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Interviewees: Dr. Arthur Victorius Williams (b. June 5, 1919, Charleston, SC; d. February 15, 2007, Charleston, SC.)
Elza Meyers Alterman (b. 1925, Charleston, SC)

Place of Interview: 36 George Street, behind Elza Alterman's store, Charleston, SC

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Begin Tape 1, Side A

DR: Your paternal—

AW: Paternal grandmother. Grandmother Williams had a desk that fit right into that alcove. She had her own little chair, her own little desk, and I spent a lot of time when I was a kid in this room and that room with the various aunts and uncles that were here. Grandmother Williams was from—she was born in Prussia. It was German-ruled, and she spoke German. She spoke English with a German accent—an itty-bitty lady, not more than five feet tall, and she wouldn't allow German spoken in the house.

My grandfather was also from Samter, Prussia, and moved to Berlin. His name was Jacob Moses Victorius, and they changed their name to Williams, because they wanted to be Americans. They wanted American names, so they took the name of the ship captain who brought them over to this country. I wish I had talked to Grandmother Williams about the Old Country, but I—you know. She died when I was six years old, so I never really talked to her about anything—anything pertinent.

The other part of the family—this was the family headquarters. We had a lot of family in this house, most of whom were schoolteachers. Aunt Rosa was a schoolteacher. Aunt Hannah was a schoolteacher, and Hannah, in her later years, was a fairly unattractive lady, but in her younger years, she was a gifted, talented teacher who taught people with learning difficulties, with hearing difficulties, with speech difficulties, in this room. Aunt Mary, she was a sweet little thing. She looked and was about the size of my grandmother. Aunt Rosa, Aunt Mary, and Aunt Hannah had a kindergarten back there. There must be pictures of that around, and I could probably identify some of who went, but most of the Jewish kids in Charleston went to kindergarten at Williams Kindergarten in this backyard.

EA: Wouldn't you say the Reform?

AW: Huh?

EA: The Reform Jewish—

AW: I don't know.

EA: I would say so.

AW: That's all there were, so far as we knew.

EA: That's right.

DR: You think most of the students were from the temple?

AW: Yeah.

EA: Oh, it was Reform, there were no—I didn't know anybody who wasn't Reform.

AW: But it was not limited to kids from the temple, because some non-Jewish kids went as well, but most of them came from the temple, I would think.

DR: Give me a little background on this. First of all, when did this property become a part of your family?

AW: Well, don't you have that—

DR: If I ask you something that you think I already know, I'm just doing it for the tape. I mean, I actually want to get on record where we are, because I don't think we even put that on the tape. Is this 36 George?

EA: This is 36 George.

AW: This is 36 George Street.

DR: We are at 36 George Street.

EA: Yeah.

AW: Sure.

EA: This is where his family lived, and it was left to the—and the Nathan family lived here too. Rosa Nathan and Uncle Modie, were my godparents. This was where we'd go after Sabbath school, because we didn't go to Sunday school. We went to school in the temple, and then we came here for chocolate cake afterwards when I was a little girl. But they all lived here in the 1800s, Arthur?

AW: Bought this house?

EA: Yeah.

AW: Yeah.

EA: In the early 1800s.

AW: Not long after the Civil War.

DR: They acquired this property shortly after the Civil War?

AW: Yeah, and that's my grandmother who lived in that corner, Grandmother Williams.

DR: Wow, how do you pronounce that name? [Laughs.] I'm not going to try that.

AW: Gonzalonziz.

EA: I've never seen that.

DR: That's Paulina?

AW: Pauline is what we called her.

DR: Pauline. And the spelling of the last name is G-O-N-Z-A-L-O-N-Z-I-Z.

AW: Gonzalonziz.

EA: I've never heard of it.

AW: Sure.

DR: That's a Sephardic name?

AW: No, that was her maiden name, and then she married Jacob Moses Victorius, who, as this thing says, came to this country at separate times, and were married in this country. He got caught up in the Civil War, and I'm not at all sure about that history, except that when they came, he went to Griffin, Georgia. He was a farmer in Griffin, Georgia. He enlisted in the Civil War in Griffin, and then during the war, the family, for reasons that are totally unknown, moved from Griffin to Camden, South Carolina. When he came back from—he was injured, a horse fell on him. He was with Stewart's Cavalry and a horse fell on him. He could no longer ride with Stewart, so he came back to Charleston as a nurse and whatever on James Island and the fights over there.

After that, they were in Charleston for a while. Then, I think, they went to Camden, I was told, because of the yellow fever in Charleston. He was one of the first people to raise tobacco in Camden and, I think, also had a small store in Camden. I never knew him.

DR: Do you know what he did in Griffin—what he was doing when he was living in Griffin?

AW: Farming. Now whether he farmed in Prussia or not, I don't know. The only person who looked into that, and apparently in detail, was one of my aunts who lived here, my aunt Rosa, who had corresponded with people in Samter and other people in Europe about family. When she died, there was no written record of anything that she had done.

DR: No letters.

AW: By word of mouth all she could find was that the family in Europe was either farmers or schoolteachers, and there had been no really distinguished family member. Everybody taught school or ran a farm or did something.

EA: No kings and queens or princes.

AW: Yeah. Aunt Etta looked into my grandmother's family, Etta Halford from Columbia, and she also left no written record. She knew the family in France very well. When I was a kid, my grandfather's sister, Aunt Henriette, would write letters in French. From the time I was a little squirt, I had to translate Aunt Henriette's letters from French to English, which is one reason I don't know any damn French, because I got so tired of translating Aunt Henriette's letters from the dictionary. I was sort of turned off by formal French.

The family in France also—the only distinguished member—Aunt Etta said was that we were one of the multiple thousands descendants of Johann Sebastian Bach, but I don't know whether that's true or not, because there is nothing written down. My great-grandmother was Fanny Bach, who was supposed to have been a descendant of his many wives or mistresses or whatever, but I'm not sure.

EA: I heard the same thing all my life about Bach.

AW: Yeah. Well, that's what Aunt Rosa told us after she had extensive correspondence, but what happened to that correspondence—all of which may still be locked up somewhere in this house behind [laughs] a wall—I don't know. When she died, we looked and we couldn't find anything.

EA: I had it done over and there is nothing.

DR: You've looked in every nook and cranny.

EA: Well, I've had it restored. I have nothing— This was all one house when Dave and I bought it. After they all died—the Nathans, who are Rosa and Modie Nathan, who lived here, and Aunt Sis and Aunt Hannah died—it went into the estate and nobody really wanted it. This is when David and I bought it.

AW: I think I could have bought it for six thousand five hundred dollars, or some phenomenal sum like that.

EA: It cost thirty-five thousand.

AW: I was a part heir, so I would have been—

EA: He's always resented that I own this building. [Laughter.]

AW: Anyhow, I wasn't interested.

EA: I would never sell this piece of property; there are too many memories here, but I made it into two apartments upstairs.

DR: And then you acquired the store in front?

EA: We did the store first and then all of this property back here where you see the driveway—that wasn't there. That was a side porch, which was not historical. I could show you the—it has doors like this leading out into the porch, which we used to play on when we were children. We tore that down to make way. I think it was acquired about the same time. I can remember the fig trees in the backyard, and another piece of property went around. So we own all that property that went with this house, not the store. In order to have parking, we bought this, and we use the parking for our business.

DR: So you had the business before you had the house?

EA: I think it must have been almost at the same time—very shortly thereafter. I don't have the exact dates. I could find them.

DR: Do you know about when?

EA: Oh, God.

AW: About when you bought the house?

EA: I could find out.

AW: It was in—

EA: I should have found out before you came.

AW: I don't know. I won't guess. I've forgotten when Hannah died—probably 1960 or the late 1950s.

EA: Easy, in the 1960s.

AW: Something like that.

DR: Dr. Williams, what about on your mother's side of the family, the Levy side?

AW: Well, her father was Gabriel Levy, who was married to my grandmother, Fanny Florence Levy, and he was a rice broker. He developed tuberculosis when he was in his twenties. Summerville was the tuberculosis center then, [sounds like "like Saranac Lake"]. You were supposed to go out in the pine trees and get fresh air, and that would cure tuberculosis. So he went to Summerville and they made him ride horses, take long walks, and do all the things you shouldn't do when you have active pulmonary tuberculosis, and he died with tuberculosis in Summerville. Her mother's father was Jules Kahn, who I mentioned before, and he was a tobacco farmer in Timmonsville, South Carolina. Fanny Florence, my grandmother, was educated in a convent school in Florence. I don't know whether you knew it or not, but she was a great pianist.

EA: My grandmother.

AW: Fanny—Sweetheart.

EA: I always heard it was my grandmother, Jennie.

AW: It may be, I don't know. I didn't know her well enough to know.

EA: Although, we have the same—that's the same grandmother.

AW: But I've heard Sweetheart play the piano, when she wanted to play the piano, and she was good.

EA: You heard her play?

AW: Yeah. She was educated by the nuns. I don't know where Jules Kahn came from. I tried to find out this morning when I went to the cemetery. I don't know whether Jules was born in this country or in Europe. My guess is he was born in Europe, but I don't know.

DR: Gabriel Levy, of course, came from Paris.

AW: Yeah.

EA: Our grandfather. Alsace-Lorraine—probably born in Paris.

AW: I don't know who came from Alsace-Lorraine, and that's why I went to look at Grandpa Kahn's tomb, because I thought he was born in Alsace-Lorraine.

EA: It didn't say?

AW: It didn't say. It just said, "Born in 1846, died in 1919."

EA: But I was told by Sweetheart. We called her Sweetheart.

DR: Everyone called her Sweetheart.

EA: Yes, all the grandchildren, friends.

DR: Wouldn't it be nice to have that as a nickname?

EA: Yeah. We used to say, "Sweetheart is not so sweet, is she?" [Laughs.]

AW: I think there is some remote—have you interviewed any Pearlstines yet?

DR: I've talked a lot to Jane Meyerson here in Charleston, but I've interviewed Hannah Pearlstine extensively—that's Shep's daughter. She was here at Jane's last weekend. I'm sure she was the most elderly person at the gathering, but she is wonderful. She came down from Wilmington to attend these meetings.

AW: Back when we were kids, we got called—Mrs. Pearlstine, Cousin Netty, and I always thought we were kind of related to the Pearlstines, and part of them, I think, came from Alsace-Lorraine. So I assume— And Milton [Pearlstine] said, that the Pearlstine family helped part of our family come to this country, so I assume there was a relationship, but I don't know. I was just curious to know if any of the older Pearlstines knew of a—

DR: I will go back and check. I don't remember Hannah saying that, but I could be mistaken.

AW: I called Dr. Izzy [Isadore] Blank, Uncle Izzy, and he wasn't any relationship at all. That was just common then to call older people aunt and uncle.

EA: That's true.

DR: It was a term of respect.

EA: Exactly. Not ma'am, but uncle. We were all like one family.

DR: Dr. Williams, would you explain to us a little bit about what a wholesale rice broker was?

AW: I have no idea. Charleston, at one time, was a tremendous rice growing center, and it was in the 1920s, I think, that the saltwater came up into the creeks that the rice fields were next to, and the rice planters went broke. But even after that, everybody ate rice, so I guess my grandmother bought rice from somewhere, and sold wholesale to groceries. I don't know. I'm not sure how the rice brokerage worked. I know she supported herself until my parents were married, and then when they were married, she quit work and lived with them.

EA: She was only forty, I remember, when that happened.

DR: She would buy, or she would broker rice that was grown *not* in South Carolina, in other words.

AW: My parents were married in more than 1919, so they were married in 1917.

EA: What are you talking about?

AW: My parents.

EA: Oh.

AW: And rice was still growing then, so she may have bought local rice—

EA: They still grow rice there now because I—

AW: Well, a little bit.

DR: But as a commercial crop, 1916 was pretty much the cutoff—as a commercial crop.

AW: Yeah, yeah.

DR: It continued even on into the 1970s, they were still growing rice, but just for the rice birds, or just for a little [inaudible].

EA: *The Gazette* did a big article on that.

AW: But she quit in 1917, and that was shortly after the big rice business was gone.

DR: So in the interview with your mother, we talked a little bit about how unusual it was for a woman to become a rice broker in Charleston in that day and age.

AW: Not many women had to work. To be a rice broker then was, or for a woman to have any job other than, I guess, a secretarial job, was very unusual. She raised all of—when my grandfather died, all of their daughters were small, and my grandmother raised them all.

EA: One wasn't born. Gabrielle wasn't born. There's a picture right here where Sweetheart is pregnant.

AW: Yeah.

EA: That's the last picture that our grandfather ever took—the one I gave you. I had Jack blow that one up.

DR: So she was pregnant when he died.

EA: Yeah.

AW: Yes.

EA: That's the grandfather, who is gorgeous in this picture. It's a tiny picture.

DR: Wow.

EA: Here are the one, two, three, four girls, and there were actually five girls. See, that's Sweetheart, and then our grandfather.

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DR: Where was this picture taken?

EA: Heaven knows. Wherever they were living. That looks like a [inaudible] on the back.

DR: This would have been in Summerville, no?

AW: Yeah.

DR: That would have been in Summerville.

EA: That would be where he would be.

DR: I don't know if you remember this, but your mother talked a little bit about your grandfather's presence in the house after he passed away. Do you remember that?

EA: You mean like an apparition.

DR: Yeah, right.

EA: I've seen that myself and I believe this.

DR: You don't remember that? She was very explicit about it. How he gave directions to Sweetheart.

AW: I'm kind of deaf, and I miss a lot of the conversation. I didn't hear that, don't remember that at all.

DR: She said that he would appear at the foot of the bed, and give her directions about how to handle the family business.

AW: I don't know anything about that.

DR: I was hoping you could confirm the presence of a ghost. [Laughter.]

EA: I can confirm that.

AW: No. Have you seen the apparition?

EA: I've seen Dave many times since he died. I questioned, discussed it with Carol [surname inaudible], who's a doctor, psychiatrist. I mean, it's nothing unusual about that, really. I believe it. She said that? I mean, I absolu—not lately. I believe in that.

DR: What are you looking for?

EA: A picture for you.

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DR: Actually, I'll try to identify, if you can help me.

EA: Oh, that's no problem. Arthur can tell you who they are, too. In her tummy was Gabrielle, who was the first one to die of the five girls. She was the youngest.

AW: Yeah, [laughs] I can identify everybody but the maid.

EA: But the maid.

AW: Yeah. [Laughing.]

EA: That's exactly right.

AW: You don't particularly want that one, do you—my grandmother's seventieth birthday?

DR: Oh, if this is an extra copy, I'd love to have it.

EA: That's Uncle Arthur, that's his father.

AW: That's Aunt Hannah, who was a gifted teacher. That's Sweetheart—that was her seventieth birthday. That's Aunt Rosa; that's Aunt Etta, who lived in Columbia and married Uncle Pete. That's Elza's no-'count daddy, Jack. [Laughter.] That's Anita Steinberg, Leon Steinberg, and my mother and father.

DR: I'm going to make a little [inaudible], and write it down afterwards, so we don't lose tape. This was taken when she was seventy. It would have been in—

AW: That's when she was seventy, and she died when she was ninety-two, and she died when—twenty years ago?

EA: At least twenty years ago.

AW: So that's at least forty years old. I don't know exactly.

DR: I have Zerline's mother was born in 1871. Does that sound right?

AW: My mother's mother?

DR: Yes.

AW: That sounds right, yeah.

DR: So that would have been in the '40s, then.

AW: Yeah.

....

EA: When did your family come here? Do you know?

MG: I think my grandfather was here in Charleston about 1920, I think. So he probably came to the United States—

AW: Well, your family was from Eastern Europe, and that's the crowd that died out just before you started your work.

DR: Right.

AW: So you couldn't talk to them.

DR: That's exactly right.

AW: I took care of all that crowd—old Mr. Sokol, and the Goldbergs, the old Goldbergs—that crowd. It's just a damn shame I didn't talk to them then, but I wasn't interested. Of course, they weren't interested in talking about Europe, because they only came to see me with a pain in the chest or something like that. They were much more interested in talking about themselves.

EA: Well, there's so much more you can do today than when he was there.

DR: Right, but I feel the same way. I knew my grandmother when she was a very old lady and I could easily have talked to her.

AW: And didn't do it.

DR: I didn't do it.

AW: Let me just mention one thing, philosophically, about the congregation and about the family. It's classical that my grandfather didn't want a Jewish name; he didn't have a Jewish name. His name was Victorius, but I don't know what kind of name that is. That got tracked back to—it did not spell that way—but some of that back to Spain, when it's used over there. But he didn't want a Jewish name; he wanted an English name. My grandmother adamantly *refused* to have German spoken in this house. English had to be spoken in this house, which reflected the fact that the congregation, of Beth Elohim anyhow, wanted to fit into the community and be friendly with the other religions, not to antagonize them, and to be so much like them that there would be no more anti-Semitism, because they were so alike.

The big row in the congregation came—I'm sure you have a copy of one of the organ controversies—[when] the organ was put in, so when people came into the synagogue, they would feel at home with an organ, like at a church. That was a row that split the congregation, as you know, for a while, and left the—Beth Elohim was mostly German descendents, then the others split away, and then they came back, later on. But the philosophy was a very friendly philosophy towards the community, and the community felt that way toward them, I think. This was true up until the time, of course, of Hitler, and then everything changed. But the philosophy when we were kids was different than it is now, I think.

EA: There's no question about it.

DR: Dr. Williams, your family were always Reform from the very beginning?

AW: My grandfather was Reform when he came to this country. Yeah, they were always Reform. I don't think anybody in my family ever, in this country, belonged to anything except Beth Elohim or other Reform congregations if they moved away.

DR: Did you hear stories about what happened when the so-called Russian immigrants started coming?

AW: Do I have stories about them?

DR: Yeah.

AW: I remember them coming. What about them?

DR: Well, I'm talking about as early as, say, the 1880s or 1890s, when the first waves of Russian immigrants started coming.

AW: I don't remember any stories. I know that my father was very active in working with the people who came in the teens and in the '20s, and getting them bank loans, getting them started

in business, trying to direct them as to what business to get started into. He worked with the Eastern European people who came. A lot of people did, but I don't remember any particular stories about them, except there was always a social difference. When I grew up, I never dated an Orthodox girl, like Sara Breibart.

EA: You weren't allowed to. You know about that, don't you?

DR: No.

EA: You don't.

AW: About what?

EA: You weren't allowed to.

AW: Well, I was allowed to, but [inaudible]—

EA: You didn't even *know* anybody.

AW: Yeah, I did.

EA: Who?

AW: I dated Betty Shimel twice.

EA: She was a borderline. [Laughter.]

AW: Yeah, but there was more, I think, in the young people, there was more—I'm not sure—it wasn't animosity, but it was more of a social difference between KKBE and Brith Sholom than there was between KKBE and St. Mary's Catholic Church across the street. The cultural differences were so much. We didn't keep kosher; they kept kosher. You would go in those houses and it really felt strange. All my friends went to St. Mary's Catholic Church, across the street from the synagogue.

The classical story was Rabbi Elzas, who was one of our old rabbis, was watching the priest do something to one of the gates at St. Mary's, and the story was that this preacher asked him to help lift the gates, so he could fix the hinges. Rabbi Elzas said, "Far be it from me to help a priest propagate." You've heard that before?

MG: Yeah.

DR: So you feel that there was greater social difference between what I guess the people called the greenhorns, the newcomers.

AW: Sure. But the first bar mitzvah I ever went to was Max Zucker's—you probably knew Maxine Zucker.

EA: No.

AW: She grew up as a Reform Jew, and not in Charleston. But the first bar mitzvah I went to was her husband's. It was on the corner of Smith and Vanderhorst. God, it was such a strange thing to have all this kosher food, and people speaking Hebrew, and Hebrew prayers. I just felt absolutely divorced from all of this. If I had gone to a confirmation in one of the churches, I would have felt pretty much at home.

DR: Let me ask you this, though—Charleston has *always* had an Orthodox community—

AW: Yeah.

DR: —because even when—

AW: Absolutely.

DR: Okay, so let's say, take the Pearlstines, the Kareshes and the Jacobs, who came in the 1850s and founded Brith Sholom—

AW: And the Robinsons came even before then.

DR: How did the temple crowd get along with *those* families, who were not the new, Yiddish-speaking [inaudible]?

AW: All the families I knew who were related to the Orthodox, even the old ones who were related to the Orthodox synagogues, they all kept kosher; they all had houses that I was very much ill at ease in. There was no animosity between them. They were friendly and they would help each other, but from a social point of view, they were separate. Some went back and forth. The Robinsons were in KKBE for a while.

EA: I don't remember them at all.

AW: That was before I was born.

EA: Before I was born. I didn't know any of them.

AW: And then something happened, they became unhappy, and they went back to the Orthodox.

EA: We have a very small temple group. Everybody was like family and the other world didn't exist to us. We didn't even know—we really didn't know about it. I didn't know about it until I was in high school.

DR: Elza, can I ask you when you were born?

EA: No [laughs].

DR: I didn't know if that would be a fair question or not, but just to get an idea of our chronology here. You [to Dr. Williams] said 1919? You were born in 1919?

AW: Yeah. She's thirty-nine.

DR: She's thirty-nine, okay, same as me.

EA: That's exactly right. Aunt Cecile always said, "Can you keep a secret?" And you'd say, "Yes." And then I'd say, "Well, so can I." I was here in the late 1920s. I'm still here. [Laughs.]

DR: So your growing-up years would be, say, just before the Second World War?

EA: You want to know? Before then.

AW: Before then.

EA: I married in 1942, so there you go.

AW: You were thirty when you were married, I remember that.

EA: I was seventeen years old when I got married. Dave graduated and I—

DR: So, what I am hearing is that there is a real difference between the way the Orthodox Jews in Charleston conducted their—

AW: Their way of life. It was different than our way of life. Their way of life was the traditional Jewish way of life, and our way of life was to be Jews, but as much like our neighbors as we could be. There was a big difference.

EA: In the social, Arthur is absolutely right. We just didn't even know Orthodox Jewish people. I don't know that I dated someone from the—to an AZA dance after I met Bernice—

AW: Right.

EA: —who was my introduction—Bernice Ginsberg, Freida Sokol's aunt, my *best* friend. I met her in school. But she lived—it's where you lived. We all lived downtown—from Wentworth Street down—and there were no Orthodox Jews to my knowledge that lived down there. Am I correct?

AW: Yes, none that I knew of.

EA: None that I knew of either. You sort of associated with who you saw at synagogue or at school. So when I met Bernice, we just became—she happened to be Orthodox, because there was no Conservatism, and we were real close friends. I used to go over to her house and they kept kosher. That was like something I had never seen in my life. It was another world. It really was another world, and it—

DR: That would have been Edna's sister?

EA: Edna's sister, her younger sister. Right. She's still a very close friend of mine, and I see her maybe once or twice a year. That's Freida's aunt, Freida Sokol's aunt.

DR: What would happen if she came to your house?

EA: Oh, she loved it. We did Christmas, okay? Bernice used to tell—she told the story. In fact, Gabrielle had stockings with our names on them and we hung stockings. We never really had a Christmas tree, but we always hung stockings. My aunt Etta, my mother's sister, married—he was either an Episcopalian or Presbyterian during the First World War, so it was not uncommon. I mean, that was almost more acceptable than marrying somebody who was Orthodox.

AW: Aunt Etta lived in Columbia, and she always had a Christmas tree. We often went to Columbia for Christmas, so we could have a Christmas tree.

EA: We went to Columbia by car.

AW: Where's that picture of Etta and Pete and the whole crowd?

EA: She always had the Christmas tree.

AW: That's Aunt Etta, she was a nurse, and she—

EA: —she nursed Uncle Pete, who was gassed.

AW: He was gassed in World War I, and damn near died, and all his life had some pulmonary difficulty from the mustard gas he inhaled in World War I. She nursed him in World War I, and they were married.

DR: That's how they met?

AW: As I understand it.

EA: Yeah, they met in France.

AW: Right.

EA: They were stationed in Paris in World War I and she was a nurse. So we used to go there every Christmas.

AW: But they had the Christmas tree, because Uncle Pete—

EA: That was a happy time.

AW: Yeah.

EA: That was really a happy time for us. We didn't do Hanukkah, and I still really don't—I did for my children—because there is a lot of intermarriage in my family, and Arthur's. Arthur's intermarried [laughs].

AW: Yeah.

EA: I'm not saying that in a positive way or a negative way, I'm just saying it as a factual way. Nat, my son, just married an Episcopalian. It works, if you really love somebody enough. My daughter is married to an Episcopalian.

AW: I don't know whether our marriage works or not [inaudible].

EA: Marsha—you know my daughter-in-law?—and Doug Alterman. Do you know her? She was Marsha Middleton. Bernard, Doctor—

DR: I don't know them personally. Wasn't there a high profile [inaudible]—

EA: Yeah, she's *wonderful*.

DR: I saw that article.

EA: And that's my only child that married a Jewish girl.

AW: I've only been married fifty years, so I don't know how [inaudible].

DR: You don't know if it's working or not? [Laughter.] Well, from an historical point of view, the interesting thing is that Jewish families in Charleston, like yours, were so accepted and acceptable, that complete assimilation was a possibility.

AW: Yeah.

EA: I never knew the word—I don't know if Arthur knew—I never knew the word anti-Semitism. I was never—one time, with Margaret Virginia Smith—I never knew the word “Jew” as being anything different, like it is today, and it's still—I think it's getting worse.

AW: Complete assimilation is possible. My son teaches in Louisiana, at a school for bright kids around the state, a magnet school at the Northwestern Louisiana State University. That town, at one time, had a large Jewish community. They have absolutely *no* Jewish community, except my son, who has to go down to Alexandria every Friday night for services.

EA: Does he [inaudible]?

AW: He's on the board of trustees now.

EA: But she's not Jewish.

AW: She's becoming a convert. She goes with him.

EA: Does she, really?

AW: Yeah.

EA: She's going to convert?

AW: She says she is.

EA: Is that right?

AW: She hasn't yet.

EA: Hmm, that surprises me.

AW: And the little girl is growing up, Sarah's growing up, as a Jewish girl.

EA: Didn't know that either.

AW: She goes to Sunday school every Sunday in Alexandria.

EA: That's wonderful.

AW: They've got to drive fifty miles to get there.

EA: Because Artie has a Christian mother and she never converted. And he's got two daughters who never converted—Mary or Frannie never converted.

AW: Mamie considers herself Jewish.

EA: She does?

AW: Right. She's egging me to go to synagogue on Friday nights and I'll probably start this Friday night, as a matter of fact. This is the forty-sixth anniversary of my father's death. So I think it will be the first time I've been able to sit still for three years. I haven't been there for three years.

EA: Unbelievable.

MG: When either of you were growing up, where was the dividing line for being Jewish and not being Jewish? What I mean is, in what places did being Jewish affect your life directly and what places did it have no effect?

AW: It didn't affect mine at all.

EA: Mine either.

AW: I was accepted everywhere I went. One thing that I thought was healthy, and that a lot of Jewish people thought was not healthy, was the Young Men's Christian Association, the YMCA, that was right down the street.

EA: Still is.

AW: The Jewish kids and the non-Jewish kids grew up together fighting, playing handball, and swimming in the pool. So we grew up, the Jews and non-Jews grew up—that time was spent in the Y or on the playgrounds together. My father's picture was part of a group picture—it was in the Y—as one of the people who had collected money to build that building long ago. He felt that was a very important contribution to the community, and it brought the Jews and non-Jews together.

EA: You know what I find different today?—it's very important, I think—that if we had continued the way we were brought up, I don't know what would have happened. In other words, the Jewish young people today are much more aware of being Jewish, raising their children, and keeping the religion alive. They work very—I mean, I can see it in the temple. Our rabbi is much more conservative. We do not have a Reform temple, as far as I'm concerned. Forget it. We have a Conserva—

AW: We have a Conservative temple.

EA: I'm not comfortable there anymore. I'm not familiar with anything except the temple, and when I sit there, I just go, because that's where I was raised, that's where I was married, that's where my parents were married, my grand— It's tradition. But I look around at a sea full of strangers and I don't—being Jewish—I don't feel that that's the temple anymore. I don't think we have a Reform rabbi or a Reform temple here, in my opinion. [Inaudible.]

AW: It's changed.

EA: Arthur and I were many times—and Robert Marks, who I'm sorry you didn't have a chance to interview—

DR: I knew him.

EA: Have you talked to Robert? Did you ever have a chance? Doubt it.

AW: You didn't know Robert.

DR: I did know him, and I tried in his last year—I went many times up to his house—

AW: Oh, in his last year, he had heart surgery, and his brain was gone in the last year or two, he couldn't talk. He was a brilliant man.

DR: Yeah, he was. We have his collection, by the way, at the library. We have had his paintings.

AW: They have his pictures at the Gibbes [Museum].

DR: His pictures are at the Gibbes, and we have his letters and books. We've got quite a correspondence with all those film stars he's got pictures of. [Inaudible.]

EA: Dirty old man, I loved him—his books, all his wonderful stories. We had the best—that was the generation. He was older, but I mean, those were the kind of—you know what I think is different? I think when the Jewish people—since our family had been here—when the new Jewish people came over, they had all they could do to make a living. That's why maybe we didn't have as much in common, although we certainly weren't rich by any standards.

AW: That wasn't the difference.

EA: I think it had a lot to do with it, in a way.

AW: Well.

EA: And other people got much richer than we did, faster.

DR: What do you think it was, Dr. Williams?

AW: What do I think the difference was?

DR: Yes.

AW: The difference was the societies they came from, that they had been people from Poland, Russia and middle Europe. They had been isolated as Jews forever. They came to this country and they continued their own cultures.

EA: I think they're still doing it now.

AW: They never assimilated to the culture of the countries they were in.

EA: Look at South Windermere. I mean, I don't know. Jews don't try to. I mean, I'm not saying you don't have Christian friends.

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

EA: Everybody moved over there who was Jewish. They used to call it “the bagel”—they still do. I lived in the neighborhood, Westwood. It wasn’t swanky. When Dave and I moved back here with our children, [it was] called Westwood. Arthur moved over there, in what was it?

AW: West Oak Forest.

EA: West Oak Forest. No Jews. The only people who lived there that were Jewish, where I lived, were Reform Jews: the Lapins, the Jacobs—Adelaide and Sammy Jacobs. Adelaide still lives there, I believe.

AW: Yeah.

EA: So my children didn’t grow up around a lot of Jewish children. There were Catholics and Christians. I just didn’t want to put myself in a pot, and I find when you’re Orthodox, you don’t try to assimilate at all. I don’t think it’s [assimilation] unhealthy. It’s hard to know today.

DR: You *don’t* think it’s unhealthy?

EA: I think it’s very healthy to assimilate. It just depends on the way you were brought up.

DR: Well, when you mentioned Robert Marks, we kind of got off because I said I knew him.

EA: I’m sorry.

DR: But what were you going to say? You were going to say that Dr. Williams’s family, and the Marks family, and your family—

EA: Well, we, at one time, after the temple got so integrated with Conservatism and all, we used to say we were going to form our own temple and have our services, right? Because it was so foreign to us, not comfortable, and we didn’t have a good time. The Patlas, Helen and Jack—although Jack came from an Orthodox family, didn’t he?

AW: Yes.

EA: And then he married Helen, who did not. Helen’s mother and my grandmother were best friends. We used to go to their house on the island with the Pearlstines and that little group as children—and Miss Lillie Blank. I mean, that was just different things. We were just deciding that at one point, we would have our own services, because it wasn’t meaningful.

DR: When was this?

EA: I would say about ten years ago or less. How about the last holidays [laughs]? I still feel—I think we—this rabbi is probably—Mother, when she died last year, she had Rabbi Rosenthal. She did not like this—not that there is anything wrong with him. They’ve got a bigger congregation. They’ve got a wonderful Sunday school, but it’s not what we identify with. So we’re the generation that is going to be the next to go. This is the way it is. Now my children

belong there, and they will go through all the right things as far as being a Jew. There's nothing wrong with that. Maybe there was something wrong with us, because there was something wrong with our parents, because they didn't know any difference either. Less with his father, though. Uncle Arthur wasn't like that. He was not as Reform as, say, Daddy and Mother were. Daddy didn't give a damn.

AW: He was Reform. Why was he not Reform?

EA: Your Daddy was president of the synagogue.

AW: Yeah.

EA: He was more religious, let's put it that way.

AW: He insisted that we go to services on Friday night.

EA: He had candles on Friday night. We used to come to your house after services on Friday night, because we didn't have anything in our house.

AW: And we went to services on Holy Days, celebrated all the holidays. No, you didn't.

EA: We had nothing.

AW: Right.

EA: We had no symbols.

DR: Elza, tell me your parents' names, because we didn't get that at all.

EA: My father—

DR: Yeah.

EA: —was Jack Meyers, and my mother was Rosalie Levy Meyers.

DR: And that's M—

EA: —E-Y-E-R-S.

DR: So your maiden name is Meyers?

EA: Yes, Elza Meyers.

DR: Would you describe, Dr. Williams, how your parents—how your family observed the Sabbath?

AW: How we celebrated the Sabbath?

DR: Yeah, you know, precisely what happened.

AW: It was always the same way. Every Friday night, we had Friday night prayers, and then we had Friday night dinner—always a special dinner on Friday night—and then we always went to synagogue on Friday night, to the temple. Then after temple, we would most often come here. There was a little porch out there, and in the summertime we would sit on the porch, and Uncle Izzy Blank and some other friends would come by and talk on Friday nights, and then we would go home. We had a Friday night ritual that we went through every Friday night. You didn't do—Uncle Jack and Rosalie didn't.

EM: They had no observance at all, none.

AW: My father didn't speak word of Hebrew. He knew the Chumash, that was about it.

DR: What about yourself? What kind of Jewish education did you have?

AW: I went to mitzvah, and Rabbi Raisin allegedly taught me Hebrew.

DR: Which rabbi?

EA: Raisin.

AW: Raisin, yeah.

EA: He was our rabbi when I grew up.

AW: I went to Dr. Raisin for years to learn Hebrew, and he was a remarkably bright, nice man.

EA: He was a scholar.

AW: The great shock and the great disappointment in his life was that when I would go up to take a Hebrew lesson, he was always typing on a Hebrew typewriter. What he was doing was translating Shakespeare, and you know all about that.

DR: I heard that he did that.

EA: Have you talked to Mordenai and Rachel?

AW: Then he shipped it to Israel during World War II and the ship was sunk [the ship was torpedoed], and he didn't have a copy, which was typical of Dr. Raisin. He was a totally impractical intellect.

EA: Rachel said to me, the last holiday—Rachel and Mordenai—that the temple was packed with all these strangers [laughs] and, I know a lot of people, being in business too—

AW: You've talked to them?

EA: Yes.

DR: Yes. [Inaudible.]

AW: Because the Lazarus family was one of our old families. They're descendants of the Lazaruses.

DR: On their mother's side.

AW: Yes, their mother was a Lazarus.

DR: And the Hart family also, on the other side.

EA: Yeah, very close to my mother.

AW: Right.

DR: So what were you going to say?

EA: Oh, I was just going to say—it was sort of funny. Rachel and Mordenai were sitting in their pew. We had our own pews. There was the Williamses, then us, the Meyerses. We had our pews, always. The Pearlstines still kept up—

AW: [Inaudible.]

EA: You know, it was just wonderful and warm and familiar, like I keep saying, like a family. So I saw Mordenai and Rachel leaving the services the last holidays, I'm sitting in the back, and she said, "None of these people are going to take away our pew, or kick us out of our pew. We're going to sit there regardless." They're sitting in the same pew that they sat in when they were children. They were not m— So everybody has this little feeling of resentment.

AW: I think that was the early '50s, when Burton Padoll was rabbi, that they stopped the individual pews.

EA: Yeah, I loved him.

DR: You did?

EA: Burt? Well, we were good friends.

AW: Burt was great, and a lot of people didn't like him.

EA: They didn't like him [inaudible].

AW: People hated Burt, and we were friends. I'm not sure why they hated him so.

EA: He was a renegade. Do you know?

DR: Well, I can tell you what other people told me. Of course, I don't know any of this from my own—

AW: What have you heard?

DR: That he was too liberal on civil rights.

AW: That's absolutely right. That's certainly a great part of it. He was totally [inaudible] civil rights at the wrong time for this congregation, but he was a good rabbi. He was the rabbi when all my kids were growing up. He's also a friend.

DR: You did not have any problems with his positions on integration or—

AW: I didn't have any difficulty at all.

DR: Then *you* were too liberal on some issues [laughs]. I mean, maybe the congregation was split politically, so to speak.

AW: When this present library opened, the Charleston Library on King Street, there was a question as to whether they should continue the black library they had up at a place called Bogard Street, or whether to let black people into the library on King Street. I wrote a letter to the editor of *The News and Courier* and suggested they integrate the library. Man, you ought to see the hate mail I got from that letter to the editor. It was really some nasty stuff.

EA: This was what you heard about Burt? That he was—

DR: That's what I heard, yeah.

....

EA: I think there were other things. He wasn't probably—I was crazy about him, and my husband was too.

DR: Well, I'm sure I would have liked him as well.

MG: Wasn't that the same rabbi that wasn't Zionist enough?

DR: No, that was Tarshish.

EA: Allan Tarshish.

DR: Well, the other thing we've heard—Michael has done a lot of these interviews as well—some people said that Tarshish was basically an anti-Zionist, as were—

AW: Oh, absolutely, in the beginning. It was an anti-Zionist Society he belonged to, because he felt the Jews should be integrated in the countries around the world, which made good sense to me. But after the die was cast, then he became a friend of Israel. But in the early—God, this was back in World War II. Immediately after World War II, there was the question of where were all the Jews going from Europe. All the countries were trying to get them in—I don't know who they are—tried to get them into other countries. We wouldn't take them. South America wouldn't take them. Nobody would take them. But Rabbi Tarshish was in favor of a Diaspora, where the Jews to go into multiple countries. That was received with considerable disfavor, and with a lot of people, but he later changed when things became inevitable.

DR: Let me ask you, did you save any of that correspondence you've just described when you wrote the letter to the newspaper?

AW: It ought to be in a letter to the editor, but I don't save anything. I didn't have a computer then. I save everything now on the computer, but I didn't save that.

EA: I didn't know you know how to work a computer. Who taught you that? You could probably find it in the newspaper.

DR: Yes. Well, I was interested in the kind of hate mail, whether that—

AW: I didn't save any of that. It was absolutely—it was really vulgar, sometimes profane, hate mail.

DR: Because you were proposing to integrate the library.

AW: Right. That stuff I threw out. I wouldn't have saved, even if I—

DR: Do you know the story about Harry Goldman's vertical integration? Do you know about that?

AW: About what?

DR: Harry Goldman, the journalist from North Carolina, proposed in the same period that they have something called vertical integration. They just take all the chairs out and they let everybody stand at the lunch counter [laughs] because there was so much trouble about the blacks sitting down.

AW: But the library was kind of a thing like the flag over the statehouse. There was a lot of controversy, and they had—the blacks had a lousy little library way up on Bogard Street, terrible little dump that they wanted them to continue using. My point was, my God, if you couldn't get along with folks in a library, where in the world could you get along? No, I wish I had saved that, but I didn't.

MG: What year was that?

AW: I'd have to find out what year they built the library, but the library is now what? Thirty years old?

EA: Well, it was originally on Rutledge Avenue.

AW: Forty years?

EA: Originally, it was in Mrs. Valk's house on Rutledge Avenue. [The Charleston Free Library of the County of Charleston was originally on the Charleston Museum building site. In 1935 the Library was moved to the Ficken residence at Montague Street and Rutledge Avenue. In 1960, the new location at King and Hudson Street opened, leading later to its present location at 68 Calhoun Street.]

AW: Well, originally, it was in the old museum [Charleston Museum], and then it was on Rutledge Avenue.

EA: Then it was Valk.

AW: Then it was there.

EA: It was on Rutledge Avenue.

AW: It's been there since the 1950s or thereabouts? I've forgotten.

DR: I wanted to go back a little bit to your earlier years as children. I think I know the answer to this question, but just for the record, I wanted to ask you. How many children were there in your family, siblings and order of their birth?

AW: One sister, Betty.

DR: Betty, who I met.

AW: Yeah.

DR: She is younger than you?

AW: Two years.

DR: So 1921.

AW: Yeah. Well, she and Elza grew up together—that makes her forty-one.

DR: Okay [laughs].

EA: We are not the same age, you know.

AW: I know.

DR: What about you, Elza?

EA: I'm an only child. About my father—my mother always had to work. Daddy came from—

AW: My sister married a doctor in Ohio. That's where my mother lives—in Ohio with my sister. Two sisters married two brothers from Cincinnati: my mother and Aunt Cecile, who is still alive—

EA: You met her, or you didn't meet her?

AW: You didn't meet Cecile. Cecile's a young lady of ninety-five. My wife is a great walker, and Cecile comes down, and walks her to death on the beaches and around town at age ninety-five.

EA: She's incredible, and cocktail parties every night.

AW: She really is in good health.

EA: I've got a good picture of her somewhere.

DR: What relationships do you remember best from your childhood? Who played the biggest influence on your lives?

AW: Well, I'm sure my father was the biggest influence.

EA: How about my father?

AW: Your father was a big influence.

EA: My father.

DR: Why?

AW: My father, from a cultural point of view, but her daddy did everything I'd like to do. He played golf and he was just a nice man. I used to caddy for him on the golf course. My non-intellectual, my non-spiritual needs were served by Uncle Jack and his—

EA: And he went to Clemson because Daddy went to Clemson.

AW: Yeah, that's one reason.

EA: You didn't find a lot of Jewish people here that did things that Daddy did.

AW: Let me tell you about her daddy. I don't know if this belongs on the recording or not, but her daddy was one of the world's best pool players, and he used to hang around pool halls that used to be around town. These nationally-known pool players would come through, like Willie Hoppe, and the people in the pool hall would place bets on Jack, and Jack would beat them.

I played pool with him and I thought I was a good pool player. He died of hypertension. It affected his eyes, so the only way he could see before he died was straight ahead. When we played pool, he'd beat the hell out of me. I remember he'd say, "Watch this five-bank shot." He made a five-bank shot, and made it in the pool hall that used to be across from Burns Lane on King Street.

EA: I didn't know that about him. I mean, I knew he played pool, but—

AW: He was *good*.

EA: I knew that, but he was a playboy type, and played golf. I used to take him to the golf course all the time. Anything other than work, because his mother and father had money at one time. They were from Washington, Grandmother Meyers, and Daddy was born there, from here. He went through it because he—you know, some men just don't work well. He tried a thousand different things. He was very creative. He used to make radios and things like that. He was an unusual person.

AW: He made the first—he made radios back before radios were supposed to have been made. The only thing you could get was WALW in Cincinnati and KDKA in Pittsburgh. I still remember those radio stations and dial them on little radios that Uncle Jack made.

EA: He was an American before he was a Jew. He was an American first.

AW: Oh, yeah.

EA: He cared about this country. He was a real patriot. He tried to join in World War II. He was in World War I, and then he tried to join again in World War II, but his health was not—

AW: He was in World War I. He was leading a mule around by a tether, and a German artillery shell blew up and blew the mule's head off. Uncle Jack took a big fragment of the shell out of the mule's head and saved it as a souvenir. He put it in a drawer in his bedroom at home. You remember that?

EA: No.

AW: Yeah. I remember it, [laughing] because I looked in the drawer one day and here's this hunk of metal, and I asked Uncle Jack what the hell was that. He told me about the mule. Uncle Jack, as I said, nobody, exactly, always believed everything he said.

One day, he and my aunt Rosalie were driving up in North Carolina and the car slipped off the road in the mountains. It went halfway down into the French Broad River and caught in a tree. Then a wrecker came by, pulled the car back on the road, and the guy who ran the wrecker looked at Uncle Jack and said, "Oh my God, you're the fellow who was leading the mule when

his head was blown off.” They hadn’t talked to each other, but he had been there when it happened. See, everybody believed Uncle Jack half the time.

EA: Look what happened with Wendy Goer. Wendy Goer’s father—you met that man; he had a series the other night. Oh, you don’t know about that. Were you there?

MG: No.

DR: This is the meeting of survivors at the Francis Marion. [On January 29, 1997, the Charleston Jewish Federation presented “An Evening to Remember,” the reunion of Holocaust survivor Peter Kleinmann and U.S. Army liberator Stanley Marcus.]

EA: That’s the meeting of the—right. That’s Wendy Marcus; she was a Marcus. That was last week. Her father liberated this man from a concentration camp, and [it was] the first time they had seen each other since then. Interesting.

DR: What about you, Elza, in terms of influences early in your life. Who do you remember? Not necessarily positive, it could be somebody—

EA: No, it was more positive. It was Uncle Arthur and Aunt Zerline, because everything took—Mother worked because Daddy played golf, and when [inaudible] was [sounds like “in knickers”], like Bobby Jones and Henry Picard. He was a golfer.

AW: He also was a better. He bet a lot of money on his golf.

EA: Well, see, I didn’t know that. I just knew that my mother worked. She was a manager of a dress shop, Mangel’s, like Lerner’s type-thing.

DR: Mangel’s?

EA: Mangel’s is like a Lerner’s. She was the manager of that store. Daddy was and then Mother took over. She was a worker. She had to work to make a living. But I would have to say, growing up as an only child, and having two parents who weren’t there except at night, it—I was raised by a black woman, who I love—I keep her picture in front of me—Mary Meyers, who took our family name, who lived with us. I loved her like a mother. Mother was wonderful. I mean, I probably wouldn’t—I mean, they would have had to adopt me. Seriously. I used to always think that, especially when that mountain story. I grew up very insecure, I think, because of that—having two parents working.

DR: Mary Meyers worked for the family for a long period of time.

EA: Until the day she died. She lived with us. She was a wonderful human being. She couldn’t read, she couldn’t write, but she could cook. And she was there.

AW: She also took care of your grandmother.

EA: She took care of my grandmother, who lived with us, and who was senile.

AW: She took care of the house.

EA: Today, they might call it Alzheimer's. She was senile. I don't know how old she was when she died.

DR: This is the Meyers side?

EA: This is the Meyers side. She was an Oppenheimer from Washington, and that's where the German side comes in.

AW: Other people who influenced me, [besides] my father, her father, [were] the ladies who lived in this house.

EA: Yeah, me too.

AW: They damn well insisted that I read well, I write well and I spell well, so by the time I went to school—

EA: This was kindergarten; we all went there.

AW: —this was old stuff.

DR: How did they get the idea of starting a kindergarten?

EA: They were teachers, first of all.

DR: But the kindergarten movement was brand new. That was a radical event.

AW: That's right. I don't know how they got—but they insisted that you learn.

DR: Wasn't Mordenai's mother also involved in the kindergartens?

AW: Not this one, so far as I know.

EA: She might have been. I remember Mrs. Raisin. I remember she was very affluent and very chic. I remember that.

AW: The Pollitzers were teachers. They taught at Memminger School, Mabel and Carrie Pollitzer.

EA: They were wonderful.

AW: They were something special.

EA: They were brilliant. Didn't their sister or cousin—wasn't she head of the women's movement in New York?

AW: Yes, Anita Pollitzer.

DR: Their sister.

AW: Sister.

DR: I don't know if she was the head or what.

EA: She taught me biology in high school.

AW: [Inaudible], but see, the Pollitzers were prominent in the women's movement here, and they were unpopular with some people because they were so active. But they were very unusual people. We had some bright people in the congregation. There were two people who had the best natural brains of the congregation: one was Robert and the other was Thomas Tobias.

EA: Oh, he was wonderful.

AW: That family [inaudible]. The Tobiases have been members of KKBE since the Revolution, I guess, and their forebears. Now, there is only one Tobias left, or one daughter, and she's schizophrenic. That's the last of that family. Shame.

DR: I just accidentally met her husband, Rabbi [Martin] Siegel.

AW: He's a son-of-a-bitch, if you will excuse me.

DR: I hope he's willing to lend some of Tom Tobias's family portraits for the exhibition.

AW: He was married, I think, because he wanted to be in the Tobias family.

EA: Who is this, Arthur?

AW: I really don't know him that well. Judy's husband.

EA: He didn't like him. Arthur doesn't hold anything back. [Laughing.]

DR: I'm getting ready to write him a letter and ask him, because he had said, in fact, they do have—the Tobias family has this incredible collection.

AW: He had all of Thomas's—he's got a pile of Thomas's stuff in his house.

DR: Dr. Williams, do you remember any of the household help that helped you in your house? We were talking about Mary Meyers and Elza.

AW: Helped me in my house?

DR: In your parents' house.

AW: When I was little—I can't tell you everything about her, because it would go on the record. But the person who ran my mother's house when I was little was called Big—her name was Annie Murray—I called her Big Fat Annie. I can't tell you what she called me because it was—it would be on the record—but it was profane.

Big Fat Annie would take me for a walk every afternoon. When she would get out of sight of the house, she'd get her boyfriend to pick her up, and we'd drive in her boyfriend's car to one of the parks and stay for a while. While she smooched with her boyfriend, I ran around the park. But anyhow, that was Big Fat Annie. For my mother, she was wonderful. She'd cook and she cleaned the house, but she wasn't anything like Mary Meyers. She was [laughs] something. She was the most pro—I'm profane.

EA: Good cook.

AW: I believe I get my profanity from Big Fat Annie, at least in part.

DR: It was a mixed influence.

AW: Big Fat Annie? There was nothing good about Big Fat Annie's influence.

EA: She was a good cook, though.

DR: How long did she work with your family?

AW: Oh God, she worked for—I don't know. The whole time I was growing up—twenty years or something like that.

DR: Really?

AW: At least. She was something.

DR: Did you ever discuss it with your mother?

AW: Discuss Big Fat Annie's language with my mother? [Laughter.] No. Big Fat Annie and my mother got along well. Big Fat Annie did everything my mother wanted her to do, and I didn't want to get in the way of that relationship at all. But Big Fat Annie and I didn't get on too well.

DR: It is interesting to me how many families have stories closer to what Elza has described. They were very, very close and important relationships with the people who worked for them.

AW: When Big Fat Annie died, my mother hired a lady named Ethel, who was more what Mary was, but I was grown up then.

EA: She was wonderful too. We were always very fortunate. Don't forget, in those days, although we didn't have a lot of money, we didn't have to pay a lot either. It was five dollars a week. There were no taxes, I don't think, then. It was just five dollars a week, and they ate what they wanted. I hate to tell you, but there was no such thing as a refrigerator. We had iceboxes. I have happy memories as a child. I said before—basically, it was happy. Arthur and our families lived across the street. I was here on Wentworth Street, and Arthur was on Kirkland and Wentworth, and then the Wetherhorn family, Sally Davis. You know Sally? You know Sally and Alan Davis? He owns A. J. Davis. Sally is our cousin.

AW: Well, the Brown family was right across the street. Sam Brown and Charlie Brown.

EA: Aunt Rena. I mean, all of our families. There was so much camaraderie. It was almost like we didn't need anybody else in our lives, really.

AW: I'm writing a book that's probably never going to be published.

EA: Why, Arthur?

DR: What is it about?

AW: Well, it's about growing up in Charleston. I lived on the corner of Wentworth Street and Kirkland Lane, so everything behind my house was totally black. Kirkland Lane was a black neighborhood. In front of me was a Reform Jewish neighborhood, plus a Protestant neighborhood, so the interplay between the three cultures was all there. But anyhow, that's what it's about.

DR: I'd love to read it at any stage. I'm very serious about that.

AW: It's pretty good.

EA: How many pages have you written so far? How far along are you?

AW: It's pretty far along. I write a paragraph, two, or three a day.

EA: That's good.

DR: That's very good. Yeah. I would seriously feel privileged to read any part of your manuscript. Have you read Louis Rubin's memoirs?

AW: Oh, sure.

DR: He's also working on a family history. I think this one is non-fiction.

AW: Yeah. He has an interesting family.

EA: Ruth?

AW: Ruth, yeah.

EA: Big in the Red Cross. I think about her sometimes when I'm driving down, going home from work, I think about her: how important she was, and formidable—this big woman—and how, today, she's lost her memory. No matter how big you are today, in a few years you're gone. It's very sad in a way.

DR: This is Ruth Rubin?

EA: Ruth.

DR: Mrs. Harry?

EA: Yeah. Nobody knows who she is.

AW: She was head of everything—

EA: You do and I do, because I knew her.

DR: She's on the plaque above city hall.

EA: Is she?

AW: We had two Jewish women who were active in everything in town, and who were real assets. One was Mrs. Rubin, the other one was Mrs. Ashley Halsey. You know about her? Good, because Mrs. Ashley Halsey doesn't ring any Jewish bells. It's not a Jewish name.

EA: No. And she used to come to temple.

AW: Oh, yes.

DR: She was a Loeb.

AW: Yeah, right.

DR: Her family was the Loeb.

AW: She was a Loeb, and she was married to a very, very nice man, who unfortunately, was an alcoholic. He used to live in a boat down where the yacht basin is now, and I used to visit Mr. Halsey in the boat. He and my father were friends. When he was sober, we could talk to him. When he was sober, he was a delightful man, but that wasn't too often.

DR: Mrs. Halsey's sons were not raised Jewish, is that right?

EA: No.

AW: I don't think so. William is—I don't know what William is. The temple is full of William's pictures, but William has not been active in any Jewish affairs that I know.

EA: There's no Jewish—I don't remember him at any part or phase in the temple, or in my personal life or yours.

AW: I don't think he's been active.

DR: I have been meaning to talk to William Halsey, because, like the Tobias paintings, Mrs. Halsey contributed a lot of work to this Gibbes [Museum] Art Show in 1964, and I'd like to track it down.

AW: Mrs. William Halsey?

DR: No, Mrs. Ashley Halsey, William's mother.

AW: Yeah, you ought to talk to William about his mother. She was a very important person in the community.

DR: I think I will do that.

AW: She and Ruth were the two most important of my growing up era, in the '20s and '30s.

DR: You mean in terms of their—

AW: Community activity. Ruth was active in Jewish, as well as community activity. Mrs. Ashley Halsey was mostly community activity, Red Cross and this and that.

MG: Can I jump ahead?

DR: Yeah, go ahead, Michael.

MG: You mentioned that a lot of people that you treated as patients were from Eastern European background—

AW: Yeah, oh, yeah.

MG: Well, my dad said that it was common, when his father was sick, for you to come over in the middle of the night and treat him or see what was wrong with him, and then you guys would sit downstairs together, have cigarettes and talk.

AW: Yeah.

MG: So I was just wondering, what was your relationship like with these people in that group, in that community?

AW: What was the relationship like with them? It was a very pleasant doctor-patient relationship. Like with your dad, we didn't go to the movies together or play cards together, but when we got together, either in the office or in his home, it was always a pleasant get-together, with your grandfather.

MG: Was it common to visit to people in their homes?

EA: Yes.

AW: Man, I made thirty house calls in one day, one time. It almost killed me. That's one of the reasons I [sounds like "left"] practice.

EA: He did. He used to go to Mrs. Solomon.

AW: There was a flu epidemic and I had thirty house calls in one day, when you were *supposed* to see people at home And I did, and it was a stupid practice. I'm glad [laughs] it's gone.

EA: Tell them about Mrs. Solomon. You used to go there on Friday night because of her gefilte fish.

AW: Yeah [laughs].

EA: What did she tell you? She used to tell you some cute stories.

AW: Oh, I don't—

EA: Herbie's mother.

AW: I know which Mrs. Solomon you're talking about. Yeah, she was [laughs] a very, very nice lady who—

EA: She said she didn't want to bother Arthur during the day—

AW: Didn't want to bother me at the office—

EA: Right.

AW: —so she called me at nine o'clock at night [laughter] saying, "I've got pain in my chest." I'd go over and she would always have some cookies or gefilte fish, but she would never call me at the office; she'd always call me at home.

EA: "I don't want to bother you." She had a very thick accent. She was adorable.

AW: And the problem was—

EA: “I don’t want to bother you, Dr. Williams, during the daytime, so come by—I’d appreciate it very much if you come by and see me at night.” [Laughs.]

AW: She never said that. [Laughter.] She said, “I’ve got pain in my chest.” The problem was she had a nephew who was a lawyer and, if she had a pain in her chest and I *didn’t* go see her and something happened, I knew what the lawyer would have done to me. [Laughter.] It was another inspiration to go see the lady, but she was a very nice lady. She didn’t want to inconvenience me by telephoning me at the office.

MG: Did she really have a pain in her chest?

AW: Oh, yeah! [Laughter.] That was the problem. You couldn’t ignore her, because she was sick.

DR: How did you decide to become a doctor?

AW: Well, I went to college and I took all the math I could take, and I took all the physics I could take, and I took all the English I could take. Then I wondered, “What the hell am I going to do with this?” I realized that I had all the qualifications to go to medical school, so I applied to medical school. I had no childhood desire to become a doctor. I became a doctor because [laughing] I didn’t know what else to do!

DR: Where did you go?

AW: Clemson.

DR: And then medical school?

AW: Went to medical school here.

DR: So you were coming home.

AW: Yeah.

DR: What specialty did you go into?

AW: I practiced medicine as internal medicine, but when I was in graduate work, we got a grant to manufacture an artificial kidney. That was in 1948, when artificial kidneys were really something rare. There were a couple of others in this country, but not many, and I was assigned along with two others to work with the physicist at the Allis Chalmers Company. It was then a big company and they made farm machines. Allis Chalmers is now about out of business, but it was an enormous company then, and they had a developmental division.

We worked with the developmental division, and developed a kind of artificial kidney that we first used in 1949. Then I brought that idea back here, and had a terrible time raising money. I finally got enough money to start hemodialysis in this part of the country in 1955. So I’m known in medicine as a nephrologist, a guy who takes care of medical renal disease. I started

the use of artificial kidneys here and I helped start transplantation here. The first typing was done in my laboratory, and I financed those typings.

EA: Do you still have the dialysis clinic?

AW: No, I dropped out of all of that.

EA: He had that, too. It was on the corner.

DR: So I guess you were a colleague from afar with Dr. Mitchell Rubin. Wasn't he a pediatric nephrologist?

AW: Mitchell was a pediatric nephrologist, except he was a nationally-known guy who—Mitch was head of pediatrics in Buffalo for many years, and his training was really sophisticated at Hopkins and at other places. Mitch was a real asset to this community. He stayed active with the Department of Pediatrics almost until the time he died. He was an exceptional person, but he wasn't particularly interested in artificial kidneys. He was more interested in the more sophisticated aspects of kidney function, and he *knew* it. He was good.

DR: His widow has given us a little collection of his papers, including some of his professional material.

AW: He [sounds like “wrote”] a modest man, but he was a great teacher, and he [sounds like “was one that”] a lot of people we've had in the congregation were something special.

DR: We've probably got about less than ten minutes left, and I wanted you to tell some of the stories about your uncle—not really uncle—Izzy Blank, that you were telling us before we started taping, when we first came in.

AW: I'd rather have you—I'm in the process of writing about Uncle Izzy Blank in the book, and I'd rather not tape it at the moment.

DR: Okay, that's fair enough. Is there anything that you feel like we haven't covered? I've got a few other questions, but I don't want to use the time unless—

AW: We've covered a lot. I can't think of—

DR: Elza, I haven't asked you about your Jewish education. I gather that your family was not—

EA: Same as his. Sunday school, over here. Same. It was that one family—two sisters, my aunt Zerline and mother. Zerline took over, as you know. After Uncle Arthur died, Zerline took over his insurance business.

AW: She took over his business long before then.

EA: Well, when he got ill.

AW: My father had a coronary. I remember running down the beach with him in 1925, and he said, "I've got this funny feeling in my chest." A man was drowning, as a matter of fact, and people had gone out to pull him in. We were trotting down the beach to see if we could help, and he had a pain in his chest. The next day, he had a massive coronary. This was way back then, and after that, he was a cardiac cripple. I don't know how he lived so long. My mother ran his business and, after he died, she took over the whole thing.

EA: All the girls were *amazingly* successful, very strong businesswomen, smart, with just high school educations. They all would have been brilliant in college, don't you agree?

AW: I don't think Zerline had a high school education.

EA: Well, mother did.

AW: Your mother did.

EA: Mother did; she was highly distinguished. I thought they all went to high school.

AW: I think Zerline went to Memminger School, but I think she went to work before she finished.

EA: Not to Memminger, Mitchell.

DR: She said that in our first interview. She said that she only went to elementary school.

EA: I never knew that.

DR: Well, I'm not sure whether she was misremembering, but she did say that.

AW: I know she didn't graduate from high school.

DR: But she became a successful insurance agent, from what I gather.

AW: Oh, yeah. She was smart as the dickens.

EA: So was Cecile. Cecile ran a Lullaby Agency, but none of the husbands were really successful; not *one* of the five girls married really financially successful men. Think about it. There was Gabrielle, the baby; Ralph was a ne'er-do-well. They were from wonderful families—the Weils in Cincinnati—they were all from wonderful families; that was important.

Then Aunt Cecile started her own agency. She came to Cincinnati—two sisters married two brothers—so if you were in Cincinnati, and you were in a hotel, you just called her. She was registered in every hotel, and she made extremely well. They all invested their money obviously well, and live well today, but it's all been on the women's side of the family. It's very interesting to me. The minds of all these girls, they must have inherited from Sweetheart, my grandmother.

AW: Well, that all depends on what time you're talking about. When Cecile married Harold, and Gabrielle married Ralph, they owned the Cincinnati Reds.

EA: Oh, I know.

DR: They owned the Cincinnati Reds?

EA: They owned the Cincinnati Reds, the Weil family. I went to the baseball games.

AW: Yeah, the Weil family. They owned the Cincinnati Reds—

EA: Yeah, but they didn't have it.

AW: —and the chief stockholder was unfortunately in the Bank of Kentucky. When the Bank of Kentucky failed, they never came back from that financial disaster.

EA: It was the Depression, too.

DR: One of the questions that I wanted to ask you, Dr. Williams, is what impact, in your estimation, the Great Depression had on business in general in Charleston, but particularly Jewish business?

AW: Well, at one time, there were a lot of department stores owned locally by Jewish people, like the Furchgotts, who went under during the Depression, like Marks, who went under during the Depression.

EA: How about the Williamses?

AW: Huh?

EA: How about Uncle Henry?

AW: Well, Uncle Henry was [inaudible] the Depression, and he was also sick. But the Depression was horrible. I don't know how the synagogue survived the Depression. I was reading the other day about people who had to reduce their bills from sixty dollars a year to fifteen dollars a year. Many couldn't afford fifteen dollars a year, and were allowed to stay on. This sort of typifies what when on the business community. It was awful.

EA: I don't remember anything about that, I think.

DR: Do you remember things picking up at the time when Charleston became a navy base, basically the armament of—

EA: During World War II is when Charleston got on the map.

DR: Yeah, right, as we approached World War II.

EA: I was in business here. I mean, my mother was. I remember well. You couldn't walk down the streets. It was packed. Things really went up [inaudible]. I don't know if you remember. You might have been at school, or you might have been in medical school or whatever. You didn't walk the streets. [Laughs.]

AW: No.

EA: You weren't in business like we were. [Laughing.] I wasn't in business during the Depression, you know. I was a child, but—

DR: Where were you during the war years? Here in Charleston?

EA: That was 1942.

AW: During the war years, I went to medical school. I started in 1940. I had a commission in the infantry, and then I tried to get out of medical school and get into the infantry, but they wouldn't let me leave school—said we're going to need doctors—and changed my commission to the Medical Administrative Corps. Then I finished medical school in three and a half years, not—that's just the way the curriculum went then. Then I went to Milwaukee for a couple of years, and then I went in the army and was in Pennsylvania when the bomb dropped on Japan—in Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania. Then after that, the war was practically over, but I spent two more years in the service in Texas after the Japanese surrender.

DR: I think you mentioned in the last interview that you thought the Second World War and the Holocaust had a very profound effect on the Jewish community here.

AW: Well, I already mentioned that before—sure it did. The Holocaust had an immense effect on the Jewish community, here and everywhere else. The Second World War, I don't know. I don't remember mentioning that. So I'm not sure what effect it had [inaudible]—

EA: I think we were all very ignorant about what was going on at the time. We were totally ignorant about our president knowing about it.

AW: When I was in medical school, I might as well have been out of town; I spent all my time in the books. Then I was out of town, [inaudible], so I can't give you any details of that [inaudible].

DR: Well, specifically, what effect do you think the Holocaust had, say, on the Reform families that we were talking about?

AW: Made them more Jewishness and made them more aware of their Jewishness. It led to what Elza talked about, the Reform temples becoming more nearly Orthodox.

EA: That's what's happening now.

AW: I think that was an effect of the Holocaust. The good feeling, or the feeling that my father grew up and had his picture in the YMCA, I don't think that would have happened after the Holocaust. The Jewish community and the non-Jewish community were separated by the Holocaust. I think that was the effect—I think.

DR: You think people had a sense that—

AW: This could happen here. And that didn't enter their heads before.

DR: Have either of you ever been to Israel?

AW: Yeah.

EA: I haven't.

DR: You have?

AW: Yeah. I haven't been recently.

DR: When did you go?

AW: I went about twenty years ago. I'd like to go again now. I loved Israel.

DR: What was your motivation in going and what do you think you found?

AW: My motivation for going? I wanted to go. [Laughs.] What I found was a very liberal country who composed its rule of very bright people, who just ran a wonderful country, in my opinion. I just thought it was great. At that time, the Jews and the Arabs, at least in the part of Israel I went, were getting along together pretty well—none of that ruckus that's going on now. I think they'll do well again. It may a thousand years from now, but I think they'll do well again.

DR: I hope so.

AW: Maybe ten years from now—who can tell?

DR: The reason I'm asking this is—and I'm not sure about the other—

END OF TAPE