Actually, they used to call my daddy Hankie, and somebody got to know me—Miss Madge McMichael—one time, and she started calling me Little Hank and it stuck.

HA: I never knew that.

RLA: I didn't either. I didn't know they called his daddy—

DR: You need a stranger to ask a really dumb question. [Laughing.]

EM: Well, that's where it came from. You know, when I was in law school several people—because they called me Hank—called me Henry because they just assumed that was my name.

HA: I didn't know your daddy was anything but Eddie.

EM: Yes, way back then. In later years, there were really very few people that called him—Mr. James Moss, before he died, always called him Hank. Sometimes Mr. Dwight would, but even somebody that went back as far as Mr. Dwight seldom did. Dr. Thackston never called him anything but Eddie.

RLA: My cousin's named Howard, and they call him Hank. I want to tell you a funny story about Edward's daddy. I think this is hysterical. Edward's daddy had the best sense of humor. He was *really* funny, and he was sick for so long there—I guess maybe six months, Edward? When he was so sick? He had a new little grandson and they named him for—

EM: Morris. That was after Daddy's father.

RLA: —after his father. Eddie—we called his daddy Eddie—was in the hospital, and was kind of delirious; he wasn't thinking straight, and he was furious. He didn't want to be up there; he wanted to go home, and he was mad. He said, "I just don't trust anybody. I don't trust a soul anymore. I don't even trust Morris." Morris was two months old. [Laughter.]

EM: Thank goodness he did get to know that he had one named after his father. He said, "Everybody's turned against me, even Morris."

RLA: "Everybody's mad with me, even Morris." He got so mad with us. It was so funny. [Laughing.] That was cute, though. Bless him. But his daddy was one of the most popular men that ever, if not *the* most popular man, that has ever been in Orangeburg, I would say, really and truly.

EM: I really wish you could—he knew all the history of the Jewish people around.

HA: But you had to pull it out of him.

RLA: But he was entertaining. He could keep you entertained forever. He was so entertaining.

EM: He had a good sense of humor.

RLA: A good sense of humor, a good—a great person. He really was.

DR: Do you have any photographs of your family and/or the store?

EM: No. None of the store. Actually, Momma has got pictures around there of her and Daddy, and we might have a picture of her and Daddy and of his mother. I've never seen a picture of his father. They all died before I was born, but I know she has a picture of his mother and, of course, pictures of them. We've got pictures of her parents.

DR: If, at some point, you would be willing to lend them to us, I'd love to have copies made, which we can use for the archive, and then very carefully identify who is who, so we have—

EM: Okay, I'll try—

RLA: She says all this is going to the College of Charleston and being preserved. So we're going to get our bible—where is it?—the old bible, Edward, that's been in our family, Daddy's family, for a million years, I guess. It is really getting deteriorated.

EM: You know Reka?

DR: I've met her, yes. She was going to volunteer, and I think I'm going to start calling her, and asking her to help out with the project.

RLA: Oh, she was volunteering?

DR: I met her at Rhetta's house and she said she might, yes.

EM: Morris introduced Momma and Daddy. He had known Momma in Blackville because he had relatives over there. And, of course, he knew Daddy over here. Grandmomma said, "Morris asked Becky to marry him and she wouldn't do it, so he married Rae." [Laughter.] Becky was my mother.

RLA: Well, Morris asked a lot of people to marry him. Edna Pearlstine was one of them.

HA: I must say your mother made a good choice.

....

RLA: That was Reka's mother. Rae had never been in New York, and Mother and Daddy took Morris and Rae to New York. Mother and Daddy had a store, and they were going to buy. They asked Morris and Rae would they like to go with them. Mother never got over talking about it. They went, and Rae would look up at the skyscrapers, and Mother would say, "Isn't this fantastic? You just don't realize all this, you know, goes up." And Rae said, "I don't see anything

to it.” [Laughing.] She got so mad with her. She didn’t see anything to anything. [Laughing.] She had to be so sophisticated, I guess, that it was beyond her. Mother said she didn’t blink an eye at anything. [Laughing.] Tried to tell her something she wasn’t interested in, show her something she wasn’t interested in.

DR: When y’all were growing up, did you celebrate Jewish holidays? Did you observe the Sabbath?

RLA: We did. We read the prayers.

EM: I didn’t do that, but I used to fast and that sort of thing, some.

RLA: I never did fast, but I read the prayers.

DR: Not a Sabbath service—you didn’t light candles?

RLA: No.

DR: And nobody here was kosher, I gather.

EM: Not that I know of. It would have been very difficult. Like I said, my grandpoppa went off and took a course in kosher, was approved for kosher killing, because Grandmomma wanted to and she never ate bacon or ham or anything like that, on purpose. But no, it was very difficult to be kosher. You know, in Charleston you could do it pretty easily, but then in Orangeburg, it would have been—

RLA: Plenty of people still do it. They’re going back to it. A lot of the young people are going back to it.

HA: My family, we were all Orthodox until I was about eighteen years old, and we moved to Kingstree and just forgot all about it. That was the end of that.

EM: Well, yes. You would have had an impossible job in Kingstree—

RLA: You did eat—

HA: When we were in Bayonne, New Jersey, you just had your choice of all the grocery stores or butcher shops. It was no big deal; it was just there. But when we came south, there was no attempt to.

EM: My Aunt Fanny tried to be pretty kosher. She wouldn’t intentionally eat pork and that sort of thing. Daddy took her to a foot doctor in Columbia, one time. They got out, and it was about one-thirty or two o’clock in the afternoon. They were heading back to Orangeburg, and when

they'd get home it'd be too late to eat lunch, so they stopped at the Piggy Park Drive-In, which is a barbecue place in Columbia.

Daddy ordered barbecue for them, pork barbecue. Aunt Fannie asked Daddy, "What's this?" He said, "It's chicken, eat it." She ate it all gone and loved it. A month later they were coming back, same time, same situation, from Columbia. Aunt Fanny used to get everything all mixed up, and they passed the Piggy Park and [she] says, "Let's stop in the Piggly Wiggly and get some more chicken!" [Laughter.] You didn't know her much.

RLA: [Laughing] I didn't know her.

EM: She was very independent. Ran a store.

RM: I don't understand who she was. She was Sol Senior's sister?

EM: No, on Daddy's side. She was my daddy's aunt. If you remember Louis Goldiner, she was an aunt to his daddy.

RM: I never knew the Mirmows and the Goldiners were related until you walked in here this afternoon.

EM: Yes. Alec Goldiner, Louis's daddy, and my daddy were first cousins. And there was a Max Goldiner, who went up in Cherryville, North Carolina. Motty (Matilda) Benjamin, if you knew Herman Benjamin, his first wife was a first cousin to Daddy.

RM: I knew the Goldiners and the Benjamins were related, but I didn't know that you were.

EM: The three boys, Milton, Simon and Irving, would be my—by the way I count it—my third cousins, Daddy's second cousins, and their mother was Daddy's—I never did like Motty much. She was my cousin. I liked Herman pretty good; we were pretty good friends.

DR: But you were going to say that Aunt Fanny was very independent.

EM: Aunt Fanny, she came down here—she was older when she got married. She ran that little hat [store]. They called it—not the Hat Box—they called it Fanny Levine [ed.: pronounced LeVIN] when she ran it, but later, Yetta called it the Hat Box. She ran a little store right down the street from where Daddy's store was for years and years until she got too—became disabled, really.

She was *very* independent and somewhere down the way, for a few years, she was married. Levine died a few years after they were married. I was born in 1930 and he must have died about then, 1932 or 1933, because I never knew him. Aunt Fanny was real close with Daddy, *very* close with Daddy. She was crazy about him, and I liked her a lot. She died about thirty-two or three years ago, within a few weeks of the time when Morris died. She had no children and her husband, Levine, was apparently a real character from the stories they used to

tell about him. Said he wasn't very bright.

DR: What did she look like?

EM: Damn if I know. I don't know; she just looked like an old lady!

DR: Did she look like kind of an Old Country lady? I mean from the old world, from Europe?

EM: I guess so. I never saw her dressed up or anything like that. My grandmomma always carried a shawl; I don't want to believe Aunt Fanny did.

RLA: People back then always dressed more like house people.

EM: You know they would have on a shoe with a thick heel on it, about one inch, one and a half inch; never a spiked high heel or dress-up clothes. I never saw those people really dressed nicely, what *I* would call nicely.

RLA: Probably never went anywhere to—

EM: No, they didn't go anywhere.

DR: What were the shops like? And on that whole list, do you think there are any of those shops where we could find photographs of the shops?

EM: Not inside, but you might, if you found some old picture of Main Street in Orangeburg, you would see the outsides of some of those. They weren't flashy stores from the outside. Mr. Becker tried to run a little bit of a flashy operation sometimes, but most of them were *very* conservative, and you almost had to know where you were to find them, almost. Daddy's store had a little sign sticking up.

RLA: Main Street was never much of a showplace, is that what you want to say?

EM: Well, Orangeburg never was a real good retail business town, as far as having a *fine* store. A lot of people made a living, but no fine stores in Orangeburg, ever.

DR: You say your father had a sign?

EM: It was a sign that stuck out over the sidewalk and said "Mirmow's," . . . and that came down in about 19—about the time he sold the store. Herman Benjamin took that down.

RLA: Then his daddy went into—what did your daddy do?

EM: Well, they called it Mid-State Investment Company. [They] sold a little bit of insurance

and finance—he had a finance company before. There was one of those on every street corner. He did that, really, until he—

HA: That was his retirement business.

EM: It really was. He and Mr. Dwight Moseley, who ran a nice ladies' department store—the fellow we told you about who was not really Jewish—he was Daddy's lifelong friend, and he closed his store in about 1951 or '52. He and Daddy just sat in there, cussed at each other all morning, [laughter] and arranged a golf match and went and played golf every afternoon. That was just standard fare for them, starting in the middle 1950s.

HA: That's what I heard at the time. When Dwight Moseley was closing his store, somebody made the comment, "What's Dwight going to do?" Somebody else said, "Well, he's going to go help Eddie Mirmow." [Laughter.]

DR: And your father closed up in the late thirties?

EM: Either '38 or '39.

DR: How did these stores weather the Depression? There's another factor we haven't—

EM: Well, Daddy just struggled. I mean, I guess he made a living, but he showed me some numbers, if I remember correctly—and this would have been like '38 or '39—from his store. My recollection is he never had a year when he made more than three thousand dollars. Now, I don't know whether he drew something out of it before that, or whatever he lived off came out of the profits of the store, but it was not a very successful store, I wouldn't think. Daddy was a manager of money. If you gave him a penny, it wouldn't take him too long to turn it into two cents, but not at a store profit. He was a manager of money.

RLA: Well, now, my daddy lost his store during the Depression. He had to close up. He went in bankruptcy and they lost everything they had. They had a dress shop and Mother worked down there too.

HA: In those days, bankruptcy was a stigma.

RLA: Yes. I guess he went bankrupt.

EM: If you ever made any money later, you paid it back.

HA: Yes.

RLA: I guess that's what he did, I don't know. I remember somebody came in . . . took inventory of everything. I don't know what he was supposed to be doing. . . .

EM: I don't think any of them—

HA: He was appointed by the bankruptcy court to liquidate.

EM: J. W. Smoak always made money. It was a very profitable hardware store in Orangeburg.

DR: That's S-M-O-A-K.

EM: Yes. And there were probably one or two other stores that were always profitable, but the rest of them just existed. Fersner's made money, always did.

RLA: Fersner's Five and Ten Cent store—that was a big one.

HA: Belk Hudson's store was a big department store.

EM: Mr. Hudson made money, but not many stores consistently made money over the years.

RLA: Those were most probably the three.

HA: Made a living.

DR: And they were all gentile.

RLA: Yes.

EM: Yes, gentile.

DR: Who was the clientele of the Jewish merchants here?

EM: Everybody. I mean, they weren't—

HA: The common working people.

EM: Yes, that's right.

DR: Black and white.

EM: Yes. Oh, yes.

RLA: Not just Jewish people, because they wouldn't have made any [inaudible]. [Laughing.]

EM: If you had depended on the Jewish people, you wouldn't have had enough for one store.

RLA: Wouldn't have had three thousand dollars! [Laughing.]

EM: That's right.

HA: The black segment was the big customer pool in a lot of these stores.

RLA: You know we have two black colleges here in Orangeburg.

EM: There is a tremendous black influence in this town.

RM: Mr. Mirmow, your daddy was way more successful *after* he closed his store than he was before, it sounds like.

EM: Yes, I think so. Like I said, what money Daddy accumulated came from investing and managing what little bit he laid his hands on. Daddy never spent a penny that didn't have to be spent. I always said I thought he must not have been a very good merchant, but obviously, he was a darn good money manager.

DR: Good enough to put you through law school.

EM: Yes, that's right.

DR: Where did you go to law school?

EM: Carolina, all the way, academic and undergraduate and law school.

DR: I just want to go back a minute to the clientele. One of the things that some of the people in Charleston have said to me is that the Jewish merchants were more gracious toward their black clientele, by and large. For example, they would let them try on hats in the store, which the Christian merchants wouldn't. I don't know whether that was true in other places or just peculiar to Charleston. Have you ever heard that, Rhetta?

HA: No, that was correct. I would say in our store in Kingstree there, that had the black customers, they gravitated toward the Jewish stores. They did get along a whole lot better than most of the big department stores.

EM: The Jewish merchant wanted to make a sale, period.

RLA: That's right.

EM: I think you'll find that, historically, the Jewish merchant, or that Jewish person, generally, would just get up a few minutes earlier, and stay a few minutes later in whatever he was doing to make a success. Darn, he wasn't going to let trying on a hat or something stand in the way of him

selling that hat. I don't care who wanted to try it on.

They used to have a saying about my grandpoppa. The train track in Blackville went right through, split Main Street in half, a terribly wide Main Street, and the station was right down the end [of the] road. Grandpoppa used to open the store about seven in the morning and closed at about ten at night. The train came through about seven and came back the other way about ten at night. He said when that train stopped up there, there might be one person that would need to buy a handkerchief. If somebody's looking to buy a handkerchief, he damn well wasn't going to miss that sale because the store was closed. That, I think, describes the attitude of the Jewish merchant. I think it's true of not just merchandising.

RLA: Jewish people do, I think—

DR: They push a little harder.

RLA: Yes.

DR: But you don't think it had to do with sympathy for the Negro?

EM: I don't think so.

HA: I don't think so. No. They were just the customer pool, that's all. They were there with money to spend on Saturday and—

EM: That's right, and you didn't limit— Judge Rosen, who was a circuit judge and was the best lawyer I ever saw, when he was practicing he told me one time, "I think being Jewish made me a better lawyer, because I never went into court."—he tried a lot of cases—"I never went into court but that I had the idea that there might be one person on that jury who was prejudiced against my case because they had a Jewish lawyer. That just kind of drove me to be a little bit better prepared to cover that one juror. As a result of that, it made me prepare my case a little bit better than I might have otherwise. I really believe that made me a better lawyer." I think Jewish people always try a little harder.

RLA: Edward, did you know he was engaged to Rachel Benjamin?

EM: Yes, I knew that. Aunt Fanny said that he wanted Rachel to take a drink, and Rachel wouldn't do it, so that's why they broke up. Now, it might not have been a drink he was wanting out of Rachel, but that was Aunt Fanny's story. [Laughter.] Judge Rosen was from Charleston. He was a terrific judge and, like I said, the best lawyer I saw, all around—do everything, do anything a lawyer is supposed to do. But yes, he was engaged to Rachel.

RM: Sounds like the Jewish community here, even from almost the start, was Jewish in thought process and feeling and attitude, but not religious enough to pass it on very strongly down the line—

RLA: That's true.

RM: —not practicing, not observant enough to really make a big deal about it down the line. But somebody, like he's talking about, Judge Rosen, I never heard him or his children make any Jewish connection or comment—

RLA: I hadn't either.

RM: —and I'm amazed that you've made three Jewish references to him.

EM: He would talk with me about things like that a little bit, but on the outside he wouldn't.

RM: His children are my age and they never knew anything about being Jewish. I never knew him to do anything Jewish or make any Jewish connection, and you've mentioned three things that he said, because you're his contemporary and I'm not.

EM: Daddy made the statement, just before—and of course I liked him; I was a little prejudiced in his favor, and Daddy liked him—within the last six months before he was elected as a circuit judge, he joined the synagogue. I remember one time Daddy said, “Damn it, he did that just so they could put a write-up in the paper.”

RLA: Hal made that same remark.

HA: Oh, yes. That was noticeable.

DR: Meaning he *was* a religious man—it didn't matter what religion?

RLA: No.

DR: He wanted to be affiliated?

RLA: No.

EM: He just wanted a write-up in the paper that he—

HA: He had to belong to something.

EM: Right, had to belong to something. Building up a resume.

RM: I remember y'all being mad with him at the temple, because he would never join and never come. Never even made a contribution, if I remember. I remember being mad with him, because he was somebody who could at least make a contribution.

EM: He could have lead.

RLA: And Hymie Marcus was another one. Hymie would never—

HA: —another one, and Lester Finkelstein. Three of them never acknowledged—

DR: His children, for example, if their name remains Rosen, everybody in the outside world is going to think they are Jewish, aren't they?

HA: True.

EM: His one daughter did marry a Jewish boy, and I don't know whether she's taken up and married a Moses boy over in Sumter.

RM: Yes.

RLA: Is he Jewish?

RM: One of his daughters married Perry Moses, whose father was also Jewish, but mother was not.

RLA: So they are not.

RM: No, they are not Jewish. The children are not Jewish, but they married people who had Jewish fathers and non-Jewish mothers also.

EM: I used to know, because Perry Weinberg was in my law—my good friend who got killed—his mother was a Moses, and I knew some of those people. I just assumed the boy she married was Jewish, but he was not.

RM: See, his name is Moses but he's not.

RLA: That's like Rhetta's friend.

HA: Frank Limehouse told me one time that he had a Jewish grandmother.

RM: Bonnie Rosen is married to Frank Moses's brother, Perry.

EM: Spec [Carlisle Walker Limehouse, Sr., a.k.a. "Spec"], I was talking with him one day—of course they are from Summerville, most of the Limehouse crowd—but he was telling me that he was some part Jewish, he didn't know how much. He called his mother to ask, and they figured out what percentage Jewish he was. It was little bit. That was his sister that married Judge Rosen, as a matter of fact.

HA: That's what Frank told me, that he had a Jewish grandmother. Or it might have been great-grandmother. I'm not clear about that.

DR: In terms of y'all's social life, did you socialize with the gentile community?

RLA: Yes.

DR: I don't mean just being on good speaking terms, but go to dinner at each other's houses—

HA: Sure.

RLA: We belonged to five clubs and there wasn't another Jewish couple in any of them.

RM: They have such a social life, it's hard to find them. [Laughter.]

RLA: I'm sure Edward and Barbara do too. You don't ever see any difference.

HA: If you stuck to the Jewish community for your social life, you wouldn't have any social life. [Laughter.]

RLA: You wouldn't have any life. [Laughing.]

EM: In law school, some of my friends used to accuse me of being anti-Semitic, because I wouldn't have anything—I didn't join the Jewish fraternities. I didn't believe in that. I thought it was wrong if some of these other fraternities didn't want to have Jewish people, and I said, "Well, if that's the case, then it's wrong for a Jewish fraternity that won't have gentiles." But really, in Orangeburg, I'm sure you wouldn't have to look too far to find somebody who had anti-Semitic feelings, but I think that's the exception and not the rule in a place like any of these towns.

HA: I remember one time when I was brand new here in Orangeburg, your father came home one time and asked me—he said somebody at the country club, I think it was Mitt Jeffords, told him that there was so few Jews in the army. He said, "How come?" I said, "Well, you don't believe that, do you? You've got a half a dozen here in Orangeburg; you can't have any more than four or five in the service. That's just not the truth." Oh, he got mad and went back to tell him that it wasn't the truth. [Laughter.] But it didn't occur to him at the time to take offense over it; it was just somebody made a statement. He picked it right up as being the truth because a good friend of his told him.

RLA: That's like [inaudible].

RM: Well there weren't any Jewish sororities, but I agree with you—

Edward V. Mirmow; Rose Louise and Harold Aronson  
Mss. 1035-052

47

**END OF TAPE**